



Biodiversity Newsletter

March 2011



Hi All,

Spring has arrived at the park, and with it signs of new life everywhere. In the woodland, the wild garlic is shooting up together with dog's mercury, both of which will form a dense carpet of lush green growth. Wild arums are also pushing through the leaf litter, and the early leaves of comfrey are showing on the wild flower bank. It seems like this recent winter has been one of the longest ever, and with snow arriving so early last year, it's easy to see why.

On the last day of February, I was delighted to see frogspawn in our new pond. This is very encouraging, especially as frogs disappeared from the park 30 years ago. The fact that they have found their way to this new place is a good sign that other amphibians may follow.

The new pond is starting to become established with new growth showing from the aquatic plants we planted last autumn. In the coming weeks, the area will burst into life. The daffodils planted around the park last autumn are also providing a welcome splash of colour. Look out by the bowling green, for a small insect hovering over the flowers, which looks like a furry bee. This is in fact, a hoverfly called *Bombylius major* (below) which mimics a Bee. They can be seen on sunny days wherever flowers grow.



Anyone visiting the park will see that we have fitted steel protection plates to all of the bird boxes. The new boxes erected in February are already being investigated by birds, and the camera box has been re-sited next to the museum, where we hope to emulate our success with Nuthatches this year. I saw my first Brimstone butterfly in the park on March 4th (top left). There is no other butterfly more symbolic of spring than this stunning species. I will be itching to try out the new moth trap this month, and at our first public moth event in May. I am sure that there will be much to report during the coming months as we move into a very productive time for biodiversity at the park, and I look forward to highlighting the best of this in future newsletters.

Mike

Bombylius major





News from the Supervisor's Trap



Stratford Park pond update

As a prelude to next months pond dipping event, it seems appropriate to bring everyone up to date with the development of the new pond. Now that spring has arrived, the pond is going through a state of transition, with the first signs of wildlife becoming evident. Frogs are continuing to lay spawn and a closer look will reveal small water organisms. Bacterial growth from the leaves and other debris accumulated on the pond floor will be providing these creatures with food, and as these in turn become established, they will provide food for larger creatures in the food chain. The aquatic plants placed last autumn are sprouting new growth, some of these are oxygenating plants. We will be planting more oxygenating plants this month.

Park staff have constructed the concrete base that will support the dipping platform, and this should be built before the pond event. Tarmac will also be laid to complete the path.

Although the park's ducks are visiting the pond, this is not beneficial to developing wildlife, as frog spawn and young plant shoots become easy food for inquisitive Mallards. However, once the perimeter vegetation has become established, there will be more hiding places for small animals.

As temperatures rise, plant growth will be more prolific. Students from Stroud College have been helping to plant Dogwood and other plants around the pond area, and all these together with what we have already planted, will hopefully attract lots of bugs throughout the spring and summer. The pond dipping day is on Sunday 10th April from 2.00pm so please come along.

Caterpillars enjoy the Sun

The present sunny weather has encouraged Scarlet Tiger caterpillars out of hibernation, and these can be seen feasting on the developing leaves of Comfrey on the wildflower bank.

The colony, at the far end of the bank, has increased in size over the last 2 years, no doubt due to the changes in the strimming regimes which was previously decimating the food plant at a critical time for larval development. The moth (bottom right) is one of our more exotic species and is on the wing from late June. The moth lays its eggs on a wide variety of plants but comfrey, stinging nettle and bugle are the favourites. The newly hatched caterpillars hibernate through the winter in their first instar (moult), and re-emerge in the spring to resume feeding. A species of damp meadows and river banks, this is a lovely moth to have in the park.

Scarlet tiger caterpillar



scarlet tiger moth



Little Owl back!

Our annual Little Owl has returned again this month, and has taken residence in the large oak tree on the main fields above the outdoor sports pitch. The owl has returned two weeks earlier than last year. We think this bird is a young one, as it continues to return to the adjacent walnut tree, which produced a brood of young owls 3 years ago. This tree is now occupied by Jackdaws, who have been fiercely protecting the nesting holes from our owl. As mentioned in the park's bird report, I feel that this owl returns to the park each year during spring, to feed on the large numbers of cockchafers in callow fields. We have relocated the owl box to this oak tree in the hope that it may be used this season. Anyone wishing to see the bird will need keen eyesight, as it is beautifully camouflaged against the tree bark. Normally, the owl uses the same perch on a limb half way up the main trunk, and to the left. When flushed, it has an undulating flight.



Birds busy inspecting new homes



Anyone walking through the park during this lovely spring weather will see birds popping in and out of the nest boxes. Most of the 12 new boxes are also being checked out by Blue Tits and Great Tits. On the morning of 21st March a pair of Great Tits was investigating the camera box which has been relocated to a large tree next to the museum. Whilst watching them, a pair of Blue Tits arrived and tried driving the other birds away from the box. A bout of aerial combat ensued, with the Blue Tits claiming the box. Within a few minutes, a Nuthatch arrived on the scene and evicted the Blue Tits. Within 10 minutes, 3 different bird species had attempted to take up residence in our camera box, which is all very well in the rehearsal, but which bird will be making an appearance next month on the newly installed TV in the museum?, Nuthatch, I hope.

Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

Birds: Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Tree creeper (all by the orangery and in the woodland), Green Woodpecker, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Little Owl (Oak tree in main field), Buzzard (woodland), Sparrowhawk (over the woodland), Song Thrush (nesting near the museum)

Butterflies: Comma, Brimstone Small Tortoiseshell (all emerging from hibernation). Scarlet Tiger moth (larvae feeding on the wild flower bank)

Mammals: Roe Deer (in the far woodland)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Pond Dipping Sunday 10th April 2011 10.00am – 12.00pm (see museum in the park website for details)

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