



(Floral displays in Stratford Park Photo: Paul Woodward)

Hi All,

Spring has finally arrived, albeit a very wet and windy one, with 70mph gusts on 11th and 12th April. Our early start in grass cutting, has been somewhat thwarted by the arrival of heavy rain. Around the park, all of the tulip and daffodil bulbs we planted last autumn, are now in bloom and being visited by bees and hoverflies. Spring colour is resplendent everywhere and the woodland is full of birdsong. This time of year in the park is especially lovely, as the trees start to unfold their leaves and the upward surge of vegetation provides a green carpet throughout the woodland. This month, we are planting more perennials to replace those lost through last years' heat wave and the freezing weather in December, as well as extending other flower beds and borders.

Outside of the park, I have recently been experimenting attracting certain species of moths using pheromone lures, and with some success. We have a fascinating family of day-flying moths in the UK called clearwings. These moths, many of which are scarce and local, have interesting life histories, and some even mimic wasps. Before the arrival of pheromone lures, finding these elusive moths involved a great deal of fieldwork, and in most cases, involved locating the early stages. One species feeds on black poplar, and we have three huge black poplar trees in the park, so I am going to try using these pheromone lures in the park this summer to see if the moth is present. Others feed on a variety of trees, so I may obtain lures for these species. It will be interesting to see if we have any species of clearwings present in Stratford Park.

Mike





News from the Supervisor's Trap



Museum in the Park 'meet the curator'

This month, the Museum in the Park held a 'meet the curator' afternoon, and I was pleased to be invited to cover butterflies and moths. These events are an opportunity for the public to book a session to view and learn from experts, about the museum's collections. In my case, I was invited to be on hand to answer questions and discuss the stunning British and tropical varieties put out to view. Our host, Alexia had arranged bookings of small groups, each for half hour sessions on the afternoon of the 13th April. All of the museum's butterfly and moth collections have been donated from past entomologists and members of the public, the writer included. Amongst these were some fine examples of species now extinct from the British Isles including large tortoiseshell and black-veined white. Sadly, many were missing data labels, so the exact place and date of capture was unavailable. The collection also contained one specimen of the Kentish glory, which is presently restricted to a small site in Scotland. This was an enjoyable afternoon, and I was able to talk to many people, despite struggling with a chest infection. However, Alexia was on call to provide me with enough water to quell my incessant coughing.

Most visitors were families with small children, and even residents from a local care home attended (see photo below). I was certainly kept on my toes with the continuous flurry of questions, the most common being "what's the difference between a butterfly and a moth". It was also nice to see children showing an interest and engaging with nature, sadly, a rare thing these days. This was also an opportunity for me to talk to the public about what Ubico do here and of the support the company gives us to promote biodiversity.



(Question time with one of the session groups)



(Some of the collections shown on the day)

Raising the standard on floral displays

In our continuing quest to improve the flower displays in Stratford Park; this year, Ubico has invested further in purchasing more plants and bulbs. We set out on a journey four years ago, to provide more sustainable planting, to mitigate the effects of climate change and support pollinators. During each of those four years, we have learnt a great deal about the varieties of plants and the conditions in which they thrive, or suffer. We have looked at each flower bed in a pragmatic way, levels of maintenance and floral impact, and this year I feel that we have the balance right. Having a team who all share a great interest in flowers and horticulture certainly helps, and in general, the choice of plants we buy is a democratic one.

This month we have planted 70 dahlia plants in the raised beds by the outdoor pool entrance. These will provide a colourful display through the summer and early autumn. To give these beds even more impact, we have sown a mixture of blue cornflower seeds to compliment the dahlias, and finally, some pot marigolds. All of these plants will self-seed, and with the dahlias, go into dormancy over winter, and re-appear next year. Before these emerge, next spring, the daffodils and tulips will shoot up again. These beds will never need re-planting again, so are completely sustainable. This is what we are trying to achieve throughout the park.

Another major project this month is the Meningitis Garden, which had become choked with some of the more tenacious weeds. Over the winter, we decided to dig everything out with an excavator, remove all of the existing soil, and replenish with new soil and compost. We found, by chance, a fantastic nursery locally, supplying a wide range of healthy perennials. We were able to purchase everything to re-plant the Meningitis Garden and restore it to its former glory.

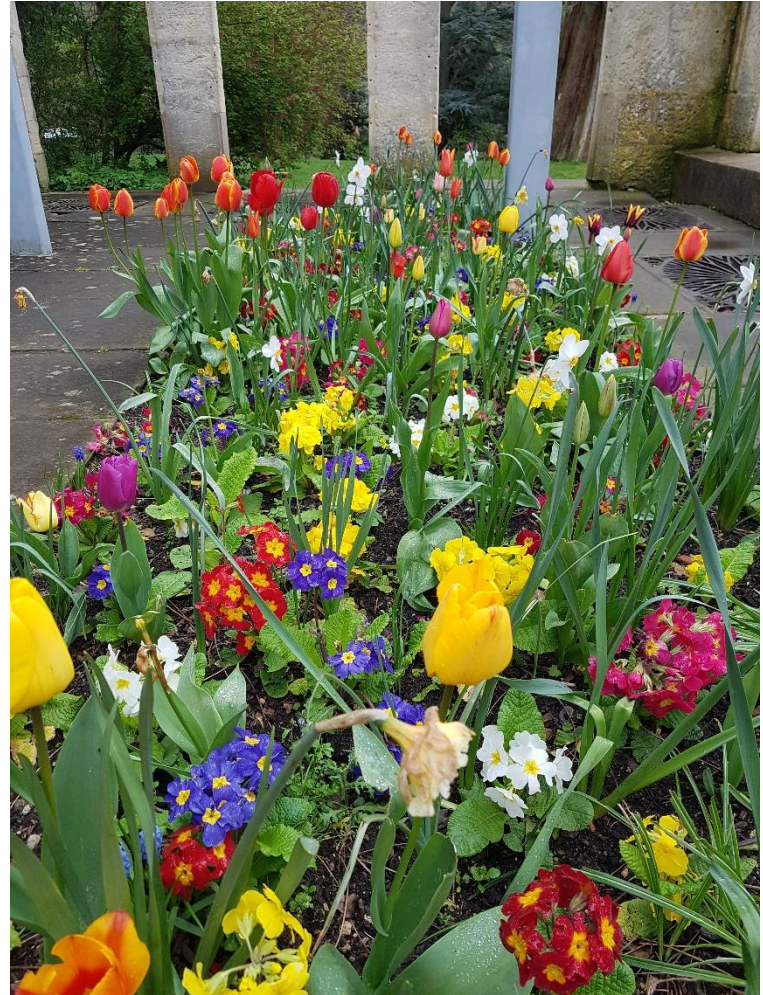


(Ubico staff collecting plants from the nursery)

Throughout the park, the flower beds are looking very good this spring, and with a good amount of rainfall, plants are recovering from last years' heat wave and severe cold from last December. Giving the plants a bit of help along the way also contributes to good blooms. We ensure that we are always on top of weeds, and mulch the beds regularly using our own mulch. The beds are also fed with a general fertilizer such as fish blood and bone, or pelleted chicken manure. Steve and Dave have also been going around the park and digging and dividing perennials, and moving these to some of the main flower beds. The bowser purchased last year has been invaluable in watering the beds and baskets. In retrospect, I should have entered the park for Britain in Bloom this year, but we were unsure how the flower beds would react and recover from last years' extremes of temperature. In any event, if the comments from members of the public is anything to go by, we've done a good job. Finally, a big thank you to Dan Jacecko for assisting us with the purchase of this years' plants.



IMAGES OF SOME OF THE FLOWER BEDS THIS MONTH



(Top left and right – Entrance beds) (Bottom left and right – Orangery)



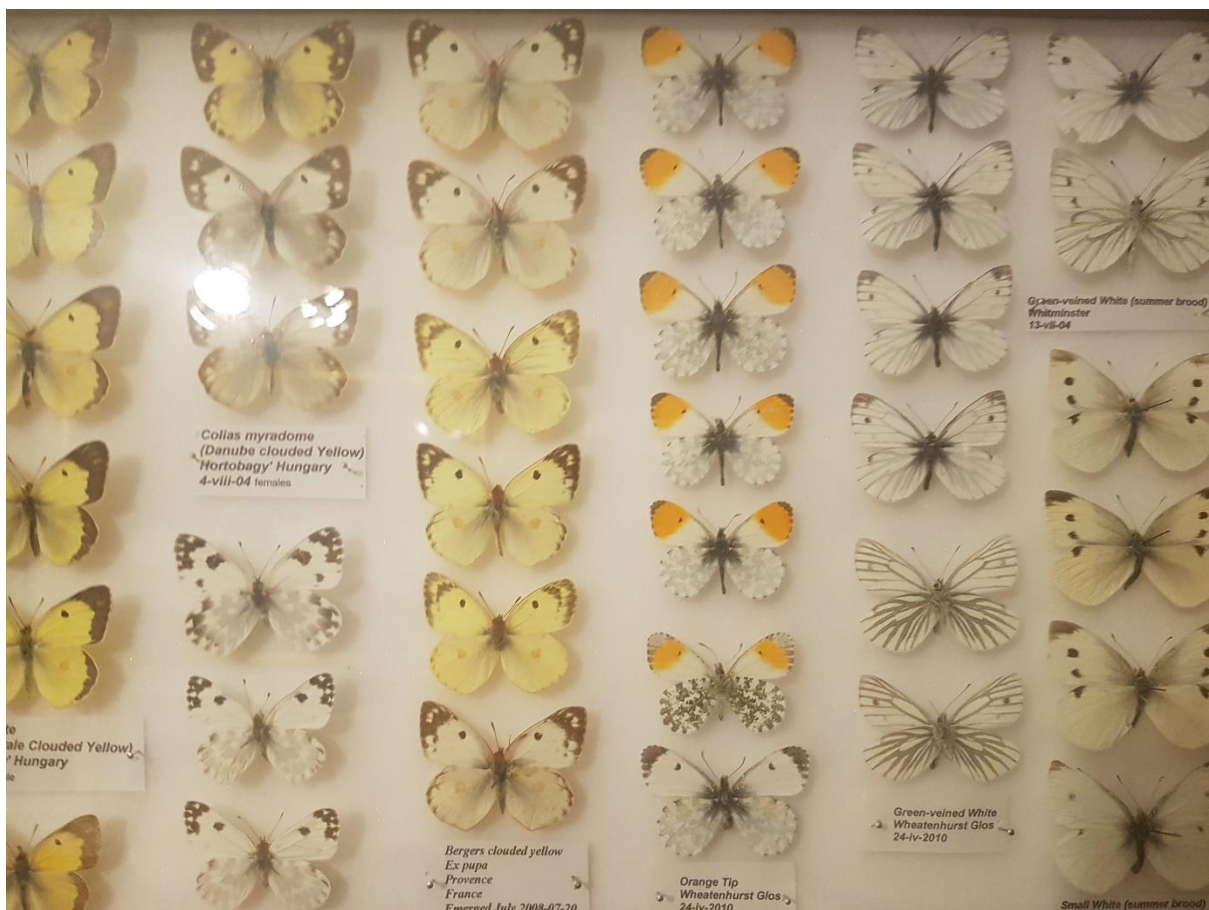
Orange tip butterfly

The Orange-tip is a true sign of spring, being one of the first species to emerge that has not hibernated as an adult butterfly. This beautiful butterfly is well represented in Stratford Park and can be seen in April and May flying on sunny days along the edge and stream. The conspicuous males have the orange tip to the wings, whilst the female does not possess the orange markings, and is often mistaken for one of the other whites, especially the green-veined white and small white. The main food plant of this species is cuckoo flower *Cardamines pratensis*, although garlic mustard *Alliaria peticiata* is also eaten. Both plants grow extensively along the woodland edge extending to salmon springs. It is sometimes possible to find orange tip eggs on cuckoo flowers. Females lay single, pale spindle-shaped eggs on the underside of flower buds. These eggs turn deep orange after a few days. The caterpillars hatch and feed on the developing seed pod. I have found these eggs on plants growing on the wildflower bank adjacent to the sports pitch. The orange tip is found throughout the British Isles, but less common in Scotland. A visit to the Model Railway area on sunny days this month and throughout May, will reveal the butterfly in good numbers.



(Orange tip habitat in Stratford Park by model railway and stream)
(Below: Orange tip food plant & male butterfly)





(Specimens from my own collection. Female without orange is shown at bottom of orange tip row)

Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

BIRDS: April and May are busy months for birds in Stratford Park. Many are sitting on eggs and raising young. Nuthatches have started 'mudding-up' holes in the lime tree next to the bandstand, so views of the birds flying to and from the nesting holes may be seen, mornings are best. Green woodpeckers are very vocal this month on the main field, and possibly nesting in one of the large oaks. Great-spotted woodpecker is also on the main field. Ravens are in the large cedars in the arboretum. Several potential nests have been located in these trees. Mistle thrush is also nesting in the Atlas cedars. Goldcrest and treecreeper are both in the arboretum. A favourite spot to see goldcrest is the cedar tree next to the lake. Blue and great tits are using the bird boxes. Tawny owls have been reported calling at night in the far woodland, evidence perhaps of further breeding. Jackdaws are nesting in a box in the beech woodland and in tree cavities along the woodland edge.

BUTTERFLIES: The first of the spring butterflies are emerging this month. Orange tip and brimstone are flying along the Painswick stream, also green-veined white. A red Admiral was seen in the park on 14th April (evidence of over-wintering) and single small tortoiseshells have been seen on the main field. Holly blue is below the museum on most sunny days. Scarlet tiger caterpillars on the wildflower bank are in good numbers feeding on comfrey.

OTHER ANIMALS: Evidence of otters visiting the lake has been reported (Paul Woodward). Otters have visited the lake in recent years and taken carp (Mike). A small deer, most probably roe deer, was seen by a dog walker on Sunday 23rd April.

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USEFUL LINKS: www.museuminthepark.org.uk www.stroudnature.co.uk
www.stroudvalleysproject.co.uk www.thebto.org www.butterflyconservation.co.uk
www.birdhols.com www.theaes.org



(Roe deer in Callowell fields, next to Stratford Park Photo: Sharon Tucker)

