

Newsletter - May 2006

Diary Dates

Hedgerow Herb Walk- Sunday 28th May 2006

Come along for a Sunday morning walk and discover the wonderful properties of the wild plants and trees growing around Digswell Lake. Medical Herbalist and Committee member Mary Barton will help you to recognise some wild herbs and learn about how they have been traditionally used for food and medicine.

When? Sunday 28th May at 11 a.m. for a gentle walk lasting an hour or so.

Where? By the main gate.

Who? All welcome.

Why? To celebrate National Herbal Medicine Awareness Week- and to have some fun on a Sunday morning.

Friday 9th June 2006

AGM — followed by:- Lemsford Springs Nature Reserve Guided tour and update..... Speaker is Barry Trevis

Barry is the Resident Warden and travels extensively.

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Friday 6th October 2006

Autumn: Season of Mists..... Speaker June Crew

June is Secretary of the Cheshunt Natural History Society and will be pointing out the delights to be seen in the countryside.

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17th November 2006

Gardening for Butterflies.....Speaker is Alan Downie

Alan is a gardening adviser for butterfly conservation and can be seen at most outdoor nature exhibitions locally.

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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Elsewhere in this Newsletter is your formal notice of the Digswell Lake Society AGM, which will start at 7.30pm on Friday 9 June 2006 at Digswell Village Hall (30 Harmer Green Lane). You are warmly invited to attend, as your Committee greatly welcome your feedback on our stewardship of the Lake. Indeed, if you feel we have not

been doing well enough, you are still in time to give notice to stand at the AGM to join the Committee (and there is every chance you will be elected!).

Still looking at your Committee, I am delighted to report that two Society members have recently agreed to join the Committee, and you will be asked to confirm them in office at the AGM.

One is Mary Barton, a local herbalist who led a successful walk around the Lake, viewing medicinal plants growing wild, and who subsequently enthralled one of our evening lecture-meetings with her wide-ranging and deep knowledge of the subject. Her botanical expertise fills a long-standing gap on the Committee.

The other is Carole Dale, who has nobly agreed to take on the Membership-Secretary/Treasurer role after a suitable induction and handover period alongside Mary Clements. Mary has quietly and efficiently performed these functions for several decades, starting when the membership was about thirty (it is now 450), and, perfectly understandably, she feels she would now like to "spend more time with her family." When she does decide to leave the Committee altogether, as she intends, her wise and common-sense approach to Society matters (not just its membership and financial administration) will be sorely missed.

After the AGM has considered the above and all its other formal business, our guest Barry Trevis will speak to us about nearby Lemsford Springs Nature Reserve, with which he is intimately familiar.

If you have visited the Lake, you will have admired the much improved gate. However, when we completed the job by fitting a spanking new barrel to the lock, we had an unpleasant surprise: hardly anybody's key would work the lock. We tried our small stock of reserve keys (kept in store for new members), and they didn't work either. Temporarily, we have left the gate unlocked, as the lesser evil.

There do exist press-button combination locks, the sort with ten numbered keys, press four of them and it releases the latch. This would be a way of limiting access to the Lake to Members, who would be told the number via the Newsletter, and it would save on the production of 450 new keys, but on the other hand, if we were occasionally to change the number (to keep out lapsed members), it is in the nature of things that the new number will fail to reach some genuine members, or there will be misunderstanding about exactly when the old number ceases to be valid, with the same consequence, namely that some genuine members will be locked out. We are currently examining a heavy-duty new make of lock, and if we have all new keys cut in one production run, it should reliably admit all members, a benefit that may well be considered worth the expense.

Our grass cutting contractor Stephen Jupp continues to do an excellent job at a very fair price, increased from last year only by such amount as will cover his increased fuel costs. He also assists from time to time with other specialised woodlands-maintenance work and we value the long-term ongoing relationship that has grown up.

When I first got to know the Lake in the late 1970s, the south side was largely open greensward, including vistas over Bessemer Road. Coinciding with an offer of free trees to groups such as ours, we engaged in a vigorous tree-planting programme in the 1990s to

improve the screening of the Lake from Bessemer Road, and we are still occasionally generously offered trees to commemorate Members' loved ones. The Committee has kept a close watch on the consequent progressive reduction of the greensward, and has now decided that it has reached its minimum effective size, bearing in mind its contribution to the visual setting of the Lake and the pleasure it gives to visitors. We will henceforth try to prevent further encroachment, so that the "parkland" aspect of the Lake is preserved. The constitution obliges us to balance the "parkland" and "nature-reserve" aspects of the Lake.

If you have any views on this, the AGM is your chance!

Peter Neville

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WELNEY WILDFOWL AND WETLANDS CENTRE

Article kindly submitted by Jenny Brewster

I have visited Welney, near Ely in Cambridgeshire, three times now and it never fails to enthral me.

The centre is one of several reserves owned by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust founded by Peter Scott. His aim in founding the Trust was to bring wildlife and people together and this certainly happens at Welney. It differs from the other centres at Slimbridge and Arundel because there are no captive birds. All are completely free and wild.

The stars are undoubtedly the Whooper and Bewick's swans. They fly thousands of miles, from Iceland and Siberia, in the autumn to escape the freezing winters and then migrate back again in the spring. They feed in the fenland fields surrounding the reserve and then, as the light begins to fade, come flocking in to roost for the night – the Whooper swans honking loudly.

The reserve provides birdwatching in luxury as there is a large heated hide and floodlights outside to illuminate the birds as they fly in. It is a magical sight to see them landing on the water outlined by a wonderful sunset on a crisp winter's day.

There are many other birds to see, including hundreds of pochard who gather to feed with the swans. Other (unheated!) hides offer views of lapwing, snipe, shoveler, tufted duck, greylag geese and many other water birds. There is also a little café where they serve lovely homemade cakes. A new visitor centre is just being built so it will be even better next year. I shall just have to make another visit !

Editors note.

Details below are taken from the WWT web site and are, hopefully, correct with regards to cost and times.

Welney Wildfowl & Wetlands Centre

Hundred Foot Bank, Welney
Wisbech, PE14 9TN

Information: 01353 860711

Fax: 01353 860711

Email: info@wetley@wwt.org.uk

Open: Open daily 10am - 5pm (except Christmas day). Late opening until 8pm from mid-November until the end of February every day except Mondays, Tuesdays, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve (when it closes at 5pm)

Cost: Adults, £3.90; Concessions, 2.90; Children, £2.50

The wetlands at Welney, on the Ouse Washes, are home to spectacular winter gatherings of wild swans. In the summer, Welney offers an opportunity to see many species of rare waders and other wildlife.

Car (inc. parking) Free parking

Disabled Access Wheelchair access to the centre, main observatory, birdwatching hides and reedbed boardwalk

Disabled Parking Yes

Disabled Toilet Yes

Toilets Yes

Food Tearoom

Shop Gift and book shop; binocular hire

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Digswell Lake Bird Report 2006

compiled and submitted by

Colin Hull

Introduction

During the year 15 visits were made to the site with most made during the spring and summer to monitor breeding birds. In addition Tom Gladwin submitted a report to me for 14th Nov.

Highlights

Monitoring of Coot and Moorhen nesting was the main focus of attention in spring and summer plus some monitoring of spring/summer visitors. The presence of Garden Warbler on site was less usual as they do not appear on site every year. Little Grebes nested on the river again. In the winter periods Siskin were again present in small flocks in the Alders near the river. Tom Gladwin also reported 2 Redpoll. There was a Sparrowhawk on 31st Dec.

Pride of place this year are two records for Water Rail. These secretive birds tend to hide in bankside vegetation and reeds. More often heard than seen. I heard one in February and Tom Gladwin reported one in November. Not sure if they were present in between or only occurring as winter visitors. Tom Gladwin also reported a Lesser Redpoll.

Full species list

In the species list below the following designations are given:-

- R Resident, may be seen all year round.
- P Passage visitor on migration in spring and autumn
- W Winter visitor (typically Sept-Apr)
- S Summer visitor (typically Mar-Sept)
- B Breeds on or near site
- Oc Occasionally present
- R Rare occurrence
- Red. High conservation concern because of national or regional decline
- Amber. Medium conservation concern because of national or regional decline

Little Grebe. R/B. One pair present in breeding season. One nesting attempt was observed but the outcome was uncertain because no young were observed.

Grey Heron. Oc. One seen twice in December near the viaduct.

Gadwall W/P/Amb. Present in small numbers in Spring and Autumn with a maximum of 14 on the 9th April.

Tufted Duck. W/S/B. Up to 2 pairs present on various dates.

Mallard. R./B Present on most visits and included a male hybrid. There was one family of ducklings seen.

Canada Goose, Oc. A pair was present February -April.

Sparrowhawk. Oc. One of this year's highlights with a female observed on 31st Dec.

Kestrel. Oc. Not noted this year.

Pheasant Oc. 1-2 on some visits. I received one report of a female with young.

Moorhen. R/B./Amb Up to 8 seen at any one time. The only evidence of nesting was a female carrying nest material near the lake and a pair with young on the river.

Coot. R/B. There were 2 pairs on the lake and 1 pair on the river near the dam. Each had one successful brood.

Water Rail. R. Unusual and welcome records in February and November.

Black Headed Gull. W/P. Apart from some flying overhead on several dates there was a flock of 15 settled on the lake on 31st Dec.

Stock Dove. W/S. 1-2 seen on some visits.

Wood Pigeon. R. Tom Gladwin counted 14. Always noted a few on every visit.

Kingfisher. W/S/B/Amb. 1 noted on 17 Aug and 14 Nov

Green Woodpecker. R. 1-2 seen or heard on several visits.
Great Spotted Woodpecker. R. 2 noted on 18th June.
Swift, S. A few sighted overhead in June.
Swallow. S/Amb. None noted this year.
House Martin. S. None noted this year.
Carrion Crow. R.1-2 on several visits.
Rook. Not normally seen on site but nest in a tree nearby and seen in adjacent fields.
Jackdaw. R/B. Max of 20 noted by Tom Gladwin.
Jay. R.. 1 on 31st Dec was the only record for the year.
Magpie. R. 1-2 on several visits
Great Tit R/B and. Blue Tit. R/B Seen and heard on most visits
Coal Tit. R/B. The only records this year were for December.
Long Tailed Tit. R/B. A few on several visits
Nuthatch. R/B. One calling in March.
Treecreeper. R/B.2, possibly 3 noted by Tom Gladwin.
Wren. R/B. Up to 6 singing males noted in breeding season.
Mistle Thrush. R/B./Amb 2 singing males in March.
Song Thrush. R/B/Red. 3 singing males in April is a good number for the site.
Redwing. Oc/W. and **Fieldfare.** Oc/W. Neither were noted this year.
Robin. R/B. Up to 6 singing males in March-April.
Blackcap. S/B. Only 1 singing male noted during the season.
Chiff chaff. S/B. 2 singing males in Mar-May was usual for the site.
Garden Warbler. Oc/S/B. Not always present each year and several sightings during Apr-May probably indicated a breed pair this year.
Goldcrest. R/B. There were no spring or summer records this year but 3 were noted in November.
Spotted Flycatcher. Oc/S/Red. A species much in decline. No records this year.
Pied Wagtail. Oc. No records this year.

Grey Wagtail. Oc/W/S/Amb. No records this year
Starling. Oc/Amb No records

Chaffinch. Oc/R. One record in April

Goldfinch. Oc./Amb. No records.

Siskin. W. None were recorded Jan-Mar but three flocks of 30-60 in December.
Lesser Redpoll. Oc/W. Reported by Tom Gladwin in November.
Bullfinch. Oc/Red. No records.

Colin Hull would be pleased to hear of your "sightings" at the Lake.

Colin's telephone number is: - 01707 390424

Lakeside Photo's

If you have a photograph, taken at the Lake, that you would like to share with other members of the Society please send it in (preferably by e- mail) for possible inclusion in the Winter issue. Please bear in mind that photos will be printed in black and white.

The Society does, however, have a web site -www.digswell-lake.org.uk - with a gallery of photos in colour so you may wish to have your photo considered for inclusion therein. Please send your photo(s) to Bob Leys the address and e-mail details of whom are shown below:

401 Knightsfield
Welwyn Garden City
Herts AL8 7LY
bob.leys@ntlworld.com

WORK PARTY REPORT

On the three work parties this year a total of 15 bags of rubbish have been collected. The weir has been cleared; a fallen tree and large log removed from the lake; dead wood removed from some trees; scrub cleared; boundary hedges and fences repaired and graffiti erased from garage door. Two of the three main gates have been refurbished and the third should be done within the next month.

A lot more could be and has to be done but we do suffer a lack of people power. We need more volunteers. Why not come and join us; no skills required just a willingness to assist on the fourth Sunday morning in the month - 9 to 12 ish with coffee and biscuits provided at half time!

Bob Leys on behalf of James Godbold