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Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter January 2023



Glossy Ibis -September to December - John Savage

Happy New Year!

Welcome to another year at Moor Green Lakes. Your enthusiastic Committee continues to keep working on your behalf to protect, monitor and manage the site. Volunteers to help in any capacity are always welcome. Enjoy your newsletter and the excellent photographs for your enjoyment!

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New Chairman for Moor Green Lakes Group

At November's well attended AGM we said goodbye and thank you to Adrian Hobbs CBE who retired as Chairman after 9 years in the role. Adrian was presented with a splendid bowl made by Duncan Clark, using alder from the reserve and was also awarded life membership of the Group.

Our newly elected Chairman is Simon Weeks, who has served on the Committee since 2001 and has played active roles at Moor Green Lakes Group, including Vice-Chairman, Site Liaison Officer and volunteer work party leader. Simon recently retired after 18 years as Borough Councillor for Finchampstead and is currently Chairman of Finchampstead Parish Council and Vice Chairman of Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.



Top left - alder bowl made from the reserve
Bottom Left - AGM gathering
Right - Simon Weeks, New Chairman

Moor Green Lakes - Work Parties

Firstly, we would like to welcome our new volunteer work party leader, Sarah Elston

The 2022/23 season began on Sunday 11th September when 23 volunteers turned out to work around Grove Lake. A large area of reeds in front of the hide was cut down to ensure a good view of the lake during the autumn and winter. For the first time battery power tools were used to do most of the cutting making the job a lot easier for everyone. The stream to the right of Grove Hide was cleared to ensure it was flowing well and some willow in the reed beds was also cut down, again to improve the view. A small team also cleared an area on the north bank of the lake, opposite the Grove Viewing slot.

During the lunch break we were treated to a brief appearance of a marsh harrier spotted by Magnus.

Tern Island and shoreline willow along the west end of Colebrook North Lake were the main targets on Sunday 9th October. Those who didn't fancy the boat trip to the island stayed on dry land to tackle the willow or help deal with the large amount of vegetation removed from the island. The birds prefer the shingle so it is necessary to clear vegetation, mainly bramble and foxgloves, each year. In addition, the lower branches of some of the trees just inside the reserve along the footpath leading from the car park were removed. The view across the lake was slowly being obscured from view and we know how important it is to keep on top of these jobs to ensure a good view for everyone, especially the birdwatchers. Volunteer numbers were again good at 21.

Like Tern Island, clearing Plover Island is also an annual event and this was done in November. Normally, we work on shore and on the island at the same time but this time we had every one of our 27 volunteers (this must be a record!) on the island, easily reached by the pontoon. Tern rafts were also brought to the lakeside ready for clearing and cleaning at a later date. They will then be repositioned ready for the nesting season.

The final Sunday work party for 2022 was on Sunday 13th December when the main tasks were removing the willow along the north shoreline of Colebrook North Lake and clearing the scrub in front of the bee verticals so they get plenty of sun. Normally, we try and avoid burning the willow but as it was likely to stay below freezing for most of the day we decided to have a bonfire to keep warm. As it turned out, the willow was not really suitable for making a good dead hedge. Turn out (excluding the cows who arrived to help out) was 17 and we all enjoyed the hot mulled drink made by Duncan (alcohol free of course) and many Christmas goodies. Thanks to everyone who provided those.

Dates for your 2023 diary are:

Sunday 12th and Tuesday 14th February
Sunday 12th and Tuesday 14th March

Many thanks to all the volunteers for their hard work throughout the year - every hour counts and it really does make a difference.

We look forward to seeing you all again.

Joint Work Party Leaders; Jane Heritage, Duncan Clark, Jon Needes & Sarah Elston.

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



It's hard work to clear Plover and Tern Islands but enjoyed by all!



Bee hotels - An update

You will have seen our two bee hotels, one at Colebrook beside a bird feed using cut garden canes and one using hollow stems and mounted on a tree at Grove Lake. The Colebrook was quickly occupied with activity from several species in May and June and canes plugged with both leaves and mud, indicating different species of bee.

However, the Grove hotel does not seem to have been at all popular. Opinion on the UK Bees, Wasps and Ants group on Facebook offers several possible reasons: Natural stems like angelica and cow parsley maybe too flimsy once dried and they prefer a sturdier cavity that would protect from the elements a little better. (This is a bit odd considering that is what they have to use in the wild, but others have found this.)

Alternatively, the Grove hotel, despite the executive lake side aspect- and becoming a landmark for passing walkers- might be too shaded? Microclimate is very important to cold blooded insects and even a slight different can be the difference between survival and not.

What is definitely the case is that they would benefit from chicken wire to protect against woodpeckers and great tits attacking the stems or the wind blowing them. Another task!

by Alan Holmes



Bird sightings - July to December 2022

by Robert Godden, MGLG Bird Recorder

For many of us, July is the start of summer, but for many birds, July is the start of autumn. Several species that migrate to breed in northern Europe start their southbound journey in July, though the situation can be confused by the movements of non-breeding birds. Green Sandpipers are particularly early - this year at Moor Green the last spring migrant was on East Fen on May 5th and then after an interval of just 37 days, the first apparent autumn migrant was seen on Jun 13th . With favourable water levels, numbers gradually picked up and by the start of July, eight Green Sandpipers could be seen on East Fen. Other notable passage waders reported in July were Greenshank on Jul 5th , Wood Sandpiper on Jul 10th and 11th and Black-tailed Godwit with one on Jul 21st and a remarkable flock of 20 on Jul 24th . The Shelduck family continued to show on East Fen though by the end of the month, no more than five young were being reported.

August was relatively quiet, with a Black-tailed Godwit on Aug 14th and two Garganeys on Aug 18th the only notable migrants. Early autumn is a good time for observing Hobbies at Moor Green and up to three were hawking for dragonflies over the lakes.

September was more eventful. Hobby sightings continued, with three around until Sep 19th and a late individual on Sep 28th and a few still in October. Three Ruff turned up on the New Workings on Sep 10th and another was present from Sep 22nd to 24th . An immature Marsh Harrier arrived on Sep 4th and incredibly remained in the area for seven weeks. When present, it was often seen hunting over the reeds and rough ground west of East Fen, and was sometimes seen drifting in from the Fleethill Farm direction, often at great height. During its stay, Peter Craig captured many fine photos of the bird and detailed examination proved that it was the same individual throughout. The flooded areas at the western end of the New Workings held good numbers of duck in this period, particularly Teal, Gadwall and Shoveler, and while checking through these birds on Sep 20th a female-type Garganey was detected. This became two a few days later, and these birds remained well into October giving good views of their distinctive face pattern. At the end of September, there were first reports of two species that are more associated with winter at Moor Green - Water Rail and Great White Egret on Sep 29th .

The long-staying Garganeys remained until Oct 7th ; the Marsh Harrier was seen most days until Oct 6th , but then unexpectedly reappeared for a day on Oct 19th . This year has been a good year nationally for Little Stints, our smallest regularly occurring wader, and a smart first-winter bird was present on Oct 4th and 5th . There were a few reports of Yellow-legged Gulls in this period. Two drake Red-crested Pochards at different stages of emergence from eclipse plumage were on Manor Lake on Oct 7th - good numbers of these (around 20) winter in the Reading area, but Moor Green doesn't seem to appeal to them as much. Then on Oct 14th , the bird of the year was located by Peter Kendall on the floods on the New Workings - a Glossy Ibis. Fortunately, the bird decided to stay and was reported throughout until Dec 6th , but sometimes appearing at Fleethill Farm. This appears to be the sixth occurrence ever in Berkshire, but five of these have occurred this century, so it seems that Glossy Ibis is a species that is turning up more regularly these days.

November started with an immature Marsh Harrier over the New Workings on Nov 1st - photos showed this to be a different bird to that earlier in the autumn. A Peregrine was a frequent visitor to the New Workings and could often be seen settled on a bank, and the first Goosander returned on Nov 15th . The Glossy Ibis was ever-present, but two female Ring-necked Ducks, a scarce vagrant species from America, were on Grove Lake for just the day on Nov 14th . These were probably the same birds that had been found by the same observer, John Clark, at Wellington CP on Oct 7th , and which appeared for a day at Moatlands Lake, Theale on Dec 2nd . A Firecrest was in roadside trees just west of the Moor Green car park on Nov 18th and 19th . Another surprise was a Shelduck from Nov 27th to 29th - normally there is a mass exodus of this species from the UK to the Wadden Sea in the autumn to moult, with birds returning to Moor Green around the New Year.

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December saw continued sightings of Peregrine, Shelduck and Great White Egret, while the cold weather mid-month had probably moved the Glossy Ibis on. Goosander numbers peaked at 36 on Dec 8th . Throughout the cold spell, wildfowl could still find open water on the Colebrook and Grove lakes and at the adjacent Horseshoe Lake. Peter Craig's photo of some surprising aggressive territorial Kingfisher behaviour possibly indicated that perches over ice-free water were at a premium. While checking the concentration of ducks on the ice-free section of Colebrook North on one such freezing day (Dec 17th), a sleeping duck just happened to show a white eye-ring and further scrutiny revealed it to be a female Ring-necked Duck, possibly one of the two highly mobile birds seen here and elsewhere earlier in the autumn. True to form, the bird wasn't present the following day, but let's hope it settles down somewhere in the area for more people to enjoy its subtle plumage features.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Moor Green birders for their observations and would like to encourage everyone to submit their sightings in future, ideally via www.berksbirds.co.uk. Thanks too to the work party volunteers for their hard work and making such a good job of clearing vegetation from the islands and the areas in front of the hides.

I also add my thanks to Andy Tomczynski, John Austin, John Savage, Magnus Brodie-Cooper and Peter Craig for allowing use of their photos in this article.



Aggressive Kingfishers by Peter Craig

On the next page are the following images by Peter Craig

- *two Red-crested Pochard - October*
- *two Garganey - September*
- *Ring-necked Duck - December*





Little Stint - October by Andy Tomczynski

Firecrest - November by John Austint





Marsh harrier - September-October by Peter Craig



Yellow-legged Gull - October by Magnus Brodie-Cooper