



Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter *August 2019*

(Dawn over Stratford Park August 2019 Photo: Mike McCrea)

Hi All,

At the time of writing (early August), we are enjoying a break in the weather. July was unprecedented and the hottest on record, placing physical demands on our daily work duties. This was reflected by the large number of tool box talks received from QHSE to cover working outdoors in hot and sunny weather conditions.

August sees us transplanting more aquatic plants to the lake with SVP volunteers who are also re-addressing the seeding of the banks. August is a quiet month for wildlife but peak time for moth activity, and we have two more moth events scheduled in the park this summer. After almost 11 years working and recording wildlife in the park, there is still so much to discover. Every year new moth species turn up and as we allow key areas of the park to naturally expand, butterflies and other invertebrates are extending their range and this has been evident during this year's butterfly walks.

The year to date has run smoother than normal, despite the recent hot weather, and we have been fortunate this year to have an excellent seasonal with Phil who has dovetailed nicely into the workforce. It is a shame that financial constraints will see us lose him at the end of the month, but I am hoping that in some capacity we can engage him again in the park in the future.

Mike



News from the Supervisor's Trap



National Moth Night 2019

This year's 20th National Moth Night will take place between 26th and 28th September. This year's theme will be the Clifden Nonpareil (Cover page top left) and migrants, and it will be an opportunity to celebrate the 20th Moth Night since the launch of the event in 1998.

Public events are an excellent way to share the fascination with moths; Moth Night is normally held in the warmest months; each event will last for three consecutive nights (Thursday – Saturday). Moth Night is organised by Atropos (www.atropos.info), Butterfly Conservation (www.butterflyconservation.org), and The Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (www.ceh.ac.uk). It is an annual celebration of moth recording throughout Britain and Ireland by moth recording enthusiasts, with local public events aimed at raising awareness of moths among the general public.

Regarding the Clifden Nonpareil, this is a rare immigrant species to the UK but one was recorded within half a mile of the park during 2013 and featured in the local press. 2019 has been a good year for the Hummingbird Hawk Moth and many thousands of Silver Y are appearing everywhere, both migrant species.

Here in the park we will be celebrating Moth Night 2019 with our own event on Friday evening and organised through the Museum in the Park www.museuminthepark.or.uk. Once again, we will be running the moth trap down by the woodland and sugaring the trees. September is a good month for recording migrants and one of the best months for sugaring. In recent years we have had some good results with sugaring including the lovely Red Underwing, Copper Underwing and this Old Lady moth (below left) seen at sugar in the woodland. For further information please visit the Museum in the Park website (above).



New plants for the lake

This month Stroud Valleys Project volunteers have been transplanting aquatic plants in the lake. It was exactly this time last year that we started restoration works to the lake and graded the banks. Last autumn one elevation of the banks was sown with a 'pond side mix' containing marginal plants, but this was not successful. Next month Tamsin and her group will be re-sowing a more robust seed mixture to the banks. Richard Spyvee (Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Living Landscapes Manager) has been supplying the plants from a local source; these include several species of reeds, rushes and native oxygenating plants. On the morning of 13th August they were planted in the lake by Tamsin and her group. Sadly, on the same day another cygnet was found injured near the stream. This was taken to the local vet but nothing could be done to save it. It has been a poor year for our swans with only one cygnet now remaining from the second brood.

While on site, Richard visited the adjacent pond to give us advice on creating more light and it has been decided to clear some of the surrounding small trees, as these are throwing too much shade on the water. Tamsin's group will be working on this over the coming weeks. I will also be transferring plants from my own pond over the coming weeks. Last year Shaun (park staff) planted some yellow flag iris from his pond and these have now become well established.



(SVP team leader Tamsin planting aquatics in the lake. Photo: Mike McCrea)

Sparrowhawks breed in woodland after 6-year absence

Sparrowhawks have bred again in Stratford Park woodland following an absence of six years. On the morning of 20th August while working by the woodland, juvenile birds were heard calling. A closer inspection revealed two young birds high up in the canopy. These birds have undoubtedly come from a nest within the woodland as they usually stay within the breeding area for several weeks after leaving the nest. Time constraints have prevented me locating the nest, but several old carrion crow nests look like possible sites. A giveaway clue is the accumulation of discarded prey and feathers at the base of the tree.

Sparrowhawks are present in the park throughout the year but will hunt further afield during the winter months. Unless they are seen in flight, they are very secretive birds and hard to spot in dense woodland. Quite often we have observed them taking feral pigeons by the stream. Sparrowhawks last nested in the park in 2013. The nest was in the far beech wood in the top of a very tall larch. The picture below is of a juvenile sparrowhawk in the woodland earlier in the year.



(Juvenile Sparrowhawk. Photo: Mike McCrea)

Third cygnet dies

Sadly, since the last newsletter and swan update, we have lost a third cygnet. On the morning of 15th August staff found the bird looking very lethargic and unable to lift its head. Once again Paul took the cygnet to the local vets but there was nothing that could be done to save it. The cause of its injury is unknown but it is possible that it was a dog attack. There remains just one cygnet on the lake and it is growing rapidly. A cygnet was killed by a dog last August so perhaps we should be considering measures to ensure that dogs are kept on leads whilst walking around the lake.

10 Years of development in Stratford Park (An overview of what we have achieved)

As we approach an important junction in our present tenure at Stratford Park, it provides an opportunity to look back and reflect on the work we have done, how we have developed the park and how we have changed so much of it for the benefit of the public and also for wildlife.

During the last ten years we have been very fortunate in having a client (Stroud District Council) that has entrusted us with making substantial changes to both the amenity areas and the green areas, something that is quite rare with local authorities. This trust has given us some autonomy on making decisions and changes for the first time ever, changes that have never been considered with previous contractors. In fact, before we took over the contract in 2008, very little work had been carried out to enhance structures and horticultural areas throughout the park, and no biodiversity development had ever taken place. For me, arriving in January 2009, this presented me with a challenge, although at that time I did not know that my job remit would allow me the flexibility to further develop and study the biodiversity.

I entered the role expecting to be supervising the workforce, working in the park and managing the budget. Within the first few days of starting my new job and inspecting the park and woodland, it became very apparent to me that many areas of the park had been neglected and that much of the wildlife I knew as a child had disappeared. During those early weeks I realised that things needed to change, maintenance procedures needed reviewing and changing to restore the park's biodiversity value. With over 35 years' previous experience of the park's natural history and coming from a construction background, I felt well placed to not only deliver the contract specification but bring additional value from my experience in ornithology and entomology and all underpinned by a sound work ethic.

On starting my new role, it quickly became evident that the client officers then in place, shared a mutual interest in the park's biodiversity but had no management plan in place to facilitate further conservation initiatives. Moreover, the budget for maintaining the grounds of the park focussed primarily on the core works and amenity works with very little additional funding for biodiversity development. No ecology report had been commissioned, and this in part was due to the fact that little was known to SDC of the important biodiversity value of its woodland, arboretum and green corridors. I needed to emphasize this to them and to inform them of my previous work and observations in the park.

Part of my role was to attend the Stratford Park Management Group (SPMG) each month, along with other stakeholders and organizations, to provide a monthly update. During the first six months I was providing a summary of the wildlife we were seeing and recording, along with the general maintenance update. Those in attendance at the meetings were surprised to learn that Stratford Park was supporting so many species which had previously gone un-recorded. At that stage I felt that the only way to convey this to a broader audience was to produce a monthly Biodiversity Newsletter which would provide a monthly account of the wildlife being recorded and to highlight parts of the park which were rich in species diversity.

Ten years later, the newsletter continues and has provided a huge repository of information of the park's wildlife and habitats. I would like to think that this was the catalyst for SDC to commission the Stratford Park Biodiversity & Action Management Plan (2011), which we have continued to address.

During the first year of my role I noticed that SDC was engaging sub-contractors to carry out general repairs and other building works around the park, many of which were within my own capabilities, so I approached the client officer and asked her to consider doing works in-house with myself and the park team. Charging the rates for additional works that were fixed in the tender would also provide a huge cost saving against the high cost of employing expensive outside contractors. My first job was to take up and re-lay a new base in front of the Meningitis Plaque and was duly pleased to add this to that month's valuation. Since then I have carried out some large and ambitious projects in the park which has generated much additional income. So, now we were doing in-house additional works, monitoring the biodiversity and producing a monthly newsletter, unheard of with previous contractors.

The next thing I needed to do was to bring the park's biodiversity value to the wider public and I knew just how to do this; by organizing public events in the park. Having forged a close friendship with Ann Taylor (Museum in the Park), I proposed planning an annual schedule of outside events which could be run through the museum's programme of events. We started with daytime bird walks, then moth events and butterfly walks in the summer. These have, and continue to be very popular and they help to engage both adults and children with wildlife.

During the last 10 years we have been able to develop the orangery (when I started, the front was a compacted weed bed surrounded by Heras fencing), re-build all of the Cotswold stone walls around the bowling green, build new raised flower beds, construct a new Sensory Garden and create a new pond, as well as many other smaller projects.

It is clear to see from the foregoing that we have not only delivered a high quality core maintenance service but brought substantial additional value to this park. Having said this, the world is changing, politics is constantly changing, and this cascades down to local authority spending. With budgets being constantly tightened in all departments, the need for development sadly becomes less of a priority. With future developments proposed for Stratford Park the future for biodiversity hangs on a tenuous thread which will worryingly be decided by those who may not be familiar with its natural beating heart. The grounds maintenance future of Stratford Park deserves to be held in the hands of a responsible and dedicated team backed by a committed company such as idverde who have supported development and supported me and the team to deliver that service and additional value. It would seem fitting therefore to provide a list of what we have done to date and what we have achieved during our almost 11 year tenure, all of which represents a substantial body of work.

INFRASTRUCTURE / NEW BUILD

- NEW BLOCK PAVING TO MENINGITIS GARDEN FRONTAGE (2009)
- CREATE NEW BUTTERFLY GARDEN AT ORANGERY (2009)
- RE-BUILD STEPS BY BOWLING PAVILION (2012)
- CONSTRUCT NEW COTSWOLD STONE WALL AROUND BOWLING GREEN (2013, 14 & 16)
- INSTALL GROUND DRAINAGE TO PLAY AREA (2013)
- INSTALL NEW RAINWATER SYSTEM TO LISTED BUILDING IN SERVICE YARD (2014)
- INSTALL NEW LINEAR SURFACE DRAINAGE IN SERVICE YARD (2014)
- CONSTRUCT NEW RAISED FLOWER BED ALONG MAIN WALKWAY USING RECLAIMED STONE FROM LEISURE CENTRE COLUMNS (2011)
- CONSTRUCT STONE STEPS AND ROCKERY FOR SENSORY GARDEN (2016)
- PAVED PATIO FOR SENSORY GARDEN (2016)



- CONSTRUCT PERGOLA FOR SENSORY GARDEN (2018)
- CARRY OUT ALL GROUND WORKS TO SENSORY GARDEN INCLUDING AMPHITHEATRE AND FORMING NEW PATHS (2016 – 2019)
- CONSTRUCT LOW LEVEL STONE WALL BY CAR PARK (2010)
- CONSTRUCT NEW RAISED ROUND HERBACIOUS BED IN COTSWOLD STONE (2018)
- CONSTRUCT HALF ROUND RAISED HERBACIOUS BED BY NURSERY (2018)
- EXCAVATE AND CONSTRUCT NEW POND BY LAKE (2010)
- CONSTRUCT NEW ACCESS ROAD TO MODEL RAILWAY (2015)
- CONSTRUCT TWO RAISED STONE FLOWER BEDS BY LAKE (2014)
- CONSTRUCT LOW LEVEL STONE WALL BY LAKE (2017 – 2018)
- DESIGN AND BUILD LARGE RAISED HERBACIOUS BED IN BRICK BY OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL ENTRANCE (2016)
- CONSTRUCTING NEW RECYCLING BAYS IN SERVICE YARD (2009 & 2015)
- CONSTRUCT STEPS BY LOWER TENNIS COURT (2010)
- INSTALLING WELFARE FACILITIES AND WATER SUPPLY TO STAFF ROOM (2014)
- LANDSCAPING TO LEISURE CENTRE FRONTAGE (2019)
- LANDSCAPE FRONTAGE BY MAIN CAR PARK

BIODIVERSITY

- ESTABLISH BIRD BOX SCHEME (2009 TO PRESENT)
- IMPROVE AND EXTEND GREEN CORRIDORS (2010 TO PRESENT)
- PLANTING 2,000 NATIVE TREES WITH VOLUNTEERS (2013 & 2015)
- LAKE RESTORATION WORKS (2018 TO PRESENT)
- MONITORING BIRD AND LEPIDOPTERA FAUNA (2009 TO PRESENT)
- WOODLAND MANAGEMENT (2011 TO 2017)
- PRODUCE BIODIVERSITY NEWSLETTER (2010 TO PRESENT)
- DELIVER GUIDED WALKS AND PUBLIC TALKS (2009 TO PRESENT)
- CREATE NEW SUSTAINABLE FLOWER BEDS FOR POLLINATORS (2018 TO PRESENT)
- CREATE BANK FOR BUTTERFLIES AND FLORA (2009 – 2017)



Park staff conducting a survey of flora on the wildflower bank 2016



Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

BIRDS: Highlight of the month is the two juvenile sparrowhawks in the woodland. the best place to hear and see them is along the top perimeter of the coniferous section of woodland facing onto the field, usually in the morning. Common buzzard is over the park most days. On the lake, kingfisher, heron and grey wagtail. One dipper was seen on the stream on 7th August. Juvenile green woodpeckers are on the main field and banks near the play areas. In the arboretum this month – Jay, raven, nuthatch, great-spotted woodpecker, goldcrest, treecreeper, mistle thrush, dunnock and song thrush.

BUTTERFLIES: Butterflies are reaching peak season at the end of this month, and there are still many species on the wing throughout the park, including speckled wood, small tortoiseshell, red admiral (a large influx of painted lady has been recorded both here in the park and throughout the district), gatekeeper, large white, small white, small copper (two seen on the wildflower bank 2nd August), common blue, comma and brimstone.

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EVENTS: Moth evening Stratford Park Friday 27th September 2019 8.00pm. We will be sugaring for the spectacular red underwing and once again running the moth trap by the woodland. We are also hoping to serve hot soup and rolls and hot chocolate. For more information please go to www.museuminthepark.org.uk This event is part of National Moth Night www.atropos.info

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

