
JANUARY 2021



Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter



Red green carpet moth by Paul Richards

A new format for the Newsletter. Let us know if you like it!

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Colin Wilson - Newsletter Editor (newsletter@mglg.org.uk)

A New Year and a new style! Email me with your comments on the format. I am often amazed by nature. Although I started as a birdwatcher my fascination with natural life has developed year on year.

I always look forward to the brilliant newsletter contributions from our specialist recorders and I hope you enjoy reading the articles on moths and damselflies, you will certainly learn a lot of interesting facts!

2020 interfered very much with the reserve and everybody's lives but we approach 2021 with hope and the knowledge that nature will carry on regardless of our human problems. Make the most of the wonderful places we have on our doorsteps, Let's hope soon we can meet up and spend warm days in the hide spotting wildlife together.

Thank you for supporting Moor Green Lakes Group.

A Swift idea!

Colin Wilson - Editor

During my time as Vice-Chair of Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust I ran a programme of activity to provide homes for swifts. This involved the installation of over 150 homes for the birds ranging from churches, public buildings, a school and many houses.

The Moor Green Lakes Committee were keen to see if we can do something for these birds on the reserve.

Birdwatchers will know hundreds pass through on passage every spring and autumn.

As part of the BVCT project a nesting box for the top of a tower was built by John Mackey, a Trust volunteer. We now need to acquire and erect a telegraph pole for the tower on the reserve.

Various attempts have been made to ask SEEBBoard and even BT to assist, so far without any luck. There are commercial businesses that do this sort of thing but at a high cost.

If any member has an idea how to advance this through contacts, personal expertise or dogged determination, please contact me via the Contact page on the website <https://www.mglg.org.uk/contactmglg.html>



Moths of Autumn and Winter

Paul Richards - Butterfly Recorder

We most often associate moths with mild spring and summer nights as we see them flitter around light bulbs or fly into our houses through open windows. Yet, autumn provides a rich variety of beautiful moth species which continue well into winter. In fact moths can be found all year round, even in the depths of winter.

One of our most spectacular moths is on the wing in September and October. The Merveille du Jour (marvel of the day) frequents woods and parks where oak trees grow. Its stunning green colouration is a perfect camouflage against lichen covered trees and branches. Two other attractive (lichen) green moths to look out for in autumn are the brindled green and green brindled crescent. Both are relatively common locally.

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Merveille du Jour

Moths of Autumn and Winter

(Continued)

Many of the moths of autumn seem to mimic the autumn hues of the trees. Moths of the sawfly family have wonderful yellow/orange/purple colouration. The feathered thorn, scarce umber (despite its name not particularly scarce locally) and mottled

umber also show the colouration of autumn leaves. A perfect disguise against predation.

The chestnut moth is a common and very variable autumn species and like its name suggests has a wonderful chestnut colour. It feeds on a range of trees and can be commonly seen at light traps between September and May. The red-green carpet moth (so called because of its Victorian carpet-like markings and not dietary preference) can be found from September to November and again in the spring after hibernation. Fresh examples show a wonderful green-purple two-tone colouration.

Some hardy moths are even named after the colder, darker months of the year. We have the November moth and December moth as well as the winter moth. The winter moth can often be abundant and frequently seen in car headlights while driving down country lanes in the winter.

One interesting observation about some of winter species is that the females are wingless (or have vestigial wings). The winter moth, scarce umber and mottle umber all fall into this category. The female moths can sometimes be found by exploring woodlands on a mild winter night and looking at the tree trunks with torch.

All photos by Paul Richards



Mottled umber



Green brindled crescent



Pink-barred sawfly



Chestnut moth

Bird sightings - July to November 2020

Roger Murfitt - Bird Recorder

With the breeding season mostly over, attentions switch to autumn migrants and eventually winter visitors for this period. Unfortunately, high water levels on East Fen and also the recent infilling on the New Workings meant that there was little good habitat for wader migrants so numbers and diversity were rather low. Despite this, Common Sandpiper was seen regularly during July and August, usually singles but a maximum of three on the 29th Aug, the last of the autumn. Two Dunlin were on the New Workings on 17th Aug and a single Redshank remained through July, last seen on 1st August. Green Sandpipers were seen throughout the period with a maximum of three seen on 7th Sept and at least one (maybe two) wintering. Little Ringed Plovers were last recorded on 28th Aug when 3 were on the New Workings and the first returning Snipe was one on 14th Sept. It was good to see four Snipe (including the one in the photo alongside) using Colebrook scrape on 16th Sept just three days after it had been cleared of rank vegetation by a working party.



*Snipe - Colebrook Scrape
16 September*



*Stonechat - New Workings
12 November*

Autumn passerine migrants included a Whinchat on the New Workings on 28th August and a Wheatear there on 30th August. A single Yellow Wagtail flew south over Colebrook Lake calling on 7th Sept, two Spotted Flycatchers were on and around the large dead tree on Manor Farm on 19th Aug and a Firecrest was recorded near the bird feeding area on 12th Oct. Other scarce passerine sightings included heathland birds dispersing from their breeding areas, with up to two Dartford Warblers seen on the New Workings between late August and early November and a single Woodlark in the same area on 24th Sept and 7th Oct. Stonechats became more obvious in the autumn period, again possibly including some dispersing from nearby heaths, with up to eleven reported on the New Workings on 29th Sept. There has been an invasion of Crossbills from the Continent into the UK this year meaning that more are around locally and on 28th Oct three were recorded in the area of the Moor Green Lakes car park.

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Bird sightings - July to November 2020

(Continued)

Amongst the wildfowl, the regular Barnacle Goose flock of up to 23 was seen fairly regularly from late August. They were sometimes to be seen on the newly-cleared Plover Island in the autumn which became popular as a loafing/roosting area for geese including Greylag and Canada Geese. Up to 300 Canada Geese were counted coming to roost on 21st Aug whilst 115 Greylag Geese were on Colebrook Lake North on 19th Nov. Unusually at least one Shelduck remained into the winter months and 2 were recorded on 25th Dec. Twelve Mandarin were seen on Colebrook Lake South at dusk on 12th Sept, Pintail were recorded on two dates with one male on Colebrook Lake South on 29th Nov and two males on the North Lake on 21st Dec and a female Goldeneye was seen on several dates from 19th Nov.

Turning to gulls, single Mediterranean Gulls were recorded on three dates, a first winter on 17th Oct and 2nd Nov and an adult on 19th Dec. Yellow-legged Gulls were recorded on five dates, singles on 21st Aug, 8th Oct, 18th and 19th Dec and then four at the roost on 30th Dec. Great Black-backed Gull was recorded at the winter roost on two dates, with an adult and first winter on 25th Dec and adult on 29th Dec.

Probably the rarest bird here of this period was a Short-eared Owl seen by two observers over the New Workings on 25th Oct. Other winter visitors included Water Rail, first noted from 10th Nov and reported from three locations suggesting at least three individuals are present. Brambling has been recorded on two dates, a single on 13th Oct and two on 7th Nov, both records coming from near the bird feeder paddock. Finally, a Great White Egret recorded on 8th July was presumably passing through and the more usual winter records began with one on 19th Oct, on two dates in Nov and then regular records of singles in December, usually on Colebrook Lake North.



Grey Wagtail - Riverside 20 August

All bird photos by Roger Murfitt



Your Favourite Tree a photography competition

by Colin Wilson - Editor

I have created a local website of nature walks. The aim is to get people, including families to explore nature.

Everybody is welcome to join in a free, prize competition, with adult and children's sections. Just photograph a favourite tree or trees, branch, stump or just bark! You can read more about it [here](http://www.blackwatervalleynaturewalks.co.uk)

www.blackwatervalleynaturewalks.co.uk

The Willow Emerald: The girls have arrived!

Alan Holmes - Dragonfly Recorder

For many years, it was unclear why Willow Emerald damselflies *Chalcolestes viridis* of northern Europe were not found in southern England as the habitat seemed suitable. But adults first appeared in 2007 and they have been spreading west and north ever since.

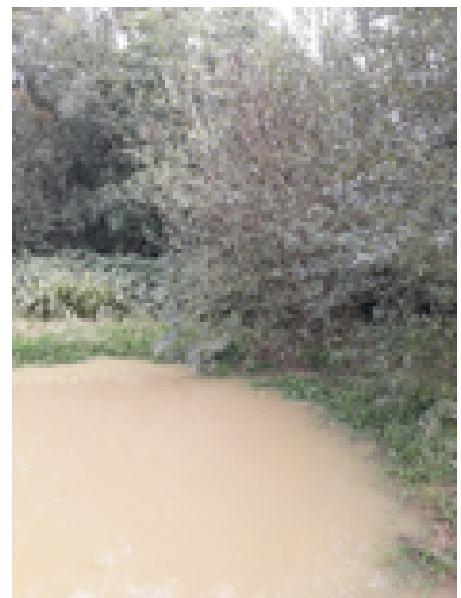
And what a difference a year makes! In 2019, the discovery of Willow Emerald damselflies at Dinton Pastures, Wokingham and Bramshill in north Hampshire caused excitement. Finding them seemed not so much like finding a needle in a haystack- but well a green needle in a green haystack. But, in 2020, there were multiple sightings in the Ascot/ Swinley area and also they have pushed strongly into north-east Hampshire. Additionally, in 2019, only males were seen: this season there was evidence of females and egg laying in Swinley Forest and as far west as Rook's Wood, Barkham.

They are the only genus of damselfly and dragonfly to lay its eggs directly into the bark of overhanging branches, with the developing larvae dropping down into the water when they hatch. The ovipositing scars made in the bark is characteristic.

They turn up in ornamental ponds, in muddy ponds used by dog walkers, in heathland habitats- any water body where there is overhanging trees. The question is why they are not yet seen at Moor Green- something to look out for.



Ovipositing pairs into bark of willow at Mill Pond, Swinley, 21st Sept.



Rook's Wood - common typical habitat



Very tame, allowing a close approach - mobile phone photo



Ovipositing scars on Goat willow *Salix caprea*

Moor Green in Lockdown - Take Two!

Duncan Clark - Secretary

As summer and the nesting season was drawing to a close, we were looking forward to starting our conservation work parties again. COVID constraints limited the number of volunteers to 6 but by working in separate areas of the site we usually managed to get 2 or 3 socially distanced groups working on each scheduled work party. Tony Elston was also organising smaller tasks to refurbish the bird feeders and paint the hides (after Bernard eventually evicted the hornets nest from Grove hide).

After our first August haycut task was cancelled due to weather, September saw two very successful tasks clearing in front of Colebrook and Grove Hides and screens. Birdwatchers should now have clear views from nice renovated hides.

October saw two work parties clearing Plover island and Colebrook North shoreline which resulted in Tern island being deserted by waterfowl in favour of the nice clear Plover island. In November we were locked down again and organized work parties had to be halted. Smaller work parties continued to finish the hide repairs, clear Colebrook west meadow improving the views from the footpath and updated the Moor Green Lakes walk posters.

View of cleared scrape and uncleared Tern Island behind



December saw work parties start up again and -in spite of the weather - we managed to get Tern island cleared of vegetation and the fence. This fence was originally put up to keep mink out but had fallen into disrepair and was becoming a hazard to nesting birds.



View of cleared Tern Island

Photos by Duncan Clark

As we move into 2021 and further COVID constraints, work parties may be limited but we hope you get some time to enjoy our lovely reserve.