



## *Biodiversity Newsletter*

February 2011

Hi All,

The welcome sign of snowdrops in the park is a sure sign that spring is on its way. The daffodils planted last autumn will soon be reaching up to the sun as warmer days heralds new growth. Although we are still in the latter stages of winter, walking around the park on my rounds each morning reveals new life everywhere, and the woodland is full of birdsong. Despite the recent cold weather, I am pleased to see good numbers of our smaller birds such as Treecreeper and Goldcrest. The mortality rate during winter for these small birds is high, but it appears that our resident birds have been able to find warm roosting sites during the big freeze. The best place to see both these birds this month is by the new pond, where they are seen most mornings feeding in the conifers by the ornamental bridge.

As we move into the warmer months, there will be much more to report in the park, and I am looking forward to highlighting this. As my first newsletter was produced last August, much of the previous spring and summer (when biodiversity is at a peak) was not covered. This year, I will cover the activity in our nest boxes, the occurrence of butterflies and any interesting wildlife seen at the park.

Next month the Wyevale staff will be busy again, maintaining the grass areas, the shrub and flower beds and the sports fields. The butterfly garden in the orangery will be coming back to life and our wallflowers and tulips will provide much welcome colour. Spring is a time for optimism, aspiration and reflection, and Stratford Park continues to embellish this with its beauty and serenity.

Mike

spring usher moth





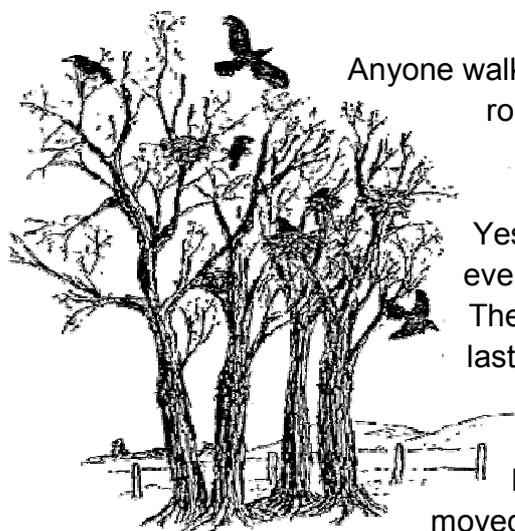
## *News from the Supervisor's Trap*



### *Wyevale plant more shrubs & trees to help biodiversity*

Wyevale have supplied trees and shrubs for planting throughout the park. The plants, surplus to stock, were recently transported to the park for naturalizing around the woodland and rough grass areas. The park's staff have planted Blackthorn bushes, Holly, Dogwoods, Lavenders and perennials, all of which are good for wildlife. Ash, Rowan and Pear trees have also been planted along the top perimeter of the park. Dogwood has been planted by the new pond to provide a thicket for birds. As we move into the spring, SDC and Wyevale will be providing more shrubs and plants for the new pond area.

### *Watch out for the Rooks!*



Anyone walking between the top car park and rear service road adjacent to the outdoor pool entrance this month will be greeted from above with more than they bargained for.



Yes, the Rooks are 'back in town', and reminding everyone passing, with complimentary spurts of white liquid!. The birds have been repairing and re-building their nests since last month ready for the breeding season, which is one of the earliest of our resident birds. They make an interesting cackle each morning on the way into work. This Rookery has been established for some years now, the birds having moved from their previous residence next to the Stratford Road.

During the spring when the chicks hatch, the adults will fly into the adjacent field for leatherjackets 'the main natural diet', and other grubs. Rooks, being intelligent and crafty creatures, know when the litter bags are put out for collection, and infuriate the staff here by tearing apart the bags early in the morning to supplement their diet with fast food. Then there is the occasional youngster that falls out of the nest, which we have to feed. Despite these misgivings, the birds have an endearing quality and provide a welcome sight as they jostle amongst the branches on a windy spring day. A word of



caution though, don't stand too long beneath the trees unless you want your clothes pebble-dashed!



### *New Moth Trap for Park*

To coincide with the park's first butterfly and moth report, a new moth trap to assist ongoing research at the park has been purchased. The trap will also be used for the moth events organized throughout the year with the museum in the park. The new trap is called 'The Moonlander' (see pictures above) and is a completely new innovation in moth trapping. The trap designed by Robert Gooden of Worldwide Butterflies, incorporates the use of a cluster of 6" ultra-violet tubes which are encased in a waterproof protective casing. These tubes emit more UV than mercury vapour (which we are currently using). With this trap, the moths enter from below instead of from above, and the design of the cage means that the public, when attending moth events, will be able to see all of the moths (see photo top left). It is environmentally friendly too, operating from a 12v battery instead of mains or a generator. This also eliminates cables which can provide trip hazards at moth events. The light generated from this trap is less obtrusive than the radiance of the MV trap, so all in all a useful tool for monitoring the park's moth populations and for operating at public events.. The new 'Moonlander' will have its first public debut at the next moth event with the museum in the park in the walled garden on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

### *Island Planting*

Wyevale staff have been busy planting some shrubs on the island in the lake. Our Mallards will soon be preparing to breed, so we want to enhance their nesting conditions. Dogwood and ornamental grasses have been planted, which over time will form dense cover. The planting will also afford better protection for the Moorhens and Coots who regularly build nests there. Last year's Mallards using the duck boxes produced record clutches of eggs, 18 in one box!!.



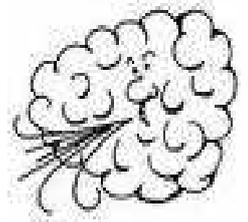


## *Bird of the Month (Treecreeper)*



One of our most endearing little birds, the Treecreeper is a small, very active bird that lives in trees. It has a slender, down curved bill, with a speckled brown plumage and white under parts. It may be seen throughout the park, especially in the woodland, working up trees in search of insects and spiders. Stratford Park has a stable population, despite some recent severe winters. The nest is built behind loose bark on trees, an untidy and flimsy structure of small twigs lined with hair and feathers. If you walk over the far model railway bridge in the woodland, you will see a special nest box on the large Poplar tree there, which we have erected for this species. During February, the birds may often be seen feeding with other flocks of small birds working diligently through the branches, before dropping to the floor and working back up the tree. It is known that during winter, Treecreepers often roost together in large numbers, snuggling together for heat. They will also use nest boxes to roost, which may account for the good survival rate of the species at the park during this extremely cold winter. A morning walk along the stream from the pond to salmon springs will usually be productive for seeing this intriguing little bird.

## *Strong winds batter Park*



On the weekend of 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> February, Stratford Park did not escape the severe storms and winds that lashed across the west, causing damage and destruction in its path. On the morning of Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February a scene of destruction greeted me when I arrived at the park. Along the avenue to the jubilee gate, several large limbs had fallen from the Wellingtonias, and other branches and debris was strewn everywhere. Sadly, the Walnut tree on the sports field, which is an important tree for hole nesting birds, had lost a major branch. Thankfully no structural damage had occurred to buildings and property, but these strong winds really did batter the park's trees.

## *Bird Boxes get Protection from Squirrels*

Our metal bird box protection plates have been fitted to the park's boxes, and these will finally prevent predating squirrels from taking eggs and young. Squirrel predation accounted for 25% of small bird mortalities in nest boxes during 2010s bird box count. Great-spotted Woodpeckers also predated 2 nest boxes 'one containing our camera'.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, Wyevale have built 12 new bird boxes, which now takes the total of boxes in the park to 36. Several boxes have been sited near salmon springs in the hope that Marsh Tit may be encouraged to use these. Although a declining species, one or two are still seen in the far woodland each year.



Marsh Tit

## *Wildlife to See Now At Stratford Park*

**BIRDS:** Sparrowhawk (showing well over the woodland most mornings), Treecreeper, Nuthatch, (in the woodland), Buzzard, Long-tailed Tit (amongst the alders along the stream), Robin (around the orangery and museum, birds becoming territorial), Wren, Chaffinch & Goldfinch (Top fields). Rook (breeding by the outdoor pool entrance).

**MAMMALS:** Roe Deer can be seen in the fields around the park early in the morning and occasionally in the woodland.

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