



Biodiversity Newsletter



NOVEMBER 2010

Hi all, the first frosts of winter have gripped the park, blanketing the fields with a white sheen. There has been a significant arrival of winter thrushes. Fieldfares (above left) are feeding throughout the hawthorns around the perimeter of the park, and I have seen them feeding on Yew berries by the orangery. (This means a cold winter ahead), or so they say.

With the onset of winter, the Wyevale staff will be taking a welcome rest from the continual grass cutting and flower bed maintenance. Not to say that we won't be busy. Autumn brings much colour to the park, but also millions of leaves to clear up.

The new wildlife pond is now completed, and I have planted some insect loving perennials amongst the vegetation next to the adjacent stream. These will bring colour next summer, and a good source of nectar for hoverflies and butterflies.

I am sad to report the disappearance of one of our juvenile swans. We have found no evidence of predation, so perhaps it's possible that this bird may have moved on. The remaining two are both doing well. Another job we are doing this month is planting hundreds of daffodil bulbs throughout the park to brighten up the grass areas next spring. We are also planting in the rough grass areas. Thanks to SDC for providing these.

With wildlife on the constant move for food, this month is one of the best to look for birds at the park. The areas in front of the orangery on a clear frosty morning will reward you with Nuthatch, Redwing, Fieldfare, Long Tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Treecreeper and Great-spotted Woodpecker.

Flocks of gulls are feeding on the fields and Starlings are starting to form they're large flocks in Callowell fields.

Autumn is indeed, a lovely season in the park, so wrap up warm and make a visit to see the wildlife and the last colourful leaves.

Mike

News from the Supervisor's Trap

Shelduck on Stratford Park Lake



A Shelduck has been seen on Stratford Park Lake. The bird belongs to a family known as marine ducks, and is normally found on estuaries and mudflats more locally, on the river Severn. It is quite possible that this bird has been blown of course, or may be on passage. In any event, it was a welcome sight on the lake earlier this month and is another 'tick' to the park's wild bird list.



Big Cat sighted in Callowell Fields



Those of you who read the Stroud News & Journal will have seen that a large 'panther' was seen on 20th October in Callowell fields adjacent to the park. This is not the first time that a 'large cat' has been sighted in the area. Only 5 years ago, reports of a large black panther like cat at Edge made the local press. As usual, these sightings are rarely corroborated by other members of the public, but the likelihood of an escaped animal cannot be ruled out. As someone who does the 'rounds' in the park on a daily basis, I have yet to see this beast. With Roe deer in the woodland, it would not be short of prey.

Himalayan Balsam 'a cause for concern?'



Several people who read this newsletter have raised they're concerns about the spread of Himalayan Balsam along the Painswick stream. There is no disputing that it can be an invasive weed, and this is mainly due to its aggressive seed dispersal. During late summer, after flowering, the plant forms seed pods which 'explode' when disturbed. In my opinion Himalayan Balsam is a beautiful plant which produces large quantities of pollen, and this is beneficial to bees and other insects. Removing it could lead to more invasive plants becoming established such as Giant Hogweed. I am monitoring the spread of this plant at the park, and should it begin to encroach too much, or choke the growth of other native species, we will cut it back. To

anyone visiting the park next summer, just have a closer look at the beautiful flower head of this plant and the myriad of insects it attracts.



'Bird of the Month' Tawny Owl (Strix aluco)

The Tawny Owl is the quintessential woodland owl often heard, but rarely seen. This bird has a special place for me, because it was this species that I studied as part of my English thesis at school, and, interestingly, it was at Lypiatt and Stratford Park where I carried out my studies, way back in 1974!. During this time, I spent many months in the park collecting pellets and analyzing the food the owls were eating. My two younger sisters were often dragged to the woodland to help me find the pellets, an activity they thought disgusting, but fascinating at the time. One very interesting observation back in 1974 was the amount of amphibian remains in the Tawny Owls' diet. This was indicative of the rich amphibian fauna in the lake, at a time when frogs and toads were numerous. Sadly, not one frog or toad exists in the lake today.

Before the construction of the present car park, Tawny Owls bred in the oak tree where you can still see the gnarled branches and hollow cavities they used. At least 3 pairs were present in the park. Today we have probably one pair only, and these frequent the far end of Stratford Park Woodland. They're main roost site is amongst the taller larches where you can often find the pellets, 'indigestible parts of the owl's prey such as fur and bones, regurgitated usually twice a day'. (See illustration below right).

Some evenings when I return to the office to do some paperwork, I can hear them calling, especially in the early spring. Tawny Owls lay their eggs quite early in the season, about mid March. Wyevale have erected a purpose made Tawny Owl box in the woodland, and you can see this high up in the Sycamore tree in the middle of the Beech wood. Pellets have been found



at the base of this tree, indicating that the owls are using the box to roost, so perhaps next year they will use it to breed. Like its smaller cousin the Little Owl, this species needs hollow trees to nest, and the park does not provide many suitable nesting sites, so our owl box may prove a hit next year. Actually seeing the bird is usually by chance, either when illuminated in the car headlights or as a ghostly figure flying overhead. The Tawny Owl is a quiet nocturnal hunter, and I'm very pleased we still have them in the park.

Tawny Owl Pellet





Winter Moths in the Walled Garden



On the evening of Friday 5th November I ran the park moth trap in the walled garden. There are several interesting species on the wing during the winter months. Most of these are dull and cryptic in colour, to blend in with the leafless trees. Running the lamp in the walled garden was quite eerie, as the brick walls were illuminated with an orange glow, and as the night progressed and got colder, a mist descended on the garden which then gave the appearance of a 1970's hammer horror film set.

During the summer, I had found many small green larvae feeding on the apple and plum trees in the walled garden, and in some cases these were defoliating some branches. I knew these to be the caterpillars of the winter moth *Operopherta brumata*, an abundant pest of fruit trees. Within 10 minutes of turning on the trap, lots of small moths came fluttering to the light, which were indeed adults of the winter moth. Several other moths were arriving, and by 7.00pm 6 species had been recorded including December Moth *pocilocampa populi* (right) an attractive moth associated with woodland and parkland (and another species to the park's list).

What I am finding exciting about recording moths in the park is knowing that it has not been done before, and every species that comes to the light is a first to be recorded. Already during the first 18 months of recording, several rare species have turned up, and we are gradually putting the puzzle together on the association our moths have with the trees in the park. If anyone is interested in joining me on a 'winter moth trapping session in the walled garden' please contact me.



(Top Left: Merviella De'Jour Moth)

(Top Right: Pale Brindled Beauty)

Stratford Park Wildlife Pond (Update)

With winter on our doorstep, it is an ideal time to update you on our new wildlife pond and proposals to develop this area. Firstly, those of you who visit the park will have seen the progress of the pond since the first shovels of earth were lifted at the festival of nature back in June. That event was the catalyst to move the development of the pond forward. Since then the pond has been excavated and the flow of water to the lake, diverted through the pond.

Frampton Court Estate has kindly allowed us to transplant aquatic and marginal plants from the village green pools to the new pond, and Wyevale staff are re-planting these. As far as the pond is concerned, we must now let nature take its course, and over the coming months these plants should become established, and during next spring when temperatures rise, the natural pond will take away the present starkness of the pond.



I intend to transport frogs, toads and other aquatic life from my own pond (which is in need of a good clear out) to the new pond, in the spring. We will be stocking the pond with fish such as Rudd, Stickleback and Minnow from other sources. Within 2 years the pond should be balanced and a great wildlife resource for everyone to enjoy.

Wyevale will be constructing a path to the elevation of the pond adjacent to the stream, and extending the present tarmac path by the ornamental bridge. This will enable both parents with children's buggy's and the disabled, to access the pond area. A dipping platform (as shown on the plan at the pond site) will be built in the spring. Steve Roberts (Stroud Nature) will be producing an interpretation board at the pond to illustrate the wildlife found there. The park has come a long way in developing the new pond since June, and thanks is due to Lloyd Turner who provided the design for the pond and the water management system. We must also acknowledge Stroud District Council who have funded this project, and who remain committed to the biodiversity development of Stratford Park.



Wildlife to look for now at Stratford Park

BIRDS: Redwing, Fieldfare, Siskin, (all around the top field perimeter) Kingfisher (Lake), Shelduck (Lake), Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Great Tit (below the museum), Black Headed Gull, Herring Gull (large flocks on the main fields) Starling (flocking in adjacent Callowell Fields) Dipper (occasionally at the far end of Stratford Park Woodland by salmon springs).

MAMMALS: Roe Deer (showing well early in the morning by the woodland)

INSECTS: Still a few late hoverflies and moths on ivy blossom. Winter moths around the outdoor sports pitch on mild evenings.

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