

# Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter January 2020



Colebrook Lake North by Roger Murfitt

## Contents

2	<b>Open Day report</b>
3	<b>British Birds article</b>
4	<b>New Arrivals and Recent Bird Sightings</b>
6	<b>Sunday Work Party Activities and Membership Report</b>
7	<b>Climate Crisis and Moor Green Lakes Group badges</b>

## Reminder! Photo Competition for members

Please let us have your entries by 1 February for the Photographic Competition to be held at the AGM on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February. Each person can submit up to nine photographs for judging, three in each of the categories, birds, seasons and nature (excluding birds). If we receive enough entries from juniors we will also have a junior category. Full details, rules etc. are found here :

<https://www.mglg.org.uk/special/photocomp.html> Join in and make the evening a success!

# Moor Green Lakes Open Day – part of the Blackwater River Festival

by Duncan Clark

## Moor Green Lakes Self-Guided Walk Map

The Self-Guided walk is along public footpaths so please do not climb over gates or fences into the reserve.



### Key

Self-Guided walk location

- 1 - Grove Hide
- 2 - Grove Lake Screen
- 3 - Invasive River Species
- 4 - Between the Lakes
- 5 - Stumpery and Hazel Coppice
- 6 - River Maintenance
- 7 - Woodland Coppicing and Dry Hedges
- 8 - Water Level Management
- 9 - Demoiselles and Dragonflies
- 10 - Live Hedgelaying and Biodiversity
- 11 - Colebrook Lake Screen
- 12 - Colebrook Hide
- 13 - Manor Farm and New Workings
- 14 - Bird Feeder Paddock
- 15 - West Colebrook Meadows
- 16 - North Colebrook Meadows

The self-guided walk signs show management and conservation information

This year BVCT organized a Blackwater River Festival to celebrate the 23 mile stretch of river valley we all know and enjoy. Moor Green Lakes was in the thick of the events with information boards enabling self-guided walks around the reserve on public paths for the 9 days of the festival and an Open Walks day on the last Sunday. Those on the public paths are still there now if you missed them. Bernard also arranged a mammal trapping session on the first Saturday while the sun still shone which was very popular with the children.

On the last day of the Festival, the reserve was opened to the public, providing hourly walks inside the reserve from the birdfeeder paddock around the



north of Colebrook Lake, past the east end of Long Island before exiting through the gate between the lakes. Despite the mixed weather we had 21 volunteers turn up to help which made a huge difference to setup, manning the walks, hides and talking to visitors. Through the day we had 26 visitors on the walks and several others stopped off at the gazebos. Everyone seemed interested in what we were doing, and we expect some new members and volunteers in the upcoming season.



Checking the pond dipping collections!

Many thanks to everyone that turned up and we look forward to seeing you all again soon as a volunteer, walking around the reserve or at our AGM on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

It was also really nice to get together with our regular volunteers and spend some time watching the wildlife on the reserve.

Our bird rarity - Black winged Stilt was still around and a Hobby was giving us lots of aerobatic displays. We even had some dragonflies come out in the short spells of sunshine as well as lots of aquatic creatures from Jenny's pond dipping.



The last walk of the day was led by Jenny, our BVCP Ranger.

*(The Committee wishes to record special thanks to Duncan Clark who put a great deal of effort and time into the event to make it a success – Ed.)*

## British Birds article

Often, we spot birds but don't necessarily 'observe' them. Roger Murfitt, our bird recorder, found some of his observation sufficiently relevant to submit the following article to British Birds. Roger was subsequently rewarded with its publication in the July edition of this important publication.

### Carrion Crow dropping freshwater mussels

On 23rd June 2018 at Moor Green Lakes nature reserve in Finchampstead, Berkshire, I noticed a Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* flying towards me along the wide riverside path. The bird dropped a hard, dark object from its bill, and when I reached the area, I found a hard, stony patch of the path with a large number of mussel shell fragments scattered around. It became clear that the Carrion Crow was deliberately dropping freshwater mussels onto the ground to break the shell and retrieve the soft mollusc inside, and indeed on a subsequent visit (29<sup>th</sup> March 2019) my wife and I saw a Carrion crow on the ground in the same area, consuming a mussel from a broken shell.

Similar behaviour has been documented from coastal areas, where Carrion Crows access marine mussels (e.g. Davenport *et al.* 2014), but I have not found reference to this for inland crows and freshwater mussels. At the coast, mussel beds can be revealed at low tide, but access to freshwater mussels for inland crows will be more challenging. In this case it may be that the crows were benefiting from low water levels in the adjacent, relatively shallow, River Blackwater.

### Reference

Davenport, J., O'Callaghan, M. J. A., Davenport, J. L., & Kelly, T. C. 2014. Mussel dropping by Carrion and Hooded crows: biomechanical and energetic considerations. *J. Field Ornithol.* 85: 196–205.

Roger Murfitt, Finchampstead, Wokingham, Berkshire; e-mail [murfitt.roger@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:murfitt.roger@yahoo.co.uk)

## New arrivals

By Alan Holmes

It was not meant to be like this. Insect populations are in collapse (which they are), but they are also moving northwards. The result of this is that all sorts of exotics are turning up that once we would never have believed. Some have come with the horticultural trade, like the "Garden Centre spider" (first seen in the UK in the early 1990's) or the Box Tree Moth (2007). This year at Moor Green we had our first confirmed record of the Small Red eyed Damselfly which only arrived in the country in 1999.

But there are others we have not yet seen that are worth looking for at Moor Green or in the surrounding area:

		
<p>The Ivy Mining Bee <i>Colletes hederæ</i> (2001) is a smarter version of the common Honeybee with smart stripes on the abdomen and a ginger thorax. You will find it on ivy flowers in October and November: but surprisingly, we do not seem to have any ivy on the reserve itself. It digs small holes in the ground as nests.</p>	<p>The Willow Emerald Damselfly <i>Chalcolestes viridis</i> arrived in serious numbers only in 2009, but has advanced westwards rapidly, now reaching North Hampshire and Oxfordshire. Uniquely among British dragonflies, it lays its eggs directly into the bark of overhanging willows creating characteristic scarring.</p>	<p>Nobody can forget an encounter with our scariest looking spider, the Wasp Spider <i>Argiope bruennichi</i>, (1920s) which is completely harmless. Find it in undisturbed rough grass waiting for a grasshopper to make a mistake.</p>

## Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, Aug to mid-Dec 2019

By Roger Murfitt

Conditions on East Fen in the autumn continued to be ideal for migrating waders, with low water levels exposing extensive muddy areas alongside shallow water. The most numerous wader species was Green Sandpiper, with a peak of 14 on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug and up to 10 in Sept. Following an unusually large autumn influx of Wood Sandpipers into the country, two were recorded on East Fen on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug increasing to three on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. With the three individuals recorded in the spring, this has been an exceptionally good year for this species at Moor Green Lakes. Other waders included the first Ringed Plovers of the year from 20<sup>th</sup> Aug, with up to two on 10 dates, two Black-tailed Godwits on 5<sup>th</sup> Aug and up to two Greenshanks on 10 dates in the autumn. Common Sandpiper and Dunlin were quite regular over the autumn with up to three of the former on 28 dates and up to 2 of the latter on 15 dates. The first Ruff of the year were two on East Fen on 16<sup>th</sup> Sept remaining until 29<sup>th</sup> Sept, though five were reported on 28<sup>th</sup> Sept. The rarest bird of the year for Moor Green Lakes and a major county rarity was a Black-winged Stilt which appeared on East Fen on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept. There had only been three previous records in Berkshire, and none since 1945 so a lot of birders came to see this individual. It was a juvenile and may even have been reared in the UK as this species has begun to attempt to nest here in very small numbers. It seems to have been the same bird that was earlier present in Nottinghamshire and clearly found the habitat on East Fen to its liking as it stayed until 8<sup>th</sup> Oct, just short of four weeks!



Black-winged stilt on East Fen – 11th Sept 2019 (J O'Brien)

Other autumn migrants included a Spotted Flycatcher on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug, single Wheatears on two dates in Aug, a Whinchat on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept and one or two Yellow Wagtails on three dates in Aug/Sept. A Firecrest seen on 6<sup>th</sup> Sept with a tit flock was the first of the year. A Ruddy Shelduck on 18<sup>th</sup> Aug was the first record here since 1996. It was part of a wider arrival of this species across the country which was believed to originate from the large flocks which gather to moult at this time in the Low Countries. Another rarity for the site was a juvenile Black-necked Grebe which was present on Colebrook Lake from 25<sup>th</sup> Sept to 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct, though it could be rather elusive, often staying close to the margins. This was the first record here since 2013.



Black-necked grebe on Colebrook Lake North – 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019 (R. Murfitt)

An even rarer bird was the Cattle Egret seen by two observers briefly on Colebrook Lake scrape on a misty morning on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. This follows the first ever record of this species in March this year. Staying with egrets, Great White Egret, a former rarity, is on the increase in the UK and seems to be becoming a regular winter visitor to Moor Green Lakes. One was seen on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct and since then there have been records of single birds on a further six dates to 13<sup>th</sup> Dec and two were seen on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. A single Peregrine was seen on four dates in Aug/Sept and then on two dates in Dec.



Great White Egret over Grove Lake – 11th Nov 2019 (R Murfitt)

Amongst the winter visitors, the first Wigeon was recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug, Redwing on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct, Brambling on 15<sup>th</sup> Oct and Fieldfare on 19<sup>th</sup> Oct. The first Goosander appeared on 30<sup>th</sup> Oct and the peak count so far has been only 18 on 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec. Another rare bird for the site was a Ring-necked Parakeet which was seen and heard as it flew across Colebrook Lake North during a working party on 19<sup>th</sup> Nov. This is only the second record here of what is a relatively common bird in other parts of East Berks. A male Pintail visited Grove Lake on

14<sup>th</sup> Nov and a Water Rail was heard in Manor Lake reeds on 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. With heavy autumn rains, the water level on East Fen is now very high and even the Snipe that regularly roost here in numbers in the winter have been mostly pushed off. Those autumn days with masses of waders on East Fen now seem a distant memory!

## Sunday Work Party Activities

*By Jane Heritage*

So far there have been four Sunday work parties since the end of the summer. Volunteer numbers vary between the high teens and low twenties.

In September the main task was to prepare for the Open Day at the end of the month, clearing the pathways and overhanging branches. This work is also necessary to allow vehicular access round the reserve. In addition, some brash was cleared around Colebrook Lake South.



On a rather damp day in October volunteers turned out to plant hawthorn & blackthorn saplings to fill in the gaps in the hedge alongside the footpath leading from the car park down to the Blackwater. The view from the viewing slot on this path was improved so Tern Island is clearly visible through the cut at the end of Long Island. The task finished early so many volunteers enjoyed a leisurely lunch and a cuppa in the hide with time to bird watch and chat.



November's task was to clear Plover Island as much as possible. As usual, we concentrated mainly on the end and side facing the bird hide. This involves removing large numbers of foxglove seedlings, digging out brambles and clearing anything else unwanted that tries to make a home on the island. Some birds prefer a shingle surface for nesting.

## Membership News

*By Steve Arnold*

At the 2019 AGM we changed our membership structure to a single household membership. This was agreed unanimously apart from one vote. For Dave (membership secretary) and myself (treasurer), it would save a lot of unnecessary work. For single members paying the minimum, it increased from £5.00 to £10.00. Hence, there was a concern we would lose members and income.

At the time of writing I can say that 75% of single members paying £5.00 have stuck with us and paid the £10.00, in some cases they have given a donation too. Only one person complained, although I am sure some of the others who didn't renew, have made a silent protest. The committee thanks all the members who have renewed.

This year, membership income is up, but numbers are down, with still several months to go. We last changed subscriptions in 2012. In the last 8 years, paying in cheques is harder. Before I could walk to Barclays bank to pay in cheques. I soon realized you could use the pay-in envelopes without waiting for a teller. Then the bank closed, which meant I had to drive to Crowthorne. And then they removed the pay-in envelopes (to prevent money laundering) so it was back to queuing.

Nowadays I use my mobile phone to pay the cheques in, and so far, haven't needed to visit the bank. Whether this is quicker than going to the bank is debatable. The phone method usually takes several attempts per cheque. So, paying in 15 say, can take quite some time, which maybe equates to a drive Crowthorne and back, but at least my carbon footprint is lower. Paying online or by standing order is better for us, but not everyone is comfortable with online banking.

One last request, please promote us to your friends and colleagues, and try to get them to join the Moor Green Lakes Group.

## Climate Crisis

by Iain Oldcorn

The climate crisis is impacting on our beloved birds so it would be helpful if we all “did our bit” to reduce our carbon footprint rather than leaving it to everyone else.

It would be unrealistic to expect anyone to revolutionise their lifestyle overnight to minimise their carbon footprint (though some manage it), however, every little change that we each can achieve in migrating to a more sustainable way of behaving must make some difference. It's difficult for an individual to alter a government policy on building infrastructure such as power stations, roads or airport runways etc., though we should put pressure on our Councils and MPs about such matters, however, there are many individual actions that we can take.

Background: carbon emissions (plus methane release) make the greatest impact on our climate, the figures are calculated in kilograms or metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted (KgCO<sub>2</sub>e or tCO<sub>2</sub>e). In terms of tCO<sub>2</sub>e per head of population per year the worst countries currently are: Australia (22.8), USA (20.2), Canada (19.5), NZ (16.9), Netherlands (11.5), Germany (11.1), ... UK (7.4), Italy and France (7.2), ...Peru (2.8), India (1.8). Note that calculating all this is quite complicated; for example, my wife's Japanese car was built in France and so it's manufacture counts against French emissions, similarly my shirt that was made in India and the Peruvian peas that I'm having for dinner do not count as UK emissions! It has been estimated that to keep global warming below the 'agreed' 2C degree increase the global average emission needs to be reduced to below 2.1 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per person per year. It is calculated that driving the average UK car just 4.4 miles will produce 1 Kg of CO<sub>2</sub> which will melt 650 Kg of glacial ice over the long, long lifetime of the gas.

So, what can the average UK citizen do to reduce their 7.4 tCO<sub>2</sub>e? Well, not taking a return economy flight from London to New York would save a massive 1.8 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, and not taking as many sea cruises would help. The average cruise ship inflicts between 1.56 and 6.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>e on our atmosphere for each passenger carried. That vast 6.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>e figure is for an Antarctic cruise and doesn't include the likely flights to/from the port of departure. Reducing one's travelling as the sole occupant of a car by 1000 miles in a year would save on average 0.4 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. The KgCO<sub>2</sub>e emissions per kilometre per passenger produced by various modes of travel within Europe are: Plane – 0.214, Car – 0.146, Ferry – 0.138, Diesel Train – 0.066, Coach/Bus – 0.036, High-speed Electric Train – 0.030.

[This article is inspired by “SOS – Simple Actions That Make a Difference” by Seth Wynes, 2019, Penguin £7.99 (150 A6 pages).]

## Moor Green Lakes Group Badges

Good quality embroidered sew-on badges were designed and manufactured during the summer. These are based on the original MGLG logo. Badges are currently being given to volunteers who regularly attend either the Tuesday or Sunday work parties. Make sure you come along and earn yours!



We wish all our members a very successful  
2020