

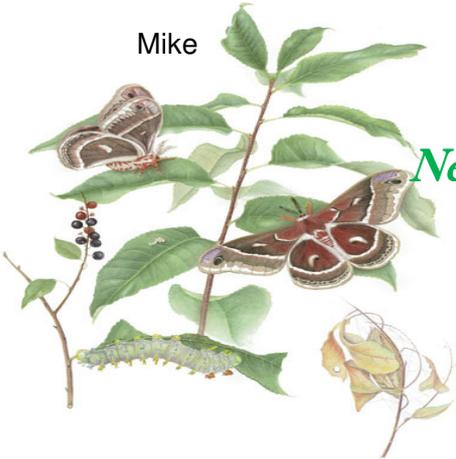
Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter *June 2012*

Hi All,

It seems that every month, the weather is mentioned as a prelude to this newsletter, but not without justification. We have recently experienced the wettest April in 100 years, following the hottest March on record. Add to this, two of the severest winters on record, and it's no surprise that the climate appears to be completely out of synch. The debate on global warming continues with mixed opinions and continued conjecture, but as a boy I remember playing in the park during endless summer days of sunshine, in autumn leaves and deep snow. Those seasons were well defined and predictable as a child. These days, our weather systems are so extreme, That it is easy to lose track of the seasons completely. I have tried to avoid lengthy comments about the weather in the pages of these newsletters, but it is so unavoidable when the extremes we have been experiencing affect the wildlife of the park. Now that the worst of the weather is behind us and the bird nesting season is well advanced, its time to devote time to our summer bugs, the butterflies and moths. With national moth night returning on 21st – 23rd June, it provides me with even more excuses to run the park moth trap with the chance of recording that rare species!

Due to the very wet spring, I have not been as active as in previous seasons, but I intend to run the moth trap regularly from our works compound over the coming summer months, and I will report any rare or interesting visitors. There is an evening 'Little owl watch' followed by a moth evening on Friday 22nd June at the orangery, so watch out for that. Enjoy the park this June.

Mike



News from the Supervisor's Trap



National Moth Night 21st - 23rd June 2012

Discover the wonder of moths and assist with their conservation by taking part in Moth Night 2012, the annual celebration of moths and moth recording. The museum in the park is holding a special moth event in Stratford Park on Friday 22nd June as part of Moth Night 2012.

I will be running the park moth trap at the orangery and inviting everyone with an interest in moths to come along and join in. We will be 'sugaring' trees throughout the park to attract secretive species. This is always an annual highlight for the kids. Stratford Park currently has over 300 species of moths and we hope to increase that number on the night. See night-time visitors feeding from flowers in the orangery herbaceous bed. Before the event, visitors will have an opportunity to see the Little owls up close. A fascinating evening guaranteed.

For information on this event visit www.museuminthepark.org and for further information on other events and how you can get involved visit www.mothnight.info



In association with the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology



Sandpipers recorded on the lake

A pair of Common Sandpipers was spotted on Stratford Park Lake on the morning of 4th May. The birds were observed feeding on the recently excavated bank on the grass areas, and give a tantalizing thought of how water birds could return if the natural corridors of the lake were restored. Common Sandpipers are not common as their name implies, but are local in marshy and boggy areas along the Severn vale and around Frampton ponds. The lake would not provide enough natural food to sustain a pair, but if a reed bed was established, and further grading of the banks was carried out, the habitat would be suitable to their requirements. Nevertheless, this is an exciting record for the park's bird list. At the time of writing our swans have produced a brood of 4 cygnets. However, on the 9th May one of these was sadly found dead on the island. There also appears to be 2 more eggs in the nest which have not hatched.



Common Sandpiper (an unusual visitor to Stratford Park Lake)

Butterflies abound in recent heat wave



After a disastrous April and early part of May, butterflies in the park have shown good recovery. During the recent heat wave, hot temperatures between May 20^t and June 1st produced large numbers of many of the park's regular species. Orange tip has been particularly abundant, and many females have been seen laying eggs on their food plant along the woodland stream. The damp spring has meant that Small tortoiseshell has been slow to breed, with only a few small larval nests being found on stinging nettles. Speckled Wood has been frequent throughout the woodland and Holly Blue regular below the mansion house. The warm weather has meant that some of the 'browns' have emerged earlier than normal. Ringlet and Meadow Brown were both along the rough grass at the top of the park on June 3rd. Of course it is too early to assess how the wet spring will impact on the butterfly populations in the park during the rest of the summer, but if larval mortality has remained low despite cold temperatures, our other species should be on the wing during July, August and September.

Nesting birds face mixed fortunes in Stratford Park

This year's nesting season has been a combination of highs and lows for the park's wild birds. Many birds were late in laying eggs probably due to the damp April. Common birds such as Blue tit and Great tit started inspecting the boxes early in the spring, but cold and wet conditions meant that many of the caterpillars they rely on to feed their young, were either late in emerging or suffered high casualties through the weather. These birds will always synchronise their nesting patterns to coincide with the emergence of caterpillars, especially those of the winter moth. However, by the latter part of May most of the park's nest boxes were occupied including Nuthatch in the woodland.

Other species at the top of the food chain such as crows, Jackdaws, Rooks and Magpies have all done well throughout the park. This spring brought some nice discoveries, with nests of Goldcrest, Coal tit and Greenfinch being discovered. Several wrens' nests were located including one in the apex of the bandstand. Song Thrush and Blackbird have both nested successfully, but Mistle thrush has been absent. A Robin's nest was located in one of the park's open nest boxes behind the orangery and Dunnock has nested around the bowling green. It sadly remains that many of these birds continue to be predated by Grey squirrels that have been responsible for destroying the nests and eggs of most of our open nesting species. The sad sight of one predated the Goldcrest nest was especially upsetting. Squirrels also predated Greenfinch and Wren's nests, even taking Mallard eggs from a nest above ground level in a willow tree. Wildfowl on the lake produced small broods this year, and Mallard numbers were very low compared with 2011. Coots produced a small brood of young, and Moorhen which nested on stream, was again predated.

Our swans produced 4 cygnets in April but one of these was found dead in the lake on May 6th. 3 eggs remained un-hatched in the nest. At the time of writing, Little owl is nesting in the walnut tree, and we are waiting to see the young owls emerge in the coming weeks. The owls have not used the purpose made box on the main field this year because 'you guessed it' squirrels have once again moved in. As a result of this, our owls have fought tooth and nail to reclaim a nest hole from the resident Jackdaws. This has resulted in some fascinating clashes between the 2 species.

Several common species have eluded discovery this year, and we have not located any nests of Chaffinch and Goldfinch. The heat wave during late May resulted in the death of several chicks in the park's bird-cam box, and on 29th May, museum staff reported that just one chick was surviving. Young nestlings can easily over-heat in bird boxes. No doubt we will discover many more little corpses in other boxes at the end of the season. Another positive discovery this year was of Green woodpecker once again nesting in the far oak. The birds did not use this site last year, and the nest hole became covered in fungus. It was therefore pleasing to see the adult bird flying into the nest hole during the recent bird walk on 13th May. Great-spotted woodpecker has been very secretive during the nesting season, and we assume that the park's population is using previous years' nesting holes. We are hoping that Sparrowhawk returns to last year's nest

in the far woodland. During May the birds have been seen regularly over the park. When the canopy is full, any nesting activity is hard to see, but being a very vocal bird, we hope to hear the familiar cries of young birds later this summer. Treecreeper nested in a Wellingtonia by the orangery in April, an amazing little nest tucked in behind the soft bark.

On the whole a reasonably good season for nesting birds in Stratford Park, but with a continuing squirrel problem prevalent, many of our scarcer species are finding it difficult to hold their ground.



Burnet Companion Moth

One moth species which is flourishing this year on the wildflower bank is the Burnet companion, aptly named because it is often seen flying in bright sunshine with burnet moths. This is one of many species of day flying moths which is benefitting from conservation in the park. Now in its 4th year of re-generation, the wildflower bank adjacent to the outdoor sports pitch has now established into the most important habitat for Lepidoptera within Stratford Park. The Burnet companion is a species of open grassland and sunny hillsides. Here in the Stroud valleys, it is found on all of the surrounding Cotswold Hills Rodborough Common, Selsley Common, Painswick beacon and Edge Common. In fact most sites where its foodplant clover *Trifolium* and trefoil *Lotus* grows. This year has seen the species increasing in Stratford Park, and on the evening of 29th May around 30 adults were seen flying on the bank. It is often mistaken for a butterfly called the Dingy skipper, but the moth is more erratic in flight, and at rest the distinctive yellow-orange underside can be seen. There is one brood in May and June. Next month I will cover some of the other day flying moths to be found in summer on the bank.

Burnet Companion



Bird-walk 13th May & Moth evening 18th May With the Museum in the Park

A modest group assembled on the morning of Sunday 13th May in glorious sunshine to attend today's bird walk in Stratford Park. We had switched the walk to the morning instead of the usual 2.00pm afternoon slot, as birds are more active early in the day, and active they were with all the park's key birds showing well. First port of call was the walnut tree on the main field where our Little owl did not disappoint. Although well camouflaged, the group was able to see the owl in its familiar undulating flight. We were also delighted to see the Green woodpeckers flying into the oak tree, where they are once again using the nest hole. Proceeding through the Beech woodland, the group was given a short talk about the woodland management work being done there before moving on through the main woodland to view Nuthatch and Coal tit nesting sites. Most people in attendance possessed binoculars, and were crouching in the undergrowth like well seasoned twitchers! I was able to show the group other birds at their nests including Song thrush. Many birds were in full spring song and as a result, easier to find. Treecreeper and Nuthatch were both showing well. Birds were flying to and from the bird boxes. Buzzard was soaring over the park and Sparrowhawk was briefly sighted as it flew over the orangery. By the time we had walked around the lake and watched the swans and coots, it was evident that as the group had enjoyed their morning so much, we had run a full hour over time, so everyone made a hasty retreat to the museum and me home, to the Sunday roast that was by now a burnt cinder!! (The wife was working that morning, and Sunday roast was my duty). With so many birds seen and with a very contented group leaving the park, I could be forgiven for ruining the Sunday roast. In total contrast to this event, our moth event on Friday 18th May was memorable for one main reason – 'no moths'! I was convinced that given the recent warm weather, moths would be flying in good numbers, but once again we were inflicted with a clear cold night and this curtailed any moth activity. Those in attendance children included, showed great patience waiting for anything to come to the light, but by 10.00pm nothing was recorded and the evening drew to a disappointing close. However, we reminded everyone that another moth event would be held in the park on 22nd June as part of National Moth Night 2012, and that by then a better catch would be had. Thanks again to Ann (Taylor) for assisting that night as well as co-ordinating the museums at night evening in the museum which was held on the same night.



Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

BIRDS: Green woodpecker (main fields), Great-spotted woodpecker, Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Coal tit, Great tit, Blue tit, Robin, Wren, Song thrush, Treecreeper, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Jay, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk Chaffinch (all throughout the park and woodland). Little owl is still on the main field in the walnut tree. (Observed sitting on the bench at the play area on 1ST June). Greenfinch (Common around the Bowling Green this year). On the lake, Coot, Moorhen, Mallard, Tufted duck and Mute swan. 13 Canada geese reported on 3rd June (Adrian Watts). Since this newsletter was written, Adrian has located a Chaffinch nest by the outdoor pool entrance, well concealed in ivy.

BUTTERFLIES / MOTHS: Green-veined white, Orange tip, Speckled wood (all along the stream in the woodland). Burnet companion and Mother shipton moths flying by day on the wildflower bank.

EVENTS

Moth evening & Owl watch Friday 22nd June 2012. Meet at the museum 9pm. This event is part of National Moth Night 2012. For more information visit www.mothnight.info
Wear warm clothes and bring a torch.

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Poppy field near Stroud (Photo Mike McCrea)