



(The Orangerie at night Photo: Mike McCrea)

Hi all,

With the arrival of the first Redwings from Scandinavia this month, it is a timely reminder that winter is just around the corner. The Orangerie pictured above and only months ago resplendent with colour, looks sad as everything dies back and returns to dormancy. In the horticultural calendar this time of the year can be a little depressing when bedding is stripped out and blank flower beds await yet another planting of spring plants and bulbs. With a backdrop of heavy rain driving across the main fields, the park can look rather bleak in November. With the prospect of a long winter ahead I will be spending much of my spare time swotting up on a new branch of entomology which I have been keen to get into for a few years now – Diptera (the two-winged flies). With over 7,000 species occurring in the British Isles the study of this order of insects is both fascinating and infinite. The park has many species of hoverflies and I intend to research this family first and start recording them. I have seen almost 20 different species of hoverflies feeding on ivy blossom in our works compound. I will continue to record the park's moths and butterflies, but I like a challenge and this new branch of entomology will certainly provide that.

Mike



News from the Supervisor's Trap



New boxes for Wagtails and Kingfishers

As part of our ongoing next box scheme, the Grey Wagtail is a species which we are encouraging to breed again in the park. Although not a rare bird only a few can be found within the park, on the lake and along the stream. As a bird endowed with lovely yellow breast plumage, it has been illustrated on the interpretation board at the lake as a species to look out for.

Most days these birds can be seen hopping along the concrete causeway used by the anglers and their undulating flight and piping call is unmistakeable. As a breeding species in the park it has a chequered history. Pre-1985 a pair regularly nested below the bridge at Salmon Springs. Structural work to the bridge and the disturbance which came with it in the 1990s saw the wagtails abandon their nest site. Wagtails like streams with stone walls on their banks, preferably with stones missing, which provide good nest sites. Unfortunately the Salmon Springs Bridge and adjacent wall is the only suitable place for them to nest but the old brickwork has long since been demolished. Adrian and I have searched the vicinity for nesting wagtails but to date have not found a nest. On the bridge there is an overhang of vegetation which would be an ideal place to site an open front nest box.

We have built and sited two new boxes on the bridge which we are sure will be successful next spring. Adrian Watts (park staff) has had wide experience with water birds from his time working for the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge and has also suggested installing a Kingfisher nesting tunnel and chamber in an elevated part of the riverbank, so whilst we are carrying out some ground works in the park, we will excavate a section of the riverbank to accommodate this Kingfisher nest chamber. With both of these birds occurring frequently along the stream there is a very good chance that they will use these new nest boxes. Nesting Kingfishers would be a great draw for the public on our annual bird walks.



Grey Wagtail



Putting up a new wagtail nest box on the bridge at Salmon Springs



Sam Morgan (work placement) with the new wagtail boxes



Kingfisher nesting chamber in riverbank

The Landscape Group receives another award



**RHS BRITAIN
IN BLOOM**

Stroud in Bloom held its annual general meeting in Stroud on 28th October and The Landscape Group was awarded the 'Wadworth Trophy for all year excellence' for its work in

Stratford Park. The award was presented to me on behalf of all the park staff by the Mayor of Stroud – Amanda Moriarty. Next year's Britain in Bloom theme is 'Growing for Gold for Pollinators' – Gold being the colour for the 50th anniversary of Britain in Bloom. The theme fits in well with our ongoing biodiversity work and will give us further opportunities to attract pollinating insects such as butterflies, bees and hoverflies with the planting of sunflowers and other high nectar bearing flowers. I would like to thank my line manager Paul James for his support, and the park staff for their hard work throughout the year, and on achieving another award for Stratford Park.



The Landscape Group receives the award for 'all year excellence' at the recent

Stroud in Bloom AGM

(Photo: Malcolm Tarling)

False widow spider found in staff room!

As part of the mobilisation procedure for the new Stroud contract we are refurbishing the existing staff room and welfare facility. Whilst emptying some old boxes in the office I discovered a small spider which was immediately familiar and confirmed as a False Widow spider. Now despite being someone who has spent his lifetime studying insects and also seen some pretty scary bugs in the jungles of South East Asia, spiders are something that I have never taken to. In fact even at my age and as big as I am, the sight of a house spider running across the living room floor sends shivers up my spine. But before any health and safety alarm bells start ringing, let's dispel any present concerns and anxieties about False Widow spiders as in fact these little spiders have been in the UK for over 100 years, originating from the Canary Islands. All of the present public concerns and hysteria about 'flesh eating spiders' is unfounded and somewhat out of context. Yes, they are venomous but deliver such a small dose of venom that the bite is likened to a wasp sting and very rarely causes further health complications. No one has ever died from a spider bite in the UK. Thankfully only the one spider was found despite a thorough search, but no doubt there are others here as they become more and more acclimatised to our warmer weather. I was able to 'pot up' the specimen to show park staff (shown below left)



False Widow Spider found in the park office



Size compared to a one pence coin



Extreme weeding for Spring Beds



Stroud District Council has been kind enough to allow me a 'free hand' on designing the outdoor pool flower bed this year, and with this in mind I have tried to make it as natural and native as possible with an emphasis on biodiversity. With a Britain and Bloom theme of 'growing for pollinators' this year, it seems a good opportunity to provide a spring bedding scheme which will provide a rich source of nectar for insects emerging in the spring. Hoverflies are some of the first insects to emerge on sunny spring days as well as hibernating butterflies and bees. In the wild these will feed on plants such as willow blossom, primroses, bugle, heathers and other nectar rich flowers. In formal bedding schemes the range of plants available for public spaces in the spring does not provide a rich source of nectar, although polyanthus is sometimes visited. The outdoor swimming pool bed has been a riot of colour this summer and autumn due mainly through the varied mix of annuals and perennials planted there. However after the flowering season there is a downside to this, as thousands of plants drop seed which thereafter, can choke out any new planting scheme. Dealing with and weeding millions of celandine and marigold seeds can be a daunting job for park staff so I decided to take some 'drastic' action in dealing with this problem. Whilst hiring an excavator to tidy up the compost and recycling areas, we carefully excavated and removed the top foot of soil from the outdoor pool bed and replenished this with fresh, recycled compost – all generated from the park's green waste recycling. This dealt with the self-seeding on the surface and provided a layer of rich humus soil for the new planting. Once prepared we planted a mixture of native flowers including primroses, snowdrop bulbs, daffodils, mixed tulips, Grape hyacinth, wallflowers, aquilegias, hyacinths and other native flowers. In fact we planted around 2000 bulbs in this bed and next spring it will look fantastic, and wildlife will benefit too. The whole operation was carried out in particularly wet weather but the rewards from February and through spring will be worth it.



(Weeding and planting the easy way!)

False Acacia comes crashing down!

The recent wet weather and strong winds has taken its toll on another of the park's unusual trees. Sadly last month we lost one of our False Acacias on a particularly windy afternoon. The False Acacia is a native of North America but has naturalised in parts of Europe and South Africa. Its bark is fissured and provides excellent nesting places for Treecreepers. The three trees found in the park all grow behind the Orangery and are important foraging trees for Nuthatches and other small birds. The affected tree came crashing down onto the path adjacent to the walled garden at 2.00pm when the park was in busy use. Thankfully nobody was in the vicinity.

It made a foreboding sight straddling the path and once again provides a reminder of how unpredictable trees can be at any time of the year, particularly in a public space.



(False Acacia – another casualty of recent weather: Photo Mike McCrea)

Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

Birds: Redwings and Fieldfares have been arriving this month and can be seen around the orangery and on the main field. It's been a quiet month for birds but Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Treecreeper and Song thrush can still be seen throughout the park. On the lake, Heron and Kingfisher are both regular visitors. Grey Wagtail are seen on the stream. Common Buzzard is frequent over the woodland. Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers are present in the woodland. Kestrel has been an occasional visitor over the main field. Goldfinches and other small birds are starting to form feeding parties along the top perimeter hedgerows.

Insects: Ivy blossom continues to provide nectar for late hoverflies and wasps. A Red admiral butterfly was at the orangery on 3rd November.

EVENTS

Autumn Bird Walk Sunday November 17th. Meet at the Museum 10.00am. Warm clothing and sturdy footwear recommended.

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USEFUL LINKS

www.thelandscapegroup.co.uk www.museuminthepark.org.uk www.stroudnature.co.uk
www.ianpetersphotographer.co.uk www.thebto.org www.theaes.org



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