

DIGSWELL LAKE SOCIETY

The Society maintains Digswell Lake and the surrounding wooded parkland (17½ acres in all) as a nature reserve and place of tranquil beauty.



Newsletter Winter 2015

Diary Dates 2015/16

Friday 20th November 2015:

Subject: **Hatfield Forest** - the National Trust's best medieval hunting forest.

Speaker: Stuart Warrington, National Trust Wildlife and Countryside advisor for the East of England.

We are very pleased to have Stuart back to talk about the Hatfield forest, its veteran trees, pollards, coppice, deer, history and wildlife and to update us on the work of the NT.

Friday 12th February 2016

Subject: **Bardsey Island, North Wales - its history and 50 years of bird watching**

Speaker: **Steve Hughes** is a Tewin resident and a lifelong bird watcher - he has Welsh roots and began serious bird watching and bird ringing on Bardsey Island off the Lleyn peninsula in North Wales in the mid-sixties as part of a school group and has visited for a week or two most years since - in more recent years with children, grandchildren and many friends. He will talk about the island and its history and about the birds that he has encountered there over the 50 years he has visited.

Friday 15th April 2016

Subject: **'Sustainability Reductions and Associated River Restoration in the Mimram Catchment'**

Speaker: **Diana Hammond from Affinity**. Diana is a Senior Asset Scientist for Affinity Water. She specialises in Hydro-ecology and has worked for the River Restoration Centre before coming to work for Affinity Water in 2014. Diana has been involved in river management and ecology for 25 years and is the project manager for the Mimram sustainability reduction and morphological work project. '

[see page 9 for remainder of programmes](#)



All evening meetings commence at 7.30 pm

and are held at the

Digswell Village Hall
Harmer Green Lane
Digswell

Admission charge only £2.00

which includes refreshments

Your friends are most welcome to come along

Ring Bob Leys
On 01707 321157
for information



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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Those of you who were able to attend the AGM will already know that two new Committee members were elected, Simon Stebbings and Deborah Smith.

In the ordinary way of administering your membership, you will get to know both of them as they are now, respectively, our Membership Secretary and Treasurer. In other words, we are splitting the job hitherto done single-handedly by Carole Date, whom we thank for her many years' work for the Society. By the time you read this, we hope to have updated our website to reflect that Simon is now the first contact about any membership matter.

At the AGM, a member suggested that litter bins should be provided at the Lake. The Committee considered this at length, but decided on balance not to follow this up. We felt litter bins would be detrimental to the natural appearance of the Lake, would require an emptying rota (by volunteers), and would be a temptation to misuse, altogether outweighing any prospective reduction in littering. We hope you will have understanding and will continue to take your used wrappers etc home after your visits.

The front page of this Newsletter carries our social programme of evening lectures through to the end of 2016. We would like your views on the future of this programme, as despite the variety and high standard, attendances do not cover the costs. Sally Burman, our Social Secretary, has more to say on this, elsewhere in the Newsletter. While those who do come to the events which she so capably organises, do enjoy a good social evening, the evening lectures are no longer as central to the Society as in its earlier days, when it had only a few score members, most of whom would attend.

Instead, as suggested by Deborah Smith elsewhere in the Newsletter, we might consider outdoor events at the Lake itself, such as guided walks, tree identifier events, "New Year's Day at the Lake", fungus forays, and dipping for pond life, on the lines of what they do at Sherrardswood. This is all tentative and up for discussion. This is YOUR Society - please let us know your views on what type of social programme you would support, by way of 'Letter to the Editor', or to any Committee member - we'll compare notes at our next meeting.

Peter Neville

Social programme of evening lectures – have your say

For many years Digswell Lake Society has invited speakers to come along in the evening to give talks on a whole range of subjects covering birds & insects; the environment; wildlife, plants and trees; the work of other similar organisations; rivers; the Olympic park; animals; both in the UK and abroad.

As Peter has outlined in his chairman's column whilst those that do attend enjoy the evening the meetings we are not covering our costs. Over the years we have made changes to the format – changing the time of the year, widening the range of subjects and included some current affairs talks for example in the year of the Olympics we had the senior conservation officer talking about the Olympic park, the police came to talk about rural and wildlife crime. We introduced a reminder email and included some off site visits. The charge of £2 has been in place for some time to encourage members and friends to attend. But is now the time to change from an evening meeting to an 'event' as outlined by Deborah combined with wider marketing?

We have 4 speakers lined up for next year and we are planning to trial the 'events' to gauge member interest. So please let us have your comments. You can email Digswell Lake Society at dls.org.uk@gmail.com Following a review of the feedback we receive and the level of support for new events, the committee will make a recommendation to the Annual General meeting on 17th June 2016.

Sally Burman

Outdoor Activities - again, have your say

First of all may I introduce myself, as your new treasurer who will be taking on part of Carole Dale's role. Following a recent committee meeting I suggested we might consider themed outdoor events at the Lake specific to the Lake, for our members. This would be a new venture for us, but something that has been successful elsewhere locally e.g. Sherrards and Panshanger.

Do let us know of any ideas or suggestions you might have. For my part, I am approaching various people who might be able to host these events, for their views. Watch this space!

Deborah Smith

The Wendover Arm Canal

A fascinating detailed talk was given on Friday 23rd October 2015 by Ray Orth the Assistant Restoration Director of the Wendover Arm Canal Trust. Ray took us through the history of the Wendover canal and the work carried out over the last 20 years by the volunteers. For those of you who were unable to make the talk, we hope the summary below will encourage you to visit the canal (around 50 minutes from Welwyn by car) and to consider supporting the work of the Trust.

Brief History of the Wendover Arm

The Grand Union Canal is a major inland waterway linking London and the Midlands. At the point where the route reached its summit at Tring where it crossed the Chiltern Hills a continuous supply of water was required to replace that lost by the use of the locks at both ends. To overcome this problem, an Act of Parliament was initiated and the construction of a simple feeder canal was authorised to carry spring water from a plentiful supply at Wendover to the Tring Summit and its reservoirs.

Construction began in 1793. However the specification was changed from a simple feeder to a navigable canal and for a small additional cost the fully navigable Wendover Arm was built and opened in 1797. The arm starts in Buckinghamshire at Wharf road Wendover, although the water rises from the Wellhead Springs near St. Marys Church. The Arm winds its way for 6 3/4 miles through the villages of Halton, Buckland Wharf, Drayton Beauchamp and Little Tring following the 390ft contour around the Chiltern Hills before joining the main Grand Union at Bulbourne Junction near Tring. Initially the canal was a success but large volumes of water were being lost due to leakage. Despite many attempts to re-line the canal bed, the leakage increased and the canal closed to navigation in 1904. Sections remained in water in order to fulfil its original objective of feeding water into the canal's summit level; part of the length was reduced in depth and part (a middle section of about 1 3/4 miles) was allowed to become dry and water was fed to the summit level by a pipe under the canal bed. The initial objective of the Wendover Arm Canal Trust is to restore the dry section to navigation and its ultimate objective is to restore navigation back to Wendover.

The Wendover Arm Trust

The Trust was formed in 1989 as a registered charity to promote and implement the restoration of the Wendover Arm Canal. Exactly 200 years



Disused section of the canal near Wendover

after the Arm first opened, reconstruction work started in 1997 after several years of preparation.

The Trust is run by a dedicated team of volunteers and is a membership organisation. There is no local or national government subsidy. All monies are raised through grants, donations and fund-raising activities. For more details you can visit the website www.wendoverarmtrust.co.uk

Restoration

Current work is focussed on a re-profiling and lining the section of canal from Drayton Beauchamp to Little Tring. Regular work parties are held. Visitors are welcome at the work site to see the restoration volunteers at work and they are always happy to answer any questions you may have. For work party dates and information go to: www.wendoverarmtrust.co.uk/restoration

Wildlife

The Arm provides rich ecological environment to support a wide range of flora and fauna. It is home to many ducks, swans, little grebes and moorhens. It is possible to see visiting birds such as herons, kingfishers as well as insects such as dragonflies.

Walking

The entire length of the Arm is walkable along the towpath with a short diversion at Little Tring. There are also many local footpaths that can be used to make a circular route including around the Tring reservoirs. There are many circular routes in and around Wendover, Halton, Aston Clinton, Drayton Beauchamp and Tring that include sections of the Arm. Find details of walks on sites such as www.walkinginbucks.co.uk and www.walkinginherts.co.uk

Getting there - (more details on Trust web site)

By Car

Stablebridge, Aston Clinton HP225ND. This is a small free public car park up the hill from Stable Bridge.

Wilstone Reservoir, HP23 4DA. Free public car park on the Marsworth to Aston Clinton road below the reservoir.

Startops End, Marsworth HP23 4LJ A large public car park next to the main Grand Union and Tring Reservoirs, charges apply

Our thanks to Ray Orth, our speaker, and his wife for joining us at Digswell.

Sally Burman

DIGSWELL LAKE BIRD REPORT

THEN AND NOW (Part 1)

Compiled and submitted by Colin Hull

A comparison of birds that occurred at the lake 1975-6 and 2009-2014

Introduction

This is a first part of a project to compare the bird species that have occurred at the lake in the last few years with past data. In this first instance with some records from the mid 1970's. For bird population data at the lake in the 1970's I have used some survey results from R Knight when he carried out a site survey of the bird species as part of a national survey of wildlife sites for the British Trust of Ornithology (1975-1979). He listed the species and approximate numbers of each through the seasons of the year. I hope that this initial report will show how the species profiles have changed as the habitats related to the site have aged and also in response to the local and national status of each species. As a follow up I intent later to follow this up by research into much older records from the Herts and Middlesex Natural History Society.

Making comparisons

For purposes of the survey RK's species counts were in broad categories (eg. 1-9, >10, <9 etc) so it is some cases difficult to be precise about counts. From a breeding point of view it is also difficult to be precise about the number of pairs. For instance less <9 listed by RK could mean anything from one pair to up to 8 individuals. In the breeding season I tend to try and count calling and singing males as potential pairs even if unknown to me some males remain unpaired. It is also worth saying that I have been less systematic with keeping counts of species in winter apart from ducks and winter thrushes and specific winter visitors. But given those difficulties I think we can get a broad comparison about changes between the mid-late 1970's and the last few years for which I have personal counts and supplemented by records from other people, particularly Tom Gladwin who has supplied his full breeding pair counts in some seasons and filled in some gaps I may have

Habitat changes

The lake is not a static environment. R.Knight in his survey noted the following features of habitat. *An area of damp Alder woodland with rich ground flora. Several small areas of mixed woodland and a small beech wood with some*

older trees. A patch of "recently planted beech, about 20 years old". A large tract of grass regularly mown. NE corner is marshy with sedges Mature hawthorn hedge.

Over time there have been changes in plant species and vertical height of trees and shrubs and these will affect the ecology of animal life and this includes the suitability of the site for feeding and nesting. Not surprisingly therefore we would expect there to have been some changes in the number of species and the numbers of each species occurring. The bird populations at the lake situation are also affected by the wider countryside. The British Trust for Ornithology has long running records of national and regional bird population comparisons dating back to the early 1900's and these have shown marked changes in bird species in the UK between the 1970's and the present. According to BTO data there have been particular marked declines of some once common species and this is also a factor in the comparison of the birds at Digswell between the present and the past. On the other hand we have had the return of some birds of prey and other species that had been absent in the local area due to previous declines from persecution and pesticide poisoning.

Full Systematic Bird List

Key.

SV summer visitor,

WV winter visitor

R Resident -seen at all times of year. This may hide some summer or winter influx of additional numbers from local or international migration.

P. Passage migrant, either spring (Feb-May) or autumn (Aug-Nov) migration periods.

Birds of national conservation concern.

Red list >50% national decline in populations or geographical range

Amber list 25-50% national decline in populations or geographical range

Little Grebe R. Recorded by RK only as a winter visitor. I have on some occasions seen evidence of attempts to breed on the river as well as autumn and winter. Usually one pair and counts a few individuals in winter.

Grey Heron. R. RK recorded as winter visitor but I have noted singles at other times of the

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year. Sometimes full adults and sometimes juveniles and immature.

Little Egret. WV. This species has only regularly been established in Herts in about the last 20 years with some breeding in the Lea Valley so was not on RKs list. In winter months a few occur along the River Mimram and have as a consequence become irregular visitors to the lake and adjacent river. Normally only sightings of individuals. Perhaps it is only a matter of time before the species may become a nearby breeding species.

Mute Swan. R. RK recorded breeding and winter. When I first started recording species at the lake there were none but since 2009 there have been attempts to breed each year, mostly successful. Often after the hatching the adults and young down river but may come back to the lake at intervals with surviving young coming to the lake in winter.

Canada Geese R. RK did not record any at all. The species originated in the UK is a foreign import and numbers continue to increase nationally. More recent years there has been up to one pair visiting. Young have been seen on some occasions but probably from off-site nests.

Mallard. R. The UK breeding population is supplemented by winter and passage migrants. RK recorded 1-9 breed in summer months and 10+ in winter. I have recorded less than 10 in some summers with occasional records of broods of ducklings. A few winter counts suggest up to 25 is common. Hence there has not been much change in status over the time period.

Gadwall. P,W. The species occurs mainly as winter and "passage" migrant. Although there have been occasional pairs on site in the summer months there has never been proof of breeding on site. RK recorded only 1-9 "passage". I suggest that there has been no overall change in occurrence between the 1970's and recent years.

Tufted Duck. SV,P,W. RK mentions 1-9 summer non-breed and winter visitor. My own records seem to concur with that. The species is mainly a winter and passage visitor (spring and autumn). There are occasional visits in the summer months and this year I saw a female with chicks so they may breed on site some years but is has not been a regular occurrence.

Shoveler. WV. RK not recorded. Winter records only. Usually no more than 10

Pochard. WV. RK not recorded. Winter records? Usually no more than 10

Mandarin Duck. Rare visitor. I have only two records for individuals.

Pheasant RK1-9 summer non-breed and winter. While I have heard individual breeding male

calls I have seen no proof actual broods on site and have been unable to get accurate assessment of numbers of summer visitors.

Common Buzzard. R. RK had no records and this was from a period of time the species was largely absent from Herts. From the last 20 years the species has naturally recolonized a lot of Herts. The species has begun to occur on site since 2007, mainly overflying and is therefore part of the national and regional of pattern of a return to Herts and eastern counties after a long absence. A recent report (Feb 2015) from Tom Gladwin was that 5 had been roosting on site in Jan and Feb.

Sparrowhawk. R. As with the Common Buzzard this species was absent from Herts in the 1970's but has gradually returned as common local species. Singles have been sighted at the lake ever since 2006. I have no evidence of any on-site breeding so the visits of mainly females and immature birds to the site is probably from local breeding pairs.

Kestrel. R. Amber List. Resident species may be seen at all times of year. There has been some national decline since the 1970's. RK put its status as 1-9 summer non-breeding and winter visitor. In more recent years a pair has sometimes nested on site and it is possible that RK missed any breeding attempts. The chances are that the local status has therefore not changed.

Red Kite. R. This species was missing from the area in the 1970's (confined to Wales) and not surprisingly RK did not record any. The local and national situation has changed dramatically following a national re-introduction program including a region of the Chilterns. There is now a resident and breeding population in Herts and this is reflected in occasional sightings at the lake all year round. There are no records of breeding at the lake but the species has been known to breed at Tewin and at Welwyn.

Moorhen. R. Common breeding species but difficult to count precisely as they tend to hide in bank-side vegetation both on the lake and on the river. Have counted up to 3-6 breeding pairs most years (6-12 individual adults). RK stated summer counts of greater than 10 so the situation may have changed slightly but not dramatically.

Coot. R. Regular breeding species with 3-4prs most years on the lake and sometimes on the river and fits with data from RK so no significant change. Young tend to leave the site in the late summer or autumn but adults may remain in the winter months and start to re-establish territories in Feb-Mar.

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Stock Dove. R. RK has breeding category of less than 9 and I have records of 3-4 pairs that would fit that.

Wood Pigeon. R. BTO data suggests this is one of the most widespread and abundant species in the UK. RK has breeding category of less than 9 and rather like Stock Dove I have records of 3-4 pairs that would fit that.

Black-headed Gull. P,W. RK noted the species as a winter visitor in the category of 19-99. Locally the species is often seen along the nearby Mirmram along the A1000 and I suspect that actual visitors settling on the lake are variably related to this. Typically I have records of less than 10.

Four **other Gull species** (Great Black Backed, Lesser Black Backed, Herring and Common) RK recorded as winter visitors, less than 9. I have no records in recent years for any of them.

Kingfisher. I record this as Resident, occurring at all times of year, but this is complicated since the species is rarely seen on consecutive visits. Over the years of my observations I have seen evidence of at least one pair present, sometimes with young probably from an off-site nest. Nationally Kingfishers have shown some local declines. RK also recorded category 1 visits (less than 9). The site is probably not suitable for support more than one pair with nesting requirements of steep banks for nesting and it is highly likely that any breeding birds actually breed off site but may bring young birds into the area after fledging.

Green Woodpecker. R. RK indicated 1-2 pairs nesting and I would concur with that.

Great Spotted Woodpecker. R. Similar status to Green Woodpecker.

Grey Wagtail. Uncertain status. RK mentions one breeding pair was usual. My own records supplemented by Tom Gladwin indicate a pair often visits from just off site near the viaduct, so no change in status from that point of view.

Pied Wagtail. R. As with Grey Wagtail indications of offsite nesting of one pair tallies with RKs records.

Wren. Breeding resident. RK mentioned greater than 10 in the breeding season. Records in recent years have varied between 6-10 pairs so that would indicate hardly any change.

Duncock. R. Between 7-10 pairs have been counted annually over the last few years. RK had no records for this species listed. So that may mean some inward migration and settlement.

Robin. R. RK mentions greater than 10 breeding. Recent years have shown 14-19 singing males and hence potentially that number of pairs. It is certainly a well established resident and holds territory all year, possibly supple-

mented by passage and winter visitors but uncertain.

Black Redstart. Rare passage migrant. One record.

Blackbird. R. RK mentions greater than 10 breeding. I have noted 4-6 pairs annually in recent years which would fit a similar picture. Nationally there were some local declines that put the species on the Amber List, but this situation seems to have largely recovered and the species remains common in the area and on site.

Song Thrush. Red List. R. RK recorded less than 9 and I have recorded between 1-3 pairs. It is difficult to assess any real change in the population status at the lake. The species suffered some severe national and regional declines since the 1970's but has recovered in some areas. There were one or two seasons a few years ago when I did not record any singing males but this seems to have recovered in accord with the BTO indications of slight national recovery.

Mistle Thrush. R. Amber List. RK recorded less than 9. 1-2 pairs in recent years has been typical but difficult to say if there has been any real change in status.

Redwing WV. RK recorded category 2 (10-99) which is a wide range. Both on site and in the fields paddocks to the north I have recorded flocks of up to 40 in some years but at other times only about 15, and only on an infrequent basis.

Fieldfare WV. As with Redwing RK recorded 10-99 but I have fewer records of any sizeable flocks, normally on the northern boundary and in the adjacent paddock. Mostly less than 40, sometimes in mixed flocks with Redwing.

Blackcap. SV. RK recorded less than 9. I have typically recorded 3-4 pairs in recent years. Again it is difficult to make precise comparisons. Nationally the species has shown some significant increase, aided by mild winters that also attract winter visitors from Europe.

Chiffchaff. SV. RK recorded less than 9. My own records show 4-6 pairs is typical. As with Blackcap there has been a national increase with some winter visitors.

Garden Warbler. SV. Was not recorded by RK. 2-3 pairs were recorded 2006-2009 but I have had no records in the last three years.

Spotted Flycatcher. P. Red List. Previously a breeding summer visitor, RK recorded less than 9 in the breeding season. I have not recorded any in the breeding season but sometimes have noted occasional passage migrants Sep-Oct. So this may be a real change in status. The BTO has shown very strong declines in this species since the 1970's and the reasons are not known.

Being migrant it may be affected on habitat changes in its wintering grounds, on route as well as locally.

Goldcrest. R. RK recorded less than 9. Sightings of 1-4 in breeding season is typical. The species generally prefers conifer plantations but we do get a few breeding pairs and also occurrences of small flocks in other months of the year. Probably not much change from RKs period of census data.

Long-tailed Tit. R. RK recorded less than 9 in the breeding season and in winter. I have records of typically 2- 4 pairs and flocks of about 10, which is probably in accord with RK, so not much change.

Blue Tit. R. No counts from RK but 7-8 pairs typical in recent years.

Great Tit. R. RK no counts. 3-7 pairs in recent years.

Coal Tit. R. RK less than 9. 2-4prs typical. Another mainly conifer loving species but the site does seem to attract a few pairs plus small groups with other tits other times of year. Again there does not seem to have been in significant change in status.

Nuthatch. R. RK less than 9. Typically 2 prs

Tree Creeper. R. RK not listed. I have observed 1-3prs most years and a few with flocks of tits in the winter.

Jay. R. The species does not seem to be on RKs list as a breeding species but only as Passage Migrant. I have recorded 1-2pairs annually in summer months. Jays are generally a woodland species. BTO data suggests an increase in the UK breeding population (check BTO data) possibly a variety of factors have made the species better established in the local area. I have not observed any confirmed evidence of breeding on site (nests) but otherwise highly likely to be visiting the site from nearby, including some young birds begging food from parents.

Magpie. R. As with Jay RK this species was only listed as a Passage Migrant whereas I have records for at least 1-2 pairs annually. This is also a reflection of BTO data that has shown an increase in the UK breeding population. No actual proof of nests on site but probably visits from local pairs in the area during the breeding season. Also small flocks in winter months.

Jackdaw. R. RK lists more than 10 breeding and winter. It's hard to miss the calling birds in the trees near the entrance and annual counts of 8-9 pairs occupying those trees are typical. I think that flocks may also be supplemented by others in the area outside the breeding season. BTO data points to an increase in the UK population and this is no doubt a factor locally.

Carrion Crow.. RK not listed as breeding but

recorded less than 9 in the winter. Most year I have recorded 1-2pr plus a few on some dates in winter. Probably not much local change although BTO data suggests a national increase.

Starling. Red List. RK recorded more than 10 in the summer and 10-99 in the winter. The period RK recorded the species was at a national high according to BTO date but the species then suffered a decline of more than 50%. I have no records of any breeding on site and no records of winter visitors.

Chaffinch. R. RK record more than 10 in both summer and winter. As an woodland species I might have expected this species to do well on site. In fact I normally record only 2-3 pairs and very few flocks in winter.

Goldfinch.. R. RK recorded less than 9 in the summer and more than 10 in the winter. I have found usually 1-2pr and some small winter flocks of about 10-20 on some visits.

Bullfinch. Red List. RK less than 9 in summer and winter. Nationally there has been a severe decline of more than 50%. I have found only 1pr in some years. Winter records are scarce with only a few sightings of less than 10 at a time.

Siskin WV. RK noted the species as a winter visitor in the category of 10-99. The occurrence at the lake is very variable depending on the influx of migrants into the UK and regional weather patterns. In some winters flocks have been few in number and less than 40 at a time. Some winters there have been higher consistent visits of 100+ at a time.

Meally Redpoll WV. RK none. I have a few records provided by Tom Gladwin.

Redpoll. WV. RK noted the species as breeding in low numbers and also as winter visitor 10-99. I have no breeding records and only a few winter records from Tom Gladwin.

House Sparrow Red list RK less than 9 as breeding species. BTO data shows the species had shown a drastic decline in many areas and I have no records of the species on site at any time of year.

Reed Bunting. Red List. RK indicated the species as breeding less than 9. I have no records for the species at any time of year. This is another species that has shown national decline of more than 50% but does well in some localities. It may also be that the vegetation is no longer suitable for nesting.

Acknowledgments

R.K Knight for his original list of observations.
Tom Gladwin who has frequently supplemented my own observations.

Colin Hull.

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SANI WETLANDS, HALKIDIKI, NE GREECE

When looking for a holiday destination in October we had located the Sani resort in Halkidiki, NE Greece, not far from Thessaloniki. The resort consisted of 4 hotels and chalet centres with a shuttle bus that ran between them. A good place to holiday and sit by the pool or on the beach (if you like that sort of thing!), about 14 restaurants and a marina. For me it was the proximity of a pine forest and wetlands that made it most attractive. Each day I made a foray into the forest and then onto the wetlands. The site is a large expanse of land, 110 hectares, and an internationally recognised and protected site and attracts about 200 species on a seasonal basis. (More information: <http://www.saniwetlands.gr>)

Highlights

For me the star bird of the week was daily sightings of Hobby, a fast flying falcon, hunting over the tree tops and reed beds, mainly hunting large insects including Dragonflies. They catch these with their feet and then transfer them to their mouths while still in the air. (They also hunt swallows and martins, but none were present). The Hobby is migrant species that also occurs in the UK in Herts and southern counties and all the Hobbies we saw were probably making a stop-over on their way south to Africa. On one afternoon my wife Usha and I counted 12 Hobbies, and seeing them gliding and dashing around was quite spectacular. I also had daily sightings of a pair of Marsh Harrier, probably a local resident pair and a pair of Common Buzzard.

Among the small birds the forest showed up lots of Chiff Chaff (or possibly migrant Willow Warblers), I did not always get clear identity for these similar looking species. Sign guides in the forest indicated Sardinian Warbler was present as a resident species but it was not until nearly the last day I caught sight of one. I thought I heard and saw several in the forest but only got one positive identification)

Among the duck species I saw Ferruginous duck as well as Pochard, Teal and Mallard. Lots of Grey Heron, Little Egret, plus a few Squacco Heron and Great Egret. Apparently hundreds of these occur on the wetlands in winter.

Aside from the birds there were lots of Beehives, put into the forest to over winter. There were also some wild Tortoise and several species of dragonfly.



SARDINIAN
WARBLER

Report from Colin Hull

A full list of species, in order of sightings, below.

Hooded Crow (commonly seen)
House Sparrow (commonly seen around the hotels and chalets)
Chiff- chaff (frequently seen in the forest)
Willow Warbler (possibly sometimes confused with Chiff Chaff)
Spotted Flycatcher (two sighted)
Common Buzzard (one pair)
Hobby (as above highlights)
Coots (lots)
Marsh Harrier (resident pair)
Squacco Heron (a few)
Grey Heron (possibly up to 10)
Little Egret (commonly seen)
Mallard (commonly seen)
Magpie (common)
Linnet (one small flock)
Redstart (one)
Black Headed Gull (a few)
Robin (in the forest and hotel gardens)
Grey Wagtail (one in hotel garden)
Chaffinch (forest and gardens)
Little Grebe (several in wetland pools)
Collared Dove (flock near a small farm in the forest)
Cormorant
Pochard (commonly seen on the wetlands)
Great Egret (a few)
Cirl Bunting (one in bushes in path through the wetlands)
Kingfisher (one in bushes in path through the wetlands)
Ferruginous duck (one flock of about 10)
Red Backed Shrike (two seen near the wetlands)
Teal (common on wetlands)
Purple Heron (one passing juvenile)
Sardinian Warbler (one lucky confirmed sighting near the edge of the wetlands)
Blackbird (several heard but only one seen)
Great Tit (a few small flocks in the forest)
Sparrowhawk (one above wetlands on last day)
Goldfinch (small flock in marshy area with small bushes)
Stonechat (one in marshy area with small bushes)

Squacco
Heron



HOBBY
FALCON

Diary Dates continued

Friday 17th June 2016

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be followed by;

"**A long nature ramble from Truro to Exeter.** A talk with photos of flora, fauna and other items of interest along the South West Coast Path and across Dartmoor."

Speaker: **Barbara Foster** is a Welwyn Garden City resident and Digswell Lake member and has recently been raising money for charity by walking between cathedrals all over the country.



Friday 21st October 2016



Bee Awareness evening by the Welwyn Beekeepers

Speaker: **Mike Goodhew** is the Training Coordinator for Welwyn Beekeepers providing local education and training, and the Training Coordinator for Hertfordshire Beekeepers providing the more advanced and specialist training to all Hertfordshire Divisions.

Mike will be running a Bee Awareness session for us at Digswell. As part of the local education and training, Welwyn Beekeepers run Bee Awareness informal sessions, aimed to provide an overview of the Honeybee and the work of the Beekeeper for those just generally interested, and also for those considering taking up Beekeeping who might then wish to attend a Beekeeping Beginners course.

For information, for those interested in taking up Beekeeping, the Bee Awareness sessions are intentionally held in October each year just before the following March's Beekeeping Beginners course is advertised in November and is always very popular and oversubscribed. Due to the level of interest from Digswell members Mike has agreed to provide the dates of the courses to be held in March 2016 in WGC and we will email out to members and display details on the notice board at Digswell Lake.

Welwyn Beekeepers Association (WBKA) is a Division of Hertfordshire Beekeepers Association (HBKA), which is a County Area of the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA); set up in 1874 to promote and further the craft of beekeeping and to advance the education of the public in the importance of bees in the environment.

PROPOSED BRIDGE REPLACEMENT AT THE LAKE

Having formed a sub committee we compiled a set of criteria that we required for any replacement bridge structure - *long life, low maintenance, ascetically pleasing, integrity of the dam etc.* We then identified suitable contractors with the help of the internet, recommendations and contractors known to have been used by the Environment Agency for similar works. Following further investigation of the companies respective web sites and a check on their credit and trading status a list of around 10 was whittled down to 5. As the contractors were from all over the UK contact was made with them to obtain their best means of contact and their willingness to consider such a project at Digswell.

Summary packs were prepared giving an outline of the project and requirements, complete with photos and dimensions and these were dispatched to the 5 short-listed contractors. They were all invited to have a site visit and submit their proposals.

Subsequently one firm decided it was not a project for them and the remaining 4 arranged site visits and were shown round by either Peter Neville or myself. We have now received 4 proposals of which we have rejected one as it was both expensive and did not lay out any clear proposals of work, only further investigation. We are now in a position that we will be reviewing the final 3 before, hopefully, making a proposal to the directors at the next meeting in January.

There will undoubtedly be some more questions we will be asking the contractors before awarding any contract, but we have 3 interesting and different solutions on the table and all have their own merits.

James Godbold

Chief Operating Director and Vice Chairman

Please note

The cost of calling our 0845 number is made up of two parts: an access charge going to the callers phone company (3p pm), and a service charge set by the 0845 telephone provider (7p pm). A call would, therefore, cost 10p pm but could vary slightly depending upon your call package.



I am a member of the Digswell Lake Society and also the local co-ordinator for the [Herts & Middx Badger Group](#).

If you unhappily come across an injured or dead badger it can be registered on the following web site; hmbadgergroup.org.uk

Alternatively you can contact me - details below;
Frank DiLieto

Phone: 01707896938 07749759062

E-mail frankdilieto@ntlworld.com

Have a look at your web site.

DIGSWELL-LAKE.ORG.UK

Find
Contact details
Calendar of events
(e.g. work parties & talks)
Picture gallery - Newsletter
And more

Please send in articles, anecdotes and photographs which you feel may be of interest to other Society members.

bob.leys@ntlworld.com

Work Party Dates 2016

23 Jan	9am - 1pm	28 May	9am - 1pm	24 Sep	9am - 1pm
27 Feb	9am - 1pm	25 Jun	9am - 1pm	22 Oct	9am - 1pm
26 Mar	9am - 1pm	23 Jul	9am - 1pm	26 Nov	9am - 1pm
23 Apr	9am - 1pm	27 Aug	9am - 1pm	24 Dec	9am - 1pm

For more information please contact James Godbold; info@digswell-lake.org.uk

or telephone; 0845-003-5253

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2015/2016

The Society's subscription year runs from 1st April to 31st March

For those members making direct payment please, if you have not already done so, make your cheque payable to Digswell Lake Society and send it, with this completed slip, to the Treasurer,

Name

Address

Post code

Tel. no.

e-mail

Date

/

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FAMILY MEMBERSHIP £10.00

