

WILDLIFE SURVEY

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2014



Toadstools growing in our grassed areas
Great Tit at the bird feeding station

Introduction

Winter is always a quiet time for wildlife on the site. Insect activity has all but ceased, very few plants are in flower and the trees have lost their leaves.

Instead the focus is the birds on the site. They are working hard finding enough to eat and are easier to see at this time of year now that the leaves are off all of the deciduous trees and shrubs.

Two new initiatives to encourage more wildlife activity on the nursery are also reported in this survey.

Butterfly Survey

Routine surveying is ended for this year but there may be butterflies about if the weather is warm enough.

The 27th October was very warm and sunny. The warmth was sufficient to get butterflies to take to the wing. There were four Red Admirals, one Small Tortoiseshell and two Clouded Yellow butterflies flying on that day. These were seen by chance and not because a proper survey was being conducted so it is possible there were more insects on the wing at that time.

November included some unusually warm days with sun and Red Admirals were seen flying around.

Since then all the sightings have been of insects that have been awakened as the glasshouses have been warmed up now that the 2015 tomato crop is planted.

Bees (and other pollinators)

During December five bee hotels were placed around the site. These boxes are designed to provide a suitable home for solitary bees. These insects are in general decline in the UK. This loss of pollinators could result in poorer yields for some crops. Providing artificial nesting sites may be part of a solution to this decline. Solitary bees are generally docile and not inclined to sting but standing just in front of a hotel if insects are going in and out is not recommended.

Our hotels have four compartments filled with tubes that the bees can adopt as a home. The tubes are of different materials and sizes to attract different species to use the hotel.

The hotels we have chosen are from a company called The Red Beehive Company who are able to supply us with advice and support in addition to just selling the hotels. Sainsbury's are very committed to these hotels as a way of helping pollinating insects. They have them installed at over 100 of their stores. As a result of the success they have had themselves they are

Bee hotel, one of the five that are on the nursery

encouraging their suppliers; particularly suppliers like ourselves where the business primarily in a built environment to install hotels as well.



Bird Survey

This period is notable for the addition of three more species to the nursery list which brings this year's total up to 45 species. Yellowhammer and Common partridge were reported as living on the nursery by Darren Ireland and in addition solitary Goldcrest was spotted in the birch trees during a weekend in November.

In November we started a bird feeding station using a variety of different bird feeders, this is located among the birch trees next to the main reservoir.

This initiative was planned in spring 2014 to see if we could improve the nursery performance in the "big farmland bird count" which is a survey organised by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and supported and promoted by LEAF.

The station has five feeders at present. These contain sunflower hearts, fat balls and suet strands. All of the feeds were purchased from the RSPB. After a slow first few weeks when there was very little activity the feeders are now being regularly visited and six species have been seen on them. The most numerous have been goldfinches with more than 12 present on occasions. It is planned to have a second feeding station near the main office in operation early in 2015.

Below is the species list covering 2014.

BIRD SURVEY DATA 2014									
SPECIES	JAN MAR 2014	APR JUNE 2014	JULY SEPT 2014	OCT DEC 2014	SPECIES	JAN MAR 2014	APR JUNE 2014	JULY SEPT 2014	OCT DEC 2014
BLACKBIRD	✓	✓	✓	✓	HOUSE SPARROW	✓	✓	✓	✓
BLACK CAP	✗	✗	✗	✗	JAY	✓	✓	✓	✓
BLACK HEADED GULL	✓	✓	✓	✓	KESTREL	✓	✓	✗	✓
BLUE TIT	✓	✓	✓	✓	LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL	✗	✓	✓	✓
BULLFINCH	✗	✗	✗	✗	LINNET	✓	✓	✓	✗
BUZZARD	✓	✓	✓	✓	LITTLE EGRET	✗	✗	✓	✗
CANADA GOOSE	✗	✗	✗	✓	LITTLE GREBE	✓	✓	✓	✓
CARRION CROW	✓	✓	✓	✓	LONG TAILED TIT	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHAFFINCH	✓	✓	✓	✓	MAGPIE	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHIFFCHAFF	✗	✓	✓	✗	MALLARD	✓	✓	✓	✓
COLLARED DOVE	✓	✓	✓	✓	MOORHEN	✓	✓	✓	✓
COMMON PARTRIDGE	✗	✗	✗	✓	MUTE SWAN	✓	✓	✓	✓
COOT	✓	✓	✓	✗	PHEASANT	✗	✗	✗	✓
CORMORANT	✗	✗	✗	✗	PIED WAGTAIL	✓	✓	✓	✓
DUNNOCK	✓	✓	✓	✓	ROBIN	✓	✓	✓	✓
GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER	✗	✗	✗	✗	SHELDUCK	✗	✓	✗	✗
GREAT TIT	✓	✓	✓	✓	SWALLOW	✗	✓	✓	✗
GREEN FINCH	✗	✓	✓	✓	SWIFT	✗	✗	✗	✗
GREEN WOODPECKER	✓	✓	✓	✓	SONG THRUSH	✓	✓	✓	✓
GREY HERON	✓	✗	✓	✗	SPARROW HAWK	✗	✓	✓	✓
GREY WAGTAIL	✓	✓	✓	✓	TUFTED DUCK	✓	✓	✓	✓
GOLDCREST	✓	✓	✓	✓	WHITETHROAT	✗	✓	✓	✗
GOLDFINCH	✓	✓	✓	✓	WOOD PIGEON	✓	✓	✓	✓
HERRING GULL	✓	✓	✓	✓	YELLOWHAMMER	✗	✗	✗	✓
					WREN	✓	✓	✓	✓
					SPECIES COUNT THIS PERIOD	37	37	38	36
					SPECIES COUNT THIS YEAR	38	38	40	45
					SPECIES COUNT 2012 ONWARDS	44	44	45	49

LEAF marque global standard audit section 8.24

This part of the LEAF audit specifies provision of bird food through the year. There are around the nursery many plants that have berries etc that are good for birds in the winter months; this includes Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Rose. The audit though requires additional food to be provided. The audit allows supplementary feeding with seed. The feeding station by the reservoir satisfies this part of the audit.



Goldfinches, Chaffinch, Blue Tit and great Tit on the new bird feeders



This Sparrowhawk is certainly bird brained!

In October a male Sparrowhawk became trapped in the PQR boiler house. No one saw the bird get in but it is presumed that it happened while it was chasing a bird which knew how to get in and out; either through the door or another gap in the fabric of the building. The Sparrowhawk was incapable of finding the door even though it was left wide open for 24 hours. Instead it was flying repeatedly from end to end of the building and crashing into the glass whenever it was disturbed.

After 24 hours it was decided that more direct action would need to be taken to get the bird out. Observation had shown that on the eastern gable the bird would usually strike the glass high up in a predictable spot. All the tools needed were gathered together to remove six panes of glass in this part of the building using a safety cage mounted on the forklift truck. The expectation was that having removed the glass there would be quite a wait before the Sparrowhawk managed to fly out of the opening. In the event the bird flew out almost immediately giving a scare to a couple of passing crows which found that a Sparrowhawk had apparently appeared from nowhere! Hopefully the bird has learnt not to fly in a second time.

Mammals

The new bird feeders are attracting the attention of Grey Squirrels. At the moment they have not found a way of accessing the feeders directly, though this may change as they are very persistent in the hunt for food. Instead they are taking advantage of the seed that the birds are dropping on the floor. The gold finches in particular like to drop a lot of seed. It is not planned to deliberately feed the squirrels but having them clear up the fallen food keeps the area tidy.



Trees

There has been little mention so far in the periodic wildlife reports of the trees on the nursery site. They are



though an important part of making the nursery an attractive place for wildlife.

The two pictures show Wild Gean in flower creating a feeding opportunity for pollinators and a maturing row of mainly native trees providing shelter from the wind creating a climate that is more hospitable for insects.

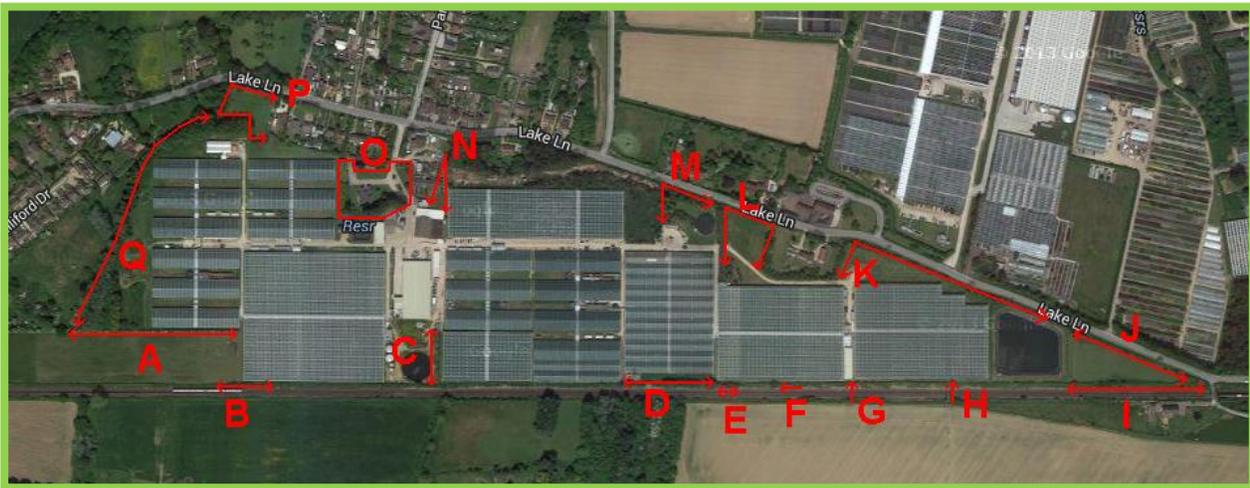
Some of the plantings are more beneficial for wildlife than others but even a row of Leyland Cypress planted primarily as a shelter belt for the glasshouses has benefits for wildlife. A dense Leyland Cypress hedge may not provide a great place for a bird to forage for insects but that bird will find it a relatively warm place to roost on a cold winter night, or when it is being chased by a Sparrowhawk a great place to hide. At nesting time there are places to conceal a nest so don't automatically assume that a non native tree is all bad.

We have around twenty young trees ready for planting that have been grown in pots from seedlings found on the nursery. Species include Oak, Hawthorn and Holly. These will be planted in appropriate places next month.

TREE SURVEY

This is the first survey of the trees on this site for some years. The objective is to get an overview of what species are on the site and where they have been planted.

The site has been broken up into a set of lettered areas so the populations in each part can be described as shown on the map below.



Area A

This is an old hedge comprised predominantly of mature Hawthorn plants. Within this hawthorn hedge there is also a short section of Blackthorn and an Elderberry. This is an old hedge that would have once been on the nursery boundary.

Area B

A short section of mature Blackthorn bushes right on the boundary with the railway.

Area C

This is part of an old hedge, probably the hedge mentioned in area A would once have continued as far as this hedge. This is mature Hawthorn with one Elderberry in amongst it.

Area D

Half the length of this strip is taken with Lombardy Poplar trees which have been pollarded on occasions. This is probably to reduce the shade they are casting over the glasshouses. These are old trees probably 50 years or more old. The rest of this section is mainly open but with some individual trees of Sycamore, Hawthorn, Willow and Dogwood.

Area E

A short length of Blackthorn bushes which may be on the railway side of the boundary line.

Area F

An Oak tree which appears to be growing from the railway side of the boundary line.

Area G

This is a clump of *Buddleia davidii* growing out of the bramble hedge which follows the boundary at this point. These plants are presumed to have seeded themselves here.

Area H

A large Hazel bush that has been “coppiced” on at least one occasion

Area I

This section is predominantly bramble with some isolated trees amongst it. The trees are an Oak, along with some Elderberry, Blackthorn and Elm.

Area J

A mixture of Alder, Oak, Hawthorn and Field Maple, of these the Alder is growing the best in the poor and wet soil. These are all young trees, less than 10 years old.

Area K

Along the boundary with the private house there is a mixture of hazel and Ash trees planted two deep. Beside Lake Lane there is a mixture of deciduous trees including Alder, Oak, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, Field Maple and Wild Gean. Interspersed with these deciduous trees is conifer, a sort of Pine. There is one Horse Chestnut located between the reservoir and Lake Lane

Area L

The remainder of old boundary hedge is here. It is composed of Leyland Cypresses and Poplars that are topped at about 4 meters high. The road side boundary is mainly Hazel, with some Blackthorn and Hawthorn. Along the boundary with the neighbouring property are multiple rows of trees. These are mainly a conifer and Alder with some Oak, Ash, Yew, Guelder Rose and Field Maple.

In front of the water storage tanks for glasshouses 10 - 17 there is a row of Silver Birch trees.

Area M

This area has two rows of free standing trees which are mainly birch but the one nearer Lake Lane includes three Beeches as well. The boundary hedges are a predominantly a mix of Hawthorn and Hazel. In amongst them there are also Elderberry, Willow, dogwood and Blackthorn. Scrambling in the hedge are Dog Rose, Ivy and Honeysuckle.

Area N

These are two Buddleia bushes that are presumed to be self seeded, neither are tidy specimens but they are doing no harm. They flower freely so there is a bonus for butterflies and other pollinating insects.

Area O

The lawns surrounding the office building are planted predominantly with ornamental conifers and hollies. To the south and west of the offices are lines of Leyland Cypress.

Area P

This parcel of land which at times has been pony paddocks is bounded by Leyland Cypress to the west and Poplar to the south. Along the road boundary there is a mixture of trees, including Oak, Sycamore and Scots Pine.

Area Q

The western boundary is dominated by an old shelter belt of Leyland Cypress. Within this belt there are also some Sycamore, Elder and White Poplar. The area between the shelter belt and the glasshouses has some isolated seedling trees, mainly Sycamore with some Ash and Elder. There is also a circular clump of self seeded White Poplar trees. The shelter belt continues round to the north of O Block as more Leylands and a Willow.

Summary

This is the finish for 2014. Two new initiatives are now in place to the benefit of biodiversity on the nursery; a large feeding station and bee hotels. Both fit well with the businesses' commitment to compliance with the LEAF audit and our ambition to become a LEAF demonstration farm.