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Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter



The meadow at Colebrook Lake North

A mixed summer at Moor Green!

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The mixture of warmth and rain has had quite an effect on the countryside and our reserve this year! The explosion of growth in paths, hedgerows and meadows has been quite something to see! Our paths are generally well maintained and we thank all involved, not least our own volunteers and our friends at Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. Work goes on in the reserve after all the restrictions of the last 15 months and you can read more about this inside. Please join our volunteers if you can, being active out in nature is so good for our mental and physical health and, of course, nature is under stress so helping it is vital in this human dominated world.

Thank you for supporting Moor Green Lakes Group.

Moor Green Workparties are back!

By Jane Heritage - Work Party leader

Moor Green volunteers have attended one Sunday and five Tuesday work parties since the end of May.

Fourteen turned out for a Sunday morning session to clear Himalayan balsam along the river from Grove Hide past Moulsham bridge and further along towards Manor farm. After a quick plant identification reminder everyone set about pulling, happy to be back outside and pleased it wasn't bramble – but there were a lot of nettles! It was nice to be joined by Emma, aged 9, who was very keen and hard working. We look forward to seeing her again.

The task for the Tuesday work parties was primarily to replace rotten fence posts between the reserve and the River Blackwater path; also the fence between the path and the bridleway near Moulsham Bridge.

A total of 100 fence posts, ten straining posts, two corner posts, one end post and two sections of deer fencing were installed. Several sections of plain and barbed wire were also repaired. The area around Grove Lake viewing hide was a particularly big job. There was a good turn out for all 5 tasks and just over 200 man/woman hours were clocked up.

A big thank you to all involved - especially Tony Elston who co-ordinated the whole operation, gave fencing installation training to those of us who were new to it and ensured we had all the equipment needed on the day.

Jane is one of three volunteer work party leaders

(Photograph courtesy of Jon Heritage)



The Bumblebees of Moor Green

by Alan Holmes

Bumblebees are among the first large insects to be seen in the year. They are able to warm themselves up by vibrating their flight muscles enabling them to fly earlier in colder weather and earlier in the day than honey bees, which are warmed by their colony.

First out of the trap in the season are Buff-tailed queens *Bombus terrestris* and we have records from March (through to September). At first glance the white tail would make you assume there were White-tailed *Bombus lucorum*, but if there is the slightest tinge of buff at the base of the white tail, they are Buff-tailed. (The White-tailed also has more lemony yellow thorax markings.) Locally, Buff-tailed are by far commoner and we have only one certain record of White-tailed.

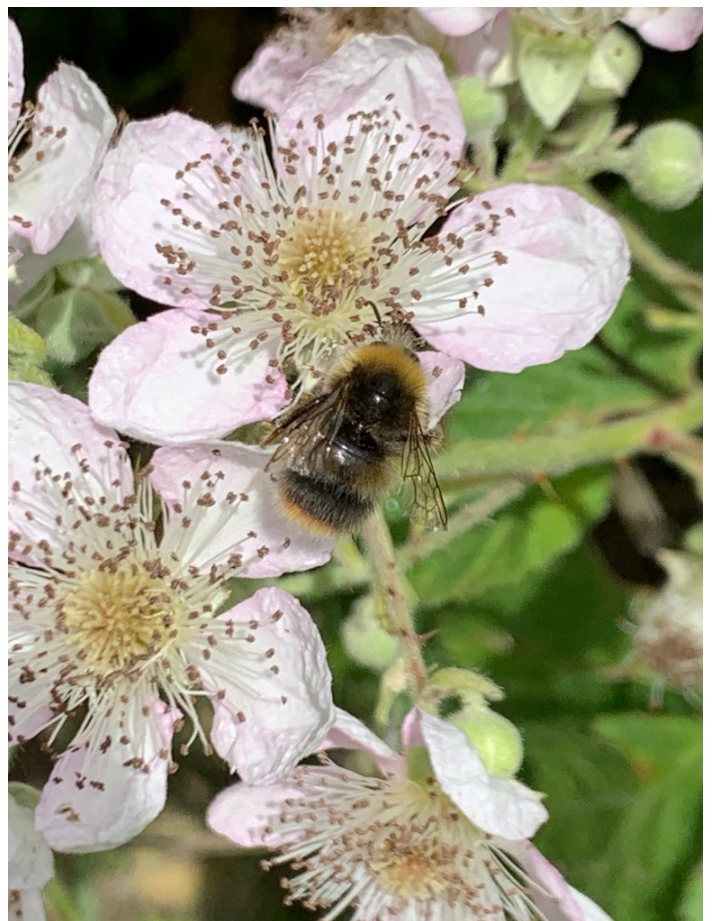
From mid April, the slightly smaller Common Carder Bee *Bombus pascuorum* appears with its beautiful furry ginger abdomen and is about as common as the Buff-tailed. A little later the Early Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum* appears from the end of April and we have one recent record for Red-tailed. *Bombus lapidaries* for June.

Bumblebees are important pollinators and are adept at buzz pollination, rapidly vibrating the flower, which is why they are used commercially to pollinate tomatoes and peppers. It is said in parts of the world that have no bumblebees, flowers are less diverse and tend to be more white . Bumblebees have an innate preference for yellow and blue flowers. So bumblebees, and other pollinators are responsible for the diverse beauty of the flowers we see around us.

From a survey in 2000 we also have records for Forest Cuckoo Bee *Bombus sylvestris*, Early Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum* and Heath Bumblebee *Bombus jonellus* . Have a look out: maybe you can find a new record and confirm they are still on site.



Above -Unusual dark queen Buff-tailed
(Alan Holmes)



Right - Early Bumblebee (Colin Wilson)

Bird sightings - January to June 2021

by Roger Murfitt - Bird Recorder

It has been an interesting first half of the year for birds, with some scarce migrant waders and gulls of particular note. On New Year's Day a Chiffchaff was showing well along the river and a Firecrest was seen along the NW boundary of the recording area, the only one of the year so far. Great White Egret was a regular visitor over the winter period with records on 16 dates from 1st Jan to 12th March, usually singles but two were seen on three dates. Turning to wildfowl, there was a good count of approximately 425 Wigeon on 11th Feb, roosting Goosanders peaked at 50 on the same date and Shoveler numbers reached 110 on 20th Feb. The female Goldeneye remained over the winter until 12th April, a pair of Red-crested Pochard was reported on Colebrook Lake North on 4th Mar and a male Ruddy duck seen on Grove Lake in early April was a rare visitor not seen here since 2011. An unusual visitor here in the winter was an adult Little Gull which arrived with Black-headed Gulls coming to roost on the evening of 9th Feb but didn't stay to roost. Five Yellow-legged Gulls were recorded at the roost on 28th Jan and there were sightings of one or two Great Black-backed Gulls on three dates. A third calendar year Caspian Gull in the roost at Grove Lake on 10th and 11th Feb was the first for the Eversley GP site since 2012.



Bar-tailed Godwit - East Fen 20 April 2021
by Peter Craig



Tawny Owl - Manor Lake 27 Feb 2021
by Roger Murfitt

The first of the scarce waders for the year was a Knot on East Fen on 5th Jan, the first here since 2007. This is a shorebird that is unusual inland but can occur during passage or hard weather. A Brambling in trees near Colebrook hide on 6th Mar was the only one of the year so far, whilst wintering Siskins reached 110 on 8th Feb. Six Common Crossbills seen flying over on 24th Feb reflect the larger numbers around over the winter following an influx from the Continent last autumn. Up to two Tawny Owls were seen quite regularly in Jan/Feb after a roost in an ivy-covered tree was discovered near the river path. One was also seen peering out of the Manor Lake owl box on 27th Feb (below) while a (usurped?) Grey Squirrel looked on!

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Bird sightings - January to June 2021

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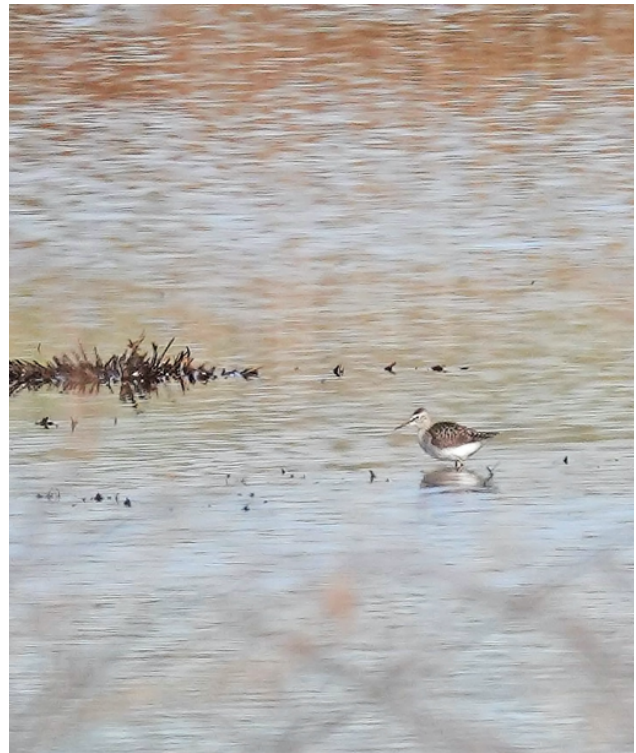
Turning now to breeding or potential breeding species, the first Oystercatchers returned from 6th Feb when a pair were seen attempting to mate on Tern Island. A pair settled to nest on Plover Island, producing chicks and rearing two young to fledging. At least one Shelduck was around from the start of the year and numbers built up to a maximum of six in 3 pairs seen disputing territory in early Spring. Despite one bird being seen entering the nest tunnel built for this species on Plover Island, there has been no sign of any young to indicate successful breeding.

The Black-headed Gull colony increased in size as many more nested on Plover Island this year with at least 80 nests counted there. With another approximately 250 nests on Tern Island (and one on Sandpiper Island, Colebrook Lake South), this made a total of around 330 nests. Breeding success seems to be pretty good with approximately 240 juveniles counted on 29th June and some already fledged and left.

An adult Mediterranean Gull was seen around the gull colony from late March and was joined by a second summer bird during April. They seemed to form a pair raising hopes that they might nest again as in 2019 (the first nesting of this species in Berkshire). A second pair was even seen in the colony on 22nd April but unfortunately none stayed to breed. There were eight pairs of Common Terns nesting at the western end of Tern Island as usual, but unfortunately their nests were all flooded when heavy rain on 18th June led to a significant rise in the water level. On a positive note though it seems that two pairs at least are trying to nest again, somewhat higher up the island this time!

Little Ringed Plovers were back on the New Workings from 18th Mar and there appeared to be at least two pairs on territory. A bird was observed sitting on a nest from mid-May and then on 29th June two fledged juveniles were seen with an adult in the same general area indicating successful breeding. Lapwings displayed at the west end of the New Workings on the grassy infill from March and two were seen on nests from 1st April. Young hatched on 21st Apr and two broods were present on 29th Apr but shortly after this the young had disappeared, presumably predated. Two birds were again seen sitting on nests from late May but it is not known whether they have been successful.

Stonechats nested on the New Workings and Treecreepers bred successfully with a pair seen feeding a brood of five young along the Colebrook Lake path on 17th May, the young huddling together at times as in the photo by Roger Murfitt.



*Wood Sandpiper - East Fen 20 April 2021
By Roger Murfitt*



© Roger Murfitt

Bird sightings

January to June 2021

Continued..

A pair of Kingfishers nested along the Blackwater River and by all accounts attracted fairly close attention from a number of photographers. It is worth noting that Kingfisher is a Schedule I protected bird species meaning it is an offence to wilfully disturb them at the nest. It has been a very good spring/summer for Cuckoo records at Moor Green Lakes, with at least one calling male heard and seen from late April to late June. It is possible there were two males in the area as one was also regularly calling in the Fleethill farm area and calling was also heard from the Ridges. On 4th June a male was seen on East Fen calling as a female looked on and it seems likely that this species bred in the area this year.

Finally turning to waterfowl, there have been relatively few broods in evidence yet apart from some Mallard broods, a Gadwall brood on East Fen on 29th June and a pair of Little Grebes feeding a large juvenile on Manor Lake on the same date.

Heathland Photo Competition

Blackwater Valley Nature Walks and Thames Basin Heaths Partnership have combined to offer a free competition with prizes for the best photographs of heathland in the Blackwater Valley area.

It is really simple, visit a heath in August while the heather is flowering, find an attractive picture and take a photo! Email your best two images to info@blackwatervalleynaturewalks.co.uk and you're done!

Closing date is 31 August 2021.

Visit <https://www.blackwatervalleynaturewalks.co.uk/heathland-photography-competition> for full details.

If you have children or grandchildren get them involved - there's a prize for them as well.

If you don't know where to go, Bramshill has plenty of heather, Sandhurst and Edgbarrow and Yateley Commons are the nearest!

