



Small magpie moth (Photo: Mike McCrea)

Hi All,

Without sounding repetitive, there's no mistaking that the recent weather has been so unpredictable. Yet again we have a recurring scenario – 'wettest April - coldest May on record'. May never really delivered the sunshine so familiar for that month, instead cold temperatures and rain prevailed. As someone who has recorded moths for over 30 years, this year has got to be the worst I have known. The park's moth trap has not run for weeks and a recent moth event with the Museum was cancelled due to cold weather. I bumped into Ash Ryder (local bat expert) in the park recently and he said that bats were also slow emerging this year. However, he did record an early Serotine recently and Daubenton's has been hunting over the lake. At a recent Stratford Park management group meeting an exciting conservation proposal was put forward by Steve Roberts (Stroud Nature) to restore an overgrown pond at Stroud college and our own pond and lake, tentatively titled the '3 ponds project'. This is a great opportunity for us to work with the college and engage their students in biodiversity. Since the last newsletter I have had great feedback about our owls. Getting those pictures really was a coup. The park enters its busiest period this month in preparation for Britain in Bloom and the Green Flag. With new summer bedding being planted this month, the park will look resplendent. I would just like to thank everyone who sent me really pleasing e-mails about last month's newsletter. Enjoy the park this month.

Mike



News from the Supervisor's Trap



Extending Green Corridors

Stratford Park's Biodiversity and Landscape Action Plan (2011), encourages the need to extend green corridors around the peripheral areas of the Park, enabling re-colonization and seasonal migration of animals and invertebrates. As a result of this we have been attempting to re-connect fragments of rough grass around the northern boundaries by way of subtle changes to grass-cutting regimes.

The objectives of extending wildlife corridors here is primarily to encourage existing small populations of *Satyr*id butterflies (browns) to extend their range into the park from adjacent pasture fields. Secondly to enhance habitat requirements for raptors and rodents both of which are intrinsically linked to a healthy eco-system. Our grass cutting regime was adjusted to accommodate wildlife during 2008, three years prior to the production of the Biodiversity and Landscape Action Plan and the initial objectives have been achieved – a healthy raptor community and a thriving and stable Lepidoptera fauna.

The butterfly species which have benefitted are Meadow brown *Maniola jurtina*, Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*, Gatekeeper *Maniola tithonus*, Small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*, Small skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*, Large skipper *Ochlodes venata* and more recently Marbled white *Melanargia galathea*. All of these species feed on various types of grasses in the larval stage. As well as a thriving butterfly population, these green corridors are now supporting many species of Coleoptera (beetles), Hemiptera (frog hoppers), Diptera (2 winged flies), and Hymenoptera (wasps, bees and hoverflies). Regeneration of important plants like umbellifers, scabious, thistles and clovers are supporting this diverse range of invertebrates. Mowing the main fields during summer is a job which is carried out usually once a fortnight with a tractor and gang mower. During the past 3 years we have started leaving areas of this grass to regenerate. The picture below (bottom left) shows what can be achieved after 2 seasons. The grass here has been left to form an extended peninsula from the main rough areas, extending around an oak tree. Our owls have been seen hunting over this. During September 2012 we decided to extend the green corridor to another part of the main fields, and the picture (bottom right) shows new growth in April of this year.

Sometimes small pockets of grassland can be saved from mowing or development due to their precipitous or isolated locations, such as the area we call 'the wildflower bank' which is basically a narrow escarpment dissected from the other rough areas of grass by the mowed amenity areas. This area which is south facing is even richer in biodiversity and will be the subject of a future newsletter. Here, a wide range of calcareous limestone flora transforms the bank into colour during the summer, and 80% of the park's butterflies thrive here including many day-flying species of moths. I intend compiling a complete list of the flora for these 2 areas in the future to assess their relationship with the invertebrate fauna. Over the coming years it is intended to continue developing the wildlife corridors

along this particular boundary of the park and perhaps introduce some annual management to reduce some parts of the longer grass, reduce sward and encourage other species of butterflies such as blues which prefer a shorter turf.



(Regeneration of grass over 2 seasons)



(2nd area first season regeneration April 2013)

A good spring for Robins

Despite a very late nesting season and unseasonal weather, robins have been breeding prolifically this spring. Our operations in the park also provide us with good opportunities to watch the birds and where they go. Whenever we are working the soil or carrying out other ground works, robins are never far away and will exploit the rich pickings of disturbed worms, flies and other insects. These provide good protein for growing chicks and Adrian and I have located many active nests this month including the one pictured below in a conifer by the Bowling Green. Most of the other nests have been found in ivy on trees which reminds us again how important ivy is for wildlife as a nesting site for birds and as a valuable source of nectar for insects in the autumn. The late nesting season has also thrown up more interesting finds. We have Coal tits once again nesting in the model railway bridge, Blackbirds have been raising second broods and Mistle thrush has nested in the Cedar of Lebanon tree below the Museum. Adrian also stumbled on this beautiful Blackbird's nest (below right) in the woodland on June 3rd.



(Young Robins – Bowling Green May 2013)



(Blackbird nest with eggs – Woodland June 2013)

'Mint Moth' at the Orangery

If you are visiting the Park this month and enjoying the flower beds at the orangery, look out for a little moth which will be seen flying over the cat-mints in full sunshine. This delicate little moth is *Pyrausta aurata* or often called the 'mint moth'. This species belongs to a family of moths called *Crambidae*. The moth has two generations in May and June and again through July and August. It flies both during the day and at night and the larvae feeds on mints including apple mint (which grows close by in the walled garden), spearmint, lemon balm and catmint, the latter two of which grow in the orangery beds. It is locally common throughout England, Wales and Southern Scotland often occurring in gardens and habitats where its food plant occurs. It is quite an exquisite little moth and has a wingspan of 18-20mm. Steve Roberts took this great photo of the moth at the orangery two years ago, and I have included it here in a large format to show its lovely colours.



(Mint moth at the Orangery in 2011 Photo: Steve Roberts)



Stratford Park has recently benefitted from a donation of free flower bulbs which have been donated to Stroud in Bloom by Sainsburys Stroud. The bulbs, a mixture of Crocosmia, Iris, Lily and Ranunculus were donated to Stroud in Bloom to plant in the town. Stratford Park has a close alliance with the Stroud in Bloom team. The park is host to the judges on their first leg of the route and forms an important part of the judges score sheet. In the past this has proved to be a reciprocal relationship as we have donated tulip and daffodil bulbs to Stroud in Bloom. The bulbs donated will be planted around the park and in the orangery. Judging day for Stroud in Bloom is Tuesday 9th July. For all information about Stroud in Bloom please visit www.stroudinbloom.co.uk. A report on the judge's visit will be included in a future newsletter.



Nature Walk for College Students



One of the things that make Stratford Park unique among the Landscape Group's contracts is its association and integration with many other organizations and individuals. Whether this is working with the Museum in the Park on a moth event, assisting Stroud in Bloom, or engaging with College students the diversity of our involvement places us highly as a pro-active and responsive contractor. During the summer months we involve college students in our operations. This can involve general assistance to the park staff, helping with planting or litter picking. On occasions we go that extra mile, and on a glorious sunny day earlier this month, a group of students from Stroud College gathered on the main field for a guided nature walk around the park. The walk was led by Adrian Watts who had been excused from grass cutting on this particular occasion, and was naturally keen to accommodate the young group. Armed with his field guide Adrian and the group set off across the fields with a pre-planned itinerary of all the best 'bird hot spots'. He explained about our owls who we know have young now. The group moved on around the main fields taking in many bird's nests on the way, which Adrian explained about in his own down-to-earth manner.

The group was able to see at close range – both Green and Great-spotted woodpeckers at their nest holes. Active nests of Blackbird and Nuthatch were also observed. The walk continued around the lake where a Heron was seen fishing. Many young ducks were on the lake and also our family of swans, their cygnets now past the danger zone for predation. As I checked the time an hour later (the planned duration of the walk) both Adrian and the group were no where in sight. 15 minutes later he appeared like the pied piper with his group in tow. 'Sorry Mike', 'there was just so much to show them'. I could not really fail to disagree, as on that same morning whilst inspecting the park, birds were everywhere. So, the college students learnt a great deal about the park's birds and Adrian managed to winkle an hour from normal duties, a good arrangement for both! Rosie Sanderson (college tutor) thanked us for accommodating her students and said how much everyone had enjoyed the nature walk. Adrian is leading another bird walk for the Museum in the Park on Sunday morning 16th June.



(Students of Gateway 1 class ACE department Stroud College pose before their nature walk with Adrian 'Tonto' Watts (second from right)

Photo: Mike McCrea with kind permission

An example of Grass mowing for wildlife

Below is an illustration of how grass mowing does not have to be regimental and formal. During the recent lead up to the park's Green Flag inspection we were ensuring that all of the grass areas were mowed and pristine. The area by the orangery and Meningitis Trust garden had produced a huge carpet of clover which hundreds of bees imbibing on it. Our client officer – Rozelle Jachowicz suggested mowing around the clover and leaving a patch for the bees. This appeared to strike a good cord with the Green Flag judges who commented on it favourably.



Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

BIRDS: A Red kite was seen over the park on 18th June. Little owls on the main field are feeding young and can be seen most days taking prey from the field. Green woodpecker and Great spotted woodpecker have both raised broods in the woodland. The photo below shows one of our young Great-spotted woodpeckers being fed by an adult bird (photo by Sharon Tucker). Tufted Duck, Kingfisher are both regular at the lake. In the woodland this month – Long-tailed tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Blackcap, Sparrowhawk and Song thrush.

BUTTERFLIES / INSECTS: The first Scarlet tiger moths have emerged on the wildflower bank. A poor season for butterflies to date. Speckled wood is on the wing around the park perimeters. Green-veined white and small tortoiseshell. At the orangery – Caterpillars of the Mullien moth *Cucullia verbasci* feeding on common figwort.

EVENTS

Moth evening at the orangery Friday 12th July 9.00pm. Meet at the Museum gates. Please visit www.museuminthepark.org.uk for further details.

CONTACT: Mike McCrea Tel: 07833091294 E-Mail: MMccrea@thelandscapegroup.co.uk
mike@media-maker.com **USEFUL LINKS:** www.thelandscapegroup.co.uk
www.stroudinbloom.co.uk www.stroudnature.co.uk www.museuminthepark.org.uk



Great-spotted woodpecker feeding young (Photo: Sharon Tucker)