Moor Green Lakes Group

November 2026 Newsletter



The long-staying juvenile Osprey carries a fish caught in Finch Pond back to its feeding perch.
© *Peter Craig*

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Chairman's Update

Gift to MGLG

The Group extends its thanks to John Hamblin (a past member), for his generous gift of 2 pairs of binoculars and a good quality RSPB bird scope with tripod. These are now being made available to visiting groups and also proved invaluable at our recent successful hide open day.

Manor Farm and Fleet Hill Farm.

The Group continues to try and influence the plans for these two adjacent sites of Manor Farm (aka the New Workings) and Fleet Hill Farm. We have made further representations to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) about the two outstanding planning applications covering the restoration of the sites, which have now been with the Council for almost 8 years. WBC now anticipates approving these applications by the end of this year. Finchampstead Parish Council (FPC, who now own the freehold of Moor Green Lakes), are also engaging with both CEMEX and WBC, regarding possible acquisition. Additionally, FPC is pushing WBC to try and get the long promised Public Rights of Way, (both footpaths and bridleways) across these two sites, formally recognised.

Regrettably, it now transpires that CEMEX will not provide the previously agreed additional car park off Longwater Road, which means the MGL Car Park is more intensively used by visitors to the adjoining sites.

Hide Security

The Group reminds all members to please take extra care when locking our bird hides after use. Regrettably there have been a growing number of occasions when the hide lock numbers have not been scrambled on departure. This could inadvertently allow vandalism of the hides, so please do be certain to leave the hides secure.

Open evening and AGM

A reminder to members to save the date. We will have an open evening and AGM on Friday 20th November between 7:15 and 9:15pm at the Finchampstead Memorial Hall. More details will be emailed to our members shortly.

Simon Weeks - Chairman



Work Party Dates

Thinking of joining a work party? You would be most welcome. We are a very friendly group.

Email: workparties@mglg.org.uk or turn up at the Moor Green Car Park on the day at 10:15am.

Planned dates are (but check the website for the latest dates nearer time).

Sunday 8th of November

Tuesday 10th of November

Sunday 13th of December

Tuesday 15th of December

Sunday 10th of January

Tuesday 12th of January

Sunday 14th of February

Tuesday 16th of February

Sunday 14th of March

Tuesday 16th of March

Work Party Update

July

Our work party season started a little early this year with some much-needed fencing work. On Sunday 28th July, 8 volunteers met with the aim of replacing the first gate and one gate post leading into the reserve and also repairing some of the adjoining fencing. Removing the old post wasn't too much of a problem, after some clearing, the new post slotted into the same hole and Postcrete was used to secure it in place. After much measuring and levelling the new gate was then attached.



Team work in the final stages, making sure the new gate is level © *Jane Heritage*

On the following Tuesday work was carried out on the car park fencing by another team of 8 including our youngest volunteer, Nathaniel, and his mum Chrissi. Posts were replaced, a permanent exit onto the bridle path created and some new rails fitted. There is still more fencing to be done on the reserve.



New access to the bridle path with new posts and rails © *Jane Heritage*

September

This is always the month when we clear the reeds in front of Grove hide to give a nice view of visiting winter birds. It's a mammoth task but helped using hedge trimmers, although some reeds are still cut down using hand shears. A team of 20 volunteers turned up to tackle the task including three new volunteers Mark, Sheila and Wendy. Also, the flow of the stream next to Grove hide was improved.

Robert Godden, the Moor Green Lakes bird recorder, had requested we improve the view along the lake to the left of the hide. Over time overhanging trees and bramble had obscured the view but now it's possible to see right to the east end of Grove Lake.

Alan and Wendy were sent to clear the views from Grove seat and in front of Grove viewing screen.

The bird feeder paddock was the base for the BVCP Tuesday task. The paddock and in front of Colebrook hide were cut using a BCS Motor mower. Others used a hedge trimmer.

The never-ending task of clearing shoreline willow from along the west end of Colebrook Lake north was started, more to be done at a later date. With the water levels being quite low, some of the reeds were cleared from the scrape to the left of the hide, opening up the view. This area proved to be popular with a snipe during the hide open day.





Left - Getting started on clearing the reeds. © *Jane Heritage*
Right - Improved view from Grove Hide after the clearance. © *Jane Heritage*





Left - Lis mowing near Colebrook hide, Tony supervising. © *Gillian Stewart*
Right - Clearing the scrape near Colebrook hide. © *Gillian Stewart*

October

A great turn out on the Sunday 11th October with 22 volunteers tackling a variety of jobs.

Duncan took several volunteers over to Tern Island, including new volunteer Jenny, to clear the plant debris with it all being removed in large bags by boat. This was all completed by lunchtime. Another group made their way over the pontoon onto Long Island having to cut their way through the bracken to gain access.

Several worked in and around the large scrape that can be seen from Colebrook hide. Exposed last year it had been used by several wading birds but had become obscured by new growth in the water and round the edges. Paths were cut back ready for the Tuesday work party and further along the northern shore some of the shoreline trees were removed.

As the BVCP Tuesday volunteers gathered the heavens opened and it poured, thankfully only for a very short time. The gazebo was up so everyone sheltered under there. Very quickly it became a warm and sunny day.

Long Island was again the main target of the group apart from some preparatory work along north of Colebrook Lake North trimming ready for the Robomower due the next day. The BCS power mower was taken across the pontoon and used to clear the large area of bracken.

Work in the large scrape continued and, after a mammoth effort, mostly by Nick, Peter and Edmund, the area was cleared exposing what we hope is an attractive area for visiting waders easily seen from the nearby hide.

Many, many thanks to all the volunteers who turn up, tackle all the jobs and have a jolly time. Also, our BVCP Ranger Sara Green whose help and expert advice is invaluable.





Left - Pulling the last weed. © *Peter Craig*
Right - Team working to clear the scrape. © *Sarah Elston*





Left - Long Island before work began. © *Jane Heritage*
Right - Long Island scrape clearing completed. © *Jane Heritage*

Jane Heritage

Introducing One Of Our Young Members

Nathaniel Mansell

Hello, I am Nathaniel and I am 14 years old. I am a regular birdwatcher at Moor Green, and frequent the reserve effectively every week. I am very passionate about birds and the natural world, and enjoy being out in nature. Being able to come to Moor Green as much as I am able to, I have had the pleasure to have had many memorable encounters with different birds.

In winter, I had the joy of staying out until dusk, and meeting many of the reserve's crepuscular residents. In this time, two encounters stood out beyond the others, both including the same bird. On the 31st of January, I stayed out late with my friend Tomos. We were hoping to get extended views of Water Rail - *Rallus aquaticus* at Colebrook Hide, where we have had very good luck on previous occasions, and that night was no different; one emerged in the heart of the reeds. However it scarpered, as a large, brown bird skulked past it. I was perplexed, as with the low light I believed it may be a Bittern - *Botaurus stellaris*, but that would be preposterous? Spectacularly, we watched the Bittern gradually come out of the reeds, and hunt in a flooded patch out in the open for a good while (photo next page).



Ringed-necked Duck © *Nathaniel Mansell*

My next encounter occurred on the 5th of March. I was walking back from Grove Hide to Colebrook, when looking out onto Colebrook South, spotted the male Ring-necked Duck, which was present at Moor Green earlier in the year. It was swimming towards the screen, so we dashed along the path to get a good view. The bird came within ten metres of us and offered fantastic views. When it moved away, we went to Colebrook hide, and we opened the wheelchair accessible port. I went to have a look at the scrape, and noticed a familiar brown bird on the edge of the reeds around five metres from me. Rushing for my telescope, I was able to get superb pictures of the Bittern, which stuck around for a few minutes after moving further into the reeds. These weren't the only brilliant birds I have seen: An ice skating Water Rail, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Wood Warbler, Whinchat, Green Sandpiper, Marsh Harrier and the brilliant Osprey are among the best birds I have seen at Moor Green.

It is my local patch and favourite reserve, and I am very lucky to be able to spend a great deal of time here. I have also helped at work parties, and got to meet many lovely people. Here, every member is welcoming and brilliant to talk to, and I have a kind word for everyone!

Nathaniel Mansell

Nathaniel thank you for your story and your help at the work parties; we really appreciate you coming along. Your enthusiasm is obvious, long may it continue. *Newsletter Editors*



Bittern © *Nathaniel Mansell*

Colebrook Hide Open Day

Saturday 3rd October 2026

The weather was a little gloomy as we set up and despite our best efforts to stay quiet, we managed to scare a Green sandpiper away from the scrape as we opened the viewing slots.

We had a very successful open day in April; would this one also be popular? The car park was busy owing to the visiting Osprey that had taken up residence in the New Workings. It was a quiet start but, as the day went on, the hide began to fill up and our total for the day was more than 70 visitors.

Most were not members and all very much enjoyed their visit. There we several families with some very enthusiastic children. They were fascinated to be able to easily use the

telescope set up low down on the wheelchair accessible viewing slot.

The day was made more successful by the very kind donation of two pairs of binoculars, a telescope, tripod and hide clamp. They were well used throughout the day.

So, what did we see? Thirty-four bird species if you include the Osprey on the New Workings – we were able to show it to some visitors from the nearby bridle path as it sat in a dead tree, enjoying a fishy snack. Others included Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Barnacle geese and Teal. Late in the day saw another very brief visit by a Green sandpiper but it was scared away by everyone excitedly shouting, 'Green sandpiper!' followed by a few embarrassed giggles. In addition, a Muntjac deer grazing in the meadow under the swift box and both Migrant Hawker and Common Darter dragonflies – numbers of these increased as the day went on - were seen.

The highlight was probably the Snipe on the recently cleared scrape to the left of the hide; excited visitors admired its beautiful camouflage plumage which made it quite difficult to see as it skulked in and out of the reeds.

We are only able to run these events with the help of our volunteers so, once again, we are grateful to Joanne, Marie, Alan, Duncan, Jon and Nathaniel for their willing and enthusiastic support – thank you.



Visitors enjoying the Open Hide © *Jane Heritage*

Peter Craig and Jane Heritage

Around The Reserve

Late summer and early autumn have seen some notable highlights at Moor Green but also, a sad low point of a very disappointing breeding season on Colebrook Lake.

At the time of writing the report for the previous newsletter there was optimism that 2026 would be one of the best breeding seasons in recent years for Common Tern as well as the first time in several years that Great Crested Grebe would breed on the reserve. Not all of the nine Common Tern nests on Tern Island were readily seen but by late June up to five chicks had hatched from four of the nests and the adult birds were kept busy bringing in fish to feed to their growing chicks. Meanwhile, the Great Crested Grebes were diligently attending their nest off the western tip of Tern Island as excitement grew in anticipation of the appearance of the first chick.

The first indication that something was amiss was a mysterious reduction in the number of Tern chicks. Then, on 25 June an enormous commotion erupted on Tern Island with a mass of circling Gulls and Terns diving at an out of sight intruder. I had seen similar behaviour from the Black-headed Gulls a few weeks earlier as they flushed a American Mink from the Long Island scrape, so I was not surprised when I saw a Mink swimming from near Tern Island back towards the hide. What did surprise me was that the Mink was carrying what appeared to be an egg – almost certainly that of a Great Crested Grebe.

Whether or not the poor breeding season on Colebrook Lake was entirely due to the Mink will never be known for certain though their presence was likely a major contributing factor and a reminder of the effect that such an invasive species can have on a local ecosystem.



An American Mink carrying an egg raided from the Great Crested Grebe nest on Colebrook Lake North © *Peter Craig*

On a more positive note, summer of 2026 provided the first confirmation of breeding in the wider Moor Green bird recording area of Water Rail - *Rallus aquaticus*. Although elusive, Water Rail are frequently heard, and occasionally seen, at various locations around both the Moor Green Lakes and the New Workings so was assumed to be one of the reserve's breeding species but no nest, or chicks had previously been recorded. One location where the distinctive calls of this species could regularly be heard this summer was the small pool towards the northwest of the New Workings now referred to as the ferrous

pool due to its rust-coloured water. Towards the end of July calling had become more persistent and at least one adult bird was seen, then, on 20 July a miniscule fluffy black bundle with a cream beak was spotted amongst the reeds – a Water Rail chick.



With sufficient patience, regular sightings of both the adults and chicks (two were seen together on a couple of occasions) could be made over the following weeks. The final sighting of a by then well grown juvenile was made on 22 August. Since then, there have been few reports of Water Rail calls from the ferrous pool, but they have been heard calling from other parts of the New Workings. Whether these calls come from ferrous pool juveniles that have dispersed across the site or different Water Rails, they provide robust evidence that the area contains several regions of habitat suitable for this secretive, but delightful species.



Top - Water Rail chick 20 July 2026. © *Peter Craig*
Above - Juvenile Water Rail 10 Aug 2026. © *Peter Craig*

Peter Craig

Osprey visit

Undoubtedly the highlight of early autumn has been the prolonged visit of an Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*. Ospreys have previously been recorded at the reserve either on their spring migration northwards or return journey in the autumn, some of which have broken their journey with a few days in the area, so when one was seen on the morning of September 6th it was assumed that this would be another fleeting visitor. This assumption appeared to be confirmed after the Osprey took off from the dead silver birch where it had perched to devour the fish that is had caught in West Fen, found a thermal which carried it high in the sky until it was barely visible then glided off to the East. The few of us who had witnessed the spectacle were left with broad grins of joy and probably an element of smugness thinking that we were likely to be the only ones who would record an Osprey in our Moor Green annual records. However, we were in for the first of several surprises when, in the afternoon, the Osprey was again seen over the New Workings.

Despite thorough searching of the area the following day there were no sightings of the Osprey. However, in the late afternoon of Tuesday 8th, after the persistent rain of that day had cleared, it was seen perched for an hour atop a dead tree to the north of West Fen before flying off to the south. With no further sightings for the remainder of the week, it was again assumed that the Osprey had continued its migration.

As I walked along the track on the north side of the New Workings on Monday 14th Sept the Osprey was just a distant memory, when, looking south through a gap in the trees surrounding Hawthorn Lake, I glimpsed a large raptor alight on a dead silver birch. Initially, the bird was slightly obscured and had its head lowered; my first impression was that it was uniform brown so thought it was probably a Buzzard or possibly a Marsh Harrier. I moved to gain an unobstructed view just as the bird raised its head to show its distinctive white crown with a dark band running through the eyes leaving me in no doubt that it was an Osprey.

Since then, the Osprey has been seen on every subsequent day and has become quite a celebrity with bird watchers and photographers coming from a considerable distance to see it.



The juvenile Osprey perched in a dead Oak near Finch Pond. © *Peter Craig*

We even had two members of the team from The Hawk Conservancy in Andover spend a morning watching and photographing it – a first sighting for one of them.



What do we know about this Osprey? The Osprey's plumage, which showed a distinct scaly appearance due to white edging to the feathers on its upper wing surface, and the timing of its arrival at Moor Green identified the bird as a juvenile. The lack of any leg rings made it impossible to know where it came from but could be seen as a reflection on the increase in the number of Osprey breeding in the UK. The absence of leg rings may be because the Osprey originated from an unknown nest; the nest was inaccessible or was on land that the landowner would not permit access to; other factors such as inclement weather prevented ringing taking place. It was also not possible to say with certainty whether the Osprey was male or female, though some of the more experienced Osprey watchers suggested that certain features such as a prominent 'necklace' and the length of the folded wing against the body suggest that is was female.

The biggest question was how long would the Osprey stay? Although it is well documented that migrating Osprey will punctuate their journeys with feeding stops, this individual has likely broken the record for the longest ever



Top. The juvenile Osprey hunting for fish above West Fen. © *Peter Craig*
Above. The Osprey taking off from West Fen after failing to catch a fish © *Peter Craig*

stay in Berkshire. Whilst those of us who visit Moor Green regularly are abundantly aware of its attraction, what was it that drew this bird to the reserve and prompted it to stay so long? The most likely explanation is a combination of an ample food supply, absence of threat or competition from other species and the exceptionally mild early autumn weather. Of these factors, perhaps the most surprising was that the shallow lakes of the New Workings, held sufficient stocks of fish to fulfil much of the Ospreys calorific requirements. The dead birch to the south of Hawthorn provided a strategic perch from which the Osprey could monitor West and Upper Fens – both favoured lakes for fishing, particularly during the early part of its stay. Possibly due to depletion of the stock in these lakes, it later started to fish in Finch Pond but on occasion was also seen to return to one of her favourite perches on the New Workings with a fish that had likely been caught in one of the surrounding lakes. Although the Osprey was seen over Colebrook and Grove Lakes on a couple of occasions, it was only late in its stay that it was seen fishing there. This may have been due to these lakes being deeper than those of the New Workings meaning that the fish in those lakes are less easily seen and caught.

A further surprise, and a cause of some anxiety amongst some of the Moor Green bird-watching community, was that it didn't proceed on its journey as soon as the weather turned in early October. However, our surprise is due to us knowing that European Osprey typically overwinter in Western Africa, but the juvenile Osprey is likely oblivious of this. GPS tracking of Ospreys indicate that juveniles undertaking their first migration do so by following a compass bearing that appears to be innate to individual populations of birds (eg Ospreys hatched in the UK migrate in a south-westerly direction) whereas in adult birds this innate behaviour is modified as a result of learned landmarks along the route of previous migrations. Furthermore, these studies suggest contrasting selective advantages in migrating in the most time-efficient manor compared with a



The juvenile Osprey following a successful dive carrying its catch back to its feeding perch.
© Peter Craig

more leisurely, but energy-efficient, way. For adult birds, it is thought that there may be a selective advantage to migrating quickly to re-secure previously established territory in the overwintering grounds. On the other hand, by making a slower journey that includes stops to refuel, juvenile Ospreys may arrive in their wintering grounds in optimal condition to withstand competition with other birds to establish their own territories.

The novelty of having an Osprey take up temporary residence at a site in Berkshire may also have tempered our views on how late in the year one might be expected to be seen. However, data from records from other counties provide some interesting insights. Analysis of records from neighbouring Hampshire (extracted from the Going Birding archive at www.goingbirding.co.uk/hants) reveals that for the years between 2009 to 2025 the date of the final sighting ranged from 6 Oct (in 2013) to 15 Nov (in 2014) and that in the majority of years (11 out of 17) the final sighting occurred between the third week in October and the first week in November. Perhaps the Moor Green Osprey should, therefore, be regarded more as a slight geographical, rather than a temporal, anomaly and the long interlude in its migration as no real cause for alarm.

The Osprey's presence has provided a talking point which has likely helped raise the profile of Moor Green Lakes. Questions have even been raised as to whether we could ever see Ospreys breeding on the reserve and could this be encouraged by the installation of a nesting platform? The probability of Ospreys ever breeding in the area is likely very low (some of the reasons for this are outlined in the Facts about Ospreys). Furthermore, in the unlikely event that a pair did nest, would the required resources be available to keep the nest secure and to accommodate the inevitable increased number of visitors attracted to the reserve?

Whether this year's prolonged visit by this magnificent bird of prey is a unique event or becomes more frequent remains to be seen but provides another illustration of the variety of species that our part of the Blackwater Valley can sustain. Although it is unlikely that Moor Green Lakes could ever provide a suitable environment for Osprey to breed, perhaps this year's special visitor will provide further impetus to secure the Manor Farm area for the benefit of wildlife.

Footnote: the Osprey was still present when this article was written but was subsequently seen for the final time on Thursday 15th of Oct

Osprey facts

Ospreys are obligate fish-eaters that catch their prey either by diving into the water or by plucking fish from near the surface. Prior to diving on a fish, an Osprey may hover high above the water before plunging towards the surface. Before hitting the surface, the Osprey draws its legs forward to enter the water feet-first and closes its third eyelid (nictitating membrane) – a semi-transparent membrane that protects the eyes while allowing the bird to see underwater; they also close their nostrils to prevent water entering their nose.

Adaptations of the Osprey's foot help it catch and retain its slippery prey. The adaptations include having backward-facing barbs on the base of the foot to facilitate gripping onto a slippery fish, while a reversible outer toe allows the bird to change from having three forward-facing and one backward-facing toe, to two toes pointing forward and two backwards when holding a fish.

Ospreys breed in northern latitudes where the long daylight hours of the summer months provide time for the adults to catch sufficient fish to feed their young. Ospreys pair for life but only spend the breeding season together and spend the rest of the year apart. A female Osprey departs the nesting area to begin her southward migration as soon as her young have fledged, typically in mid-August, leaving the adult male to continue to provision the fledglings with food. Juveniles usually set off on their first migration in early September with the adult males being the last to leave the nesting area departing after all their young have left, often in late September.

Juvenile/sub-adult Ospreys remain in their first overwintering area for up to two years before undertaking their first return northern migration. Adult males usually return to their natal area and will typically establish their own breeding territory within a few kilometres of where they hatched. The natural expansion of Ospreys' breeding territory thus occurs slowly, which is why reintroduction programmes such as those at Rutland Water and Poole Harbour are usually required to establish breeding in new locations. Current estimates suggest that up to 400 pairs now nest in the UK, mostly in Scotland but with slowly increasing numbers in England and Wales.

Bibliography

Mackrill, T. R. (2017). Migratory behaviour and ecology of a trans-Saharan migrant raptor, the osprey Pandion haliaetus (PhD dissertation, University of Leicester).

This dissertation presents detailed analyses of GPS tracking studies of Osprey migration between the UK and their sub-Saharan overwintering grounds. In addition much background information is provided on the reasons for bird migration and the strategies employed by various species in undertaking their journeys.

Mackrill, T. R. The Osprey - www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHqy4USKhlY

Mackrill, T. R. Osprey Migration Webinar - www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXWgoSF-Yrk

In these excellent presentations Dr Mackrill reviews, in a very accessible way, much of the work undertaken during his PhD.

Osprey migration: facts and map - www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2023/08/osprey-migration-facts-map

This short article provides a succinct overview of Osprey migration

Poole Harbour Osprey Translocation Project - www.birdsofpooleharbour.co.uk/osprey/osprey-translocation

A review of efforts undertaken to restore a population of breeding Ospreys to the South Coast of England. The failed attempts to attract Osprey with nesting platforms and the subsequent, successful translocation project are described.

Peter Craig

Plants Plus

Unless you lived in a cave or a secret air-conditioned underground lair, you probably noticed that yet again we had an exceptional hot and dry summer, which ironically as I write this it is raining outside which is great. The conditions on the reserve during mid-to-late summer meant fewer flowers, or growth quite stunted. Although unlike last year, there was no Dexter bull overstaying his welcome.

Jane and I ventured out late July and again in September recording 43 and 21 species respectively. I should point out, we don't record everything, particularly plants we have already seen during the year. We also tend to overlook trees as they are there for a long time, (but we may possibly do a more detailed tree survey next year.) Grasses are notoriously difficult to identify and to distinguish them requires detailed examination of the flower heads, which takes time and is even harder when the grass has turned into hay and the seeds have dispersed.

One plant that seemed to be unaffected by the weather is Water mint – *Mentha aquatica*, as it thrives in the damp soil on the water's edge. Around the water's edge, the smell of mint is quite pervasive. Mentha is one of the oldest plant names going back some 4000 years.



Water mint covered in water droplets. © *Steve Arnold*

Quite common around the reserve is Lesser Burdock - *Arctium minor*. This looks a bit like a thistle but closer inspection when the flower dries, the outer bracts have hooks, which helps them attach to passing animals and trousers, thus dispersing seed heads over a greater range. Burdock was the inspiration for Swiss engineer George de Mestral to conceive Velco in 1941.



Close up of Lesser Burdock showing the hooks. © *Steve Arnold*

One of the unexpected side benefits of plant surveying is seeing various insects. There are those hard-to-photo dragonflies zipping about, and when butterflies settle, they often fold their wings up or skitter away as you get too close. During our September survey, Jane kept pointing saying, "there's a Clouded yellow". Potentially we saw five while doing our survey, unless it was just the one following us around the reserve. To prove the point about the difficulty of taking a photo mine below was the best I could manage to take. Of course, with more time or a butterfly that has been to modelling school a better shot would have been taken.

I also got a photo of a Red Admiral maybe not quite as exciting, but still very attractive.

Photos next page.



Above. Clouded yellow butterfly hiding in the undergrowth. © *Steve Arnold*

Below. A Red admiral resting on Common knapweed. © *Steve Arnold*



Sometimes though a creature stays still long enough to capture a photo. Below is a Mottled green grasshopper although I had to look it up afterwards and stand to be corrected by any entomologists out there. For those of you who don't know (I didn't) grasshoppers have far shorter antennae than crickets.



Above. Mottled green grasshopper © *Steve Arnold*

On our surveys, we also check under corrugated iron sheets, that Mary Thompson monitors.

In a well-established routine, Jane lifts the sheet (notice she gets the dangerous task) and I take a picture before anything mobile runs away. Most times there is nothing of note, but we got lucky in Sept and discovered a Slow worm – *Anguis fragilis*. Notice the shed skin on the left of the photo. Slow worms are neither worms nor snakes, but legless lizards. We carefully replaced the sheet and left the Slow worm in peace causing minimal disturbance. Like all UK reptiles they are protected by UK law.

Photo next page

The last two surveys may have been disappointing for plants, but personally I was thrilled to see a Slow worm.

Steve Arnold



Slow worm resting. © *Steve Arnold*

Membership Update

For many years we have managed our memberships with a spreadsheet on one person's computer. (Thanks again Dave for doing a great job). But there was always a worry, if our membership secretary got hit by the proverbial bus, we would be in dire straits (not the band) with not knowing who our members are. We also wanted a better way of communicating particularly with our volunteers regarding work parties.

The decision was made to take into use a tool called membermojo, which several of the committee had experienced within other organisations. It is GDPR compliant, maintains member records, manages the membership process (reminders, renewals and notices) and allows users to manage their own data. Mailing lists can be created based on user data, useful for bulk emailing such as to just the volunteers. Duncan worked on configuring and testing the tool and then doing a bulk import from Dave's data into the tool. It was taken into use in June.

One big worry we had was we would lose a lot of members in the transition. Fortunately, this has not been the case. Some people have stopped their membership but so far, their reasons given were quite unconnected to how we manage the membership, such as relocation. Some people are late in renewing so maybe they are letting their membership lapse. But the non-renewal numbers are low. We should expect a certain level of membership churn.

As the treasurer, the "truth" is the bank transactions, and I must marry incoming payments to the members in the tool. This is why having the post code in the bank reference is a key part of tying the two together, particularly when we have several people with the same surname (for example we have 4 Taylors).

We also decoupled the membership from our financial year, so your membership will run for 1 year from when you joined. For example, someone joining on the 4th of March, their membership would run from 4th of March to 3rd of March the following year, and not until 31st August the same year. This seems fairer to new members, and in the long term will smooth out our income across the year (currently it peaks in August and September).

At the time of writing (19/10/26) our paid membership is 308, which is up from 282 from the previous year.

Looking ahead, when we get charitable status, we may attempt to do gift aid.

We currently accept payments by standing order (see#1), bank transfer or even cheques, we still get a few of these. Occasionally we get asked about direct debits but we would need to be a far larger organisation to meet the necessary banking requirements.

A couple of other points.

1 We have had a few members pay more than once. If you do this, we will treat the second payment as an extra donation, unless you contact us. When you do renew, it is worth checking you haven't already paid or have a standing order already set up.

2 Occasionally we have people who have paid but we have no contact information. So please make sure we have at least an email address, so we can reach out to you.

Thank you all for your continuing support, and for the people who do generously give an additional donation. Approximately 35% of our total income comes from the additional donations.

Note #1 The difference between a standing order and a direct debit.

In case you are not aware (most of you probably are), a standing order is your instruction to the bank to make regular fixed payments to a third-party (a push). A direct debit allows a third-party to take money from your account (a pull) with your permission, the amount may vary.

The Last Word

Senescence

The condition or process of deterioration with age (OED).

According to an article in Nature, there is evidence that suggests ageing is closely associated with cellular senescence and subsequent accumulation of senescent cells in various organs, leading to multiple ageing-associated disorders. Cellular senescence halts the cell cycle, preventing cell proliferation and growth under conditions of cellular stress, including DNA damage, telomere shortening (part of a chromosome) and oxidative stress.

Sadly if you live a full life, it gets us all in the end.

Steve Arnold



Don't forget to check out the website at www.mglg.org.uk which includes information on how to volunteer. To reach out to us, please use the contact form, or if you see one of us, speak directly. Most of us are friendly!

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Editors Steve Arnold, Peter Craig and Jane Heritage.
This newsletter is made by real people, all are volunteers.