



BRACKNELL DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER

2011
– ISSUE 89 –

DRAGONFLIES

The beautiful warm weather of April and May led to lots of spectacularly early dragonfly records. The last newsletter listed local records to the end of April. More fascinating records were collected from local sites in May. Two species – Hairy Dragonfly and Beautiful Demoiselle – have been regarded as visitor species in Bracknell Forest Borough, because they have only been seen sporadically in the past. But further sightings of these species this year, following last year's records, suggests that they may now be resident in the Borough. In 2010 Hairy Dragonfly was recorded at 3 sites – Englemere Pond, Swinley Brick Pits and Whitmoor Bog - the first local records for over ten years. This year this species has again been recorded at Englemere and Swinley Brick Pits. In addition it has been seen at Chaucer Woods (Wellington College) Ponds in Crowthorne, Rapley Lake, Swinley Forest, and Felix Farm Trout Fishery (Binfield). Turning to the Beautiful Demoiselle, it has been found in small numbers amongst the much more frequent Banded Demoiselles, as a result of careful monitoring of the River Blackwater, at two sites in Sandhurst - Shepherd Meadows and near Horseshoe Lake.

Since the ideal conditions experienced in April and May, the weather has certainly turned for the worst. Like humans, dragonflies like sunshine. The cool, cloudy and wet weather during June and July has kept flying dragonfly numbers down to levels much lower than normal.

Although not in Bracknell Forest Borough, Des Sussex obtained an interesting dragonfly record recently. On 1 July, he observed a Scarce Chaser 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.

John Ward-Smith

DIARY

WORK PARTIES

For details of the Group's work parties please contact Peter Knipe
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BRACKNELL FOREST NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

(www.bfnathistsoc.org)

South Hill Park, 7.30 pm

19 Sept

Corsica—Mountains in the Med.

By Mike Read

18 Oct

Owls

By Chrissie Harper

21 Nov

Tree Aid

By Helen Read

BBOWT EVENTS

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

NATURE NOTES by David Lloyd

Have you noticed that many of the grassy areas of the town on roadsides and roundabouts are full of low-growing yellow flowers this summer? These are usually hawkbits, related to the dandelion, or one of the vetches related to clover and others of the pea family. While we are used to seeing the grass often full of dandelions and buttercups in the spring followed by clover and daisies in summer, let's hope the new arrivals continue flowering in summers to come. At the time of writing in mid-July, Larges Lane Cemetery has abundant areas of pink-purple Betony and yellow vetches in the grass. To follow in August we should again have Devils-bit Scabious, one of the 24 species on the Bracknell Biodiversity Action Plan. At Lark's Hill in Harvest Ride, Warfield, the areas at the lower, western end which were full of summer cornfield flowers last year, have now been ploughed and re-sown after the end of the dry spell in May. One area is sown with Sunflowers and other plants, another area to provide seed food for wintering birds

The main subject of concern this last May was the dreadful forest fires in Swinley Forest and Crowthorne Woods. The principal ingredients of very dry ground, a keen easterly wind, combustible material and public access giving a tempting scenario to light fires were all present. With some 300 hectares affected and 55 per cent damaged it has been a very worrying time for the Forest Commission and the emergency services. The Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service were nobly assisted by firefighters from many different other units and it took many, many hours for it all to be controlled. Mainly young plantation trees with some mature trees as well need to be cleared and plans are already in hand to plant between 60,000 and 70,000 new trees after the end of the bird-nesting season. Attention will be given to establishing more and better firebreaks to help contain future wildfires. Most evident is the wide clearance of the roadsides along part of Foresters Way where the fires ripped across to the Crowthorne side helped by strong winds. While birds lost nests and young, they seem to have returned to make second attempts. Animal, insect and reptile life is returning. Plenty of work will go into restoring wet areas particularly for dragonflies which are a much loved feature of the area.

We have enjoyed much beautiful singing by blackbirds from early spring. Starting well before 5am in midsummer till late in the evening the full extent of their repertoire has been heard. Now the singing has stopped while moulting takes place. Robins and Tits and their young were badly affected by the lack of soft insect food during the very dry, hot spell which coincided with their breeding this year. This was followed by a spell with no Robins or Tits to be seen or heard, but in mid-July they seem to be back.

Parties of Swifts have been enjoyed, mainly a group of six birds spending all day with their shrill calls over rooftops in our part of Bracknell. By early August they will be off on migration once again. I enjoyed one evening of Nightjar watching at Caesar's Camp early in July. I think there were four adults calling and flying around after sunset over the heath catching insects. I had a good number of close views of the birds flying only feet away from me. Hopefully there were nestlings in the heather still not on the wing then. A good view of a Tawny Owl flying across the heath and of a Woodcock nearby helped to make it a good hour well spent. I was in a group of walkers down in Swinley Forest not far from Rapley Lake when we found a Siskin down in the grass searching for food. These small finches with brown and yellow markings are well known as winter visitors in flocks around this area. But it seems that each year a few are seen staying through the summer and breeding. A few are reported each summer. As last year Oystercatchers have bred at Theale and Twyford gravel pits. These handsome black and white birds with long orange bills and legs live on rocky coasts on limpets and other shellfish exposed by the tides. Will they find enough of their shellfish in freshwater lakes or perhaps they will gradually change to more available diets if they continue living inland?

Looking back at the weather for the months of March, April and May, we experienced warm dry conditions in April and into May, some 5-6degC above average in South-East England, the highest recorded ever, with many sunny days, and rainfall amounts a record for over 100 years. Since late May, we have recovered our rainfall which has helped to restore growing conditions for farmers, cooler temperatures and only short hot spells early and late in June. It has helped the grasses, bracken and other vegetation return quickly in the fire-damaged areas of Swinley Forest, hiding from view much of the blackened ground.

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BRACKNELL'S WILD ORCHIDS

2011 has been a good year for Bracknell's wild orchids. The count of 118 Early Purple Orchid at their main Bracknell site was down on the past three years, but no cause for concern. In June, there were good numbers of Twayblade on the grass bank outside BMW on the Southern Industrial Estate, many of them fine specimens. Later in the month, on the same bank, the display of between 300 and 400 flowering spikes of Common Spotted Orchids was as spectacular as last year. There were originally 12 flowering spikes of Early Marsh Orchid on the grass banks at the Running Horse roundabout. However, six spikes were cut off by a council worker using a strimmer, one was picked by the public, leaving just five. The Borough Council are fully aware of this important site - there are two large "Blooming Biodiversity" boards prominently on display. So one has to ask the question: "Why do the Council allow a strimmer anywhere near this important site during the flowering season?" In the hay meadow at Lily Hill Park about 16 Early Marsh Orchids or hybrids with Common Spotted Orchid appeared this year, down on last year's count. Also, they were smaller specimens due to the dry spring. Pure specimens of Common Spotted Orchid were also present at the site but their numbers were not counted. About 50 flowers of Pyramidal Orchid were present on the bank behind the Old Manor, another fine display following last year's total of 60. For the second year running, a single Pyramidal Orchid flowered at Twin Bridges Roundabout, after an interval of several years since its previous flowering in 2004. At Gormoor Valley, 7 spikes of Southern Marsh orchids flowered, the highest count since records for this site started in 1995. For the second year running, 11 bee orchids appeared on Ascot Race Course (admittedly just outside our patch), equalling the highest count for the site. The mixed colony of Common Spotted and Heath Spotted Orchids, and their hybrids, once again put on a fine display at Broadmoor Bottom. Indeed the colony expanded in size this year.

John Ward-Smith

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

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, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

YOU COULD EDIT THIS NEWSLETTER!

I have recently moved out of Bracknell and wish to hand over the production of this newsletter. Only basic computer skills are required. The template is based on Microsoft Publisher but many other packages can be used including Word.

This would give someone an ideal opportunity to develop and improve the newsletter. Full training and continued support will be available. Please contact the editor for more details.

FROM THE EDITOR

Please can we have your contributions to the next newsletter by Saturday 29th October
All articles on our local wildlife and habitats will be very welcome.

Please send to: David Rowe,
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BUTTERFLIES

There have been several interesting butterfly sightings during June and July. On 4 July, a Purple Emperor was seen by Chris Gent, whilst doing a bird survey in Swinley Forest near the Lower Star Post. Coincidentally, a second was reported from the Wishmoor Bottom area on the Berkshire/ Surrey border on the same day. Then, on a group walk on 15 July, a male Purple Emperor was observed at Bush Fields, Swinley Forest. As far as I am aware, these are the first records of this species from this area south of Bracknell. Silver-washed Fritillaries have been observed at Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield, for the third year running. This species has also been seen by the River Blackwater, near Horseshoe Lake, Sandhurst, near Rapley Lake, Swinley Forest, and at Swinley Brick Pits, between Ascot and Bracknell. It is pleasing to report that the Small Tortoiseshell seems to be making a comeback, though numbers are still far short of those of ten/fifteen years ago. Plenty of Red Admirals have been seen on the wing.

The Silver-studded Blue has had a particularly good year at its Broadmoor Bottom site, with counts higher than for many years. Sightings have also been reported from Wildmoor Heath and Wishmoor Bottom.

John Ward-Smith



Yellow-tail

Ruby Tiger



MOTHS

By David Rowe

The moth trapping I introduced in the last Newsletter (Summer #87) has continued apace but at a different location. It is difficult to compare the two sites due to changing seasons and local weather conditions, but I feel that Forest Park with the nearby heathland, conifers and ancient trees gave better moth numbers than the urban / agricultural / riparian Wargrave.

None the less, I have found some superb moths in recent weeks including Ruby Tiger, Swallowtail, Scalloped Oak, Dusky Sallow and last week a Dark Spinach. The star though, having nothing to do with the moth trap, was the day-flying Humming-bird Hawkmoth feeding on Buddleia in the garden.

My current total of 90 species has also been added to by an additional site, my workplace in rural Winkfield. Several of my colleagues have been bitten by the bug, so to speak. Two have their own traps and a few others join in the early morning inspection of walls and widows where we have found Riband Wave, Yellow tail, Oak hook-tip and this morning sheltering from the rain an Early Thorn.



Dusky Sallow

Dark Spinach

