

Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter January 2019



Winter Kingfisher by Michael Hunt

Main Contents

Page 2	Flower Spotting Walk and AGM notice
Page 3	Hornets at Moor Green Lakes and Treasurer Needed!
Page 4	Common Blue Damselfly
Pages 5 and 6	Recent Bird Sightings at Moor Green Lakes

This is your Newsletter!

You are welcome to submit items for publication whether they be images of life at Moor Green Lakes or articles of interest to share with others. We encourage our members to take part in sharing their knowledge and experiences with others and this is a good way to do it.

Flower-spotting walk

By Peter Scott



Cowslips by Peter Scott

You are invited to join a walk on the reserve to spot flowers, led by Peter Scott and Irene Draper. It will probably take place in mid-May or early June: check the MGLG website from April onwards to find the final arrangements. If you wish to register an early interest, drop a line to Peter (scottpeterp@gmail.com).

Moor Green Lakes Group AGM The Memorial Hall Finchampstead 31st January 2019 at 7.30 pm

Come and join us and learn about how your reserve has been doing recently. Apart from the usual business of the Group which is interesting in itself, there will also be a talk by a well known visitor.

Brian Clews will be talking about the birds of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire and walking you around some of the best places to visit. Always entertaining and full of experience, Brian is an author of many books and knows birds in our region like few others.

There will be some light refreshments to help you enjoy the evening so do come along.



Hornets at Moor Green Lakes

By Bernard Baverstock

Grove hide had to be closed for a period during the summer, as we had a hornets nest, just above the door, inside the hide. This was the second time hornets had used this site and as hornets are a very useful and attractive species we wanted to allow them to complete their life cycle in peace.



Wasps had already built a nest in this hide and I had isolated that with a plastic sheet so that the hide could still be accessible, unfortunately the position of the hornet's nest prevented any safe use of the hide. Although the hornets look fierce they are less aggressive than wasps and will only sting if they are disturbed or attacked.

July was very late in the year to start building a nest, the queen hornets are the only individuals to survive the winter, by hibernating, and would normally start a nest by at least April. This is probably another indication of the strange weather we had this year.

The female will have mated in the previous year and will build a small nest from wood pulp and bring up the first worker hornets, which will then take over the work of expanding the nest and rearing the colony. The eggs are laid in individual cells and when they hatch the larvae are feed a protein diet of flies and other insects, they help to control some pest species.

Later in the year the queen will produce eggs which will develop into sexually mature individuals, the males will mate and then die but the females will find somewhere safe to hibernate.

Hornets were once quite rare in our area but over the last 20 years they have been spreading North and East, they are mostly a woodland insect, although with this spread they are often seen in gardens. Our reserve is proving popular with hornets as we had two other nests in a couple of bat boxes as well. They also turned up in bird ringing nets on several occasions!



The early stages of the nest

(Photos by Bernard Baverstock)

Treasurer needed!

Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust

We are seeking a new Treasurer for the charity. This is an important role but not highly onerous. The Treasurer makes sure we operate within our Financial Procedures and runs the bank accounts. He or she maintains the financial records of the charity so monitors the bank account and records the income and expenditure (currently on a spreadsheet).

As an important member of the Trust management team he/she will update the Trustees each month with the balances of the accounts and advise on budgets etc.

The time needed for the role is just a few hours a month.

If anyone would like to know more please contact colin.wilson@bvct.org.uk

This is a great chance to help nature in our valley by supporting a Trust that has delivered projects totalling over £200,000 in recent years.

See more at www.bvct.org.uk

The Common Blue Damselfly.

By Alan Holmes

When I began dragonfly surveying at Moor Green, I thought I would be surveying, well dragonflies. I did not realise that it would be Common Blue Damselflies and the rest. While there are least a thousand Common Blues, even the next most common species, the Banded Demoiselle, might have just over 100, and most of them are on the Blackwater River. It is probably like this over much of the Common Blue's range in Europe from Southern Spain to northern Scandinavia.



The mature males have a club pattern on segment 2 and all blue upper surface on segments 8 and 9 of its abdomen. The females and immatures are much more tricky, sporting a range of drabber purples and greys. Even the brilliant blue of the male can become a muddier grey late in the season as the temperature drops.

They first appear at the end of April or early May, more emerging, as you would expect, if the weather is mild, and by mid May to the end of June peak numbers are quartering the bushes along the path by Colebrook Lake North and over the meadow at densities of over 0.5 per m². One can almost feel sorry for aphids! Meanwhile, down on the lake bankside, in gaps in the trees, there is frantic breeding activity.

Such densities enabled Ken Crick, who set up dragonfly recording at Moor Green Lakes, to work on the identification of the Common Blue larvae, publishing a paper in 2007.

But the season does not end well. Slowly and quietly without any fuss the numbers start to drop. You find the odd one in a spider's web but I have also found them dead on the ground, so predation cannot be the whole story. By the end of Sept there are very few flying, and this year the last one was on the 11th Of November. But next year the cycle will begin again.....

(Photographs by Alan Holmes)



Join the team

There is an active group of volunteers helping to maintain your reserve to the highest standards. Everybody is welcome to join them and you can find out more by taking a look at our website <https://mglg.org.uk/workparties.html>
We can guarantee that you will enjoy yourself and it is a great way to keep fit and healthy!

Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, Aug to Dec 2018.

By Roger Murfitt (Bird Recorder)

Autumn wader migration was relatively uneventful, despite good conditions on East Fen with large areas of mud exposed. Single Greenshanks were recorded on 26th Aug, 28th Aug and 7th Sept, whilst Dunlin were recorded on three dates, 5 on 25th Sept, a single on 28th Oct and 2 on 17th Nov, all on East Fen. There was a good count of 14 Black-tailed Godwits on the New Workings main diggings on 11th Sept. Up to two Common Sandpipers were recorded on 13 dates in the period from 2nd Aug to 13th Sept and Green Sandpiper (both a migrant and winter visitor), was recorded throughout the period, with a peak count of 6 on 2nd Sept and at least one was still present to year end.

I should mention the excellent work done by Jenny (BVCP Ranger) and a group of volunteers in late Aug to clear a longstanding blockage in the pipe from Colebrook Lake South to the river. This opened up the outflow and for a period during the autumn the water level on Colebrook Lake dropped significantly to reveal the bund of Colebrook scrape. The improved scrape immediately attracted Snipe, Grey wagtail and Green Sandpipers to give close views in front of the hide as in the photograph below. Winter water levels mean the bund is again mostly underwater but come the spring we can hopefully expect to see it reappearing.

Other passage migrants during this period included a single Whinchat on 11th Sept and up to two Yellow Wagtails on three dates between 25th Aug and 3rd Sept. The latter were to be found on the New Workings where they sometimes associated with Pied Wagtails as they fed on the weedy infill. Unusually there were no autumn records of Wheatear received. Spotted Flycatchers were recorded on two dates with a single in the paddock by the car park on 29th Aug and then two nearby at the northern edge of Colebrook Lake North on 2nd Sept.



Green Sandpipers at Moor Green Lakes, 31st August 2018 (Roger Murfitt)

The first Meadow Pipit of the autumn appeared on 29th Aug and then a good count of 77 was made on the New Workings on 16th Sept as waves of birds took off from the weedy infill and moved south, possibly having roosted there overnight. A Firecrest on 29th Aug and a single Crossbill calling as it flew over the New Workings on 13th Oct were among the more unusual records during this period.

In the autumn a Linnet flock built up, which was feeding on the weedy infill of the New Workings and reached a peak of about 50 individuals on 30th Oct. First arrival dates of winter visitors were 1st Oct for Siskin, 2nd Oct for Fieldfare, 8th Oct for Redwing and also Brambling.

The most unusual bird of the period was a Whooper Swan on 22nd Oct only. It was initially found on East Fen but moved to Colebrook Lake South for some time before returning to East Fen. This is only the second record of this species for the site, after the first in 2014. Most of the UK's wintering birds come from Iceland and the closest of the main wintering areas are the Ouse and Nene Washes in Cambridgeshire. On the 22nd Oct there were a number of inland records down the centre of the country with the southernmost being at Moor Green Lakes, suggesting that weather conditions had disorientated birds arriving from the north.



Whooper swan at Moor Green Lakes, 22nd October 2018 (Michael Hunt)

The first wintering Goosander were not seen until 18th Nov and on the same date, just two days earlier than the first ever record last year, a Great White Egret was seen. This bird (possibly the same individual as last year?) was present 18th to 20th Nov and then again 14th Dec.

The first record of Water Rail was on 13th Sept and I just had to include the superb photograph below of a Water Rail on Colebrook Lake North scrape (with thanks to Michael).



Water Rail at Moor Green Lakes, 2nd November 2018 (Michael Hunt)

There were some reasonable counts of wintering wildfowl with up to 83 Shoveler (10th Dec), 68 Teal (30th Nov) and 179 Wigeon on the relatively early date of 13th Oct. Amongst the more unusual wildfowl, a first winter male Scaup was found on the New Workings on 28th Dec, a female Goldeneye was present from 1st Dec to the year end and a male Red-crested Pochard was on Grove lake from 12th to the

year end. Wintering Snipe reached an unusually high count of 86 on 24th Dec and Goosander peaked at 49 roosting on 29th Dec.

It just remains for me to wish you the best of luck with your birding in 2019 and please remember to submit your Moor Green Lakes records (preferably to Berkbirds.co.uk) as they all count.