



Hi All,

After a glorious April and one of the driest on record, the month ended with some very sharp frosts which rocked one of our magnolia trees in the park. At the time of writing, we do not know whether this will survive. May started off very cold with a biting easterly wind. Despite this, April was a fantastic month for birds with bullfinches and even a common sandpiper on the lake (above right). After sitting on her eggs for what seemed like ages, our female swan produced six new-born cygnets between 1st and 3rd May almost to the day of last year's emergence.

These have again been a big draw for the public. It appears to be a positive time for biodiversity in the park and it seems like larger steps are being made to address the Management Plan. A recent (SPMG) meeting looked at the priorities for creating interpretation and of replacing specimen trees in the arboretum. These are objectives that even with present financial constraints, should be achievable next year and will hopefully be the catalyst for the larger project of restoring the lake. With various funding options available including a crowd funding platform supported by our own company, we can, along with the expertise of various stakeholders and individuals, achieve major results over the next few years. May and June are

undoubtedly the busiest months for us in the park, and with an early Green Flag judging this year, we will all be kept on our toes. Sadly, this year we will not be providing a marquee at the Stroud Festival of Nature, this does not mean that we do not support it wholeheartedly, but with such a busy few months ahead, we need to prioritise the park's horticultural profile and to also 'stop to smell the roses' ourselves.



News from the Supervisor's Trap



Remarkable recovery for Park thrushes

In recent years I have commented on the dramatic decline of Mistle thrushes in the park and with two successive wet springs in 2015 and 2016 it looked like the birds would disappear altogether. It is therefore very encouraging to report that this bird has made a remarkable return in numbers this spring. This is undoubtedly due to the prolonged, dry weather that we have been experiencing. As an open nesting species, incubation rates will plummet during cold and wet weather, and although this would seem contradictory, as mistle thrushes nest early in the spring when the weather is often cold, warm and dry weather will produce an abundance of food for thrushes to feed their young. In the last few years only one or two pairs have successfully nested, but this year, during April and May, I have observed about 8-10 families of juvenile birds foraging in the park. Mistle thrushes appear to be nesting in much higher trees these days, possibly to avoid squirrels and other disturbances. It is very pleasing to see this bold bird showing signs of a strong recovery. Song thrushes have also been doing well this spring, so it would seem that climate change may be more influential to our birds breeding success patterns in Stratford Park than perhaps even squirrel predation.



Bird Walk Sunday 14th May 2017

A well attended group together with glorious weather was the prelude to our first bird walk of the year. However, this walk was tinged with some sadness as Ann had lost her mother a few weeks previous, and also, another Ann who attends the walks regularly with her husband informed us that he had passed away in March. That she attended today's walk together with her daughter, showed immense strength of character, so, with a heavy heart, we set off through the park to remind us of the better things in life, the beautiful surroundings, and, of course, the birds. I had been scouting the park during the week to find bird's nests and was delighted to find a very well hidden Nuthatch nest in the arboretum, and as everyone gathered at the base of the tree, the bird was seen popping in and out of its nest-hole and good views were had.

A visit to the lake saw our swan family with six cygnets grazing on the bank. The young birds looked remarkably healthy but were closely guarded by the two adult swans. Our resident heron stood prominently on the bank side and a brief flash of a kingfisher was seen flying along the adjacent stream. Today the woodland was absolutely stunning in the morning sun, and in the canopy above the sound of birdsong was quiet beautiful.

We followed our usual route through the woodland and up into the far beech wood. Here, we stopped to talk about the Tawny owls that are using the nest boxes, and of our present stage of woodland management work. Continuing up and through the green corridors provided everyone with a panoramic view of the park under clear blue skies. Mistle thrushes were feeding on the field, and these had been seen throughout the arboretum during our walk. After an hour or more, we returned to the museum which completed another lovely bird walk.



Rotary Club talk 8th May 2017



During autumn last year we planted 5000 purple crocus bulbs for the Rotary Club in aid of 'End Polio Now'. The flowers duly emerged in the spring and provided a streak of purple along the bank by the car park. Following on from the planting, Rozelle (SDC) and I were invited to the Stroud Rotary Club AGM and dinner. During this meeting, I was asked if I would do a talk on the park and its biodiversity, so I naturally agreed. The venue for this talk was The Old Crown Inn near Stroud and only 3 minutes drive from the park so this worked well for me.

The preparations started off badly as my laptop was not compatible with the digital projector and software supplied by the Rotary Club, so panic set in, especially as people were arriving and taking their seats. With the screen in place and a full room, my anxiety was increasing. Thankfully, the landlady of the pub came to the rescue and allowed us to use her own laptop, but wait, there's still another problem, she can't remember her password, and after several attempts she is logged off and has to re-start the computer again! Further panic ensues until finally, she remembers her password and everything is up and running. Never before have I been so pleased to see the opening power point slide showing on the screen. With this sorted, we all sat down for our meal which was very nice. If all this seems superfluous as a prelude to

the actual presentation, it is because despite all my initial worries about the equipment failing and letting these guys down, I can say with all sincerity that at the end of the talk I was very gratified with the lovely thanks from the Rotary Club, and of their kind comments about what we are doing here in Stratford Park, and support for Stroud District Council too for supporting us. Everyone in attendance was astonished to learn about the wealth of wildlife we have in the park and the Q&A following the talk covered everything in the Biodiversity Management Plan. I would like to thank Richard Lacey and David Waite for their kind hospitality, and we are also pleased to accept another batch of crocus bulbs to plant in the park this autumn.

Green Flag judging day ‘a resounding success’

Green flag covers a wide spectrum of criteria associated with Public Spaces, so these comments are only applicable to the main content of this newsletter. Firstly, the day previous to judging day 17th of May produced the heaviest downpours of the year to date. Rain fell torrentially and we were all soaked in our attempt to prepare the park for the judges. This was acknowledged by our client (SDC) which was appreciated. Thankfully on judging day we were blessed with beautiful sunny weather which exemplified the grass, flowers and trees.

The judges were very impressed with how we have created and extended the green corridors and of the bird box scheme in place. Much of the judging route took us through those areas and I was inspired by the judge’s comments. In fact one of the judges previously employed by Gloucester City Council is returning with her previous manager to show him what we have achieved and to provide him with ideas for other Green Spaces. That to me speaks volumes.

The judges were also impressed with the large poplar tree converted into a bridge, with one of them saying “I’ve been involved in many fallen timber sculptures, but this is the best example of using a tree that I have ever seen” so Mark Graham (SDC Public Spaces), you can take all the praise for that one.

The judges were provided with a buffet lunch at the Museum in the Park where they met others associated with the park including members and volunteers from Stroud Valleys Project, Steve Roberts (Stroud Nature) and Stroud District Council. A visit to the restored walled garden must have gained us many more points. I was stunned by the new herbaceous beds and I am going to include some ‘before and after’ pictures in the next Biodiversity Newsletter. This was not just a Green Flag judging day, but a celebration of this beautiful park and the dedicated people who work in it. I felt very proud at the end of the day and especially proud of my staff for all their hard work in making the park pristine on the day. I have no doubt that Stratford Park will be awarded another Green Flag this year.



Beetles 'swarm' the park

At the time of completing this newsletter, we are experiencing a heat wave which has triggered the emergence of thousands of small brown and green beetles. On 22nd May temperatures were in the 80s and on the main fields these beetles were swarming and jumping in their thousands. Coincidentally, the day before, our Green keeper Paul Woodward had mentioned the same occurrence of beetles at his home, where guests to his house recoiled in horror at the numbers. These are garden chafers. Adult chafers feed on the foliage of many plants but are generally not a problem. They will however, sometimes damage the flowers of roses and other plants. In heavily infested parks and gardens, the adult beetles fly up in large numbers, which is what we are seeing in the park and elsewhere locally. Their eggs are laid in the turf and these hatch a few weeks later. The grubs feed on roots but do not cause significant damage until early autumn, by which time the larvae are becoming fully grown. They overwinter as larvae and pupate in the soil in the spring. Fortunately, we have only seen a small number on the more formal grass areas and they will have little impact on the main fields. Nevertheless, seeing thousands of these small beetles bouncing over the grass is a fascinating sight.



Garden chafer beetle

This month's Biodiversity Newsletter is slightly shorter than usual due to preparing the park for Green Flag.

Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

BIRDS: May is the best month to see birds in the park and all of the bird boxes are occupied. On the main field there is a new Great-spotted woodpecker nest in the oak above the play area. Common buzzards are soaring over the park every day. Also on the main field and green corridors – Goldfinch, Linnet (1 on 15th May), Green woodpecker, Mistle thrush and Pied wagtail. In the woodland – Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Jackdaws (nesting in the poplars), Jay, Tawny owl, Dipper on the stream and Song thrush. On the lake – Grey wagtail, Kingfisher. The swans have lost one cygnet leaving 5 remaining.

BUTTERFLIES: Many species will be emerging next month. In the park now is green-veined white, orange-tip, Brimstone, holy blue, speckled wood, small tortoiseshell and a surprising red admiral on the 16th May!

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(Photo below: Holly blue by Laura Jarman)

