



Biodiversity Newsletter

OCTOBER 2010

Hi all, autumn is upon us, and with it, a transition of colour that will transform the park into a tapestry of gold, yellow, reds and browns. The first Siskins (top right) have arrived, and anyone wishing to see this delightful little finch should take a walk around the fields above the play area early in the morning. Here, they may be found feeding in the alder trees. For those of you who work at the council offices at Ebley Mill, the alder trees in the car park adjacent to the river Frome support large flocks of Siskins later in the winter.

The new pond is completed and 'up and running'. Wyevale staff have constructed the manhole and made all the connections to the main water supply. It's great to see a large body of water in the pond at last, and our Mallards are already checking it out. Hopefully, this time next year I will be reporting on the wildlife that has become established there.

It is gratifying to hear that the recent Stroud in Bloom judging awarded 9 out of 10 points for biodiversity due to the work we are doing in the park, and with an interesting programme of wildlife events scheduled for 2011 in collaboration with the museum in the park, there has never been a better time to learn more about the park's wildlife. During these events, as well as our regular bird walks and moth evenings, I hope to cover other species of importance to the park such as hoverflies and other insects.

With this newsletter, I am introducing a new feature called 'bird of the month'. This will cover an interesting species that is showing in the park that month, what to look for and where to find it. This month's bird is the Common Buzzard which has nested in the park for the first time this year.

Autumn is one of the best months to see birds in the park, as our native species are augmented by large numbers from Scandinavia and Northern Europe, so as well as looking for these, enjoy the trees and the wonderful colours of autumn at Stratford Park.

Mike

NEWS FROM THE SUPERVISOR'S TRAP

HORNETS NEST IN OAK TREE

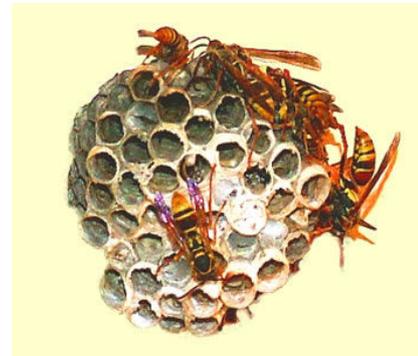


Most of us are familiar with wasps and of the nuisance they are, especially at this time of year. However, how many have seen a Hornet, or even better, a colony?. For those not intimidated by the size of this large insect, a walk up to the corner oak tree above the playing area is recommended, for here we have a large colony with

many hundreds of foraging males whirring around the hedgerows in search of food.

Despite their size, Hornets are not aggressive like their smaller cousins, and are often an indicator of a healthy ecosystem. They are not interested in stinging you 'although the sting can be painful', and are more interested in feeding the queen, which will be producing fertilized females and some males. Once the queen has done her job, the males will gradually die by the end of the month.

Walk up to the tree on a sunny morning to see these interesting insects, and for those who wish to see a 'spectacular' wasp nest, take a walk back down to the car park and look up into the oak tree adjacent to the service barrier. There is a huge wasp nest extending from a rotten cavity about 20 feet up.



'BIRD OF THE MONTH' COMMON BUZZARD

The name 'Common Buzzard' is slightly misleading, for although Buzzards have increased in numbers since the 1970s, they are far from common.



Numbers were reduced drastically during the 1950s and 1960s due to persecution by gamekeepers and myxomatosis, which rendered their eggs infertile. These days, Buzzards can be seen soaring around the Stroud valleys wherever there is suitable woodland, especially on hillsides. Unlike many other birds of prey, the Buzzard is an opportunist, feeding on carrion or as I like to call it, 'roadkill ragu' instead of hunting for prey. However, they will take weak rabbits and

even young lambs, especially during hard winters.

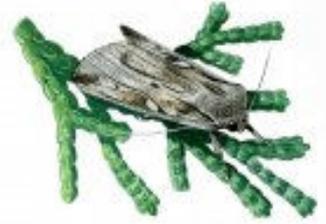
In previous years, Buzzards have often been seen flying over the park and throughout the Painswick valley, their 'mewing' calls unmistakable high on the thermals. This year we have been fortunate to find this bird nesting in Stratford Park for the first time. During June, Steve Roberts was visiting the park and noticed the birds flying over the park woodland. On further inspection, he located a large nest high in a scots pine tree at the far end of the woodland. This was duly brought to my attention, and throughout the summer, I monitored its progress.

Watching the 2 adult birds alighting on the nest was a spectacular sight, and by mid July, 2 young birds were seen feeding on the fields with the parents flying overhead. The immature birds have since moved on, but right now the adult birds can still be seen most days, soaring over the woodland. The breeding of this species is another success story for the park's wild birds.

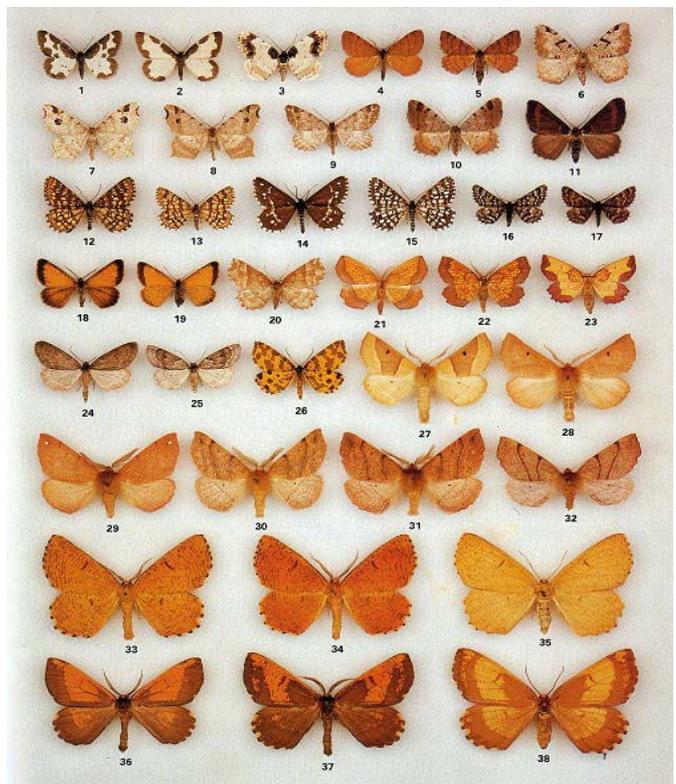
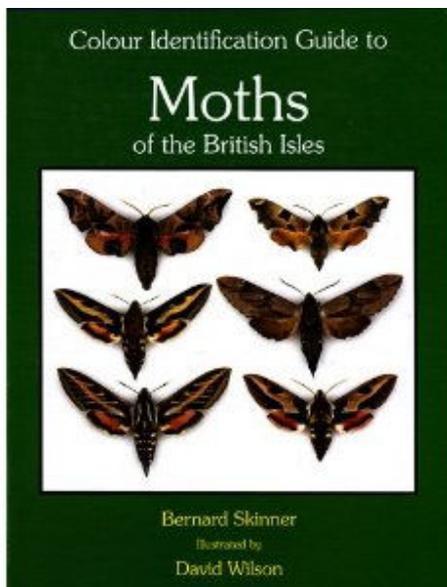


INTERESTING MOTH TURNS UP IN PARK'S TRAP

With around 2800 species of moths in the British Isles, it's almost inevitable that something interesting will turn up in the park's moth trap, and on the evening of October 2nd I saw a moth unfamiliar to me.



I consulted my copy of Skinner's 'Guide to Moths of the British Isles', and was pleased to confirm a specimen of Blair's Shoulder Knot *Lithophane leutieri*. This moth is relatively new to the British list, and was first recorded in 1951. The larvae feed on Monterey Cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa* and other Cupressaceae, which we have in the park's arboretum. Nationally, this species is rather local and is a good addition to the park's moth list. The moth is rather dull and cryptic in colour (above right), and characteristic of many species that are on the wing during autumn. For those interested in purchasing a good guide to British moths, Skinner's guide (below) is probably the best on the market and available from www.atroposbooks.co.uk.



IVY, AN UNDERRATED PLANT

October is the month when ivy is in full blossom. On a sunny day in the park, ivy is probably the most important source of nectar for late flying insects and butterflies. It is the food plant of our Holly Blue butterfly which can be seen in spring and again in late summer. The foliage of Ivy is also important for roosting birds such as tree creepers, robins and wrens, and acts as a good insulator against winter weather. Ivy berries are important food for thrushes, and this month, Redwings and Fieldfares. Ivy can also be debilitating to more ornamental trees and shrubs, and also walls and buildings, as its roots are very strong and penetrating. Having said this, the importance of ivy as a food source for wildlife cannot be disputed. In Stratford Park, ivy grows everywhere. In the woodland it rambles up many of the trees, and it has colonised many large shrubs below the museum. The largest expanse of ivy grows over the walls of the walled garden. In our service compound, we have a large ivy, and this is often 'heaving' on sunny mornings with hoverflies, wasps, bees and butterflies. It's sad that in a way, ivy is its own worst enemy, no less than any other parasitic plant, but from an entomologists' point of view, I am happy to see it thrive in the park

Red Admiral Butterfly on Ivy Blossom



WILDLIFE TO SEE AT STRATFORD PARK NOW

BIRDS: Siskin (top fields), Redwing, Fieldfare, Buzzard, Great Spotted Woodpecker (woodland adjacent to A46) Look in the tall poplars, Green Woodpecker (still foraging around the play area early morning), Great Tit, Blue Tit Long Tailed Tit (all these are starting to form foraging flocks, and can be seen working through the hawthorns above the play area. Heron (on the lake), Kingfisher (our resident bird is using one of the anglers platforms to fish from, and is fascinating to watch as it 'plops' in and out of the water).



INSECTS / BUTTERFLIES: Red Admiral, Comma Painted Lady (all can be found feeding on ivy blossom throughout the park), Speckled Wood (still a few late butterflies on sunny days). Hoverflies, abundant on ivy blossom, Hornet (Oak in top left corner of field above play area) Wasp (nest) Oak adjacent to service barrier.

MAMMALS: Roe Deer (sometimes seen near woodland and in adjacent fields early in the morning)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Autumn Colour Walk in Stratford Park 17th October 2.00pm. Join staff for a walk around the park in all its autumn glory. All ages welcome, wear sturdy shoes and meet in courtyard. Further information

www.museuminthepark.org.uk

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