



BRACKNELL DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

**WINTER
NEWSLETTER
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– ISSUE 90 –

Management of Grass Banks

I bleat about the poor management of grass banks every year, and there remains much room for improvement. Bracknell's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) draws attention to the importance of grass verges and banks for their wildlife. Several sites are indeed identified by large, colourful boards in the shape of a butterfly with the message "Blooming Biodiversity". The orchid sites on the BMW bank, behind the Old Manor and on the Twin Bridges and Running Horse Roundabouts are all recognised by the local authority. However, there are other verges around Bracknell which are currently mown or strimmed through the summer months, when they deserve to be left for wildlife. There are still many sloping banks, which cannot be used for leisure activities because they are too steep, which are strimmed, generally in July as part of a "tidying-up" for Bracknell-in-Bloom. Not only is this bad for wildlife, but it is a waste of Council Tax payers' money and is against the very spirit of Bracknell-in-Bloom, which should be allowing flowers to bloom.

These areas are not only important for the flowers that grow there; these are the places where butterflies and bees can find nectar. Only if these sites are managed consistently from one year to the next can we expect to find a gradual increase in the butterfly species which have been lost in past years. These are places that are important in their own right but also act as wildlife corridors connecting other sites of importance to wildlife.

One area in particular deserves an improved management regime. This is the complex that involves the roundabout system linking Mill Lane to the Southern Industrial Estate, the patch of grass at the western end of Mill Pond and, importantly, the grass banks linking the two. Parts of this complex are already well-managed – the BMW bank, the Ox-eye Daisy bank, and the grassland at the western end of Mill Pond, for example. But other parts are mown or strimmed quite unnecessarily. On several occasions in the past, I have drawn attention to the grassy bank next to the footpath/cycleway on the north-west side of the roundabout. This has a delightful array of flowers, including Lady's Bedstraw, providing nectar for bees and butterflies. It was mown again this year in the middle of summer. A second area that should be left is the bank adjacent to the concrete channel which acts as an emergency overflow from Mill Pond.

Surely the default situation should be that banks are left uncut until the autumn unless there are specific reasons - leisure use, line-of sight safety issues - for cutting. Our BAP has been going for many years. A new BAP is planned for 2012 onwards. There has been real progress in the management of banks and verges over the years. It would be timely for the Borough to make a renewed effort to bring further areas into a favourable management regime. Cutting banks unnecessarily is a waste of Council Tax money. This is an area where the Council could make real savings in its budget.

John Ward-Smith

DIARY

WORK PARTIES

For details of the Group's work parties please contact Peter Knipe
Tel. 01344 485232
peekay750@hotmail.co.uk

BRACKNELL FOREST NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

(www.bfnathistsoc.org)
South Hill Park, 7.30 pm
21 Nov

Tree Aid

Speaker: Helen Read

BBOWT EVENTS

Please check for details at
www.bbowt.org.uk

30 Nov

Belarus—In the shadow of
Chernobyl

By Alastair Mackay

New Wildmoor Heath Work Parties

Second Saturday of the
month. Tools and gloves
provided. All welcome.

12 Nov, 10 Dec & 11 Feb

Further details: Berkshire
Reserves Officer

ianstevenson@bbowt.org.uk
For further details

NATURE NOTES by David Lloyd

"Although it is so seldom felt, and seldom fulfilled, it is nevertheless one of our foremost duties – to know Nature, to realise the value of Nature's great and wonderful Chain, - to regard its splendour devoutly and with admiration, - to use its products wisely and with consideration." Carl Peter Lumberg 1743-1828.

Lumberg was a Swedish botanist who had studied under Linnaeus, the creator of the Latin binomial classification of all life on Earth. Lumberg had widely travelled in Asia and South Africa collecting flowering plants not long after Captain James Cook had explored the Pacific and the coast of Australia. *Flower Hunters*, by Mary and John Gribbin is the story of eleven such plant collectors of the 18th and 19th centuries who were responsible for bringing to Europe so many plants which are now established in our gardens.

A new edition of the Berkshire Bird Atlas is in preparation. Following the end of fieldwork by many volunteers, trends are starting to appear of losses and gains in the twenty years since the previous edition came out. Berkshire may have lost Wood Warbler, Tree Sparrow and Hawfinch, with Willow Tit and Snipe almost gone. Declines in farmland birds include Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove, Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail and Yellowhammer. Among woodland birds there are declines in numbers of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher and Marsh Tit. Species new to breeding in Berkshire in the last twenty years include Little Egret, Red Kite, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Peregrine, Dartford Warbler. A welcome number of other species are showing good increases in their expansion in the county:- Egyptian Goose, Shelduck, Gadwall, Mandarin, Cormorant, Buzzard, Hobby, Stone Curlew, Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Common Tern, Ring-necked Parakeet, Woodlark, Stonechat, Cetti's Warbler and Firecrest. Thanks to Brian Clews for this information.

Cathy Rose of the Chilterns Conservation Board was quoted in the press expressing concern that the feeding of Red Kites in gardens is increasing so much as to possibly upset the balance of nature. Any such adding of food would increase the birds' breeding numbers to the end that their numbers might be too large for the Chilterns to sustain naturally. Other issues might then arise such as the Red Kites being drawn to take pet rabbits and guinea pigs from gardens. At the same time we can read of the Red Kites being fed in several well-known places in west Wales, where many people come to watch the spectacular sight of the feeding. Largest numbers of birds occur in winter months with up to 150 birds coming to one site from miles around. Good for tourism too as well as the enjoyment of local residents.

The Forestry Commission face the replanting of possibly 120,000 trees in Swinley Forest and Crowthorne Woods this autumn and winter. Following a public meeting at Crowthorne at the end of September some 150 people had registered to help with the replanting and other related projects to help wildlife too. This is a real example of community spirit locally in an area which usually would not involve members of the public and the Commission deserve our congratulations.

Horse Chestnut trees are once again badly affected by the caterpillars of the leaf miner moth which burrow into the thickness of the leaves, resulting in premature shrivelling and shedding.

The trees' supply of chlorophyll in the leaves and the ability to convert sunlight into sugars will weaken the trees and their ability to fruit. Perhaps half of the horse chestnut trees in England and Wales are now affected, and scientists are eager to find where the moths originate from in the hope of finding a natural enemy to introduce here.

Despite some good downpours of rain in July and August, and the cool cloudy conditions, water levels in chalk streams in the Wessex area are very low, also affected by water abstraction. The dry spring too has worsened the situation and there are still large areas of the Midlands and Eastern England with rainfall deficiencies, technically a drought. The River Teme in Shropshire and Herefordshire required urgent efforts by the Environment Agency capturing fish including salmon and brown trout from drying pools where they were stranded and translocating them downstream.

A talk by Chrissie Harper of Chrissie's Owls to the Bracknell Natural History Society on October 17th was of great interest. Chrissie flew a Barn Owl and an European Eagle Owl around the room very close to the heads of her audience. She runs a refuge for owls and raptors north of Oxford and takes in abandoned and rejected birds bred in captivity which cannot be released into the wild. Chrissie highlighted the plight of Barn Owls, many of which are injured or killed in road collisions. Farm use of poisons on rodents also affects the birds in their hunting and feeding. European owls and raptors that come to the UK also introduce new strains of viruses into the British population. The group provide nesting boxes for Kestrels and Barn Owls and are ready to give advice on placing the boxes in suitable locations.

Larges Lane Cemetery had a great display of Betony followed by Devil's-bit Scabious. Starting in July and finishing early in October the grassy areas of the cemetery remained uncut during flowering. Now all the grass is mowed and raked off and tidy once more for the winter until spring flowers return again.

Numbers of free-roaming deer are vastly greater at present over many parts of the UK, including Berkshire. The damage caused to hedgerows and scrub by browsing is now considered of concern over loss of habitat for nesting Nightingales, Whitethroats and other birds.

Grey Squirrels are continuing to drive out Red Squirrels from their remaining strongholds, by their larger size and as carriers of squirrelpox which affects the Reds but not the Greys. At the same time, Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, a long-time haven of Red Squirrels, is said to have at last been cleared of all the rhododendrons after decades of effort by all concerned and the squirrels should benefit from the improving habitat.

The debate on badger culling to eliminate bovine TB is ongoing and the debate on vaccination versus culling is not decided. If professionals and not volunteers were used to vaccinate, the costs could be more than ten times the cost of shooting. Training of vaccinators, volunteer or other wise takes time, and there are no guarantees of the percentage of the badger population that are or are not vaccinated. So during the five years or so of the badgers' lifetime, the farming industry certainly cannot wait while the disease continues to wipe out huge numbers of cattle.

EDITOR by John Ward-Smith

You will have read in the previous Newsletter that our editor, David Rowe, has moved to Wargrave. The Group is therefore seeking a new editor to look after the production of the Newsletter. David is prepared to give any training required. Please do consider whether you can help the Group by taking over this post.

David took over with Issue 53, Winter 2002/3, and has produced 37 Newsletters over the 9 years he has been in charge. So it is an appropriate time to thank David warmly for this valuable work over the years.

GROUP CONTACTS

CHAIRMAN

Peter Knipe, 4 Thornhill
Bracknell RG12 9LY
Tel. 01344 485232

Email: peekay750@hotmail.co.uk

TREASURER & MEMBERSHIP

Barbara Jerome, 98 Uffington Drive
Bracknell RG12 9JD
Tel. 01344 411025

MERVEILLE DU JOUR

My Wargrave moth trap had a very spectacular visitor on the 29th Oct—a Merveille du Jour. There was also a Green Brindled Crescent.

BRACKNELL DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

Bracknell, together with the surrounding villages of Binfield, Warfield, Winkfield, Crowthorne and Sandhurst, is an area subject to substantial development pressures. Yet, if we want it, wild plants and animals can survive and flourish in our gardens, roadsides, parks and open spaces. We believe the presence of this wildlife enhances the quality of our environment.

What do we do?

- discover what wildlife there is and where it is, and how best to encourage it
- press for recognition of its value
- watch out for threats it might face

How do we work?

- by surveying the wildlife in the area covered by Bracknell Forest Borough Council
- by undertaking and advising on practical management of open spaces for the benefit of wildlife
- by running projects on particular plants and animals
- by holding regular open meetings, occasionally indoors but usually at outdoor sites

We are affiliated to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and to the Bracknell Council for Voluntary Service (BCVS). We also work with other local conservation groups and have the active support of English Nature and our local wildlife trust: the Berkshire, Buckingham-



THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NEWSLETTER ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE EDITOR OR THE BRACKNELL DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

Please can we have your contributions to the next newsletter by Saturday 28th January
All articles on our local wildlife and habitats will be very welcome.

2011 Dragonfly Season in Bracknell Forest Borough—John Ward-Smith

Despite mixed weather, this has been a very good year for dragonflies in the Borough with, for the second year running, 27 species observed (see Appendix). Evidence of breeding was obtained for 21 species. Much of the early part of the flying season was highly favourable for dragonflies, with hot, dry, sunny weather from early April through to the end of May, and into the first four days of June. Thereafter, the weather deteriorated markedly and for most of the next four months - the remainder of June, and most of July, August and September - it was generally cool, wet and cloudy. Sunny days were few and far between. The summer was the coolest since 1993. There was then a short period of record-breaking sunny weather that spanned the final days of September and the first few days of October.

The 2011 summer was important for two species. For the second year running, **Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*) was observed at Englemere Pond and Swinley Brick Pits. In addition, during 2011 new site records were obtained: from Chaucer Woods Ponds (observed by Des Sussex), Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield, and Rapley Lake. Although no breeding activity has been observed at Bracknell sites, the number of sites at which the species is now present is a good indicator that the Hairy Dragonfly is breeding locally (Note: In 2011 an ovipositing female was recorded at the Thames Valley Business Park in Reading, the first breeding record for Berkshire).

Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*) was recorded and photographed on two occasions during 2011. Careful monitoring has revealed that there are small populations of *C. virgo* embedded within the larger *C. splendens* population at two Sandhurst sites on the River Blackwater, Shepherd Meadows and near Horseshoe Lake. A female was also recorded flying through Swinley Brick Pits, a new site record.

The **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*) had, over the past two decades, come to be regarded as a locally resident species. Although never common, it was seen regularly in the 1990s. Numbers have declined in the 21st century, and it was not recorded at all during the three years 2007, 2008 and 2009. Three records were obtained during 2010. In 2011 there was just one confirmed record of this species, a singleton male on the wing at the bog at Crowthorne Wood on 22 September

Two species found locally are now classified under the British Dragonfly Society scheme as **nationally-important** species: **Brilliant Emerald** (*Somatochlora metallica*) and **Small Red Damselfly** (*Ceriagrion tenellum*). **Brilliant Emerald** was recorded at six local sites, the presence of a teneral at Swinley Brick Pits providing evidence of breeding. Eight site records for **Small Red Damselfly** were obtained, with evidence of breeding at five. For the first time, evidence of breeding was obtained at Rapley Lake.

Five species have been classified by BDS as **locally-important**. These are: **Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*), see above, **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*), see above, **Downy Emerald** (*Cordulia*

aenea), **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** (*Cordulagaster boltonii*), and **Keeled Skimmer** (*Orthetrum coerulescens*). **Downy Emerald** was recorded at 7 sites, with breeding activity recorded at Swinley Brick Pits. **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** was seen at 5 sites, including a new site record at Wood Pond, Windsor Great Park, where a male was hawking over bracken. No breeding activity was observed. **Keeled Skimmer** was recorded at 8 sites, with breeding records at 4 sites. Numbers of all these species were down on 2010 figures.

The two species **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*) and **White-legged Damselfly** (*Platycnemis pennipes*) were first recorded as resident species in 2005. **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** was seen in 2011 at just 3 sites: Englemere Pond, Allsmoor Pond, Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield (FFTF), and population sizes were smaller this year. **White-legged Damselfly** (*Platycnemis pennipes*) continues to do well at Butter Bottom Ponds, but again numbers were down in 2011.

In 2010, concern was expressed about **Blue-tailed Damselfly**, **Black-tailed Skimmer** and **Brown Hawker**, as numbers were down. In 2011 the first two species continued to decline, but the Brown Hawker showed signs of recovery. On the positive side, there are indications that the **Scarce Chaser** (*Libellula fulva*) is moving closer. In 2010 it was recorded along the Blackwater Valley just south of the county boundary, and on 1 July 2011, Des Sussex observed a male on the Colne Brook, south of Wraysbury station, which is currently in the Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. It is a new county record for the modern county of Berkshire. However, the national dragonfly recording scheme is based on the old county boundaries before the changes of 1974. So this record falls into VC24, Buckinghamshire, and not VC22, Berkshire.

The fine spring weather led to seven early flying records this year: **Banded Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx splendens*) was recorded at Shepherd Meadows on 21 April, the first local April record; **Downy Emerald** (*Cordulia aenea*) was observed at Swinley Brick Pits (SBP) on 24 April; **Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*) was observed at Felix Farm Trout Fishery (FFTF), Binfield, on 26 April; **Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma najas*) and **Common Blue Damselfly** (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) were on the wing at Mill Pond, Easthampstead, on 1 May; **Brilliant Emerald** (*Somatochlora metallica*) was seen at SBP on 10 May, and **Black-tailed Skimmer** (*Orthetrum cancellatum*) was recorded at FFTF on 24 May. There were four late flying records: **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) on 28 September, observed by Robin Dryden, and **Small Red Damselfly** (*Ceriagrion tenellum*) on 13 October, both at Crowthorne Wood. The latter record exceeds the previous date of 20 September by over 3 weeks. At Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield, on 15 October, **Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*) and **Ruddy Darter** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*) provided two more records.

There is an increasing problem with invasive weeds, which have taken hold on several local sites. *Crassula helmsii* is now a serious presence at two ponds in Windsor Great Park, Leiper Pond and Wood Pond. At Mill Pond, Swinley Forest, another weed (species unknown) was covering a substantial proportion of the surface in mid-summer.

Appendix - 2011 Dragonfly Season

SPECIES RESIDENT IN THE BOROUGH (25)

Damselflies

Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>
Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>
White-legged Damselfly	<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>
Small Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma viridulum</i>
Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>
Small Red Damselfly**	<i>Ceriagrion tenellum</i>
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>

Dragonflies

Common Hawker*	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>
Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>
Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Golden-ringed Dragonfly *	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>
Downy Emerald*	<i>Cordulia aenea</i>
Brilliant Emerald**	<i>Somatochlora metallica</i>
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>
Keeled Skimmer*	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>
Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>
Black Darter	<i>Sympetrum danae</i>

VISITOR SPECIES, NOW PROBABLY RESIDENT (2)

Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* (1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

Hairy Dragonfly* *Brachytron pratense* (1996, 1998, 1999, 2009, 2010, 2011)

** Nationally important species * Locally important species