

Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter August 2017



*Summer flowers at Moor Green
Photograph by Paul Richards*

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Our volunteers clear Himalayan Balsam and Ragwort



As the summer weather appeared so did the Himalayan Balsam. The Moor Green Lakes volunteers scheduled extra work parties to clear this invasive plant. In the first work party in June we concentrated on clearing the bank of the river next to the reserve in the hope that it would limit the dense balsam spreading from the southern bank.

The river bank next to the reserve was quickly cleared as were some of the bigger clumps downstream. After stacking the balsam away from the river, we felt satisfied with the riverside clearance by the end of the day. We also cleared some areas inside the reserve but unfortunately discovered some larger clumps of small balsam – a task for another time. Thanks to Steve, Paul, Linda, Angus, Marie, Gerry and Melvyn for their valiant efforts at short notice.

July brings the ragwort into flower and this is poisonous to the cattle grazed on the reserve. Jenny, Bobbie and Sam from BVCP brought trailer and lazydogs (special forks for pulling ragwort) and with a good number of volunteers we quickly cleared the ragwort from around Colebrook Lake. This was a really hot day but we managed to greatly reduce the amount of ragwort on site with some time to enjoy the many butterflies, insects and birds on the site.



By late coffee break the volunteers had removed all visible ragwort from around Grove Lake in readiness for the cattle to return. We then set upon the remaining balsam. This was a horrible task in amongst the nettles and brambles but we could at least see the flowers now and it did pull up easily when you could get to it.

By the end of the day we had cleared much of the balsam from around Grove Lake. We will have to attack this area again next year but the situation has been greatly improved thanks to all the volunteer efforts. Many thanks to Jenny, Bobbie and Sam (from BVCP), Angus and Helen, Mary, Colin and Julia and all the other volunteers who have helped this summer and we look forward to seeing you again (and anyone else who fancies a bit of fresh air and fun) when we start our regular work parties in September.



Fantastic effort clearing balsam from Grove Lake.

(Note that Ragwort is a highly valuable plant for many native insect species, removing it is for the protection of cattle, not because it is harmful to nature – quite the opposite applies. It is a home and food source for 77 insect species and 30 rely on it exclusively. Where possible it should be left to flourish - Ed).



Our Group has a new Facebook page.

Search for Moor Green Lakes Group. A page called Moor Green Lakes has been set up which we would like to merge with ours soon, so make sure you add 'Group' to the end of your search.

Members are welcome to post any photos news or items of interest on the Facebook page although they may have to be moderated if considered unsuitable. News of sightings of wildlife are very welcome.

Please use our website to advise us of misuse or abuse of the reserve or any other matters you need to draw to the Committee's attention

<http://mglg.org.uk/contactmglg.php>

While on the subject of Facebook

There is a Facebook Page called Finchampstead Against Village Expansion – FAVE. This site brings together the local population who are objecting to the planning permission being sought to build on land adjacent to the area of Moor Green Lakes and the new RSPB reserve area. You should object in the normal way to Wokingham District Council if you wish to have any say on the matter (the date has now passed but there are usually a few days still allowed for late objections).

You can find more information here

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bzy5-ZjCXNzWdjcyXzZnLVdySzg/view>

Mammal trapping at Moor Green Lakes

By Bernard Baverstock



Bank vole by Grant Evans

The small mammal trapping session on the 13th May had lower numbers of animals than the previous year but this may have been the effect of overnight rain. Sixteen people enjoyed a pleasant morning examining the animals from the Longworth traps.

There were six Wood mice, three of each sex, which were in fine fettle and coming into breeding condition. The only other animal was a very angry Common Shrew. She was not pleased at being disturbed, probably as she was pregnant and just wanted to eat all the Casters from the trap.

There will be another trapping session with Bernard, on 2 September, for Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust and our Group members. It would help if you booked via the BVCT website so we can plan the day for the right audience.

Booking can be done quickly via this link <http://www.bvct.org.uk/calendar/>

Introducing Duncan Clark



I am the new Committee Secretary at Moor Green Lakes taking over from Julian Le Patourel, who I would like to thank for his contribution to the nature reserve and his patience in teaching me the secretarial ropes.

My family and I have lived in Moulsham Copse Lane, Yateley for over 30 years so know the area well and regularly walk around Moor Green, the Blackwater Valley and Horseshoe Lakes. We have always had boating interests in lakes and rivers as well as many holidays spent outdoors camping but it wasn't until I retired from IBM two years ago that I managed to get some time to become more involved with conservation and now volunteer with the National Trust up at Finchampstead Ridges and with the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.

Trees are my main nature interest and, as a keen woodturner, I am often retrieving interesting pieces of wood from the bonfires and the BVCP logpile for making bowls or treen. I am also one of the Moor Green volunteer leaders and would love to meet as many of you as possible on our Sunday (or weekday) work parties.

www.mglg.org.uk



Our signs are not only appreciated by humans!

Your images are welcome for future Newsletters and for our Facebook page so please share them.

Bird ringing at Moor Green Lakes

Ringling has taken place at Moor Green Lakes since 2007 by Tim Ball and his colleagues. They started by mainly ringling young Black-headed gulls but in 2010 a full land based mist net ringling programme commenced. The results are in the annual reports.

Sadly, Tim is unable to continue with his programme at Moor Green Lakes but Colin Wilson has now restarted the mist netting so we can see some continuing results of species using our reserve in winter and summer.

There will be gaps in our data until we can obtain Tim's records but we hope to be able to maintain a good long term record at the reserve.

Training to ring birds is serious stuff – it takes a few years to qualify – but if you are interested contact Colin – see Swift article for his email address, or see here

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/about>

Saving our Amazing Swifts

This project by BVCT is aiming to try to stop the decline in our swifts by providing new homes for them. As we seal up our existing and new homes to keep heat in we, possibly unwittingly, keep birds out.

So, BVCT are working with local authorities, builders and developers to include swift bricks in new houses and with people like us to provide new homes for swifts by way of boxes.



It is always best to put the boxes near where swifts already nest but they can go almost anywhere where the conditions are right. There are many ways to help with this project. Finding and recording the breeding birds (mainly over now until next year), making and fitting next boxes – see picture below, making simple sound systems, watching for redevelopment of old buildings where boxes could be fitted.

If you want to know more or want to help see <http://www.bvct.org.uk/blackwater-valley-swift-project/> or email colin.wilson@bvct.org.uk.

This is an expensive project so if you want to help with a donation see here <https://mydonate.bt.com/events/blackwatervalleyswifts/441576>

Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, January to June 2017

By Roger Murfitt

During the first winter period of 2017, roosting Goosander numbers reached a peak of 54 during a cold spell on 21st Jan and the peak count of wintering Wigeon was 187 on 22nd Jan. Oystercatcher was first seen from 16th Feb and there were a couple of less common visitors in a

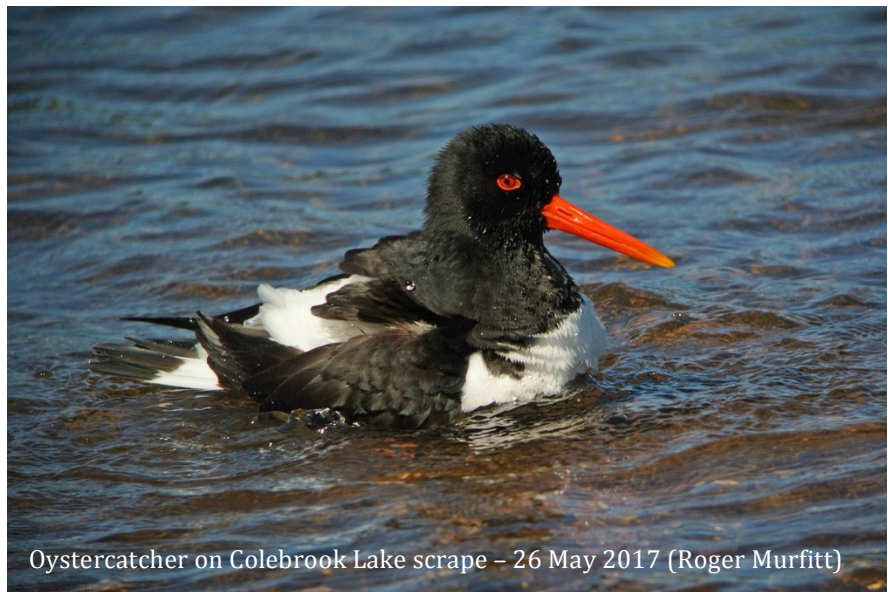


Long-tailed Duck at Moor Green Lakes - March 2017 (Michael Hunt)

Great Black-backed Gull on 31st Jan and a Woodcock seen on 15th Jan. Of particular note was a female Long-tailed Duck which was first seen on 6th Feb and then occasionally until 11th March (it also spent time on the adjacent Horseshoe Lake). This is normally a sea-going duck and is quite unusual inland with this being only the second record for the site (previously in

1992). There were higher than usual numbers of this species reported around the coast this year which may explain this occurrence.

Low water levels on the Manor Farm Workings, due to pumping out of water to aid in-fill, exposed spits and islands and made for promising habitat for passage waders - though this was partially offset as the main lake was being filled with spoil. There was a good sprinkling of the regular passage waders including Dunlin, Ringed Plover, a single record of Black-tailed Godwits, Common and Green Sandpiper but nothing unusual. Little Ringed Plovers liked the habitat on the New Workings, and there were probably three pairs holding territory. On 7th May a Black Tern, White-fronted Goose and male Garganey were recorded on Colebrook Lake, though the latter moved to East Fen. An Osprey passed through on 8th May and Lesser Whitethroats were recorded on 23rd April and 1st May, both scarce here.



Oystercatcher on Colebrook Lake scrape - 26 May 2017 (Roger Murfitt)

Numbers of breeding Black-headed Gulls were higher this year with around 80 nests in total comprising of 16 nests squeezed onto the two Tern rafts, another two nests on East Fen and the remainder on Tern Island. By the time Common Terns arrived in late April nesting space was at a premium but around five pairs settled to nest at the western end of Tern Island. By late June

at least four broods of Common Tern chicks were visible on Tern Island and many young Black-headed Gulls were visible with the first birds fledging. A pair of Oystercatchers again took up territory on Tern Island and by 23rd April three small chicks had hatched. One of these disappeared after a couple of weeks but the other two juveniles, despite a marked size difference, were reared to fledging.

During late May to mid-June there were a number of visits from Mediterranean Gulls to Tern Island, either as singles or two birds. On 26th May, the ring was read of a colour-ringed adult



Mediterranean Gull, Colebrook Lake – 26th May 2017 (Roger Murfitt)

Mediterranean Gull on Tern Island and was subsequently found to be an adult female that had been ringed as a chick in 2014 in SE Ireland. It had recently been nesting at Walton Reservoir, London (which would have been the first nesting for the county if successful) but it failed, due to fox predation, on 24th May. The bird was seen to pick up a stick on occasions on Tern Island, as if it was thinking about re-nesting, but nothing came of it.

After no proof last year, it was good to see that Shelducks nested, with a pair seen with four small ducklings on 18th May. Unfortunately, one duckling disappeared on the first day and then the remainder were all lost in subsequent days, presumably due to predation, possibly by Herring Gulls, a few of which lingered around the islands over the spring and were seen eating Canada Geese eggs. A Lapwing held territory on Plover Island but there was no evidence of nesting by either this species or Redshank this year.

Finally, we are grateful to Cemex for suspending operations on the New Workings during June, at the Committee's request, in order to protect nesting Little Ringed Plovers (a protected Schedule 1 species) from disturbance whilst breeding.

Butterflies bounce back

By Paul Richards

Last year was one of the worst on record for butterfly numbers at Moor Green. Low numbers



were observed for most of our regular butterflies and for some species, populations crashed. For example, the gatekeeper where normally we would expect to see in excess of sixty butterflies during the peak of their flight period was down to just ten. The common blue, a species that has always been seen on site, sometimes in large numbers, was not seen at all last year. So, for me, it was interesting taking over as butterfly recorder and seeing how butterfly number fared this year.

We record butterflies once a week on suitable days weather-wise on a route from the Lower Sandhurst Road car park, along the western and northern shores of Colebrook Lake and then along the Blackwater Valley Path to Grove hide and then back along the track to the carpark. It covers a variety of habitats but most butterflies are seen flying in the grassy meadows around Colebrook.

This year we had a dry winter with a few good hard frosts which is beneficial for many butterfly species as it decreases the probability of fungal disease for their overwintering stages such as caterpillars hibernating amongst grasses or the bark of trees. Winter was followed by a mild spring with warm sunny spells, triggering the early emergence of many butterflies such as brimstones, orange tips and holly blues even before of butterfly recording starts at the beginning of April. Spring eased into a hot early summer with long periods of dry weather, all good for butterflies.

Work parties at Moor Green

Work parties at Moor Green Lakes start at 10:30 and continue until about 15:30 or 16:00. Anyone is welcome, including non-members; just turn up. Volunteers are welcome to attend for just a few hours even if they can't spare time for the whole session.

The schedule is published on the website and this is an extract until the end of the year.

Tuesday parties are led by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership but Moor Green Lakes members more than welcome.

Sunday parties are led by one of 3 Moor Green Lakes Group Volunteer Leaders listed below.

- **Sunday 10th September 2017 - Leader Jon Needes**
 - Clear a patch of scrub from the northern bank of Colebrook North
 - Cut vertical exposures for bees
- **Sunday 8th October 2017 - Leader Jane Heritage**
 - Clear reeds in front of Grove hide
 - Clear vegetation in front of Grove view-screen
- **Tuesday 17th October 2017**
 - Clear scrub and cut back bramble Long Island
 - Move pontoon to Plover Island
- **Sunday 12th November 2017 - Leader Duncan Clark**
 - Clear Plover Island. (Set up pontoon using waders and MGL key. Wheelbarrow vegetation off island)
- **Tuesday 21st November 2017**
 - Clear scrub/trees on a Long Island scrape
 - Haycut Long Island grassland
- **Thursday 7th December 2017**
 - Install dog proof fencing on north fence of Colebrook North
- **Sunday 10th December 2017 - Leader Jane**
 - Clear Tern Island
 - Clear vegetation from bunds of Colebrook scrape

Members contributions to this Newsletter are always welcome. It can be stories of visits, special encounters with wildlife or your images around the reserve. Send them to the Editor colin.wilson@bvct.org.uk