

# Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter August 2019



*Photo by Alan Holmes – see page 5 for the story*

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## **New Photographic Competition**

Our AGM in February will include this competition for our Members to show their best photos.

Please join in and make it a great evening of celebration of Moor Green Lakes.  
See more on Page 2

## New Photographic Competition for our AGM

*Get those cameras out and start snapping! Or sort through your images ready for this!*

So many of our members nowadays carry their cameras and take excellent photographs around the Reserve. We would like to give them an opportunity to show them to other members by way of a light-hearted competition at our AGM.



The competition and rules will be as follows:

1. Only Members may participate. (Committee Members may not enter)
2. All entries must be the entrants personal work
3. There will be four sections/categories. They are birds, nature (excluding birds), seasons and a youth category \*for the under 16s (allowing any photographs described by the three previous categories in this one). The 'youth' must be living in the 'Household' of a member
4. Participants may enter up to 3 photographs per section hence the maximum entries per person will be nine, and just three for the youth category
5. All photographs must have been taken in/from publicly accessible places from outside the reserve boundary (this may include Manor Farm workings and river from the river path) or from the hides and paths to the hides  
The photographs can be sized as the entrant wishes but must be small enough to be sent by email. They will be viewed on a large screen so (eg when cropping), take that into account. Please email them to [photocomp2019@mglg.org.uk](mailto:photocomp2019@mglg.org.uk)
6. Two judges from the MGLG Committee will select the finalists and discuss the merits of the images at the AGM. They will choose the winners of each section and the members will choose the overall competition winner
7. Images submitted to the competition may be used by the Committee on the website, Facebook page, newsletter and for publicity as the Committee see fit. Copyright will be retained by the photographer
8. Images will be anonymized before the judges view them to avoid any personal bias
9. Final date for submission of entries will be 1 February 2020

(\* The 'youth' under 16 section will only take place if we have a minimum of 5 entrants).



## ***Blackwater River Festival*** ***Saturday 21st September – Sunday 29th September***

This festival will help you to enjoy so much more about our River Valley, its nature and its history. During this week there will be a range of walks, talks and events showing off much you may have missed here in our own Valley. All events are free and most don't need booking in advance. Full details are here <http://www.bvct.org.uk/brf19/>

### ***Moor Green Lakes and the Blackwater River Festival – join us at our own Reserve***

Moor Green Lakes Reserve is supporting Blackwater River Festival by providing a self-guided walk around the perimeter of the reserve. Information posters describing conservation activities will be available on public foot paths from Grove Hide along the river Blackwater to the Moor Green Lakes car park for the duration of the festival.

On Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September, with the nesting season over, Moor Green Lakes will be opened to the public at the birdfeeder paddock next to Colebrook Hide from 10:00 to 16:00. Volunteers will be available to talk about the reserve, its conservation and its wildlife. We hope to provide guided walks on private paths within the reserve hourly (depending on numbers) between 11:00 and 15:00. Note that dogs cannot be allowed on the reserve (except assistance dogs). We will also have the hides manned on this day allowing visitors to hear more about the Moor Green Lakes Reserve and its role in the Blackwater Valley.

Parking is available at [Moor Green Lakes car park and Horseshoe Lakes car park](#)

### **To learn more about the Festival and all the free events go to**

<http://www.bvct.org.uk/brf19/>

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|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Saturday 21st September</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- See small mammals in the hand</li><li>- A Valley walk</li><li>- Evening walk to see bats</li></ul>                   |
| <b>Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup></b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Guided birdwatching walk at Tice's Meadow</li></ul>  |
| <b>Monday 23<sup>rd</sup></b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Managing meadows for wildlife, walk and talk</li><li>- Evening talk - The revival of the Blackwater Valley</li></ul> |
| <b>Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup></b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Morning Walk and Talk</li><li>- River restoration task</li></ul>   |
| <b>Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup></b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rail to Trail walk and (free) train ride</li></ul>   |
| <b>Thursday 26<sup>th</sup></b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Two Rail to Trail walks</li><li>- River Restoration task</li><li>- Moth Trapping at Tice's Meadow</li></ul>          |
| <b>Friday 27<sup>th</sup></b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- River walk - focus on wildlife</li></ul>   |
| <b>Saturday 28<sup>th</sup></b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Volunteer Work Party at Tice's Meadow</li></ul>  |
| <b>Sunday 29<sup>th</sup></b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Moor Green Lakes Showcase Day - walks, information for all</li><li>- Evening Moth Survey at Rowhill</li></ul>        |

## **Moor Green Lakes Group – Membership changes 2019-2020**

*By Steve Arnold, Treasurer*

### **What is changing?**

Starting on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 our membership will change from 2 levels, Single and Family, to just 1 level called Household. The cost of membership will be the same as the old Family rate of £10. New members who joined after 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019 as always, gained three months free.

### **Who made the decision?**

As Treasurer I put forward the proposal at the AGM on 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2019. After discussion it was agreed with just one negative vote, by members present at the AGM.

### **What is the rationale behind the decision?**

In one word – Simplification. All of your Committee are volunteers and the work involved in having two levels needed reducing. The differing levels were never used in practice. For instance, we don't "police" access to the hides based on membership level. We also benchmarked the Moor Green Lakes Group against our collaboration partners the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust with a simple membership structure.

### **Is this just a way of increasing revenue?**

This was not the reason for making the change. Many of our existing members are already Family members, or Single members paying an additional donation. We do appreciate that some single members pay just their minimum subscription and will be affected. We hope not to lose these members, and that they will continue to support the Reserve.

### **Do you think the £10 membership value is good value?**

Obviously, we do. To put it in perspective, for £10 you could get 2 coffees and two pieces of cake at Costa coffee, or 1 small take-away Pizza, or parking one day for a few hours at the Oracle in Reading. The same £10 will get you one years membership which is calorie free. 😊

### **What are the benefits of membership?**

The prime benefit is that funds from members help us keep the nature reserve in good shape, along with volunteer work parties and help from the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. It is a great cause to support and over 150 species of birds and other wildlife would agree. We produce 2 newsletters a year plus a comprehensive annual report, plus there is free access to the hides, and priority booking on special events.

### **Is this change because of the car park extension?**

It is not. The car park extension was many years in planning and saving, but with generous contributions from Finchampstead Parish Council and Wokingham Borough Council, we are still in a sound financial position after the work was complete.

### **Are there any big purchases on the horizon?**

There is currently nothing major planned but an additional hide or replacement/repair of the existing hides is one future possibility for which we need to reserve some funds.

### **About Blackwater Countryside Partnership**

Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership coordinates work in the Valley area on behalf of local authorities that border the Valley or land owners with management obligations.

### **About Blackwater Countryside Trust**

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust was founded in 2006 by enthusiasts who are passionate about the people and wildlife of the Blackwater Valley. They support and manage projects in the blackwater valley countryside, for the benefit of nature and people living here. See more at [www.bvct.org.uk](http://www.bvct.org.uk)

## **An Exotic Resident - (See front page picture)**

*By Alan Holmes*

We do not expect our native fauna to be exquisitely beautiful, but the blue tailed damselfly with its sombre black body and light blue tip to the tail always looks very smart. However, some immature females take this a bit further with a purple (the books say violet) thorax creating this beauty. In a week or two it will lose this patterning and be in full adult plumage. Blue-tailed Damselflies can be seen in small numbers all along the water's edge and along the Blackwater River, especially for some reason south of Grove Lake. Look out for them in summer, they fly between April and October.

## **For the love of nature!**

*By Bernard Baverstock*

We had to lock Grove hide during the summer of 2018 because both wasps and hornets made their nests in the hide. This was the second time that hornets had used the hide and to prevent any more disruption I spent some time sealing the gaps which the insects were using, after they had finished their breeding season.

It was therefore a surprise when yet again a wasp made a nest within Grove hide this year. While many people would just destroy the nest, this is not the way we should behave to our wildlife, particularly on a nature reserve.



The wasp entered the hide through a small knot hole in the left hand viewing flap, and built its nest just above this, on the flap hinge-joint, as you can see above.



To protect members from the wasps and the wasps from the members, I decided to make a box to isolate the wasps from the interior space. Originally this was just going to be a wooden box but then I had the idea to use some Perspex, so that people could see the wasps while remaining safe from stings. The viewing box is now in place and I would hope that you will watch the wasps without disturbing them, particularly by only using the right-hand viewing flaps.

Wasps are not all bad! They feed on nectar so play a role as pollinators despite not having body parts to help collect pollen. They are also predators helping to manage other insect populations.

## Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, Jan to July 2019

*By Roger Murfitt*

Wildfowl counts in the winter period were relatively unexceptional though roosting Goosanders peaked at a very respectable 59 (26 adult males) on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb. A count of 58 with 30 adult males three days earlier means that at least 63 individuals used the site. The male Scaup which was first found at the end of last year stayed through the winter period until 18<sup>th</sup> March and a single Great White Egret was seen on four occasions between 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan and 5<sup>th</sup> April. A Great Black-backed Gull on East Fen on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan was a scarce visitor to the site but signalled an increase in records as presumably the same bird was seen on four further dates to 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, then two were on Tern island on 20<sup>th</sup> April and a single was seen on 28<sup>th</sup> April. An interesting observation by one of our regular visitors was of a Moorhen that seemed to specialise in catching fish (Perch) from the small stream in front of Grove hide – relatively unusual behaviour for this species. Other winter visitors included occasional sightings of Water Rail and a female Goldeneye.



In March the first returning Oystercatcher was seen on 1<sup>st</sup> and Redshank returned from 15<sup>th</sup>. Also in March was a new species for the site – a Cattle Egret seen perched in a tree on the N side of the New Workings near to dusk on the 30<sup>th</sup>. There was an influx of this species into the country in previous months and hence there had been rather more sightings than usual. A male Red-crested Pochard was present on Manor Lake from 29<sup>th</sup> Mar to 3<sup>rd</sup> April (see image).

First dates of arriving summer migrants included Sand Martin on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar, Swallow on 31<sup>st</sup> Mar and Whitethroat on 18<sup>th</sup> April. Spring migration got fully under way in April with an early Greenshank passing quickly through on 5<sup>th</sup> April. On 8<sup>th</sup> April a Sandwich Tern (normally a coastal bird) was seen briefly on East Fen, which is only the fifth record for the site and the first since 2011. Two Black-tailed Godwits and a Whimbrel were seen the next day, 9<sup>th</sup> April.

Overnight rain helped create the conditions for a “red letter day” on 8<sup>th</sup> May with several scarce visitors. These comprised a single Black Tern over Colebrook Lake North, two Grey Plovers, a Turnstone, a Wood Sandpiper, one or two Whimbrels, two Dunlin and a Ringed Plover. This impressive list of scarce waders and terns for an inland site shows what can turn up when poor weather conditions impact on migrating birds. Low water levels on East Fen early in the year (due to a relatively dry winter), exposing large areas of mud, attracted



many of these waders. Other wader migrants in May were two Wood Sandpipers present 17-18<sup>th</sup> on East Fen (making it an excellent spring for this species with 3 individuals), 1 or 2 Greenshank 17<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> and one to three Dunlin on the New Workings from 9<sup>th</sup> until 1<sup>st</sup> June. Also, in May were two records of a male Cuckoo on 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. Sightings of Hobbies have been relatively few (only four, all of singles) but one adult was seen very well as it caught dragonflies over the edge of Manor Lake on 14<sup>th</sup> June (see image above).

Moving on to the breeding species, Black-headed Gulls were back starting to behave territorially on Tern island by mid-Feb. The colony increased in size again with at least 200 nests on Tern island and the two rafts. Breeding success appeared to be good with a count of 220 juveniles (70 fledged) on 26<sup>th</sup> June. As last year, Common Terns nested on the western end of Tern island, with six nests counted on 31<sup>st</sup> May though one was washed out by a rise in water level following heavy rain in the first half of June. It is good to report, after a failure last year, that a minimum of 8 juvenile Terns fledged. As last year, the Black-headed Gull colony again attracted Mediterranean Gulls following on from the pair that



nested but failed to hatch last year. A pair of adults were first seen on 15<sup>th</sup> April and then a pair of second summer birds were seen from 22<sup>nd</sup> April. It was exciting to see both pairs settling down to nest, although the adult pair chose a nest site on the NE corner of Tern island

which was very difficult to monitor. The pair of second summers were easier to observe and were seen feeding recently hatched young on 27<sup>th</sup> May (see image). This was a significant event as it is the first proven breeding of this species in Berkshire! It became clear there were two chicks, one of which was subsequently lost but one went on to fledge and was last seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Interestingly, one of the adult pair of Mediterranean gulls was observed on more than one occasion patrolling Tern Island waiting for unattended Black-headed Gull chicks before swooping down to take a small chick for food.

The breeding Oystercatchers moved to Plover island to nest this year (presumably the squabbling and din from the gull neighbours on Tern Island had finally become too much!). They were seen to have hatched 3 young on 29<sup>th</sup> April and two young were reared to fledging. Redshank did not nest this year but it was a pleasant surprise when an adult Lapwing with 3 small chicks was seen on the far side of the New Workings on 24<sup>th</sup>



June. The young were seen for at least another two weeks and are believed to have fledged successfully, which would be the first successful breeding since 2008! The Barn Owl boxes were checked rather later than usual this year and adult pairs were found in both the Manor Farm and Colebrook Lake boxes though with no young. It is thought that in the case of the Manor farm pair these had already fledged and left. Other breeders included a pair of Great-crested Grebes with two young on Manor lake, one brood of Gadwall and three broods of Tufted Duck ducklings in July. Kestrels bred on site or nearby as a family party of five were seen in the dead tree on Manor farm on 20<sup>th</sup> July. Finally, among the breeding species, we come to Little Ringed Plover. Filling operations were suspended on the New Workings during the breeding season of this Schedule 1 protected species and it has been a very successful year. At least 3 pairs were on territory and at least 5 broods of young have been seen (this species has more than one nesting attempt per season). At least 7 young fledged, possibly many more. A very good count of 23 Little Ringed Plovers (adults and fledged juveniles) was seen on East Fen on 17<sup>th</sup> July whilst a pair with three small (1-2 day old) juveniles was also on the New Workings on the same day.

Return autumn migration of waders can begin as early as June and single Black-tailed Godwits were seen on 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> July. There was an unusually high count of 12 Redshanks on 19<sup>th</sup> July on East Fen, most of which soon moved on. Green Sandpiper numbers also built up on East Fen during June and July, from 3 on 26<sup>th</sup> June and then 7 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 10 on 11<sup>th</sup>, 13 on 17<sup>th</sup> and then a very impressive 19 on 26<sup>th</sup> July (possibly a record count for the site). We can look forward to what else the autumn migration season will bring over the next few months!

*All images of Red-crested Pochard, Hobby, Mediterranean Gull (second year with juvenile) and Oystercatcher (with fledged juvenile) by Roger Murfitt*