



## *Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter* *March 2023*

(Stratford Park Arboretum in March Photo: Mike McCrea)

Hi All,

At the time of writing, another arctic blast is heading for the UK, and following one of the driest Februarys on record, yet more evidence of climate change. The weather has been so dry, that the grounds teams are starting grass mowing early this year. Here in the park, we are also starting mowing early. The nesting season appears to have also started early this year, and I have been watching a pair of song thrushes at a nest on the edge of the woodland. It's good to see these birds as they have become quite scarce. They were once very common here, and a dozen or more nests could be found during March and April during the 1970s.

Birds have also been 'in and out' of the nest boxes, and I have noticed an increase of blue tits in the park, and this in comparison with hardly a few birds last spring. As we engage with the public on a daily basis, we are able to process this feedback and assess our performance and priorities to provide the best grounds service to the park, I have mentioned for some time, that this feedback should be recorded, because not only does it give us valuable feedback which we can use in our duties, but it also underpins that reassurance to SDC that their facility is being managed to a high standard. I have always been aware of the importance of Stratford Park as a valuable green space to the public, and equally aware of the responsibility entrusted in us to ensure that we deliver a service that is sympathetic to the environment, as well as aesthetically pleasing to all visitors. March in Stratford Park is a month of reflection and projection, where snow can fall one day, and the next day, bees can be buzzing around daffodils, it stretches that tenuous thread from winter to spring.

Mike





## *News from the Supervisor's Trap*



### *New hedgerows planted*

Last month, volunteers supplied and planted hawthorn saplings along the boundary wall to the outdoor Lido, primarily to provide a future barrier to late night revellers, who climb over the wall to access the swimming pool at night. The writer, as a youngster, is guilty of this, as was many a schoolboy who went 'skinny dipping' under the cover of darkness. However, in present times, health and safety has become a priority in every aspect of life, and climbing over a high wooden fence presents many potential health and safety problems.

There is a dual purpose for the planting, and hawthorn was chosen for its high biodiversity value. A hawthorn can be cut back each year to remain as a shrub, but if left, can mature into a small tree producing heavily scented blossom in spring which is very attractive to pollinating insects. A hawthorn tree teems with wildlife, supporting more than 300 insect species. The foliage is food for caterpillars, and the antioxidant haws in autumn provide food for birds and mammals. The dense foliage of hawthorn gives good protection for birds in winter as well as providing impenetrable sites for their nests in spring, so, every hawthorn planted in the park is a good one.

### *Arctic blast brings in hundreds of redwings*

On 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March, during a cold blast of arctic weather, hundreds of redwings were seen converging on the main fields. The birds remained on the field throughout that week, and eventually moved into the top car park. Redwings fluctuate in numbers from year to year, but this is the largest concentration of birds I have seen at one time in Stratford Park.



(One of hundreds of redwings on the main field this month Photo: Mike McCrea)

## *Senior Public Spaces Officer retires*

It is with some sadness that we report the retirement this month, of one of Stroud District Council's most committed and enduring Public Spaces Officers, Rozelle Jachowicz, whose significant contribution to Stratford Park and its biodiversity remains indelibly stamped to this present day. I was first introduced to Rozelle at a meeting at SDC's Stroud offices in 2009 during my first few days at the park, and I recall how pleased she appeared to learn of my background in entomology and ornithology. As we both shared a keen interest in horticulture, I knew then, that my role in the park would be supportive by her, which soon proved to be the case.

During those first months, I was introduced to the Stratford Park Management Group, to which I represented the then Wyevale Grounds Maintenance Company who were contracted to maintain the grounds at Stratford Park, and with Rozelle at the chair, I gave a short 'resume' of my interests and previous knowledge of the park. At that time, there was no one assigned by SDC, or other SPMG members who had knowledge or experience in biodiversity topics, other than Steve Roberts (Stroud Nature), who, up until this time, had been championing wildlife and interpretation development in the park. This therefore seemed a good time for me to join the fold, and from then, Rozelle and I developed a close working relationship.

After settling into my new role, after a few months, I put forward various biodiversity objectives to the SPMG, primarily to establish a nest box scheme and to start recording the park's invertebrates. Rozelle was supportive of this and provided funding for us to construct bird boxes throughout the park. She also funded the purchase of the park's first moth trap, which I was able to use during my moth events with the museum. In 2010 she allowed us to create a new dipping pond adjacent to the lake. During these early years, Rozelle and I would hold weekly or fortnightly site meetings, where we would walk around the park and inspect the flower beds and other areas. She had a particular relish for pointing out weeds which I thought were innocuous or insignificant, but this persistence on her part made me punctilious in all my future horticultural duties. Quite often, we would look at an area in the park, which I felt would benefit for conservation development, to which she would say "give me a quote for that Mike". One thing I always respected about Rozelle was how she would listen and be guided by an individual's experience in a given subject or expertise, often allowing that person the freedom to put forward proposals for change or improvement. However, when it came to flower beds, she was in charge. Annuals were her thing, and these, planted with perfect symmetry was her passion. I was kept on my toes from March to the first frosts to ensure the best floral displays, and, if additional plants were required for the park, the funds were always there.

Rozelle was a passionate supporter of Stroud in Bloom, and she carried out the pre-judging day inspection around the park like a fervent Sergeant Major, looking for every missed strand of bindweed or couch grass. In 2013 she was instrumental in commissioning the Stratford Park Biodiversity & Landscape Action Plan which really underpinned her commitment on behalf of SDC to develop the park and increase biodiversity. In 2016 the concept of a Sensory Garden in Stratford Park was placed in her hands for consideration, and together with Stroud Valleys Project and park contractors, she allocated substantial funding to get the project started. I recall spending many months working on the infrastructure of the garden, building the walls and creating the paths, which was an

enjoyable period during my time at the park. We all worked with the volunteers, and there was a great family atmosphere.

Rozelle also had a passion for trees, and she funded the purchase and planting of many new specimen trees for the park to replace those destroyed by storms, as well as funding hundreds of new trees for the green corridors.

The raised brick flower beds which I built in 2016 by the outdoor pool was funded by her, and such was her trust in my work, that she commissioned thousands of pounds worth of new walling around the Bowling Green and other new build projects throughout the park. She was always supportive of the park staff, and every Christmas, a delivery of chocolates would be dropped off along with a thank you card, a nice touch of hers. With changes within SDC, around 2018 Rozelle's duties would change, and Stratford Park would not continue within her remit, although she would continue to be responsible for trees and play areas. My / our involvement with her became much less.

I have known Rozelle closely for many years, and I know she has agonised about the decision to retire, and we have both jested about this. However, finally, she has decided to 'stop and smell the roses' and finally retire from SDC, a decision which I know has been hard for her.

In concluding this short appreciation of her time at SDC, I would like her to know that she should feel proud of the contributions she has made in making these 56 acres of green space, a wonderful place to visit and for its wildlife. There is no question that with her past commitment and vision, and above all, her faith in me and others, Stratford Park is a better place, and myself, and the park staff wish her every happiness in her retirement.



(Rozelle front left pre-judging day Stroud in Bloom 2015)



## *Furry hoverflies emerging this month*



This month, on sunny days throughout the park, Bee-flies are emerging. Bee-flies are hairy flies that resemble bees. The bee-like appearance is further enhanced by their swift, darting flight, which is usually accompanied by a shrill hum. These bee-flies not only resemble bees, but the larvae of some species live in the nests of solitary 'mining bees'. These flies are harmless, and do not bite or sting.

There are four species of bee-flies in the UK, the commonest, and most often seen here in the park is the Large Bee-Fly *Bombylius major*. Which is often seen hovering over flowers by the bowling green and the orangery in March and April. The proboscis 'tongue' of these flies is especially prominent, being long, projecting and non-retractable. The picture shown below which I took in the service yard last year, shows this extended proboscis. In March and April, it favours the flowers of primrose, bugle and violet. The Large Bee-Fly is on the wing until the end of May, and the other species fly until the end of August.



(Large Bee-Fly Photo: Mike McCrea)

## *Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park*



**BIRDS:** March is a month of high activity for birds in Stratford Park. Great-spotted woodpeckers are still 'drumming' in the oak by the bore hole long-tailed tits have been seen in the green corridors. Chiffchaffs have been heard in the woodland, grey wagtail is by the lake most days. A red kite was seen over the park on 19<sup>th</sup> March and a barn owl was reported in adjacent Callowell Fields on 11<sup>th</sup> March. Common Buzzard is seen over the park most days, and 4 individual birds was seen over the woodland on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Nuthatches are busy checking out new nest sites, and treecreeper and goldcrest are in the arboretum.

**OTHER WILDLIFE:** Roe deer have been spotted in the woodland and in fields opposite the park this month. Otters have been reported on the stream. Red-legged partridges are on farmland next to the park.

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**USEFUL LINKS:** [www.museuminthepark.org.uk](http://www.museuminthepark.org.uk) [www.stroudvalleysproject.co.uk](http://www.stroudvalleysproject.co.uk)  
[www.thebto.org](http://www.thebto.org) [www.theaes.org](http://www.theaes.org) [www.butterflyconservation.co.uk](http://www.butterflyconservation.co.uk) [www.birdhols.com](http://www.birdhols.com)  
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(Blackbird's nest Photo: Mike McCrea)