

Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter August 2020



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Moor Green Lakes AGM

As you know this is usually held in February or March of the following year. At present it is uncertain whether this can take place in the usual way. Your Committee is looking at ways to deal with the AGM if COVID-19 restrictions continue to apply.

We will inform you of our progress in the next Newsletter or before if other action is required.



The Hoverflies of Moor Green

By Alan Holmes

The over 270 species of hoverfly in the UK represent the most charismatic group among the true flies. Hoverflies are important pollinators, of open flowers and many prey on aphids in their larval stages.

Many are challenging to identify, but here are some of the easier ones found around Moor Green.



Technically the group is known for its unique "spurious vein" (blue arrow), an odd additional vein on the wing. Other features of the venation (like the loop, red arrow in this picture) are important in identification.



The beautiful grassland species *Chrysotoxum bicinctum*.



The famous, and very common "Marmalade hoverfly" *Episyrphus balteatus* is known from its orange yellow colouration. However, this is variable and the double stripes, forming moustaches, on the abdomen is a better guide.



The "Footballer hoverfly" named after its distinctive stripey thorax, *Helophilus pendulus*.



The male *Sphaerophoria scripta* has a long body with distinctive short wings.



Male *Eupoedes corollae*



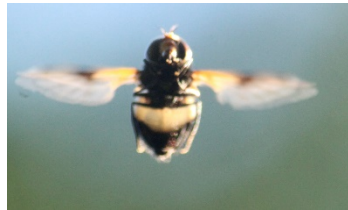
One can find various male "Drone flies" *Eristalis sp.*, here *tenax* can be seen hovering over a territory early in the season—such as in our gardens during lockdown. You find them pollinating hog weed and cow parsley.



Among our largest flies, *Volucella pellucens*. With their pale undersides take over the hovering to hold a territory habit later in the season showing a remarkable white underside.



The hornet mimic, *Volucella zonaria* is a large spectacular species often seen at Moor Green and happy to be confused with hornets and left alone.



John Westmacott

It is with great sadness we learnt of the passing of John after a long illness before coronavirus hit the country. John was a very conscientious member of the Committee and a reliable contributor to this newsletter as our Butterfly Recorder for a number of years. He produced regular and interesting articles on the species found on the reserve. Everybody that knew John saw him as a very pleasant person and we will all miss him.

Ed.

Oak Processionary Moth

Bracknell Forest DC notified us of the presence of caterpillars of this moth at Horseshoe Lake. We have undertaken searches of Moor Green Lakes and not found evidence yet. Please keep your eyes open on trees on the paths as they need reporting. Do not touch them as they may cause severe reactions. Please notify us by way of the Contact Form on the website.



Moor Green Lakes in Lockdown

By Duncan Clark

As we finished our last work party of the season in March, little did we know the impact COVID-19 would have on us all. When restrictions started we had some lovely early spring weather leading to lots of visitors along the river and crowding in the local car parks. Then lockdown was announced, and we reluctantly had to close the car park and hides at a peak birdwatching time of year. The work that had been done in the reserve over the winter was already reaping rewards and new hedging saplings were bursting into bud, clear islands and scrapes were filled with birds and insects were abounding in the hedgerows.



With the encouragement to exercise, the footpaths around the lakes became very popular and I would often meet members and other volunteers as well as many local families out and about taking an interest in the reserve and its wildlife. Thanks are due to recorders Alan (dragonflies) and Paul (butterflies) for all their photos and posts on the [Moor Green Facebook page](#) helping us keep in touch with nature and the wonderful diversity of the reserve. In May following easing of lockdown, we opened the car park and started recording activities again.



With the hot weather there was an abundance of hatching activity on the reserve but we were also subject to 2-legged youngsters swimming in Colebrook Lake – most left when asked. With the car park now open we have started seeing a steady stream of visitors mostly still adhering to social distancing and enjoying the reserve.

Many thanks to Jenny Sibley and BVCP for the path cutting and fence work that they have undertaken during lockdown and the encouragement she has provided during these frustrating times. As we look forward to the rest of the summer we hope to return to some form of new normality and get back to enjoying Moor Green Lakes.

Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, Jan to mid-July 2020.

By Roger Murfitt

Winter wildfowl counts were relatively unexceptional though there was a pretty good count of 74 Shovelers on 10th Jan. Roosting Goosanders peaked at a relatively low 41 (23 adult males) on 15th Jan. A female Goldeneye was present until 16th March and a single Great White Egret was seen on five occasions between 2nd Jan and 22nd March and then one appeared on 8th July. A Great Black-backed Gull on 2nd Jan was the only record so far this year. Two unusual winter records for the site were a Firecrest found along the river path near Grove Lake on 1st Jan and a first winter Mediterranean Gull on the New Workings on 2nd Feb.

Oystercatchers returned from 12th Feb with 3 on that date and the first Shelduck of the year was a pair on 3rd Feb. Two male Red-crested Pochards seen on 8th Mar and then three subsequent dates until 7th May will have been the ones that were on Eversley Gravel pit in Hants, just across the river from Moor Green Lakes, during the winter. Peregrine falcon was seen on at least three dates, including this adult male on 10th Feb which spent some time on the ground on the New Workings.



Peregrine – Roger Murfitt

The first summer migrants were three Wheatears seen at the west end of the New Workings on 20th Mar when there had been a sizeable influx into the south coast. A very unusual record was of a Snipe heard “drumming” over the New Workings in the pre-dawn gloom by one observer on 23rd Mar. The drumming sound is produced by vibration of the outer tail feathers as the bird dives and is normally a breeding display. However, there has been no further sign of breeding activity in what is not typical breeding habitat anyway.

The Coronavirus lockdown from late March through much of the Spring period has meant there have been fewer bird records over this period but some were able to make periodic visits as part of our outdoor exercise walks. Spring wader migrants included 6 Black-tailed Godwits reported on Plover Island on 10th April, Common Sandpiper on at least 5 dates, a Whimbrel west along the valley on 3rd May and single Dunlins on 29th April and 5th May. The rarest wader was a partial summer plumage Spotted Redshank on Colebrook Lake scrape on 29th April, the first for the site since 2007.



Spotted Redshank on the Colebrook Lake scrape – 29th April 2020 - Roger Murfitt

Other Spring scarcities included a male Garganey which was on Tern Island on 15th May, a male Cuckoo which was calling on 3 dates during mid-May and an adult Little Gull on 18th April which was on Colebrook Lake with a large flock of around 40 migrant Common terns.

Turning to the breeding or potential breeding species, the first Redshank had returned on 11th March and two or three were seen on 5 dates from mid-March to mid-April. No significant breeding activity was seen though and by late April only one individual remained which stayed into July and, as in previous years, it took to hanging around with the Common Terns on Tern Island. A pair of Oystercatchers nested on Plover Island and on 16th June were seen with at least two newly-hatched young. By 19th June there was only one young left, though this was not seen after 1st July so they seem to have failed to raise young this year.

The Black-headed Gull colony was around the same size as last year with approximately 200 nests but there were no sightings of Mediterranean Gull at the colony, despite their successful breeding last year. The gulls have apparently had good breeding success with a count of at least 180 juveniles mostly on and around Tern Island on 29th June. Breeding Common Terns increased slightly this year with at least 7 nests (maybe more out of sight in the vegetation) at the west end of Tern



Little Gull over Colebrook Lake North – 18th April 2020 (Roger Murfitt)

Island and a minimum of 10 young was counted from 5 broods on 26th June with other adults still sitting.

Two pairs of Shelduck were seen regularly from mid-March, occasionally in territorial dispute. One pair were holding territory around Plover Island and the female was seen entering the tunnel nest chamber on the island on a few occasions in April but they were no longer seen on Colebrook Lake after the end of April indicating any nesting attempt failed. This may have been connected to some large (duck?) eggs which were being

eaten by Jackdaws and an Oystercatcher on the edge of Plover Island on 17th May (see photo). I was surprised to see the Oystercatcher tucking into the eggs but consulting reference sources indicates these are a known food for this species. On a more positive note, a pair of Shelducks were seen with four small ducklings on the New Workings on 1st July.

Great-crested Grebes are having a good breeding season with three broods seen and a bird still incubating eggs by mid-July. Similarly, Tufted Ducks seem to be doing well with at least six broods seen, a brood of young Gadwall were seen on East Fen and it was pleasing to also see a female Pochard (a scarce breeder) with two young there on 13th July. Kestrels nested in the Dell field Barn owl box and five juveniles were seen in the entrance and on the box on 1st July. Since they were using the main compartment of the two-tier box usually used by our regular Barn Owls, it looks like we may have had no breeding Barn Owls this year as there has been sign of them using the other two boxes. Return wader migration has got under way in July with three Greenshanks seen on 8th July and two Green Sandpipers on 21st July but high water levels on East Fen mean that conditions are not as attractive to waders as last year.



Oystercatcher feeding on egg on Plover Island – 17th May 2020 (Roger Murfitt)

AGM Photo Competition

By Colin Wilson

This was our first attempt at holding a competition this way. From a good selection of entries in three categories, birds, nature and seasons, the judges, Paul Richards and Colin Wilson had the task of finding winners for each one.

There was a very varied selection and some good quality entries made the task difficult. After observing on the key aspects of the images such as composition, exposure, sharpness and relevance to the categories, a winner for each was found from a shortlist.

It was then the audiences turn to take part. They had the unenviable task of choosing an overall winner from the three category winners. The choice was quite clear at the count! The autumn scene on the Blackwater Valley river path was very popular.

The big surprise on the evening was that, having been anonymous throughout, when the names were announced of the category winners and overall winner, they were one and the same person! Peter Craig 'scooped the pool' as they say! So, many congratulations Peter and let's see if someone can beat you next time we do this!



Overall winner - Autumn

The other category winners are on the next page



Winner - Nature



Winner - Birds



Adrian Hobbs, Chairman of Moor Green Lakes Group presents Peter with the life changing prizes for winning!

So, the question is, will Peter have the field to himself next time, will he be sunning himself in the Caribbean with his winnings OR will a competitor emerge?

If we do this again we hope more people will be enthused enough to take part. It was great fun!