



Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter

April 2011

Hi All,

As I write this newsletter the park is basking in glorious sunshine on one of the warmest April days on record, a far cry from the coldest day last December which saw temperatures plummet to minus 13 degrees. At this time of the year, the park's wildlife unfolds with great splendour and colour. Many of our resident birds are now nesting. There has been a huge surge in insect activity due to the present warm weather, with several species of butterfly emerging earlier than normal, most notably Orange-tip, which is flying 3 weeks earlier this season. Speckled Wood too, has emerged early, and both of these butterflies can be seen along the woodland stream on sunny days.

Our 2 juvenile swans have been re-located to another site, as they were straying too close to Stratford road. The 2 adult swans (now breeding), were becoming very territorial to the younger birds. One cannot help but notice the small Mallard ducklings which have hatched recently. In general, broods are smaller this year, although Mallards will continue laying eggs well into May. The 2 gulls frequenting the lake have been eyeing up these ducklings as well as Magpies, who we have watched attacking the baby ducks. These are vigorously protected by the adult females. At the time of writing, most of our bird boxes are occupied by Great and Blue Tits. Park staff will do a complete inspection of the boxes, and I should then be in a position to provide a more thorough report on the occupants of all our bird boxes. Moth recording has not been carried out in recent weeks due to the cold evenings, but the trap will be put out during May when night temperatures rise. Look out over the woodland this month for our resident pair of Buzzards who are soaring near last years nest site, and our Little Owl, who watches like a sentinel from its majestic oak perch, the children playing on the fields. At the moment it is a birder's paradise in the park, which puts me in my element. However, despite all the wildlife around, one must not lose sight of our primary duty to maintain the park and its gardens for the public.

Mike





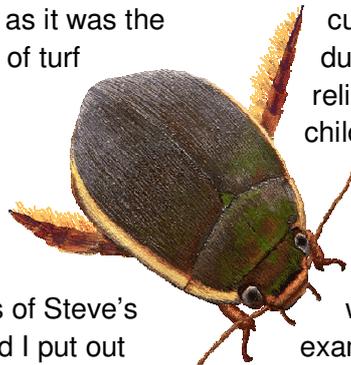
News from the Supervisor's Trap



Pond Event 'A Great Success'

On the morning of Sunday April 10th, my driving skills were tested to the limit. If anyone has ever tried transporting a tank of tadpoles in the passenger foot well of a Nissan pickup, they will know that gravity and motion play a huge part in successfully getting the occupants to their final destination. Too much brake, and a tidal wave of tadpoles surge forward. (Retrieving these from the foot well by hand is not recommended)!. Then there are the inclines and hills to consider, as your tiny cargo swell backwards and forwards in their temporary home. I am proud to say though that despite some nerves, my contingent of tadpoles reached the new pond with only one casualty out of several hundred. The only bit of terrain that almost lost me my occupants was the steep path next to the island and Stratford road. Overcoming this, I stopped my vehicle and carried the tadpoles to a level part of the path before re-loading them for the final stretch, and all in the name of conservation!. Along with my cargo of tadpoles, fish and other creatures, I arrived at the new pond to be shortly greeted by Steve Roberts, displaying his usual exuberance and enthusiasm. The event, to invite the public to help introduce wildlife to the new pond, was a proud moment for me personally, as it was the culmination of almost a years work to create, from the first shovel full of turf dug at last years festival of nature, to watching a container full of 'very relieved' sticklebacks being put into the water by a group of excited children.

The weather too was absolutely glorious, and with a great public turnout, and the combined input of museum staff and Mr Roberts himself, the morning was a resounding success. Members of the public were treated to exhibits of Steve's wonderful wildlife paintings. There was colouring for the children, and I put out examples of wildlife from the park including some live butterflies, which children had great fun identifying from an identification chart on display. All sorts of wildlife and aquatic plants were put into the pond, and members of the public had a very hands on approach to things. The local press covered the event, and did us proud in the Citizen and Stroud Life newspapers. With such glorious weather, we could have stayed all day. We have a few finishing jobs to do around the pond, but already it is becoming very popular with the public and will provide a valuable resource for schools as well as the public in the future.

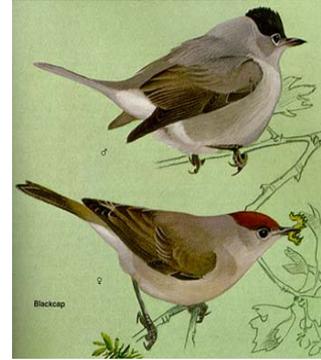


A big thank you to everyone involved in the event, and thanks especially to Charlotte from Museum in the Park for negotiating the steep grass slopes with a welcome tray of morning tea and coffee. Thanks also to Ann (Taylor) for once again being an absolute diamond on the day. All in all, a great success. (Photographs of the event can be seen on Steve's Stroud Nature website).

Blackcap (a new bird to the park's list)

A pair of Blackcaps (a small warbler) has been seen in the park's woodland this month.

Although this bird has been possibly overlooked in the past, it represents a new species to the park's bird list. Spotted by Wyevale employee Adrian Watts, the bird is a summer visitor from North Africa during spring. However, during recent years, the birds have been overwintering in the UK in small numbers. It is one of our most recognizable visiting warblers, and the male has a slate black cap, whilst the female's cap is chestnut brown (top right). The pair can be seen in scrub adjacent to the model railway bridge 'closest to salmon springs', and in the mornings they have a beautiful song. This pair will undoubtedly breed, though the nest is very hard to find, usually concealed low down in dense vegetation. If you are walking through the woodland this month, check the birds out at this spot.



Woodland paths to be made safer

During the coming months, park staff will be improving safety in the woodland. Certain sections of path throughout the woodland have become eroded, and prove slippery during the autumn and winter months. Certain trails are to be made more level with timber edgings which will provide extra stability. We will be using fallen timber in the woodland to chip and lay as path material, which is beneficial to elderly visitors to the park, as well as the regular dog walkers who use the woodland every day. These repairs will form part of a longer term maintenance plan to provide easier access through the woodland, especially in the more precipitous areas. Sustainability is the main objective, and all materials will be recycled from the woodland. Two park staff have recently completed CS30 Chainsaw crosscut and maintenance courses provided by the Landscape Group, which will provide future in-house woodland management for the park.

Spring Butterflies to look out for at the park during April



The glorious weather this month has produced lots of butterflies at the park, many emerging much earlier than previous years. With almost continual sunshine throughout March and April, conditions have been perfect for butterflies. The best place to see butterflies is along the banks of the stream, and the wildflower bank by the sports pitch. Small Tortoiseshells are laying batches of eggs on stinging nettles around the perimeter of the park. Orange Tip is very abundant this year, and can be seen flying by the pond. The food plant Cuckoo flower *Cardamines pratensis*, grows here in the dappled sunlight, and females (without the orange tip to their wing) lay eggs on the flower heads. A close look at these flower heads will reveal the eggs, laid singly and at first, bright orange in colour.

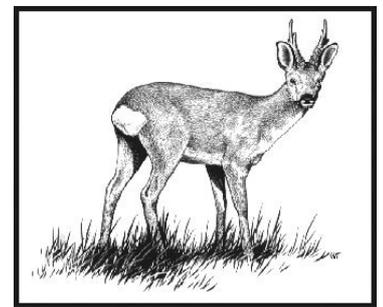


Walking through the sunnier parts of the woodland will reveal Speckled Woods, a delicate brown butterfly which is very territorial, often protecting its patch of sunlight from other wandering males. This species produces 2 or 3 generations throughout the summer, and the caterpillars feed on grasses. The Holly Blue is enjoying a good spring, and males are often seen flying around the orangery and banks below. A second generation is on the wing in summer. The beautiful sulphur yellow Brimstone 'mentioned in last month's newsletter' is also enjoying the prolonged sunny weather. The caterpillars of this species feed on buckthorn *rhamnus*, which grows commonly throughout the park. All of these butterflies mentioned apart from the Orange Tip will produce a generation of butterflies this summer, and during the next few months, their caterpillars can be found by carefully searching the respective food plants.

Roe Deer in the work's Compound

On the morning of Wednesday April 26th, park staff was startled to see a deer in the work's compound. The animal had managed to get in somewhere, and was showing signs of distress.

Staff coaxed it to a sheltered area of the yard and placed water. The deer remained in the yard for an hour before making an exit through the gates. Roe Deer have turned up all over the park in recent years, and last year, one animal was rescued from metal railings, after a failed attempt to bridge this. At this time of year, deer are seen frequently in the far end of the park's woodland.



Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

BIRDS: Bullfinch (a pair have been seen regularly in shrubs by the museum), Buzzard, Sparrowhawk (both flying over the woodland), Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit (all in the bird boxes), Robin (nesting in an open nest box by the putting green), Greenfinch, Dunnock (both nesting by the bowling green), Tufted Duck (pair on the lake), Coot (nesting on the island), Blackcap (pair in the woodland by the model railway), Chiffchaff (woodland).

BUTTERFLIES: Speckled Wood, Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Small White, Green-veined White, Brimstone

MAMMALS: Roe Deer (woodland), Red Fox (cubs on far field above woodland)

Forthcoming Events

Bird walk Sunday 8th May 2011 Meet at Museum in the Park 10.00am

Stroud Festival of Nature meeting Museum in the park Wednesday 11th May 10.30am – 12.00pm

Moth Evening in the walled garden Friday 13th May 2011 8.30pm to 11.00pm

Contact: Mike McCrea 07833091294 E-Mail: MMcra@thelandscapegroup.co.uk
mike@media-maker.com www.museuminthepark.org.uk

