



Biodiversity Newsletter

January 2011

Hi all, firstly, I would like to wish everyone a happy and healthy new year. Stratford Park is experiencing one of its coldest winters on record, and this has had an impact on our wildlife. A few days before Christmas, I saw Roe Deer moving by the lake. Normally a very reclusive animal, the search for food is bringing them further into the park. I notice too, that our smaller birds are forming much larger feeding flocks, and on the edge of the woodland at salmon springs, large parties of Long-Tailed Tits, Nuthatches and other birds are moving through the trees in search of food. The cold winter we are experiencing will no doubt impact on our resident birds as the continual search for food under frost and ice takes its toll. However, hard winters can be beneficial to other wildlife. Many of our butterflies are parasitized by parasitic flies and wasps during the summer, but during cold winters, the mortality rate for these parasitic species is very high, which in turn increases our butterfly populations the following summer.

The start of a new year brings much optimism for biodiversity at the park. Ann Taylor (Museum in the Park) and my self have scheduled an interesting programme of wildlife walks and events for 2011 to highlight our successes last year. Moth events, bird walks, Hoverfly identification and pond dipping are all planned this year, including a moth evening in the walled garden. Stroud District Council continue to support the development of the park and its wildlife, and we are hoping that funds will be available to provide a new interpretation board for our new pond. The Festival of Nature is scheduled for early September, and this event will magnify the work we are doing at the park. I am excited also, to see what new species of moths turn up in the park this year. I have almost completed the park's first butterfly and moth report for 2009 / 10. If anyone would like it e-mailed to them, please contact me at stroud@wyevale-landscapes.co.uk . Once again, a happy and healthy new year to you all.

Mike

News from the Supervisor's Trap



More Nest Boxes for Park's Birds

Following the success of the bird box scheme during 2009 & 2010, Wyevale staff will be making and erecting 12 more nest boxes this winter. The main target species will be Coal Tit, which is present at the park in small numbers. Coal Tits used 2 nest boxes in 2010, but utilised a more unique nesting site in the Museum in the Park courtyard, where a nest was built inside one of the masques on the railings. Unfortunately, one of the Coal Tit boxes was predated by a Great Spotted Woodpecker, so we hope to encourage this species during 2011 with the addition of more boxes. Primarily a species of coniferous woodland, the Coal Tit has ample habitat at the park and is most often seen feeding in the Cedars and amongst the larches in the woodland.



Photo: Mike McCrea



Winter takes it's grip on Stratford Park

The recent winter weather has turned Stratford Park into a winter wonderland (photo above), with snow exemplifying the grace and beauty of the Cedar trees. A heavy blanket of snow with small pockets of new growth coming through, and new buds forming earlier this month created a festive picture throughout the park. In the woodland the scene was like going through the cupboard into Narnia. Just before Christmas Steve Roberts (Stroud Festival of Nature) and I took an early morning walk around the park to view the birds. Evidence of Roe Deer could be seen in the snow, and their footprints along with other mammals, could be seen around the new pond where the water has remained unfrozen. The new pond 'even in winter' is providing wildlife with an important source of water. Steve and I were looking for our Barn Owl, but although this did not show, many other birds were active including flocks of Siskin by the lake. We also watched a lovely female Goldcrest feeding in one of the Cedars. Large numbers of Redwings and Fieldfares continue to arrive at the park, and these have been stripping the last of the Holly berries. The park under snow, is a beautiful sight, yet at the time of writing (mid January), signs of spring are evident on the trees.

Grey Squirrels (Stealing or Surviving?)

The North American grey squirrel was deliberately introduced to Britain and other parts of Europe during the 19th century. Since then, the adaptable and hardy grey squirrel has thrived in Britain's parks, gardens and woodlands. Indeed, it has now become so widespread, that it is accepted by many as a natural part of our wildlife, much enjoyed by many people and perhaps one of the most commonly seen British mammals. However, despite its obvious charm and appeal, it is now clear that it's continuing spread through the British Isles is having a serious impact on our native flora and fauna.

In fact the grey squirrel is having such a profound impact on British wildlife that the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) have now listed it on their list of the 100 worst invasive species globally.

Here at Stratford Park, grey squirrels are having a debilitating affect on our native birds. They exert impact through the predation of eggs and young chicks. One only has to walk along the Painswick stream to see the damage they have done to our nest boxes. Grey squirrels compete for nesting sites with bird species such as Little Owl, Tawny Owl and Kestrel (all of which have declined in recent years at the park). It is my view also, that grey squirrels have been instrumental in the decline of open nesting bird species such as thrushes and finches throughout Stratford Park, certainly over the past 30 years.



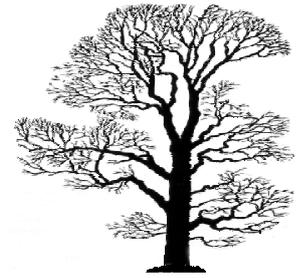
The final impact grey squirrels exert on our birds is through the competition for food. Their diet of insects, nuts, buds and seeds brings them into competition with other woodland bird species, such as Nuthatch, Bullfinch and Greenfinch. Solving the problem is another issue. Culling? Yes, beneficial but abhorrent in the public's eye. Permission can be obtained to shoot, trap or poison grey squirrels, but this has to be justified, and is the protection only of our birds sufficient justification to do this in the park?. The majority of the public visiting our park see these mammals as cuddly animals that their children can throw food down for, and in doing so are encouraging the proliferation of this invasive species. In studying the birds in this park for over 30 years, I have perhaps embarrassingly overlooked the huge impact grey squirrels are having on our native birds. Only since our nest box scheme was set up, have I had the time and resources to monitor this closely, and unless measures are put in place to control grey squirrels, the park's birdlife will continue to suffer. In conclusion, Elizabeth Sargeant passed on a newspaper article for me to read, and is reproduced here as follows:-

'Foreign invaders cost £1.6billion to control'

Popular wildlife species such as grey squirrels and rabbits are costing Britain £1.6billion a year, a new survey shows. Non-native species have become major problems for farmers, landowners, environmental agencies and wildlife charities across the country. Research conducted for the Scottish government, Defra and the Welsh Assembly concludes that urgent action is the only way to rid areas of pests. Other species such as giant hogweed, the rhododendron, the rat house mouse and Japanese knotweed spread rapidly and are also becoming dominant in an ecosystem.

The rabbit is the most economically damaging pest, followed by Japanese knotweed. The study focused on five species – the Asian long-horned beetle, carpet sea squirt, water primrose, grey squirrel and coypu, and aquatic rodent. Costs to the English economy are significantly higher at 1.3billion because more invasive non-native species have become established there. The cost to Scotland is £251million a year and £133million to the Welsh economy. 'Invasive non-native species have a significant impact on the British economy and damage our own wildlife', said Defra minister Richard Benyon. 'The costs of controlling these species will rise unless society takes steps to prevent them taking hold and spreading'.

Park loses elm trees at Salmon Springs



Stroud District Council have had to fell a stand of elms at the edge of the woodland at salmon springs. In December around 12 trees were taken down by tree maintenance contractors because of an early infestation of Dutch elm beetle, and due to their close proximity to the A46 main road. The trees were regularly used by winter flocks of birds in search for food. However, Wyevale staff is recycling the wood for logs and wood turning. Some of the chippings will also be used for mulching the park's shrub beds.

Bird Walk January 9th 2011



Around 30 members of the public met at the museum in the park for our first bird walk of 2011. The previous day had been wet and cold, but today's weather was perfect with a clear and sunny sky. After introductions we proceeded to the walled garden where Ann Taylor gave everyone a brief history of the walled garden. The party then continued to the top fields where I explained about the park's nest box scheme. All the bird boxes were shown on route, and along the perimeter of the park good numbers of Goldfinches were moving through the hedgerows. Moving on to the woodland, a close flock of Redwings were seen, and my binoculars were handed around to those interested at a closer look. Moving through the woodland, a short talk on the owls was given before proceeding down to the new pond. Despite the lovely weather, few birds were active, but those prepared to squint further saw Blue and Great Tits feeding in the trees. A solitary Buzzard was soaring nearby. The group walked around the lake and then back to the museum for a welcome cup of tea. For those in attendance it was an enjoyable walk, many of which said they would be coming back for the next walk in April.

Wildlife to See At Stratford Park Now

BIRDS: Goldfinch (large flocks top fields), Green Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Redwing, Sparrowhawk (over the woodland this month), large flocks of Black-headed Gulls on the lake.

MAMMALS: Roe Deer (woodland) one was killed by a motor vehicle at Salmon springs on 8th January'.

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