



Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter



February 2023

Hi All,

Signs of spring are everywhere, with crocuses, snowdrops and daffodils reassuring us of warmer days ahead. After weeks of dark mornings and evenings, rain and frozen ground, I am starting to realise how negative this is to my mental health. Being unable to get outside and do anything enjoyable and constructive at weekends is quite depressing. My gardening, allotment and entomological activities have all been grounded due to the weather. This also applies to the park, where frozen ground has halted any horticultural progress. I am therefore encouraged by the prospect of lighter evenings and warmer weather to come, and to be able to get a digging fork into the ground again, and to see the first moths of spring arrive to my garden moth trap.

This month, the team will be completing some last main jobs in the park, before the grass-cutting season starts again, including a revamp of the Meningitis Garden, where we will be restoring it to its former glory as a rose garden. Sadly, due to ongoing vandalism, we are demolishing the two stone raised beds by the lake. Whenever the lake freezes over, we are seeing more and more stones from these beds ending up on the ice. We will be recycling all of the stone and soil for use elsewhere in the park. Closing on a positive note, I am looking forward to seeing the hundreds of bulbs we planted last autumn, burst into colour next month.

Mike



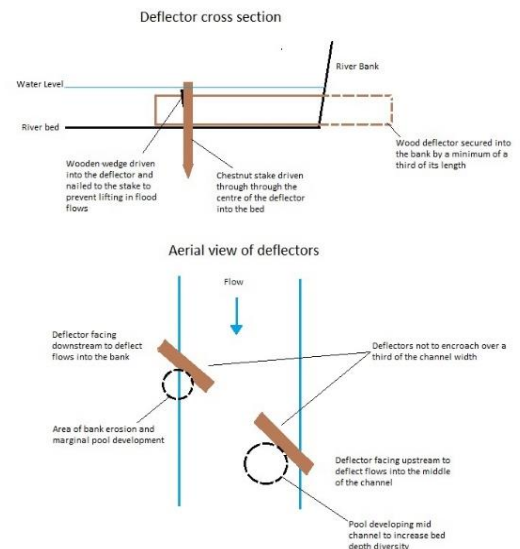


News from the Supervisor's trap



Conservation works completing this month

During the spring of 2021, a contingent of Gloucestershire Wildlife staff visited the park with some encouraging news to support conservation in Stratford Park. The trust had been successful in being awarded funding from the European Regional Development Fund, and amongst several other sites of conservation importance, Stratford Park was chosen as one of the sites which could benefit from funding. The initial meeting with GWT representatives was held in the park with Rob (Griffiths) and myself, to ascertain the priority areas, and when this had been agreed, later that year, we received proposals and costs for key areas such as the lake, the Painswick stream and the woodland. The first phase was to carry out habitat enhancements to the lake, previously documented (Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter: March 2022). Floating cages containing aquatic plants was placed around the lake, and an island of vegetation placed in the centre. Further riparian enhancements to reduce pollution and improve habitats and breeding opportunities for brown trout was also implemented by way of creating flow deflectors and fascines (bundles of coppice material, secured in place at the base of the river bank). Examples of flow deflectors created in the Painswick stream are shown below.



As well as improving habitat for brown trout, contractors for GWT have also been increasing light levels along the banks of the stream by removing alders. This was completed last month.



(Coppicing of alders January 2023)

To date, a comprehensive package of habitat enhancements has been carried out in Stratford Park by GWT, which in my opinion, underpins the importance of this site as one of high biodiversity value in the Stroud District.

The full list of work elements and time lines are shown here.

Invasive control of Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed

April – July 2022

Rubbish / river clearance

June 2022

Removal of over-shading vegetation around wildlife pond

September 2022

Removal of bankside alders

December 2022 – January 2023

Tree planting (approx. 270 native trees)

February 2023

Installing water deflectors

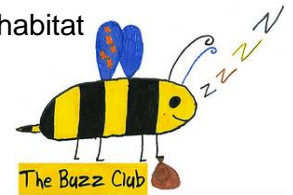
February 2023

New interpretation board about the work in the lake, river and pond (designed by Steve Roberts)

February 2023.

Moving forward, there is still much work to be done in the woodland, primarily to increase light levels. Much of the woodland is coniferous, and has a dense canopy. In summer, when the other deciduous trees are in leaf, the combined canopy growth cuts out much light, which

reduces the amount of ground flora. It would be beneficial therefore, to remove some of the established trees to increase light levels, followed by the planting of woodland flowers, such as bluebells, wood anemones and primroses. We had hoped to have engaged Ubico grounds staff in the woodland this winter to carry out maintenance works, but it was decided to allow GWT to complete their work first. Further funding would be needed to thin out the woodland. In the meantime, it is pleasing to see that biodiversity initiatives and habitat enhancements are continuing in Stratford Park.



Stroud Buzz Club

Almost 90% of wild plants and 75% of global crops depend on animal pollination. Bees in particular, play an important part in maintaining our planet, and we need them to pollinate the food we need to survive, and many of the trees and flowers that provide habitats for lots of other wildlife. Bees are declining rapidly on a global scale due to loss of habitat, urban development, loss of wildflower meadows and invasive farming methods. Climate change is another important factor for declining bee numbers. It is therefore important to help these insects and promote their conservation through education and the preservation of habitats.

Peter Lead is a bee expert, and formed the Buzz Club to promote honey bee conservation, and increase our awareness of the importance of these insects, particularly amongst children. Peter has a long association with Stratford Park, and has Bee hives located in the Museum's Walled Garden, which he uses to promote the knowledge of honey bees to the general public, and visiting schools. Each month throughout the year, he highlights what the Bees are doing in his hives, and explains their biology and life histories. There is a website www.stroudbuzzclub.com which has a programme of free events, and details of meetings in the Walled Garden.

Although honey bees are the main focus of the Buzz Club, Peter has been keen to extend this interest into the wider world of insects, and organizes monthly events throughout the summer with other specialists, to learn about other insects such as butterflies and moths, and even birds. I have hosted his members on several occasions on walks through the park, where we have searched for bugs and other wildlife. In May 2019, Peter arranged for a log hive for bees to be erected in the arboretum. His enthusiasm for promoting the conservation of Bees is boundless, and he engages with children with a rare dedication. Peter's knowledge and dedication to bees extends way beyond the Stroud District, and he has a strong association with Bees for Development, a charity that promotes sustainable beekeeping as a means of alleviating poverty and supporting education in countries such as Ghana, where he has visited on many occasions. Through this, he has initiated an exciting new project, 'Buzz Club Ghana.' Highly recommended for children, this years' Buzz Club programme is shown here.





New boxes for Owls



This month, Ubico staff are erecting two new Little Owl boxes on the main field. These are to replace two existing boxes that have become damaged and worn. The two original boxes were put out in 2013 and 2015, and had provided homes for the owls until 2018, when sadly, squirrels had taken up residence in them. The new boxes were purchased by Stroud District Council, from Stroud Valleys Project a few years back, but have sat in our yard until now. Nest boxes have been very important for little owls in Stratford Park, as many of the hollow trees they used, have been lost through storms and felling. With recent habitat enhancements, it seems a good time to put these new boxes up and hopefully, attract the owls back to the park. During the changeover of boxes, we found evidence of squirrel occupation, which is an ongoing concern, and a squirrel was in one box.



(Ubico staff member erecting one of the new boxes)



(New box in place)



(Squirrel damage)



(Squirrels have chewed through this box)

Despite recent occupation by squirrels, there has been some great success in the past with encouraging these owls to breed in the park, as shown below. All of these photos were taken in the park.



Wildlife to see now, in Stratford Park

BIRDS: Long-tailed tits have been seen in good numbers this month in the woodland, often with other small birds in feeding groups. Nuthatches have become very vocal as the nesting season approaches. Grey wagtails are by the lake, and the resident heron seen most days. A kingfisher was by the lake on 24th February. Common buzzard is still regular over the park, with four birds seen together on 12th. In the arboretum – goldcrest and tree creeper remain active on sunny mornings. Ravens are also in the arboretum. The jackdaw roost is spectacular at dusk, as thousands of birds arrive to roost by the museum. Great-spotted woodpecker is still drumming on the top field.

CONTACT: Mike McCrea Tel: 07423687482 E-Mail: Michael.mccrea@ubico.co.uk
michaelmccrea2@outlook.com

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

