

August 2023



Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter



Blue Mason bee by Alan Holmes

I'm told it's summer even if it doesn't feel like it! Sadly, elsewhere in the world they have had far more than their share of dreadful heat while we suffer our own, thankfully so far moderate, consequences of Climate Change. Fortunately nature is resilient to a degree, as some articles here show, and you and your fellow members are helping our local nature by supporting this Group and our reserve. Help is always welcome, committee help, recorders too, and work parties are an enjoyable opportunity to join us and keep the reserve a success. Look up the Contact page on the website <https://www.mglg.org.uk/contactmglg.html?v=q1up0kzp> Click Destination - Work Parties and get in touch!

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Moth trapping at Moor Green Lakes

By Colin Wilson

Only limited moth trapping has been done in the past but we are looking to start a more regular survey in future years. Probably two sessions a year in the optimum periods so May and September are likely.

A pilot attempt, prompted by Ally Williams, took place recently and some interesting sightings were recorded. A more detailed report will appear in the next newsletter but it's surprising how many moth varieties can be seen in the space of a couple of hours.

Ideally, we would leave a trap overnight and our team check the contents in the morning. Sadly, that is not practical unless we can find a willing person(s) to camp at the site overnight and stand guard over the equipment. Does anybody fancy that idea? The attraction of early morning birdwatching would be a free bonus on top of the fascination of seeing many moths!

Contact the Newsletter Editor via the website Contact page for more details.

Not all the photos were from the night due to the conditions. Photographers were Mary Thompson, Alan Holmes and Colin Wilson.



Peppered moth



Elephant hawkmoth



Mother of Pearl



*Pine
Hawkmoth*



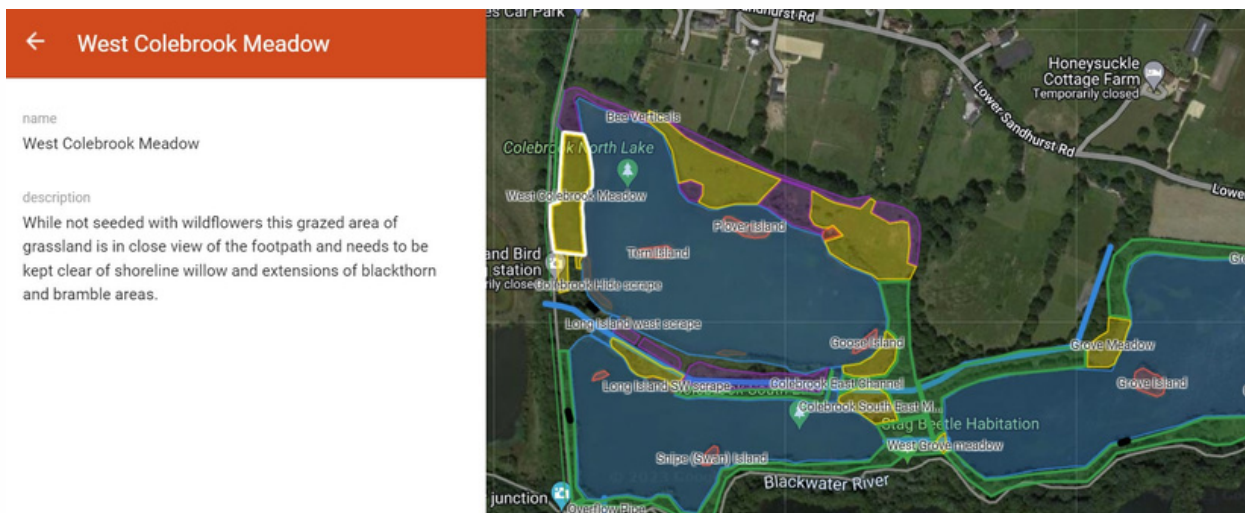
*Hornets appeared but
were easily cleared*



*Lesser Broad-
bordered Yellow
underwing*

Moor Green Lakes AGM -2023

The MGLG AGM this year will be at Finchampstead Memorial Hall on Friday 3rd November 2023 at 7:30 pm. Please put the date in your diary and we will send out the agenda nearer the time. At our last AGM, Duncan Clark looked at how Moor Green Lakes had changed over its history and how we might improve the way we manage the reserve in the future. We showed a new Moor Green Lakes Habitat Map that allowed each area of habitat to be shown as a colour coded layer on Google Maps. Each area can also have a description and pictures associated with it that allows the conservation state and key management tasks to be documented. This new map is being used for the first time in our annual report and images are shown below. A read only version can be accessed by following the [link](#) and the various habitat layers can be seen overlaid on top of Google Maps satellite or other selected base view.



Our thanks go to Duncan Clark for his work on this project which will inform us in years to come.

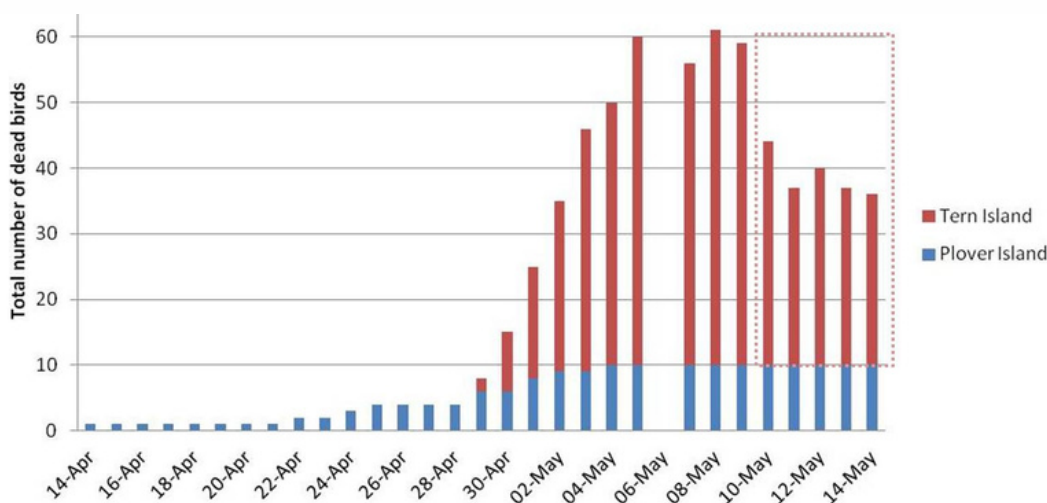
Bird sightings - January to June 2023

By Robert Godden, Bird Recorder

A feature of a winter's day at Moor Green Lakes is the large number of wildfowl present, when our small resident population is swelled by arrivals from further north escaping harsh winter conditions there. Maximum counts of the commoner species were 225 Wigeon, 65 Gadwall, 156 Shoveler, 135 Tufted Duck and 39 Pochard, while the roost of Goosanders peaked at 34. Once again, there were no reports of Goldeneye, but Pintails made a welcome appearance with up to seven in various configurations of males and females on several dates between Jan 14th and Feb 9th, often close to Plover Island. The female Ring-necked Duck that arrived in the area in the autumn continued to make sporadic appearances until Feb 17th.

The Tawny Owl pair were often in their regular roosting tree by Grove Lake but it was always a challenge to actually see them. Also by Grove Lake, one lucky observer watched a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on Feb 21st, the first report of this rapidly declining species here since 2014. As many as 16 Fieldfares could be seen in the paddock by the car park accompanying up to 50 of their more common relative, the Redwing – towards the end of their stay, their typically thrush-like song could be heard from the trees by the paddock.

March saw the arrival of the first spring migrants – a Redshank on Mar 5th was a bit overdue, but many Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were singing by mid-month and Little Ringed Plovers appeared on Mar 13th. The only hirundines before April were two Sand Martins on Mar 25th. A Mediterranean Gull on Tern Island at the end of the month raised hopes of a return to breed, but these hopes were not realised. Kittiwakes are rare birds in inland counties, usually brought in by storms at sea, and have only been recorded at Moor Green Lakes in three previous years. The appearance of one on Plover Island on Apr 14th was the cause for some excitement, but that was short-lived as the bird was clearly unwell, and also short-lived. This event coincided with (but was probably not the cause of) the start of a disturbing period at Moor Green Lakes when large numbers of Black-headed Gulls and a few birds of other species succumbed. DEFRA were informed on three occasions but were unable to respond as many similar sites in the area and beyond were experiencing the same symptoms. Though never confirmed as such, Moor Green Lakes was in the grips of avian influenza. Advice was sought on how to handle the situation and the RSPB advice to leave well alone was followed. Over the following days, birdwatchers monitored the progress of the outbreak and Peter Craig produced this graph showing the number of corpses visible day by day – the apparent reduction in number of corpses suggests divine intervention at first, but was due to their bodies disintegrating, floating away or being predated over time. The surprising message from the graph was that no new corpses were being observed after May 8th, just ten days after the outbreak had significantly taken hold – the situation seemed to have stabilised, and this suggestion was borne out at other locations. It was also apparent at this stage that the number of gulls on the islands had greatly reduced compared to before the outbreak, more so than could be accounted for by the number of fatalities, so many gulls had departed either to die elsewhere or to avoid the disease. The return of many gulls to the islands to breed later in the spring appears to support the latter conclusion. Common Terns fared better than the gulls and five pairs went on to raise chicks.



Peter Craig's graph of bird deaths

Meanwhile, waders had settled down to breed, and from one vantage point overlooking the New Workings, four Lapwings were on nests in close proximity, and it wasn't long before the first chicks were observed. Three pairs of Little Ringed Plovers produced broods of three chicks each, while at least two other pairs were present but harder to monitor. A pair of Oystercatchers took up residence on Plover Island, but it seems that there has not been a successful breeding outcome yet. On the New Workings, the presence of two, and sometimes three, Redshanks raised hopes of a breeding attempt, and finally when the behaviour of the adults became noticeably agitated, the first small chick was seen on Jun 5th, the first breeding here, and in Berkshire, since 2016, and captured by Peter Driver's historic photo (on the next page). The attentive parents ensured that two offspring have now reached full size.

Bird sightings - Jan to June 2023 continued

A large area of wet gravel referred to on Moor Green Lakes restoration plans as West Fen has offered good habitat for passage and breeding waders; up to three Ringed Plovers have been around for most of the spring – this is a species that has bred here in the past and its return as such is highly anticipated.

Other waders that have visited this spring were on their way to breeding grounds to the north. These included Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrel, Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Dunlin, Sanderling and Turnstone. A pair of Garganey turned up in front of the hide on Apr 5th but found Finch Pool more to their liking, remaining there until Apr 22nd. Little Gulls were seen on two occasions including a delightful party of three adults, while two Arctic Terns passing through on Apr 24th were the only record of this species.



Redshank chick by Peter Driver

Moor Green is not noted for passerine migrants – Wheatears are usually the most prominent, but only four were reported this spring. Willow Warblers, once common breeders here, announced their arrival for a few days in early April with their distinctive descending melody but quickly moved on. However, it was a good spring for Yellow Wagtails, and up to four could be seen on the New Workings through much of April. Amongst the warblers, perhaps the biggest surprise of the spring turned up in ringers' nets on Apr 24th in the form of not one but two Grasshopper Warblers! These secretive birds normally pass through undetected, and even when they reach their breeding marsh, their high-pitched reeling song is too high for many to hear.



Grasshopper Warbler by Colin Wilson



Yellow Wagtail by John Savage

By close scrutiny of photographs, it seems likely that the same juvenile Marsh Harrier that was present last autumn for seven weeks has turned up again this spring, and at the time of writing it has already been present for a month. As well as Mallard and Tufted Duck which are common breeding species at Moor Green Lakes, Gadwall have produced at least three broods of ducklings. It's hoped that the handful of Pochard, Teal and Shoveler that have been continually present since the winter might be a sign that these rare breeding species might soon produce some young. But it was another duck species that produced one of the biggest surprises of the spring, when a female Goosander was photographed on the river accompanied by eight well-grown ducklings. Goosanders have colonised Berkshire as a breeding species in only the last few years, and this constitutes only the third or fourth county breeding record!



Black-tailed Godwit by Peter Craig



Bar-tailed Godwit by Rick Dawson

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. Also special thanks to Peter Craig, Rick Dawson, Peter Driver, Mike Hubbard, Colin Wilson and John Savage for allowing use of their photos in this article.

The amazing sight of a family of Goosanders by Mike Hubbard



Bees, hotels, and special wasps

By Alan Holmes, Dragonfly Recorder

Some canes were taken from the bee hotel and hatched out. Over the course of May several male blue Mason Bees *Osmia caerulea* emerged. (See photo on Page 1) Male eggs are laid at the end of the cane so that they emerge first, ready for the females and secondly to protect the more critical females from the long ovipositors of parasitic wasps.

Different species lay their eggs in different places all specific to the species. For this reason, back in December we had a workparty working on a new bee vertical with an enthusiastic volunteer finishing off!



And so it was that a mining wasp, the rarely recorded *Gymnomerus laevipes* was found beginning to dig a nesting tunnel at the newly restored bee verticals on Colebrook north bank. They prey on weevil larvae.

Lesser Emperors at Moor Green

A male was seen on a dragonfly survey on 7th July on the biodiverse west bank of Colebrook North. It was quartering the edge of the reeds, presumably looking for females and interacting with the Black tailed Skimmers which appeared to be half the length. It flew very fast, though perhaps the effect was accentuated by the thin abdomen.

The strikingly blue saddle is distinctive, but note that some individuals of brown hawkers can also have a prominent blue saddle though the foxy brown wash of the rest of the body and wings are usually obvious. The Vagrant Emperor also has a blue saddle but not the prominent yellow/ green eyes of the Lesser. With the shiny wings, I wondered if it had just emerged and at one point I thought there was more than one beast but with the furious speed and rapid interactions with the Skimmers, though I could not be sure.

So on the 10th, Mary Thompson and I had another search and got pictures of a pair in tandem - see next page.



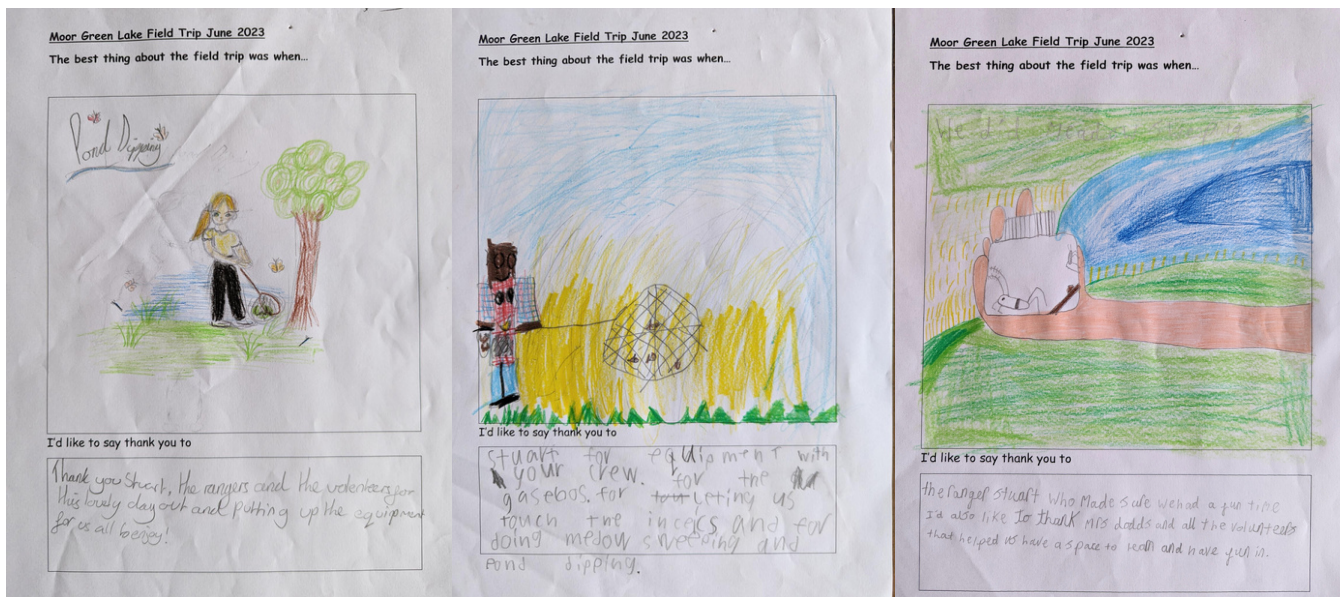
The 7th July Lesser Emperor



They flew back an hour later, still in tandem. There must be strong chance of oviposition, the species egg laying in tandem but we cannot prove that- yet.
 We had a thorough search for excuviae, the old skins left when the larvae bursts out and emerges as an adult. Between us, Mary and I found 34 Black-tailed Skimmer 60 Common Darter, nearly 1 a metre, over an 80 m stretch of the bank in the north west corner of Colebrook North. But of course no Lesser Emperor- and what is surprising no Emperor or Hawker.
 What is a shock is how out of date all the textbooks are due the rapid spread of the species on the Continent. In 1988 a European review stated: " local on Central Europe and rare in the north...Vagrant to Holland ... and northern Germany. Even 6 years ago, Ken Crick our former Chair and Dragonfly recorder had a record in Bramshill questioned. Not anymore. The species has spread rapidly in the UK with it now established and egg laying at for example Tices Meadow:
 Oh!- and there was Willow Emerald scarring- but that is so last year!

School visit 20th June

Volunteers and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership entertained a group of schoolchildren recently at Moor Green lakes. It sounds as though they thought it was a very special visit and remained excited some time after. Here are some of the letters they sent in thanks to the Ranger team and volunteers.



Articles and ideas are always welcome - just contact the Editor via the Contact page on the website.