

WILDLIFE SURVEY

JANUARY - MARCH 2015



TOP - JAY STANDING ON THE LOG PILE UNDER THE BIRD FEEDERS
BOTTOM – PRIMROSES ON SIDE OF THE RAINWATER RESERVOIR

Introduction

As March ends spring is finally getting under way. Birds are finding mates and beginning nest building. Some bees are on the wing. Plants are beginning to grow and some are well into flower.

Grass cutting is started as we mark out the areas that will or will not get mown through the summer season.

Bird Survey

There are no new species to add to the nursery list in this quarter though 36 out of the 49 species seen in the last three years were present in this period. I think this is a solid start to the year as the summer migrant species are most of the remaining species to be seen. As the species count starts to become stable it will be useful to build up a picture of how many individuals of a species are on the site. We are finding more birds on the nursery so

recording the number of individuals present at any one time will add to our understanding of how we are progressing with encouraging this trend.

The most notable species recorded in this quarter is Chiffchaff. A pair is seen regularly near the main water tank. Only a few thousand chiffchaffs spend the winter in the UK, all the rest migrate further south. Bullfinch makes its first appearance on the list since 2012 as a pair were spotted on the boundary with the railway line.

This is the first winter where we have had bird feeders. There are six feeders clustered around the birch trees by the 6-9 turning circle and another 3 near the main office. The feeders are proving very popular and need to be filled

BIRD SURVEY DATA 2015									
SPECIES	JAN MAR 2014S	APR JUNE 2015	JULY SEPT 2015	OCT DEC 2015	SPECIES	JAN MAR 2015	APR JUNE 2015	JULY SEPT 2015	OCT DEC 2015
BLACKBIRD	✓				HOUSE SPARROW	x			
BLACK CAP	x				JAY	✓			
BLACK HEADED GULL	✓				KESTREL	✓			
BLUE TIT	✓				LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL	✓			
BULLFINCH	✓				LINNET	x			
BUZZARD	✓				LITTLE EGRET	✓			
CANADA GOOSE	✓				LITTLE GREBE	x			
CARRION CROW	✓				LONG TAILED TIT	✓			
CHAFFINCH	✓				MAGPIE	✓			
CHIFFCHAFF	✓				MALLARD	✓			
COLLARED DOVE	✓				MOORHEN	✓			
COMMON PARTRIDGE	x				MUTE SWAN	✓			
COOT	✓				PHEASANT	✓			
CORMORANT	x				PIED WAGTAIL	✓			
DUNNOCK	✓				ROBIN	✓			
GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER	x				SHELDUCK	x			
GREAT TIT	✓				SWALLOW	x			
GREEN FINCH	✓				SWIFT	x			
GREEN WOODPECKER	✓				SONG THRUSH	✓			
GREY HERON	✓				SPARROW HAWK	✓			
GREY WAGTAIL	✓				TUFTED DUCK	✓			
GOLDCREST	x				WHITETHROAT	x			
GOLDFINCH	✓				WOOD PIGEON	✓			
HERRING GULL	✓				YELLOWHAMMER	x			
					WREN	✓			
					SPECIES COUNT THIS PERIOD	36			
					SPECIES COUNT THIS YEAR	36			
					SPECIES COUNT 2012 ONWARDS	49			

three times a week. We are feeding with a sunflower seed mix, peanuts, fat balls and suet strands. Most of the species visiting are birds that find perching in front or on a feeder easy. This includes various finch and tit species. Other birds are trying to use them but only robins seem to be fairly good at doing it. Blackbirds and jays seem to have the least success but persist with the fat ball feeder so they must be getting some reward. Long tailed tits are also very found of fat balls and we do see these birds occasionally, but only feeding on the fat balls.

There is always seed being rejected at the feeders which the birds then drop to the floor. This can be searched for on the ground, this food is attracting other birds. If the food is falling onto open grass it is found by wood pigeons usually; these visit in the biggest numbers but mallard, pheasant, magpies and carrion crows have also searched for dropped food. Two of the feeders are located over a log pile which means the dropped food is inaccessible to large birds. This gives smaller birds an opportunity to find food without competition from bigger species. Robins and dunnocks often forage in amongst the logs and wrens do sometimes.



All of the feeders are hung near to cover so our feeding birds have a chance to escape from predators. Twice I have seen a sparrowhawk attempt an attack at the feeding station, both times without success, but the birds are right to be wary. The sparrowhawks don't always fail and there are often piles of pigeon feathers that indicate a sparrowhawk kill around the nursery.

The big farmland bird watch

The second of these events was held in February. This bird survey is carried out by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. LEAF encourages its members to participate and our survey was completed on a quiet weekend morning when the ordinary comings and goings of the nursery were not going to frighten the birds away during the half hour counting period.

The count was done from a point overlooking the turning circle and the reservoir which was also the place used last year. The new bird feeders were in place so there was an expectation that the count would improve from last year; and it did. Two more species were seen and twice as many individual birds. The panel opposite shows the data collected from the two surveys.

National nest box week

The British Trust for Ornithology runs national nest box week, an annual event held during February. The objective is to improve the availability of nesting sites in our increasingly tidy environment.

The nursery site is not without places to hide a nest and there are nests found every year and evidence for the presence of others. It is likely though that birds that usually nest in holes in trees would find few suitable places as there are no really old trees here. To help remedy this we have purchased and erected two nest boxes that are for hole nesting birds like blue and great tits.

A bit of citizen science

The Zoological society of London in association with other organisations is collecting data on the incidence of papilloma virus in Chaffinches. This disease usually affects the legs and is apparent as a warty growth called papillomatosis. There has been one unlucky chaffinch with this disease visiting our feeders so a report of this individual has been forwarded for their data base.

Butterfly Survey

Butterfly surveying will recommence in April. This spring which has not been particularly warm or sunny has yielded no chance encounters with butterflies which is different to 2014 when Peacock butterflies were seen on several occasions before April.

There is no reason to be concerned about this position as the weather turned quite dramatically warmer at the beginning of April and suddenly there were butterflies!

Glasshouse herbicide strip

The immediate boundary to the glasshouse has to be a herbicide strip. Without this strip weeds tend to get under the glasshouse wall and inside the glasshouse they will grow incredibly well. Sometimes these weeds can also become a home for pests so their growth has to be prevented. The herbicide strip often has stinging nettle in it. This plant is the food plant of peacock, comma and small tortoiseshell butterflies which come out of hibernation early in the spring. What we want to try and avoid is that the butterflies choose nettles in the herbicide strip to lay eggs on when we know that they will be weedkilled. We have weedkilled very early this year almost before the weeds are growing well. This is not ideal for a good kill of weeds with the herbicide Glyphosate but it has worked. A lot of weeds are dead and the nettles although not dead yet are dying so they will not be attractive to egg laying butterflies.

SPECIES	2014	2015
BLACK BIRD	2	2
BLACK HEADED GULL	0	5
BLUE TIT	0	1
CARRION CROW	3	0
CHAFFINCH	0	6
CHIFF CHAFF	0	2
DUNNOCK	1	3
GOLD FINCH	0	5
GREAT TIT	1	1
GREEN FINCH	0	3
GREEN WOODPECKER	1	0
GREY WAGTAIL	1	0
HERRING GULL	1	4
JAY	0	1
LONG TAILED TIT	0	2
MAGPIE	1	0
PIED WAGTAIL	1	0
ROBIN	1	2
SONG THRUSH	1	2
WOOD PIGEON	5	5
WREN	1	0
TOTAL SPECIES	13	15
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	20	44

Bees (and other pollinators)



The same weather that was preventing butterflies from flying in March was also affecting bees. Some bees have been seen but not very many yet. Of the bumble bees; buff tailed and tree queens have been seen so far. An early buff tailed nest has been found under the tussocky grass on the boundary to Lake Lane and glasshouse 14-17.

While queen bumble bees are difficult to find at present there is a thriving colony of



Andrena flavipes?

mining bees on the south facing slope of the mound behind the pack house. There is, when the sun is shining, 100 or more of these little

solitary bees on the wing. There are also lots of their little mines excavated in the soil. Trying to identify this bee is very difficult. It could be *Andrena flavipes* as this bee fits the criteria, but there are so many bees in this genus that it could be something else.

One of the many mines

Whatever the bee is exactly, they are finding that the mound is a very good place for their activities. The mound may not be the prettiest feature of the nursery environment but it is working for this bee and pollinators generally are a group of insects we are encouraging to use our site.

Wild Flowers



The recurring theme is that the season has not moved on as fast as 2014 and consequently there are less flowers about than last year. This is especially noticeable with ground ivy which is very plentiful around the nursery but even in the warmest and sunniest spots has only just begun to flower in last days of March this year. The plant that is flowering best in the last days of March is red dead nettle. Bees love this plant so there is something they like in full flower.

Some works have been done to improve the success of early flowering plants. In particular the area of primroses on the

Red dead nettle

reservoir bank was opened up by removing all the brambles that were coming up over them

and clearing back all the dead grass that was in their way. The result has been a much better show of primroses than last year



Primrose

and potentially scope for them to expand. The primroses had never been added to the nursery wild

Celandines in full flower



flower list but as they are now properly uncovered and doing well they are

now on it making the list 65 species long. In the ground behind 6-9 there are celandines that struggle against the nettle growth so this year we have cut the nettles back already and raked off all the material to give them less competition. We have found more celandines than expected and they have responded to our treatment by flowering well. All the clumps have been marked with canes so we can find them next year when we will repeat this operation. As well cutting back the nettles a big area of bramble was removed as there is plenty of bramble in the boundary lines without allowing it to take over areas where different flowers could be growing.

Trees

16 seedling trees that were discovered growing on the site and kept in pots through last summer have been planted out in appropriate places around the nursery.

5 hollies, 2 birches and an oak have been planted in the field by glasshouse 10-13.

5 willows have been planted in the triangular field beyond the rain water reservoir.

2 hawthorns are close to the turning circle

1 birch in the middle of the field by glasshouse 14-17.

All the trees are tiny and are protected with a wire guard from the rabbits. Some are already starting to open this year's leaf so some at least are alive and away. Hopefully the rest will follow suit as spring moves along.

Summary

Although this spring has not been as warm as last year meaning that there has been less to see there has been useful work done to make the site better in the long term in this quarter.

The things achieved are often a result of observation of the site on a regular basis. For example the primroses are having an excellent year compared to previous because they were found in 2014. Then a decision can be made to ensure they are not being crowded out by other things the following spring. The same analysis can be applied to the young trees, they have to be found where they happened to germinate and moved while the possibility exists to move them to a more suitable place.

Last year we made some changes to the mowing regime around the site to improve its biodiversity; some parts worked well and others less so but it did give us better ideas when deciding what to do for 2015. These measures are already being implemented with this years mowing strategy. What has been achieved already is an improvement on the same period last year.

The nursery is looking more ready for the demonstration farm launch in May.