
AUGUST 2022



Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter

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*A very well searched for but often not seen Tawny Owl!
See the Bird Report for more*

Happy New Membership Year!

Thanks for being a member of Moor Green Lakes Group, we appreciate your support. The Group continue to work hard to manage and provide wildlife with a good home at our Reserve. Your membership is vital to our continued work so please make sure you renew this year - see David Bishop's email on 17 August. We look forward to seeing you in the next 12 months. As always, please make sure your nature records are shared with us - in the hides or by messages to our Recorders. Contact details are all on the website www.mglg.org.uk . Photos are also very welcome.



Juvenile Lapwing Day 43 by Peter Craig

Moor Green Workparties Continue!

By Jane Heritage - Joint Work Party Leader

Sunday monthly work parties begin again in September and continue through until March 2023. Each one will be followed immediately by a BVCP work party on the Tuesday, allowing multiple tasks to be undertaken and ensuring that each one is completed.

Dates for your diary until the end of the year are:

Sunday 11th and Tuesday 13th September

Sunday 9th and Tuesday 11th October

Sunday 13th and Tuesday 15th November

Sunday 11th and Tuesday 13th December

The work party tasks are yet to be decided. If you are already on the MGLG list of volunteers you will receive an email around the beginning of September with full details of the September tasks.

We look forward to seeing you all again.

Our Joint Work Party Leaders: Duncan Clark , Jane Heritage, Jon Needes and Sarah Elston.

Our work parties are informed and guided by the Management Plan for the reserve. This has grown a little out of date although many of the original objectives remain. Over the coming weeks work will be completed on updating the Plan to ensure the reserve continues to meet its objectives, principally for the benefit of our local wildlife.

JOIN A WORK PARTY

Anyone interested in joining us can make contact via workparties@mglg.org.uk. Meet nice people, learn about nature and the reserve and get some exercise – it's great fun.



See Page 8 for this volunteer story

An amazing spring!

by Alan Holmes, Dragonfly Recorder

What difference a year makes! In 2021 we had a late spring and even as late as early June you could visit favourite dragonfly spots and literally not find any. Roll on 2022, and we have seen the opposite. At Moor Green we had 6 species in late April, and we will benefit here from any further records but this appears to be unprecedented.

First dates

Date Common Name

23/04/2022 Banded Demoiselle

23/04/2022 Beautiful Demoiselle

23/04/2022 Common Blue Damselfly

23/04/2022 Large Red Damselfly

28/04/2022 Blue-tailed Damselfly

30/04/2022 Hairy Dragonfly



Hairy Dragonfly ovipositing, Colebrook, 13th May 2022

Perhaps most remarkable among all of this was the number of hairy dragonfly records. These are an early species anyway and expanded since the 80s across Southern England. Smaller in size than your average Hawker and unmistakable with an earlier flight time than any of the others. But we have had no records since 4 in 24th May 2010. There have been records in surrounding area, such as the Ridges, so an occasional vagrant record unsurprising. (See Annual report 2020.) Paul probably saw one on 30 th April and then there are more on 13th May, even ovipositing during a survey (see picture) and then arranging a magnificent fly past on an insect walk on 12 th June. The little experience I have of them is that they very much stick to the water's edge looking for females and so that, unless you were right down there, this small dragonfly is easily missed. Even at the maximum count of three, this is over the whole site and shows how challenging it is to see them casually. They are very easily missed so, have we had them breeding unnoticed?

On the other hand, in 2021 Downy Emeralds were for a short period they were quite prominent around the screen at Colebrook West. Over the year the vegetation and nettles grew up with the trees, obscuring view of the water line from the path and they could easily have been missed so our sole record is of one alighting in a tree in a glade on the Blackwater River.

In the end, even with the most intensive surveying, it shows how species can simply be missed. The more we study the more we observe- and the more we know we do not see...

Bird Sightings January – June 2022

by Robert Godden

I took over from Roger Murfitt as Moor Green Lakes Bird Recorder at the last AGM, so this is my first newsletter contribution as such. With Roger's keen powers of observation and meticulous record keeping it will be a hard act to follow. Moving from an inland county, where a single Knot or Bar-tailed Godwit is noteworthy, to a county such as Norfolk where the counts will be in the thousands, I must admit to being somewhat jealous, but I wish Roger and Sarah well as they settle into their new surroundings.

A feature of a winter day's visit to Moor Green Lakes is the large number of wildfowl, with Wigeon, Gadwall, Shoveler and Tufted Duck most prominent. Goosander are less common generally in the south east but have a special affinity with Moor Green Lakes (hence the Group's logo) – whereas some birds are present all day, towards the end of day more can be seen flying in from other sites in the area to roost, though it seems that in recent years they have shifted their preferred roost location from Grove Lake to Colebrook North. Numbers peaked at 50 on 5th Jan and gradually diminished until the last on 7th Apr.

Goosander pair by by Roger Milligan



Another duck species, the Goldeneye, that has turned up annually at Moor Green has for the first time not appeared in the winter of 2021-22. It seems that Goldeneye, in common with Smew, are migrating to the UK in smaller numbers as nowadays they can find ice-free water closer to their breeding grounds in the north.

The discovery of a dead Barnacle Goose, presumably from the local feral population, in January was concerning as there had been a number of reports of avian flu in the area. Although reported to DEFRA, the bird wasn't collected for examination so the cause of death wasn't confirmed. Even now, avian flu is still prevalent and its effects are more widespread than with previous outbreaks, causing high mortality amongst seabird colonies this summer. Please report any cases where avian flu is suspected, particularly if multiple deaths have occurred.

Large numbers of gulls roosted either on Grove Lake or Colebrook North in the winter, and amongst the 1200 Black-headed Gulls and 800 Herring Gulls were the occasional Yellow-legged Gulls and on one occasion a possible Caspian Gull. Some Black-headed Gulls sported colour rings which showed that all had been raised locally, mostly at Moor Green itself.

Bird sightings (cont)

Good numbers of Redwing were reported, especially in the pony paddock, but Fieldfare were scarce. A Great White Egret was seen on many dates between early January and early March on Colebrook North or flying to or from Fleethill Farm. Water Rails were scarce or just typically elusive and there were just three reports of Peregrine. One or two Tawny Owls were regularly seen in their favourite tree by Grove Lake (see image on Page 1 by Peter Craig), and there were occasional sightings of a Barn Owl. The gravelly areas of the New Workings held many passerine species during the winter such as Linnets, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits but these were hard to observe unless they flew.

The first of Moor Green's summer visitors appeared at the end of January in the forms of an

Oystercatcher and a pair of Shelducks on 29 th Jan, the latter increasing to four birds two days later. These were joined on 16th Mar by Little Ringed Plovers and a Redshank. Across the country, summer migrants were deemed to have arrived later than usual – at Moor Green the first Swallow was reported on 11th Apr and the first Sand Martins and House Martins on 13 th Apr. A Cuckoo was a welcome sound in the last week of April and early May.

Springtime can be an exciting time for birders when the right weather conditions can cause

migrating birds to drop in for a short stop en route to a destination further north. Such visits are to be expected at Moor Green during the season but cannot be predicted more accurately. Conditions on East Fen looked promising for waders to turn up, and so it proved. This year's passage migrants included Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Marsh Harrier, four Sandwich Terns, three individual Whimbrels and a late pair of Pintails. While Nightingales can be found fairly easily around the gravel pits south of Reading, there have only been a handful of previous reports at Moor Green, so one on 30th Apr was a surprise. Perhaps equally surprising was that only one Wheatear was noted this spring! (Cont on page 6)



Shelduck drake by Roger Milligan

Bird sightings (cont)

The gravelly areas and the floods on the New Workings appeared to offer plenty of potential for birds to nest. Good numbers of Little Ringed Plovers were around in early spring with perhaps five pairs displaying – Inert were asked to suspend their restoration activities at the western end, but with the vegetation growing up it was almost impossible to monitor this species' success. Interestingly, when Ringed Plovers appeared on passage, they were occasionally seen in this area as well, raising hopes that they too might breed. Lapwings were keenly defending their territories in the same area and two early broods were monitored and largely resisted the attentions of corvids; at least another three nests were active later in the season. The pair of Redshanks were around until early May but probably didn't stay to breed. Meanwhile, the pair of Oystercatchers could often be seen attending to two chicks on Plover Island, though just one remained by late June. Up to six Mediterranean Gulls including two pairs could be seen around Tern Island; one pair settled on a nest site at one end of the island, but the weeks went by and nothing ensued. Common Terns which take advantage of the protection offered by the Black-headed Gull colony were down to one pair this year and raised a solitary chick. Up to four pairs of Shelduck were present around the lakes in spring with a pair showing off their eight ducklings on East Fen in late June.



Clockwise from top right

Redshank Pair - Peter Craig, Little Ringed Plover, Marsh Harrier Mediterranean Gull by Andy Tomczynski

Blackwater Valley Nature Walks

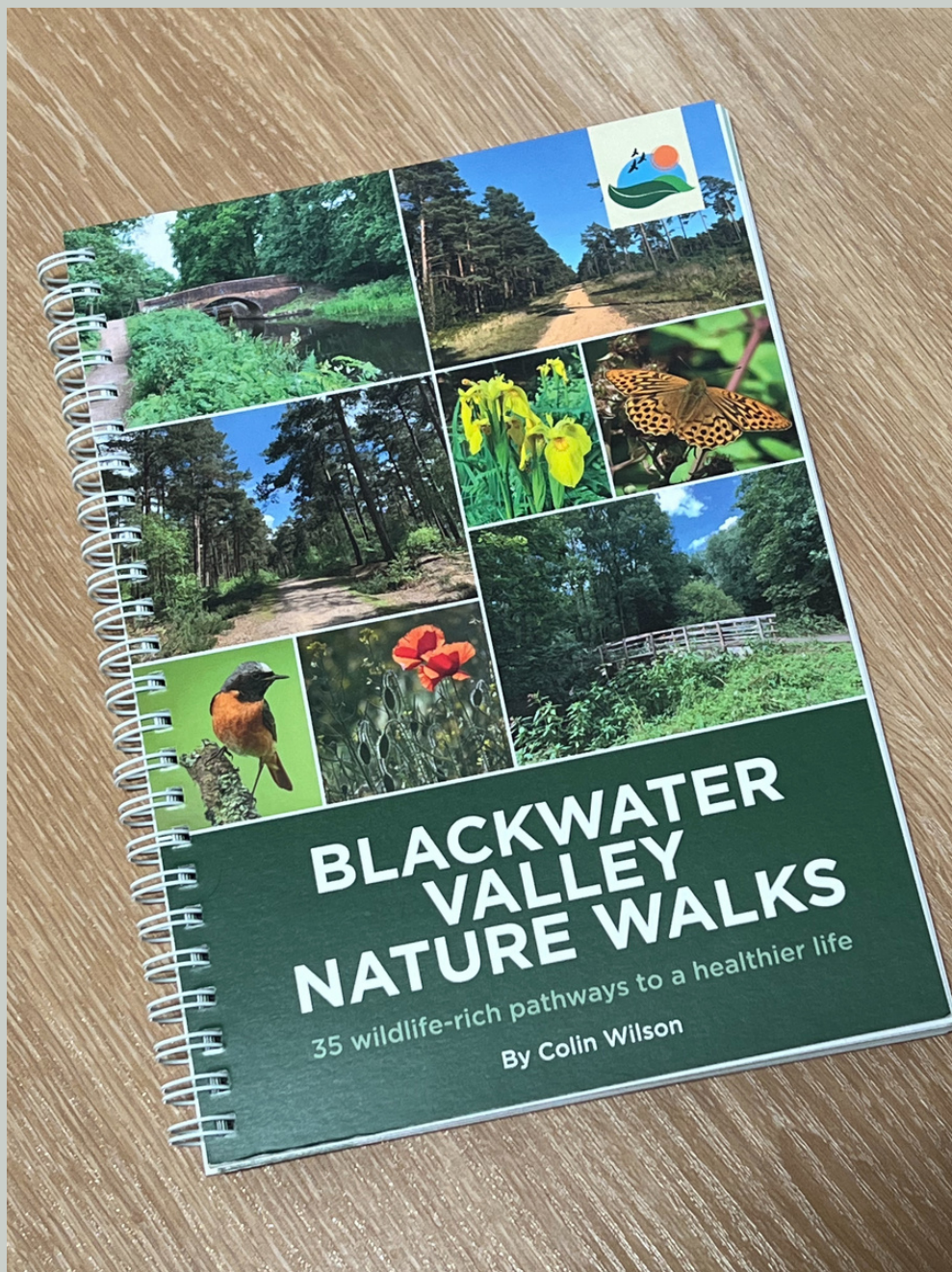
Colin Wilson, our Newsletter Editor, started this venture in the 2020 lockdown. The idea was to increase people's interest in nature on their daily walks. Having time to spare in lockdown Colin created a website to supply ideas for walks with maps, nature tips and step by step guidance. It became very popular and to date has attracted 90,000 visitors and offers over 70 detailed walks and many ideas where to walk.

Recognising not everybody has a computer, smartphone or printer and with the support of the local NHS, he has produced a similarly popular book of 35 local walks ranging from under 2 miles to 10 miles. All walks are accessible by public transport. The health benefits of walking in nature are widely recognised.

You can find the website here:

www.blackwatervalleynaturewalks.co.uk

The website is also the only place where you can buy the book which is just £9.95 and designed specifically for walkers with best OS maps and laminated pages in a ring binding. 70% of the books have been sold already, published in April 2022.



An ideal gift?

Moor Green Lakes gets its swift tower

For some time we have been aiming to install a swift tower. Acquiring a suitable pole and transporting it to the site was found to be the greatest challenge. A local friend of Colin Wilson, John Mackey built the nesting box with 14 nest compartments, then with the help of BVCP, we located a pole and arranged its delivery through personal contacts of our chairman, Adrian Hobbs.

In July, the final step of the project was to add a caller to attract the birds on passage in the hope that when they return to the UK next year they will come back to this site. The caller system was kindly built by Ted Rogers and will play early in the morning and in the evening during the summer months. This was working when installed but has since stopped. It will be removed now until next year rather than to leave it to suffer the weather through the winter.

The plight of swifts has been well documented and a lack of nesting sites is one possible reason for the decline in numbers. The lack of aerial insects could be another factor but our reserve should be good for them. Hot summers is not a likely issue as the young swifts fall into a state of torpor when very hot and of course they do survive in much hotter countries than ours.

Taking up the boxes in towers is a slow process. Once the swifts find them and like them it can still be two years before they finally choose them to breed.

It would be excellent if members kept an eye on the tower when in the Colebrook hide and record what they see. There is a likelihood other birds such as Great Tits and Blue Tits may use the holes, starlings may also do so but the holes are sized to make that a less common possibility.



Colin and Duncan fit the wiring then Ted holds up the pole!!