



## *Biodiversity Newsletter* *August 2011*

Hi all,

It's hard for me to believe that this edition of the biodiversity newsletter represents the first anniversary of its compilation. On looking back over this first year, it is very evident to me that the park has a huge repository of wildlife, and only when you document this over the course of a year, do you marvel at the diversity contained within its 53 acres. The newsletters have become very popular with not only those associated with the park, but others with an interest in the park's wildlife within the broader public. I must thank Kevin Ward of the Museum in the Park who has faithfully posted the newsletter on the museum's website each month, and in a very reader friendly format.

Thanks also to Steve Roberts of Stroud Nature, who has played a pivotal role in galvanizing my observations into biodiversity initiatives throughout the park, and for posting photographs on his website which I have been unable to do this end. With next months' festival of nature imminent, the biodiversity of the park will experience another elevation of recognition.

I thank all of the individuals during the year who have provided me with their sightings and observations around the park, and for the support and enthusiasm from staff at the Museum in the Park and Stroud District Council, all of which make my job here more rewarding.

As the park approaches high summer, another period of transition arrives, with swallows and House martins (above) heading back to their wintering grounds in Africa. These will be replaced soon, with our wintering thrushes and other birds on passage, and as the walled garden bears its yearly bounty of fruit, the parks butterflies will feast on the windfalls. 12 months of newsletters gives you a good snapshot of what we have here in Stratford Park, yet, I would like to think that 'we are only scratching the surface'.

Mike





## *News from the Supervisor's Trap*



### *Sparrowhawks breeding in woodland*

Another exciting discovery was made in the park woodland on Sunday July 24<sup>th</sup>. Ash Ryder sent me a text message to say that he had discovered a Sparrowhawk's nest located high in a Larch tree in woodland adjacent to salmon springs, and had seen and heard the birds calling. Adrian Watts (park staff) and my self met up with Ash on the Monday afternoon, and were taken to the location. On approaching the woodland, 2 birds could be heard calling high in the tree tops. One bird, a female, flew to and from the nest, and we managed to get great views of it flying through the trees. A search beneath the nest site revealed several carcasses of small birds and wing feathers of Blackbird. We also found some pellets. The following morning of 26<sup>th</sup> July, 4 birds were observed flying around the nest site. We feel that these are 2 juvenile birds and 2 adult birds, as 2 of the birds are constantly calling for food, which is characteristic of young raptors when they are due to leave the nest site. The nest itself, was very high up in the fork of a Larch tree, and would in full canopy, be difficult to spot. In fact this nest had slipped under our keen eyes during regular inspections through the park. Once again, this represents an important find for breeding raptors at Stratford Park, with Buzzard, Little Owl and now Sparrowhawk nesting during the last 2 years. Now that we have located this nest, we will be able to monitor it more closely, especially next spring. Yet another surprise in what has been a fantastic year so far for birds at the park.



Sparrowhawk



## *Stratford Park prepares for Festival of Nature*

With almost 50 organizations, groups and exhibitors attending the 2011 festival of nature, this promises to be the highlight of the year for wildlife at Stratford Park. Following on from the success of last year's festival, the event is the brainchild of Steve Roberts, who works tirelessly throughout the year to put together a day of wide ranging interests within the umbrella of biodiversity, sustainability and conservation. Well respected within Stratford Park and the wider community, Steve has managed to attract such diverse organizations as the Bee Guardian Foundation, WWT Slimbridge, Ecotricity and Cotswold Canals Trust, and is supported by Stroud Valleys Project and many others, who aspire to Stratford Park, its place within the community and of course, its varied wildlife.

This year's festival is being held as part of the broader Stroud Valleys Festival incorporating Stroud walking festival, Stroud drink and food festival, Stroud festival of nature, Eco-renovation Open Homes and Stroud Fringe. Anyone browsing through the official 40 page programme will see that there is something for everyone, bird box building, Bat detecting at night, guided walks around the park, pond dipping at the new pond etc etc.

On the Friday evening prior to The festival, renowned Gorilla expert Ian Redmond will be giving a talk at the leisure centre on Gorilla conservation, and his work with Diane Fossey, who pioneered research on mountain gorillas in Rwanda during the 1960s and early 1970s.

For further information on the festival please visit Steve's website [www.stroudnature.co.uk](http://www.stroudnature.co.uk)

## *Squirrels continue to predate bird boxes*

Despite fixing steel plates to all of the holes in our nest boxes, squirrels have continued to predate some of these. Boxes in trees along the woodland edge have had large holes gnawed through the roofs, which only emphasizes the continuing damage that squirrels are having on our breeding bird populations. This recent spring has also seen 3 Song Thrush nests and 2 Blackbirds nests predated by Grey Squirrels. Watching a squirrel rob a clutch of Song Thrush eggs (which I have witnessed this year), is a frustrating sight, especially as many of our open nesting birds have seriously declined in the park as a result of this. I know that the culling of squirrels is an emotive subject with some, but unless measures are taken to reduce the squirrel population in Stratford Park, these once common birds will continue to decline.

One of the most beautiful of British birds eggs, the Song Thrush (right)



## *Unusual occupants in bird box*

Whilst examining one of our bird boxes recently, I was interested to note that although the Blue tit chicks had left, other occupants were in evidence. A cloud of very small moths flew out, which I knew immediately as moths of the genus *tineidae* or frequently referred to as 'cloths moths'. On closer examination the species was identified as *tinea pallescentella* the larva of which feeds on keratinous animal matter such as hair, wool, fur and feathers, either indoors or out. Despite its previous reputation as an insect that destroys cloth, (actually it is the caterpillar that does the harm) the moths have become much rarer, mainly due to the decline of the woollen industry, increased hygiene and cleanliness in factories. The last time that I have encountered this little moth was at a cloth mill in Stroud in 1982 where it was breeding amongst old cloth and detritus. It is therefore very interesting to find it in Stratford Park breeding in the nest of a bird.



*Tinea pallescentella* (magnified x 100)

## *Landscape Group flying the flag for Biodiversity*

Within the Landscape group portfolio Stratford Park is one of the company's smaller contracts, but in many ways, one of its most prestigious. The company recognizes the work being done to improve biodiversity here, and is considering the park as a 'case study' for other contracts to aspire to. I met with Sarah Hughes-Clarke (Business development director) to discuss what's so special about Stratford Park and its place within the Landscape group's contracts.

'Promoting an image of environmental commitment is important to the company' she said, and developing the biodiversity for other contracts and new ones, is high on the company's future agenda. With this in mind, I took Sarah on a walk around the park, explaining along the way how we are conserving habitats and creating new ones. After meeting Kevin (Ward) and Carlos and Rozelle, we took in the butterfly and Bee garden and the new dipping pond. Sarah is keen on birds, as I discovered when she produced her own pair of binoculars(!), and was quick to

focus them on our Little owl box. Demands on time meant that a visit to the Sparrowhawk nest site was not possible on this occasion, but Sarah has promised to return for a better tour of the park.

After her whistle stop tour, we had an interesting discussion about how biodiversity initiatives could be introduced within the group and to benefit its clients. Providing staff with conservation training was an option, more importantly making them aware of the biodiversity within existing contracts would mean that managers and supervisors could adopt a more pro-active approach in considering conservation on their contracts. However, finding and securing people with the knowledge and skills to advise and develop contracts was difficult, and Sarah recognized that none of the Landscape Group contracts supported a manager with my previous background. We further discussed how perhaps I could provide an advisory role throughout the group to advise on developing biodiversity and conservation, a suggestion I found very interesting. One thing that came over clear from our meeting was that the Landscape Group is keen to embrace the environmental potential of its contracts both present and future, and perhaps Stratford Park can be the catalyst for future initiatives.



### *Stratford Park pond update*

It is exactly a year since we started excavating the new pond with heavy machinery, and since then it has gone through various stages of transition. The final construction works were completed last autumn, with the stone wall and supply feed manholes. Many of the marginal plants planted last October have established, but we still have much more planting to do. Sticklebacks introduced this spring, have produced many offspring, and these can be seen now in the pond. Other pond life has been somewhat secretive, and this is in no doubt due to the constant dabbling of Mallards and swans. Although these wildfowl are welcome on the lake, they have been detrimental in their damage to establishing aquatic plants. These birds will eat new shoots and roots, which does not give plants enough space to develop. The dabbling also turns over the sediment in the pond resulting in cloudy water. This is frustrating when children are looking for pond creatures. Having said this, we now have whirly gig beetles, damselflies, frogs, water boatman, pond skaters and many other small organisms thriving in the pond. We had a slight concern last month when the pond water appeared black. SDC undertook water tests, and these returned showing no contamination to the water. We now think that this was due to the breakdown of organic material on the pond floor. At the time of writing, the Giant Flee bane *Inula magnifica* is flowering, and the surrounding vegetation is well established. Park staff is laying a concrete base near the pond to site a new bench which will provide a lovely place to sit and look at the pond on a sunny day. The bank needs further planting, and I will be discussing this with Rozelle Jachowicz in the near future. I

am sure that the pond will prove a hit with the public at the festival of nature. In the autumn, I will be carrying out some repairs to the stone walling, and we will continue introducing other pond creatures over the coming months. It's nice to see the pond has reached its first anniversary with only a small amount of vandalism. Finally, the best news is that SDC has now commissioned Steve Roberts to design and put up an interpretation board at the pond.



### *Hot weather produces large numbers of moths*

Recent hot and humid weather between August 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> has produced huge numbers of moths at the park's moth trap. I ran the moth trap in the works compound on the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> August and recorded 78 species, among them, 8 new ones to the park's list. On this night, temperatures at 9.30pm were 22 degrees. The following evening, Ash Ryder and I ran a moth trap at nearby Edge Common and recorded in excess of 80 species including many interesting ones such as Magpie, Dusky Sallow and Beautiful Carpet.



Beautiful Carpet



Magpie Moth



Large yellow under wing

### *Tawny Owl box shows signs of occupation*

More owl pellets have recently been found beneath our Tawny Owl box located in the woodland. This is a good sign that the owls are using the box to roost. The box was erected in March 2009 to encourage the species to breed again in the park. Previous to this, Tawny owls used to nest in the oak tree in the car park adjacent to the recycling bins. This was before the existing car park was built, so pre 1975. Tawny owls can be heard in the woodland at night, and are one of the earliest of our birds to nest, usually in March. We are hoping that 2012 sees them using the box to breed, which will continue our success with birds of prey at the park. The target species also for 2012 / 13, is Kestrel for which we have another box on the main fields.



## *Stock Dove (Another bird to the park's list)*

On the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> August a pair of Stock Doves was observed in the walnut tree on the main field. At first these were mistaken with feral pigeons, but on taking flight I noticed that the white rump (characteristic of feral pigeons) was absent on these birds. The pair was trying to get into a cavity in the tree (Stock Doves are hole nesting birds), but were thwarted by hassling Jackdaws. Stock Doves are widely distributed throughout the British Isles, but not that common in this part of Gloucestershire. I have not previously seen them in Stratford Park, but they may have been overlooked in the past. Nevertheless, the species is another bird to add to the park's growing list.



Stock Dove

### *Brief updates*

The Little Owls are still in the oak tree on the main fields. This is the latest that they have remained in the park. A green Woodpecker family can be seen every morning on the grass bank adjacent to the top car park and play area. There have been two incidents this month where swans have been caught up in fishing tackle. A member of the public jumped into the lake to retrieve a cygnet that had fishing line around its neck. On the second occasion, a cygnet had partially swallowed some line and tackle. Both birds were fine after their ordeal, and finally Stratford Park recently received its highest ever score rating for Green Flag 80+. A personal thank you to all of my team at the park in contributing to this achievement.

### *Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park*

**BIRDS:** Sparrowhawk (in the far woodland. Birds are still using the nest and can be seen throughout the day), Little Owl still on the fields. Green Woodpecker, Great-spotted woodpecker, Mandarin Duck (a pair on the lake), Heron, Kingfisher, Goldcrest (a general

increase in numbers this month, possibly immigrant birds), Song Thrush (feeding a late brood by the play area). Kestrel. One bird has been quartering the main fields this month. Hobby (reported again near Callowell fields).

### **BUTTERFLIES:**

Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Skipper, Small Tortoiseshell, Common Blue, Small Copper Brown Argus (all on the wildflower bank). Speckled Wood (woodland) Red Admiral Peacock (around the walled garden and orangery) Green-veined white (second generation butterflies on the wing throughout the park). Holly Blue (summer generation flying. Females observed laying eggs on Ivy 9<sup>th</sup> August)

### **HOVERFLIES:**

Many species to be observed around the new pond and at the orangery

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

MOTH EVENING AT THE ORANGERY FRIDAY 19<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 8.30PM – LATE

Join us for an evening moth recording at the orangery. We will be establishing a sugar round by the new pond, where we hope to see Red Underwing, Copper Underwing, Old Lady and other interesting moths. Meet in the museum courtyard. A torch will be useful. Further information at [www.museuminthepark.org.uk](http://www.museuminthepark.org.uk)

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