

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 2019

Diary Dates

Friday 21st February 2020
Speaker and subject
to be confirmed on the Society's
web site and by e-mail.

AGM

Friday 19th June 2020
Digswell Village Hall
Start time 7.30 pm

Do visit your web site

digswell-lake.org.uk

for events, gallery,
work parties,
contact details and more.



All evening
meetings
commence at
7.30 pm
and are held
at the

Digswell Village Hall
Harmer Green Lane
Digswell

Admission charge
only £4.00

which includes
refreshments
Your friends are
most welcome
to come along
Ring Bob Leys
On 01707 321157
for information



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WORK PARTY DATES 2020

Jan	25th	Jul	25th
Feb	22nd	Aug	22nd
Mar	28th	Sep	26th
Apr	25th	Oct	24th
May	23rd	Nov	28th
Jun	27th	Dec	19th?

For more information please contact
James Godbold
info@digswell-lake.org.uk
or telephone; 0845-003-5253

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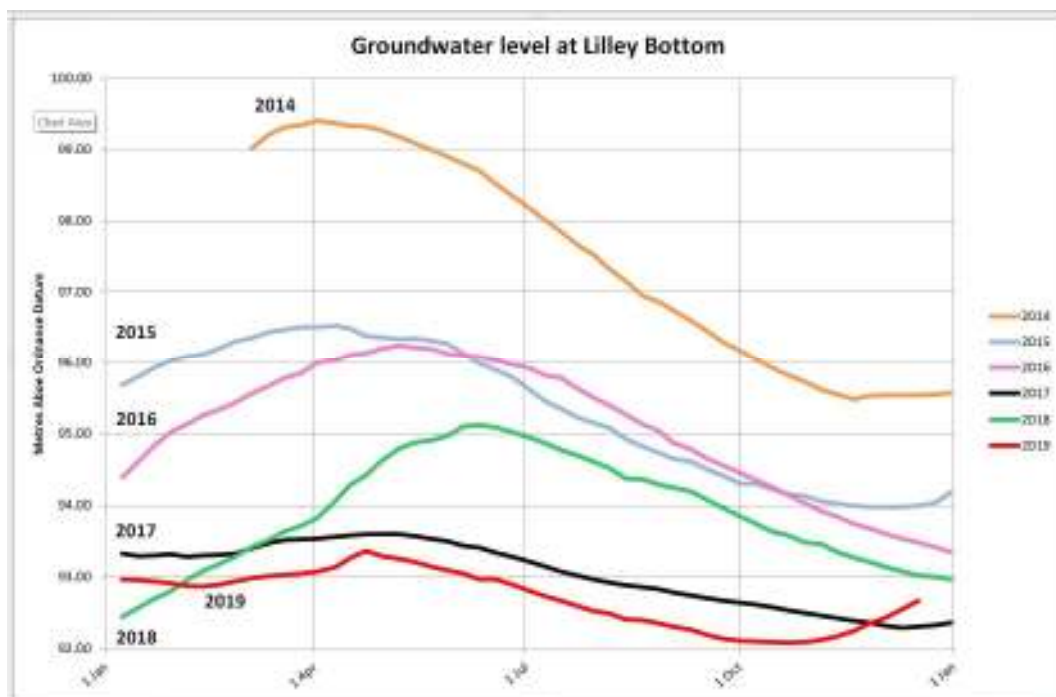
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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Sorry, I want a really wet winter!

At the risk of becoming a bit of a bore about the woeful state of our local river – indeed pretty much all of the other rivers in Hertfordshire – my hopes for a wet summer did not materialise. As a result groundwater levels continued to fall.

In the Spring newsletter I published a rather “busy” graph showing the decline in groundwater levels at Kimpton Mill. This time around I have Environment Agency data for the groundwater levels at Lilley Bottom (normally the head of the river). For anyone interested the up-to-date picture can be viewed at the GaugeMap website (www.gaugemap.co.uk/#!/Map/Summary/9152/4530).



As the graphs show with frightening clarity, groundwater levels fell to new lows this year with the result, as you will all know, that the Mimram stopped flowing from somewhere upstream of Singlers Marsh. First reports of this calamity came around the end of July with reports of dead and distressed fish in the centre of Welwyn village. This prompted a very rapid response from the Environment Agency whose staff collected as many living fish of all species as they could and transported them downstream to Archers Green, on the basis that the river was likely to continue to flow at that location (as it did). Sadly the very large trout living in the river just downstream of Mill Street didn't survive.

As groundwater levels continued to drop the length of dry river increased so that within a few weeks, although there was a trickle of water from Whitwell (where the river normally rises) to Codicote, the river effectively rose at Digswell Lake itself. Fortunately the Lake as you all will know, is fed from underground springs which did not dry up, though it must have been a close-run thing as the springs on the land upstream from the Lake (the land with the Hebridean sheep on it) seemed to disappear. If any member with a long memory does recall there ever being a time when water did not flow over the weir into the river, I'd like to know when that was.

So what impact will this have on the river? Most immediately the fish stocks in the dry sections of the river will have been wiped out unless the fish were able to move downstream with the receding water or (in some cases) were rescued and transported. Whether they will later be able to recolonise the dried up sections when water returns depends on their ability to negotiate the many barriers to passage that exist on the river. For instance the remains of old mills at Tewin Bury Farm and in the centre of Welwyn village (as well as other weirs) present insurmountable obstacles to the movement of fish upstream.

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Work Party Report

Compiled by James Godbold - Chief Operations Director & Vice Chairman.

Work parties have been well attended over the last 6 months.

There are as ever a number of repeat jobs, such as making sure the weir is clear and the pipes under Elliott's crossing are clear. Large volumes of leaves and floating vegetation are generally removed and allowed to decompose on land, while the remainder is encouraged through the pipes with the help of drain rods and chimney sweep brush. It is surprising the difference small changes in water flow, wind direction and consistency of vegetation has on its ability to flow or accumulate.



We have also continued to tackle the Himalayan Balsam at work parties and when we come across the plant. We have again had the assistance of Affinity Water and their contractors and have reduced further the ability of the plant to flower and produce seeds. This was tackled earlier in the year once the plant was identifiable and visible but before it had a chance to flower and seed. It has been noticeable that over the recent years the plant is be-

coming increasing more difficult to find. There is still more work to be done, but along with other land owners along the Mimram, progress is certainly noticeable year on year.

Those of you who have walked around the island path will have noticed a Willow walk; this has been planted with the aim of creating some interest and diversity. It is also hoped that the trees will help reduce the moisture content of the path, which historically becomes quite boggy in wet weather. Longer term it is hoped that the willows will grow tall enough to be able to be trained into an arch, which will certainly keep the ground dryer!

The river works of previous years have created narrower sections but sadly we have still not had sufficient rainfall or subsequent flow / water volume to scour the gravel bed and remove the silt. During a couple of work parties we have walked the river in sections to remove rubbish & debris and have managed to encourage a clear gravel section of river. Unfortunately at its current flow rate this is not being maintained. The Mimram at Panshanger is averaging around 0.35m, it would need to be around 3 times this level to present any flood danger and has a maximum recorded level of around 1.25m, so a little higher and a little more flow would be nice, but all too often over recent months the river flow has been near static when joining our site at Digswell Park Road bridge. For anybody who's interested, live data can be viewed at <https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/station/7336?direction=u>



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DIGSWELL LAKE BIRD REPORT
AUTUMN REPORT - 2019
 Compiled and submitted by Colin Hull

This report covers the period of March to September and is mainly about breeding data and summer visitors

I want to start by expressing my gratitude to Geoff Ralph for sending me spreadsheets of extensive additional observations that included some occurrences I did not see and was unaware of.

Mute Swan

One pair nested in the usual place at the west end of the lake. This year I noted 6 young hatched on the 10 June but later only five chicks were observed.

Coots

This year there were only two pairs on the lake and only the west –end pair produced any young in a nest located in some bank side Iris. The pair near the dam again failed to raise any young. An additional pair sometimes seen on the river near the dam also did not provide any evidence of successful breeding.

Buzzard and Sparrow Hawk

Special thanks to Geoff for this note that a pair of Buzzards nested in some trees near the viaduct although the outcome is not known. Geoff also had record of a possible nest belonging to Sparrow Hawk. Mike Livesey also sent me a record of a juvenile Sparrow Hawk with an adult that seems to confirm breeding had taken place.

Breeding Ducks

Geoff noted a female Mandarin with young on the river 19 July. Mallard and Tufted Duck were also observed with ducklings. I have a two records of Tufted Duck with 5 young and 7 young,

Moorhen

There was no precise count of breeding pairs but there were occurrences of juveniles later in the season.

Other breeding observations

Young birds were also seen for Blue Tit, Great Tit, Woodpigeon, Grey Wagtail and Robin. There was flock of Long Tailed Tits in June that could have included family groups. A pair of Little Grebe were observed with 3 young.

In respect of singing males that indicate potential breeding there were 2 Goldcrests, 1 Treecreeper, 2 Chiff Chaff, 3 Blackcap, 2 Song Thrush and 2 Blackbird, 1 Mistle Thrush, 9 Wren and Dunnock (not counted). Chiff Chaff alarm calls later in the season was probably indicative of nearby hidden young. One pair of Bullfinch also seen.

Other species observed during the period

Red Kite and Swift overhead, Green Woodpecker and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Ring necked parakeet on several visits. Blackbird, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw and Jay.

Special mention must also be made of single occurrences of Hobby (14 June, having a fight with a Buzzard) and Peregrine Falcon (2 July near Viaduct) and Reed Warbler (20 June), Tawny Owl (7 May) all spotted by Geoff.

Later in season Teal and Black Headed Gull.

Final Note

I always happy to hear from people who may also note the birds they see during visits as it helps to supplement my own data. Even reports of common birds are of interest, especially any counts. If you have any interesting sightings or information in connection with birds at the lake please contact me by phone or email (see below).

Colin Hull.

Tel 01438 813974

Email: colinhull88@btinternet.com

There are photo's overleaf of some of the birds highlighted in Colin's report. Ed.

buzzard

Credit: Tony Cox/WTML



Reed Warbler



Red kite

Credit: Our Wild Life Photography / Alamy Stock Photo



Sparrow hawk

© Denja1/Getty



Hobby

Credit: Helen Davies/Alamy Stock Photo-



continuation of Work Party Report from page 3

Over recent months we have also out sourced some serious tree works to a local contractor. This work was all subject to TPO's and had the full support and supervision of WHBC tree officer. The obvious works you will likely see is on the Chestnut trees that boarder the lake. These have all had limbs removed and the crowns reduced; in turn this has made the trees safer and better balanced and hopefully extended their life expectancy for a few more years. There have also been some less obvious tree works on some other trees due to their condition and proximity to paths or roads. Where possible the contractor has left suitable wood piles and chippings on site to enhance wildlife habitat and a number of trees, where deemed safe to do so, have been left as Totems for the benefit of bats and woodpeckers etc.

Additional work party tasks have included pumping of some silt from the lake, removal of excessive ivy growth from some trees, removal of Sycamore saplings and reduction of rhododendron.

There are many more tasks to complete, both planned and enforced so if any members have any spare time even if they cannot spare 4 hours, you would be most welcome to join us on the 4th Saturday of each month. See <https://www.digswell-lake.org.uk/work-parties/>

James Godbold

Down at the Lake



A Crayfish from the Mimram



What a difference two years can make.



Elevenes for our Work Party volunteers

continuation of Chairman's Report from page 2

But that is not the only impact the dry spell will have. Much of the life of the river depends on the availability (as food) of insect larvae and other aquatic invertebrates which typically live in the top three to five inches of the river bed. The Mimram is a chalk stream and most of its insect population is adapted to living in clean, fast flowing and well-oxygenated water. If the river dries out or even if these conditions are not met, the larvae will not survive. Will they be able to recolonise the river when it flows again? As larvae they move only very short distances and then generally only downstream with the current. When many of them emerge as flying insects in the late Spring (think "Mayflies") they may travel a bit further both up and downstream but even then only relatively short distances. Still, with the river managing to survive upstream there is a good chance that the river will recover over time. The question is how long will that recovery take? As some of you will know a group of volunteers from the Riverfly Partnership (www.riverflies.org) monitor the insect life – and thus the health of the river – on a monthly basis. Currently there are 20 monitored sites from Whitwell down to Panshanger Park and Nature Reserve. While sites in the dry sections of the river could not be sampled, when sampling is able to be restarted it will be possible through their efforts to assess the how quickly the river is recovering.

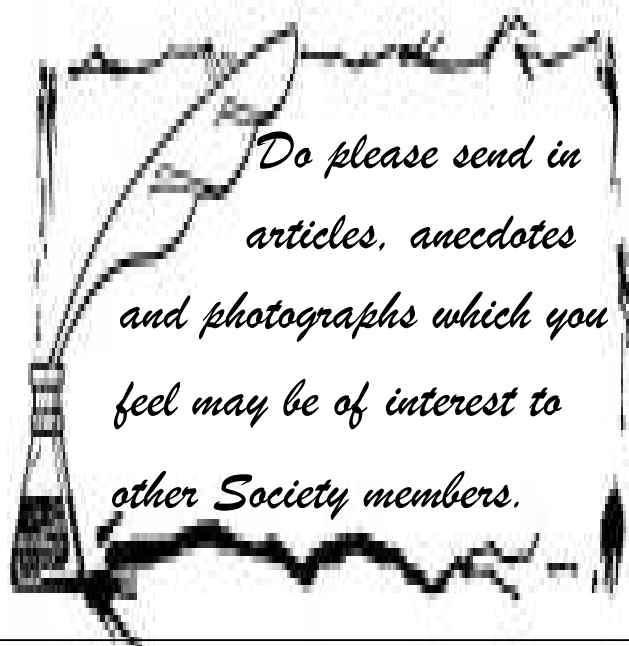
In fact, following the relatively wet November (121% of the long term average rainfall for November fell last month), the river has recently started to flow and a sample has been taken at Singlers Marsh. Perhaps predictably this came up with a score of zero meaning that none of the insect larvae normally regarded as indicators of a good, healthy chalk stream were present. Still, early days and with the weather forecast to remain unsettled, things can only get better.

Changing the topic you will have seen (and read in James's report) the work that has been done to manage some of the more elderly trees at the Lake. This work is outside the abilities of our dedicated band of volunteers and has had to be contracted out, with more to be done hopefully before the bird nesting season starts next year. But that leaves a lot of management work that needs to be and can be done by members of the Society. Work parties take place every month and the more members we have helping out, the more we can get done. Any more volunteers?

And finally, though in a similar vein, the Society is run by a committee of its directors. This committee meets quarterly to address the issues which arise in the management of the Lake and its surrounds. We are currently short of members on the committee and in particular are short of a member willing to take on the rôle of Company Secretary. Can I ask anyone who feels they could spare a few hours every third month to assist in the running of the Society to get in touch with me?

Well, that's it save to wish everyone a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy (and wet) New Year.

Simon Stebbings





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