



Biodiversity Newsletter *November 2011*



Hi All,

That we are watering bedding plants here in the park in the final days of October indicates just what a dry and prolonged autumn we have been experiencing. I could be forgiven for thinking that winter is just around the corner, as I look out over the field under glorious blue skies. I am sure that this lovely weather is great for people visiting the park, but the wildlife is very confused. On October 24th a wood pigeon was sitting on eggs by the bowling green and some of the park's ornamental shrubs are producing a second flush of flowers. Anyone walking around the park will notice that the holly is laden with berries this year. In fact, I have never seen berries in such profusion. The saying that we will have a hard winter if the holly bears heavy has proved true over the last two winters, and if the number of Redwings and Fieldfares arriving in the park is anything to go by, another big freeze could be on the way.

We have 'pushed the boat out' this year, with the winter and spring bedding, and increased the number of tulip bulbs planted. The beds next spring will be spectacular. We have also planted many bulbs all around the orangery, and throughout the park.

The park moth trap has been productive, and good numbers of moths have been recorded.

Of course, my mercury vapour lamp now has to compete with the two new security lights that have been fixed to the back of the museum wall. These lights have been attracting moths on the nights that I am not running the trap. Birds too, have been showing well, especially Common Buzzard (above right), which has been seen feeding on worms along the woodland edge.

The trees around the park are stunning at this time of year, and there is much wildlife to see for those prepared to explore further. Enjoy the park this autumn.

Mike



News from the Supervisor's Trap



Work starts on Stratford Park Lake

Following approval from those in attendance at the recent Stratford Park Management Group (SPMG) meeting, park staff has started work on alterations to the lake by removing a section of boundary timber posts. This objective is to hopefully restore access to the lake for amphibians and other wildlife. Firstly, a short history about previous wildlife on Stratford Park lake; Pre-1980s, the lake held the largest density of amphibians and aquatic fauna within the Stroud district, comparable only with Cherrington lake and Toadsmoor lake. 3 species of newt frequented the lake, palmate, semi-palmate and the now protected Great-crested newt. One of the areas largest populations of common toad and frog occurred in the lake, and when one mentions the term 'thousands', this is not an understatement. In spring, their spawn lay in the shallows by the tonne. Sticklebacks could be seen in 'shoals' along with minnows and other freshwater fish. The perimeters were fringed with reeds and bulrushes, which provided nesting sites for the many species of water birds, including Little Grebe, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Teal, Coot and Moorhen. I recall seeing Reed Buntings in 1974, and the occasional Water Rail. Biodiversity was at a pinnacle, and just gazing into the clear waters would reveal a multitude of aquatic organisms and plants. Looking at the lake in 2011 there is a glaring absence of these birds and animals.

So, why have they all disappeared? Answer-a change in husbandry, environmental impact, pollution and angling practices. Reed beds were removed, the lake dredged, aquatic plants severely reduced and predatory fish introduced. The other smaller fish could not compete with these and quickly disappeared. Then and worst of all, timber stakes was placed all around the perimeters. A concrete causeway effectively cut off access for all of the frogs, toads and other amphibians that inhabited the lake. Like the fish, they disappeared. Only adaptable species such as Mallards now remain. Add to this the pollution from the increased number of motor vehicles that idle on the incline at the Stratford Park / A46 junction during wet weather with the emissions from their exhausts leaching into surface water which runs into the lake and you then begin to understand why wildlife has declined so drastically on Stratford Park Lake. However, things are starting to change, and with a programme of gentle adjustments, we can begin to restore the biodiversity. Improving the access into the lake for wildlife is the first stage, and this is why we are removing some of the timber stakes. Re-establishing some of the reed beds is the next important step. I am sure that given a sympathetic approach, the lake can be restored for the benefit of wildlife, anglers and the public alike. For those of you who are reading this in my age bracket or older, cast your minds back to when you were a child, and recollect the lake then.



Water Rail

Dead Kestrel found in Park

Park staff was saddened at the discovery of a dead Kestrel in the park's composting area. The bird (a female) appeared to have been predated, possibly by a cat or other animal. This is a disappointing discovery as the park has only one regular Kestrel occurring, and this unfortunate bird could be it. Kestrels have declined nationally in recent years, mainly due to loss of habitat. The park has a nest box especially for Kestrels situated in one of the large oaks on the main fields. We are considering moving the box to another tree during the winter, as the birds have not used the box in the present location since it was put up 2 years ago.

Myth, 'Ivy kills trees'

Being involved in the woodland management of the park, I have listened to conflicting concerns about the impact ivy has on our trees, especially with public safety, wind damage and snow loading. I do know that ivy is a very important plant for wildlife, but do these benefits outweigh the concerns of those who think of it as a problem to our trees. Firstly, contrary to belief, ivy is not a parasite as it does not draw nutrition and therefore debilitate the 'host' plant on which it is growing. Ivy roots into the ground (unlike a true parasite such as mistletoe), and it uses a host tree merely as a climbing frame. The masses of tiny aerial roots produced by ivy are simply for support, and do not penetrate the tree's bark to any depth. Ivy in a tree is generally an indicator of stress rather than the cause of it: In the dense canopy of a healthy tree, there is rarely enough light for ivy to thrive (such as the case of the park's woodland), but where a tree is on the way out, ivy will take advantage and grow vigorously, and the top heavy weight of ivy will then cause a tree to topple. Ivy should be welcomed on healthy mature trees, as it offers invaluable food and shelter for a host of birds, bees and butterflies.





Recording the Park's moths in 2012



2012 will be the 4th year of regular moth recording at Stratford Park. During the last 3 years I have started to build up a picture of the status and distribution of the park's moths, but there is still much to do and learn. Each season throws up new species, and the present list is growing.

Transferring field notes and observations can be a time consuming job, especially when these need to be put on a permanent data base in the office. For 2012, I will be using a system that will enable me to e-mail a complete file to other individuals and organizations who are working on the park's biodiversity. This will show dates and frequencies of moths occurring in the park. The system template is provided by the 'garden moth scheme', a project set up to assist individuals to record moths in their gardens. Each region has a representative (Stroud comes under South-west England), and at the end of each season, records are sent to the regional representative. At present, I am also sending records to the Gloucestershire county moth recorder. The moth events organized through the Museum in the Park, are becoming very popular, and Ann (Taylor) the Learning Programmes Officer and I intend to increase these next year. In general 2011 was not a great year for moths in the park. Although we experienced a prolonged and dry spring, night time temperatures were cool and during May and June, windy. However, we have added many more species to the park's list in 2011, and hope to have a better season next year. Anyone who would like to know more about the 'garden moth scheme' or learn about recording moths in their gardens can visit www.gardenmoths.org.uk.

School children enjoy Park's wildlife

Pupils from St Mathews primary school paid a second visit to the park on November 2nd, and enjoyed a wildlife tour as well as other activities organized by the Museum in the Park. Despite the threat of rain, the weather held out and the pupils split into 2 groups, and were taken around the park in the morning and afternoon respectively, with each group eagerly seeking out the park's bird boxes. The morning group were lucky enough to see a Kingfisher fishing on the lake and a Buzzard soaring over the fields, the latter showing again for the afternoon walk. The children were taken around the lake where they were informed about the work being done there. Moving from the new pond, the walk took them through the woodland where various nesting sites were highlighted, such as the Sparrowhawk and Little Owl, then on up to the main fields where more birds were seen. In the afternoon after the second group had finished their walk, the pupils gathered in gallery 2 for thanks and farewells. I gave each pupil an

information pack on butterflies and moths, and they then departed with these, looking forward to a return to the park next spring. An enjoyable visit was had by all.

Stratford Park picks up 2 Stroud in Bloom awards

It was gratifying for me to attend the recent Stroud in Bloom AGM on 25th October, and to leave with 2 awards, both of which came as a total surprise. I was presented with an award for achievement in biodiversity and conservation, and the park staff received an award for their efforts and service in dealing with vandalism and littering in the park. The awards were presented by Green party councillor John Marjoram. That we are continuing to receive awards for the park, BALI 2010 Green Flag 3 years running, a Britain in Bloom silver gilt in 2011 and now these 2 awards, is a credit to the park staff. The Landscape Group team in Stratford Park deserve a well earned 'pat on the back'. Whilst attending the Stroud in Bloom AGM, I was impressed by the commitment and dedication of the committee, particularly Malcolm (Tarling) and Linda (Philips) in promoting and cultivating interest in the town's floral displays and other amenities, and I hope that next year, the park will achieve 10 out of 10 for biodiversity and conservation.

Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

BIRDS: We have large numbers of birds moving through the park this month, including thrushes and finches from the continent that are supplementing our resident birds. Chaffinches, Goldfinches and a few Greenfinches are flocking along the top field. Redwing and Fieldfare may be seen amongst these. Look too for Siskin as the weather gets colder, especially along the stream feeding in alders. Kingfisher has been regular on the lake. Buzzard is showing well by the woodland, and can be seen soaring most days. Our Little Owl has now moved on for the winter, but Sparrowhawk is still around the woodland, and the evidence of several kills has been found in the park. Nuthatch is still present in the woodland, and recently observed near Salmon Springs feeding amongst flocks of Long-tailed tits. Goldcrest is common this autumn, probably due to the influx of continental birds. Mistle Thrush is in small numbers in shrub areas around the lake, but Song Thrush remains absent.

BUTTERFLIES / INSECTS:

Although butterflies are at the end of their season now, a Red Admiral was seen in the park on November 5th (a late date). Ivy blossom continues to attract moths and other insects throughout the park, and on sunny days, Hoverflies are still on the wing on ivy blossom in the service compound. In the park's moth trap recently has been November moth, Feathered thorn, Pine Carpet, Pale pinion, Orange Sallow and Herald.

Feathered Thorn



MAMMALS:

Roe Deer are moving between the woodland and adjacent fields. Fox activity has been seen around the park, and Badgers are visiting the park most nights.

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