

# Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter January 2017



*Photograph by Paul Richards*

## **Main Contents**

Page 2	Group Secretary vacancy, Bird box monitors, Swifts are disappearing fast!
Page 3	AGM Notice
Page 4	New Butterfly Recorder, Car Park extension, Work Party Report
Page 5	Fluctuating Mammals
Page 6	An Ambarrow Walk
Page 7/8	Walking in the Area with BVCT, Recent bird sightings

## Group Secretary

We are sad to be losing our Secretary, Julian Le Patourel. We urgently need a replacement.

The job is not onerous: there are four ordinary meetings a year plus a straightforward AGM. Each meeting takes a couple of hours preparation and write up, plus the duration of the meeting itself – and of course there is the occasional voluntary ad hoc job. The reward is an insight and influence into what goes on at Moor Green Lakes and a feeling that you are making a contribution, however small, to the Reserve's smooth management. Please contact Julian, the Editor or any other Committee Member if you would like to know more. You can use the Contact Form found here <http://mglg.org.uk/contactmglg.php>

We take this opportunity to thank Julian for his contribution to the Reserve in past years.

### Moor Green nestboxes

Our nestbox recorders have moved out of the area. Ever since nestboxes were installed at the Reserve they have been monitored. A mix of birds has been found ranging from Stock Doves, Mandarin and Blue and Great Tits.

If you fancy having a look into our boxes in the spring months you could take on the role. You don't need special skills, but you will learn a lot of new things about how birds breed and watch the young grow. Please use the Contact Form on the website if you want to know more

<http://mglg.org.uk/contactmglg.php>. We will arrange some training and point you in the right direction. You will enjoy it!



Some nestboxes contain surprises! This young Blue Tit is inside a Great Tit box

### Swifts are disappearing fast – let's do something about it!

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust is starting a project to reverse the massive decline in Swifts here in the Blackwater Valley. A valley with lakes is an ideal place for them and they can travel big distances to find the insect food they need. Nationally the losses are 47% in the last 20 years but enthusiastic people are changing that. We need your help.

We only need you to watch birds, what you love doing! Just locate screaming Swifts in the summer months – April to July and see if you can find out where they breed – usually in the eaves or roofs of churches, older properties etc. Then tell us on our website [www.bvct.org.uk](http://www.bvct.org.uk). By April we will have a page set up for you to enter details of the approximate number of swifts and location.

Swifts like to live in colonies so if we are to get them back we need to provide nest sites near where they already breed. The Trust will arrange this with owners and even fund the cost of boxes.

So, make a real contribution to ornithology by watching out for swifts and telling us. What could be better than a stroll around a local town or village on a summer's afternoon?

Watch [www.bvct.org.uk](http://www.bvct.org.uk) for more details in the next few weeks.

## MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP

### Notice of Annual General Meeting

**The Twenty Third Annual General Meeting will be held at 7.30pm prompt on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017, at The Memorial Hall, The Village, Finchampstead, RG40 4JR**

#### AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence;
2. To agree the Minutes of the AGM, held on 28 April 2016;
3. Matters arising;
4. Chairman's Report;
5. Ranger's Report;
6. Wildlife monitoring reports;
7. Treasurer's report;
8. Election of committee and officers -

Nominations to the committee are invited and should be sent to the secretary (email: [jlepat@btinternet.com](mailto:jlepat@btinternet.com)) . Nominations can also be made at the meeting. (note: of the current committee members John Westmacott and Julian Le Patourel have resigned; Paul Richards is willing to stand for election in John Westmacott's place; the remainder are willing to stand for re-election).

9. Appointment of accounts examiner;
10. Matters requested by members for consideration by the committee.

#### Interval

There will be a short interval during which refreshments will be provided.

#### Presentation

Dr Richard Shaw, Country Director UK, CABI (Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International) who will give a presentation on "Invasive Species."

*Julian Le Patourel*  
Secretary  
4 January 2017

This talk should be absolutely fascinating. Dr Shaw is a true leading expert on the subject of Invasive Species. CABI (Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International) is an international not-for-profit organization that improves people's lives worldwide by providing information and applying scientific expertise to solve problems in agriculture and the environment. Do come along and enjoy the evening.



## Introducing Paul Richards



I am the new Butterfly Recorder at Moor Green Lakes taking over from John Westmacott, who I would like to thank for contribution to the nature reserve and his patience in teaching me the surveying techniques last summer.

My family and I moved to Finchampstead in October 2014 from Stratford upon Avon after leaving my former career of research scientist. Very soon I discovered the area is very rich in places for nature and being a photographer with a passion for nature I have enjoyed exploring with my camera. I have always had a keen interest in all aspects of natural history but have a fondness for 'bugs' so I was delighted to take up the position as butterfly recorder at Moor Green.

The recording season starts on the first of April, through to the end of September. As you may have heard, last year British butterflies struggled and unfortunately Moor Green was no exception with most species significantly down on numbers and the common blue one of the worst affected. On a positive note we are seeing a few of the very pretty marbled whites appearing on the reserve so it will be interesting to see if they increase in numbers over the next few years.

I plan to take plenty of photographs next season of the insects at Moor Green and will hopefully increase interest in an essential group of creatures on our reserve.

### Car Park extension

*Committee member Tony Barnes has been working hard to secure Planning Permission to add a possible twelve further spaces to our car park. The good news is that he has succeeded. Perhaps less good is that there is a lot of work still to do including agreeing the method of protection of the tree roots – a costly task. Then we need to get cost effective assistance and materials. So, with luck this summer we will have more space for our many visitors.*

## Moor Green Work Party - Sunday 8th January 2017

*By Volunteer Leaders, Duncan, Jane and Jon*

An amazing 23 volunteers turned up to help clear Tern Island, including several under 18 years old. Some minor boating issues meant the start was slow but, to fill in time, some volunteers cleared willow from alongside Colebrook Lake North.

Tern Island consists of a shingle bank with part of the island enclosed by a fence to prevent mink swimming ashore and attacking any nests. The island has to be cleared of weeds each year to provide the open shingle nest sites and this is usually a challenge for the working party.



The island before the onslaught!



By tea break both parties were hard at work and piles of cleared weeds started to appear.

Roger Murfitt had explained that redshanks, a declining species, nested on the island for the first time in a while in 2016 and that they like a bit of cover. An area within the fence was left uncleared in the hope that they will return this year.

This is the first time a work party has ever managed to completely clear Tern Island so many thanks to everyone, in particular those who came for the first time. We hope you enjoyed yourselves and will join us again. If you'd like to come along and lend a hand, the next Sunday task at Moor Green Lakes will be to clear scrub near Grove hide on the 12th February, meeting at 10:30am in the Lower Sandhurst Road Car Park. Keep your eyes on the noticeboards, Newsletters and website for future chances to enjoy a good day out!



The finished article at the end of a great day's work.

## Fluctuating small mammal numbers - Mammal surveys at Moor Green Lakes

*By Bernard Baverstock, Mammal Recorder*

You may have read in the annual report, that 2015 was unusual for having few animals caught in our Longworth traps at the three trapping sessions. In May we only had two Common shrews from our 40 traps and on the Open Day there were only 10 animals from 45 traps, Three Common shrews, seven Wood mice and one Yellow-necked mouse. An extra trapping session in Honey Field, on 24<sup>th</sup> October failed to catch any animals in the 45 set traps.



Yellow-necked Mouse

The first trapping session in 2016 showed how such low numbers can recover very quickly in these prolific breeders. On 22<sup>nd</sup> May we found 22 Wood mice, 5 Yellow-necked mice and one Bank vole.

On the Open Day, 5<sup>th</sup> September, the catch was slightly down at 25 animals but with a good selection to show the visitors. The Wood mouse was again most common (15) and some of the ten males showed signs of fighting. Five Yellow-necked mice were caught and it was good to be able to show the defining "Yellow" collar as we had one very well marked adult and another, very young animal, which still showed that the collar spread right across its chest, between the front legs.

Two Bank voles and two Common shrews added to the interesting mix.

It is still a mystery to me what subtle changes can affect these fluctuations in the population but the Barn Owls have taken advantage and bred well this year.

There are small mammal events taking place you can enjoy. Jointly with Camberley Natural History Society there will be Mammal trapping on the reserve on Saturday 13th May at 08.30. A further opportunity with CNHS will be Saturday 2nd September, time to be announced. Surveying will continue and if you would like to be involved please contact Bernard via the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust at: trustee002@bvct.org.uk

## Enjoy an Ambarrow Walk

*By Steve Arnold, Treasurer*

Walking is a great way to exercise, particularly after the excesses of the holiday season. If you can manage the return walk from Moor Green Lakes car park to Horseshoe Lakes car park, and want to add a bit of distance, you can extend the route to take you up to Finchampstead Ridges. This walk has been recently improved by a couple of changes along the route. This also creates a few possible variations of the walk. For the first timer, this is best tackled in an anticlockwise direction. Expect to find some birds and wildlife on the way!

Starting at Moor Green Lakes Car Park, head South along the path to the river and turn left, heading East along the river path until you reach Grove Lake hide. This section can get very muddy. Go through the gate and take the path that heads around the North West side of Horseshoe Lake. After passing through the second gate, about 10 metres in, look for a new path that will take you to the junction of Lower Sandhurst Road and Ambarrow Lane. The new path – it doesn't look new - was added in 2016 and means you no longer have to walk through a bog to reach the junction.

Taking care on the road, walk up the Ambarrow Lane until about half way up – a little before the road bends to the right – where there is footpath sign on the left. Confusingly the footpath sign sits between the two tracks. The footpath is the first track, the second track slightly higher up the hill is someone's drive. Walk down the footpath, after about 200 meters the footpath turns right and is narrower than the track you have just completed. As you make the gentle ascent, there are good views on your left into the valley, and on your right, you may spot the tops of the Wellingtonia trees that line the aptly named Wellingtonia Avenue.

As you enter the wooded area, a new fence has been added which aids navigation and the path is now more clearly defined than it used to be. Continue walking keeping the new fence to your left. Part of the path has been improved with wood chips which at the time of writing means it is a lot less muddy than it used to be. This will undoubtedly deteriorate in time.

The path levels out and follows the contour of the top of the hill, until it reaches an obvious track. You now have a choice, to make. The easiest (and best when conditions are muddy) is to turn left, and simply follow the track all the way down until it reaches the Lower Sandhurst Road, then turn right and it is a straight line back to the car park. Total distance is about 4.6 km (3 miles)





Alternatively, when you reach the track, turn right, and then almost immediately turn left, and follow the path – which can get very muddy - until you reach Finchampstead Ridges at the top of Wellingtonia Avenue. Getting down from the Ridges is complicated by the fact there is no obvious main path, but lots of possible paths, some steep, so take care. With your back to the road, find a path and head down. You should

eventually reach a bridleway – and then a fence - that runs along the bottom of the Ridges. When you reach the bridleway - which like any route shared with horses is usually churned up and muddy in all but the very driest of weather - turn right and follow the path until you reach Dell Road. Here turn left until you reach Lower Sandhurst Road, turn left, and after about 200 metres you will be back at the car park. Total distance is about 5.2 km (3.2 miles)

### **Walking in the area with BVCT**

As Steve says, walking is a great, easy way to keep fit. Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust offers walks throughout the year on the third Saturday of most months. Keep your eye on the website [www.bvct.org.uk](http://www.bvct.org.uk) for details.

The Trust has also offered a more adventurous walk each year called 'Walk the Path', a total of about 11 miles along the valley with refreshment stops and full support. About 250 people enjoy this annual day out. In 2017 there will be a change! The Trust is launching 'The Big Valley Ramble'. This will offer a new route each year of similar length, again with refreshments and support. This year it will be on Sunday 23rd April so watch out for the publicity and check the website for more details. It promises to be a very interesting and enjoyable day.

### **Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, July to Dec 2016.**

*By Roger Murfitt (Bird Recorder)*

Breeding activity continued in the second half of the year with around three broods of Tufted Duck seen and it was good to see an adult Little Ringed Plover with young on the New Workings. Despite Great-crested Grebes sitting on nests in three different locations on the reserve, all seem to have failed as no young were seen. Autumn migration got well under way in July and returning Green Sandpipers numbered up to four this month and included the Dutch-ringed individual seen regularly here in recent years, as it reached at least 6 years of age. Autumn brought a good variety of wader species this year, helped by the pumping of water from the New Workings to reveal gravel islands and edges for waders to feed. Greenshanks were seen on several dates with up to eight briefly on 16th August and Dunlin were similarly present with up to three on 10th September. Other passage waders included Black-tailed Godwit on a couple of dates, a Ruff and flyover Turnstone.

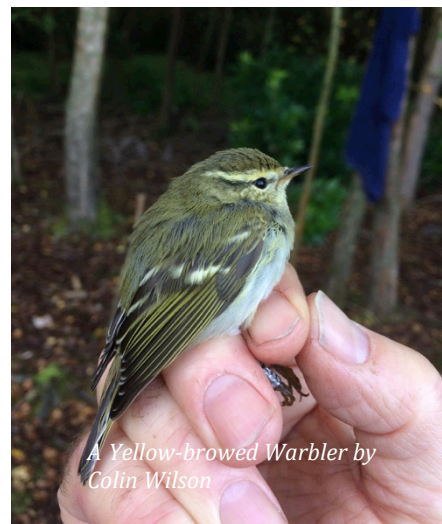
Two of the scarcer passage wader species in UK, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint, breed in Arctic Siberia and winter in Africa and South Asia. Both species were reported in higher than usual numbers in the UK in 2016, which was thought to indicate a better than average breeding season with conducive weather conditions with easterly winds to drift migrants to the UK. Waders such as these may have an improved breeding season during years with high lemming populations in the Arctic (numbers cycle up and down) which means lots of rodent food for predators like Snowy Owl and skuas and less predation of wader chicks. On 11th Sept I was fortunate to find a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper feeding on East Fen (my photo is on next page). This bird, the first on site for nine years, remained until 17th Sept giving many observers a chance to connect with this species.

Little Stint also featured at Moor Green Lakes in 2016, the first records for 7 years. One was seen on the New Workings from 29<sup>th</sup> July to 4<sup>th</sup> August, then 2 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 3 on 6<sup>th</sup> and then 1 on 9<sup>th</sup>. A late bird was also found on 7<sup>th</sup> October. This is a tiny, sparrow-sized wader weighing around 30g. The stints favoured a small gravel island on the New Workings where they were quite often seen to be harassed by other species like Common Sandpiper and Moorhen but despite this at least one stayed faithful to the area for a significant period.



It was a good year for Honey Buzzard sightings at Moor Green Lakes, with the adult male reported in the last Newsletter on 15<sup>th</sup> August followed by a sighting of a pale phase bird on 27<sup>th</sup>.

Another scarce autumn migrant which showed a much larger than usual influx to the UK in 2016 was the Yellow-browed warbler. Although normally seen along the east coast, with larger than usual numbers of this species turning up, some began to be found quite widely inland and on 8<sup>th</sup> October one was found in the nets at Moor Green Lakes by Tim Ball and the ringing team. This represents a new species for the site. It is another Siberian breeding species and is quite close in appearance to the much rarer Pallas's warbler. Many of you will remember we had a wintering individual of the latter species at Moor Green Lakes in 2013.



*A Yellow-browed Warbler by Colin Wilson*

Other autumn migrants included a few Yellow Wagtails and Whinchat, with up to 3 of the latter on 10<sup>th</sup> Sept, a Black Tern on 19<sup>th</sup> August and Spotted Flycatcher along the river on 31<sup>st</sup> August. There were some good autumn counts of Canada Goose reaching a peak of 590 on 20<sup>th</sup> Aug whilst wintering Wigeon numbered 300 already on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct.



*Whinchat by Roger Murfitt*

As we went into winter, flocks of Lapwings were attracted to the newly turned soil where a bulldozer worked on the New Workings and a high count of 340 was present on 16<sup>th</sup> December. A Golden plover was picked out amongst the Lapwings on 14<sup>th</sup> Dec, a scarce visitor to the site. A small flock of 6 Brent geese flew east along the valley over the reserve on 18<sup>th</sup> Dec in the fog. These are normally coastal birds and had probably become disoriented by the poor visibility. Snipe numbers on East Fen reached a good peak count of 55 on 20<sup>th</sup> December and the peak count in the first half of the winter of roosting Goosanders was 43 (22 ad males) during a colder snap on 4<sup>th</sup> Dec.

It just remains for me to wish you best of luck with your birding in 2017 and please remember to submit your Moor Green Lakes records (preferably to [Berksbirds.co.uk](http://Berksbirds.co.uk)) as they all count.