Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter
February 2019

(Juvenile male Sparrow hawk in the woodland Photo: Mike McCrea)

Hi All,

On the morning of 23rd January, and during the first snowfall of the year, I was doing my morning inspections of the park and watching a large flock of mixed birds, coal, blue, Great tits and goldcrests all flitting through the trees in the woodland when a distant bird caught my attention, way up in the canopy. Fortunately, I had my camera with me and zoomed in to reveal the bird above, quietly surveying its territory. It sat motionless for several minutes affording me some good photos. As I returned to our Gator buggy, there was a tremendous explosion of birds from the nearby Dawn Redwood and a puff of feathers. After posing for this photo (above) our bird, a juvenile male, had decided to take breakfast and departed with an unfortunate blue tit. I thought to myself after “why don’t we see these opportunities on our scheduled bird walks”? Nature can be so unpredictable, but hey, that’s just another day in Stratford Park.

Mike

News from the Supervisor's Trap

Works finally resume on the Sensory Garden

After recent meetings and consultations with SDC and SVP, works finally resume this month on the Sensory Garden Project. This month sees us working alongside SVP volunteers again on another phase of the garden which started in 2015. Over the next two months we will be continuing with the pathways, building two more raised beds and installing a second pergola. The two beds are to continue the sense of smell and will be planted with aromatic herbs. Seats made from our salvaged cedar will be placed by the beds so that people can sit and enjoy the aroma from the herbs. It was decided to extend a path from the garden and onto the main path through the park, which will direct people through the garden via a direct recognized route. The 2nd smaller pergola will be placed near the main rockery and steps, and will be planted with some vigorous clematis. Further into the year the SVP volunteers will be working on a new maze and additional planting. It has also been proposed to plant some sections of paths with lavender.

In April, a large area adjacent to the existing patio will be levelled and seeded providing a nice open seating area prior to future development. If budgets allow, we hope to complete the seating for the amphitheatre which we created last year. We hope to have all of these elements completed before this year's Festival of Nature.

(SVP volunteers resuming work with the park team this month)

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Leaf miners recorded in Stratford Park

Val Taylor, a local moth enthusiast has recently visited the park and recorded some interesting leaf miners. She has sent these great pictures. Many leaf mines are made by moths whose small larvae feed actually within the substance of a leaf. As they feed and grow they leave a ‘mine’ in the form of a blotch or track which is often characteristic of the species involved. If you are walking around the park you will see on almost every tree or plant, a mine created by an insect. This is a fascinating branch in entomology.

Stigmella basiguttella

Stigmella sp with dead larva

Phyllonorycter larva

Phyllonorycter mine

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Festival scoops top naturalist and presenter

This year's Stroud Festival of nature looks like being the biggest ever as the organizers have been successful in booking top naturalist, adventurer and TV presenter Steve Backshall who will be giving a talk and meet and greet at Stratford Park Leisure Centre on the evening before the main event in Stratford Park on Sunday 7th July. Last year's guest speaker Chris Packham proved so popular that two talks were scheduled. Steve Roberts (Director) has already told us that applications for stalls have increased significantly this year. This is always a fantastic day out for the family with lots to see and do. There is also a full programme of events and activities throughout the district leading up to and after the main event at Stratford Park. This year, Idverde will have a presence where we will highlight all of the biodiversity and park development work we have done through the year. Ticket prices for Steve Backshall will be announced soon and further information can be found at www.stroudnature.org

Stroud Valleys Project
Enriching lives, transforming places

Wild about Stratford Park Volunteering Group

This year is becoming a very special year for Stratford Park, and sees us engaging with groups and organizations and forging new relationships with organizations and individuals. In integrating and working with these, I feel that we are providing extra value to our client Stroud District Council. For example, what other grounds maintenance contractor can offer the level of service that we provide, over and above our core duties? Within our contract we are providing much of the construction, landscaping and development work direct to the client, reducing considerably, their need to engage expensive contractors. We are fulfilling our commitment, to the Biodiversity Action Plan, lake restoration and overseeing the Sensory Garden Project and providing our services there. In recent months the whole complexion of the park seems to have shifted in momentum with a new positive and objective agenda. The park team are enjoying their work and the variety of duties. Along the way they have learnt more about the biodiversity and how this interacts with their daily work. Our company Idverde has invested in training to maximize our potential and ensure that the team is comprehensively trained to carry out all operations.

Next month sees another Stroud valleys Project group attending Stratford Park one day each week commencing on 5th March. This is in addition to the present team working on the Sensory Garden on Wednesdays. The new group supervised by Tamsin will work on a variety of duties in the woodland, around the lake, green corridors and the Sensory Garden. With park staff being primarily engaged on core work throughout the summer, Tamsin's group will fill important gaps in the biodiversity work which we are currently doing. Planting native flowers in the woodland is high on the list of priorities, also more tree planting Himalayan balsam bashing and providing new boxes for bats and insects. The new group will dovetail nicely into the park's program especially when we are over-stretched during peak months. As a keen vegetable gardener, I am excited with the first project within the Sensory Garden, to provide a new community vegetable garden. Tamsin's group will be working on this and I hope to provide practical advice on vegetable growing, sowing, propagation and rotating crops to volunteers and others who attend. The Wild about Stratford Park Volunteer Group has been funded by the People's Lottery Fund and will operate on a budget of £20,000. The park team will be involved in some of this work but will primarily concentrate on the Sensory Garden work along with Richard's Wednesday team. Regarding this project, the coming months will see us constructing a second pergola, a raised herb bed, sowing a wildflower area, preparing new grassed areas and general assistance to the volunteers.
All of these projects are rewarding as well as challenging and with some substantial changes to infrastructure and landscape features it almost feels like the park is going through a metamorphosis. The draft schedule for volunteer group 2 has been forwarded to me and is attached.

Wild about Stratford Park

Draft Work Plan for Tuesday volunteers

Month	Volunteer Work	Materials Cost
March	Raised bed for Vegetables Tree planting – oak and roses Tree Maintenance (3000 trees in top field) mulch, clear and make a note of replacement trees needed	
April	Bug hotels, bat boxes Tree maintenance Reed bed?	
May	Lake – aquatic plants and pond maintenance Small pond – tidy and aquatic plants	
June	Himalyaan Balsam bashing	
July		
August	Bat boxes	
September		
October	Tree planting (trees from Woodland trust)	
November	Planting native flora – bluebells, wood anemones aconites, sallow	
December	Woodland work	
January		
February		

Common Buzzards increasing in Stratford Park

Exactly this time last year I reported in this newsletter that a pair of common buzzards had moved closer into the park and were feeding on scrap food left by members of the public. That pair disappeared at the end of March but throughout last summer more birds were seen in the woodland. Birds were also congregating along the green corridors and within the arboretum and I captured this photo of one of the birds (below). Since last summer, numbers seem to continue increasing and recently on the morning of 14th February 5 birds were observed soaring over the park at low altitude. These birds have also been seen regularly in the woodland in recent months, and as they appear to be remaining in the park, it may lead to them breeding. We have parts of the far woodland which provides huge towering trees which would make perfect nest sites, and during summer, when buzzards nest, the canopy is dense, offering good camouflage

to nests. Buzzards have only nested once during my time working here, in 2010. These birds are becoming a regular sight throughout the Stroud Valleys.

(Common Buzzard in Stratford Park February 2018 Photo: Mike McCrea)

Stroud Valleys Project donates more bird boxes

At the time of writing SVP has donated 6 new bird boxes for the park and as part of National Nest box Week. We will be placing these out during Nest Box Week. This brings the total number of boxes in the park to over 100. We hope to site one more owl box next month.

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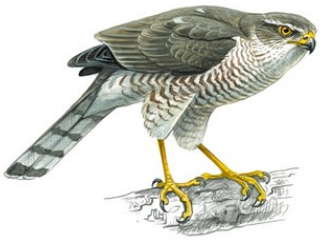
Snow brings park and district to a standstill

I think everyone was caught out by the snow that fell on Friday 1st of February. We all saw it coming on the regional weather forecasts but did not expect so much to fall so quickly. The park is about 600ft higher in altitude than where I live in the Severn Valley and by the time I arrived at work in the morning much snow had fallen and the park was deserted with only a couple of cars in the car park. Fortunately, we were prepared this time, and held good stocks of grit. By midday I was wondering if I would be able to get out of the park, the snow was that deep. During the day I managed to take some pictures showing the park transformed into a winter postcard scene



Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

BIRDS: Birds have been showing well this month as we experience clear, cloud free days. A sparrowhawk was seen by staff taking prey and mantling on12th February. Common buzzards have been soaring over the park most days. There has occurred a large influx of pied wagtails on the main field along with redwings which have come very close to the car park. Jays were in the woodland on 4th February and a kingfisher was on the lake on 30th January. Goldfinches by the park entrance on 14th February. Heron was on the lake 12th February and pheasants on the main field on 13th February. Lots of feeding groups of birds working through the woodland this month containing long-tailed tit, chaffinch, blue tit and nuthatch.

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(*id*verde – working through all weathers)

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