



Moor Green Lakes Group

August 2025 Newsletter



Four spotted chaser - *Libellula quadrimaculata* - seen near Grove Hide © Steve Arnold

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Progress on the Sale of Moor Green Lakes

It looks extremely likely that the future of Moor Green Lakes will continue to function as a nature reserve, albeit with a new landowner/freeholder, namely Finchampstead Parish Council. Currently relevant contracts are being drawn up, and are with various parties' solicitors, so there could still be some unforeseen issues which causes a problem.

On the assumption that it does go ahead, your committee and Finchampstead Parish Council are already in discussions on the best way of working. This will mostly likely mean an organisational structure change for Moor Green Lakes Group.

I hope to be able to provide more details in the next newsletter, including the benefactor who has made this all possible. All three parties are aiming to conclude this issue by November.

Please note that this does not include Manor Farm (the "new workings") or Fleet Hill Farm. That is something for the future.

Simon Weeks - Chairman 

Spring Weather

A short update on the weather, as it is a factor in several of the reports. In case you hadn't noticed, the weather this year – from about March - has been rather hot and dry! This subjective impression and clues such as brown lawns and struggling plants, is backed up by Met Office statistics for the Southeast.

Mean temperature. April the 4th warmest, May the 7th warmest and June the 2nd warmest. Together for the Spring period (March to May), the 1st warmest on record. Also, Spring has the warmest Max temperature.

Sunshine hours. This really started in March,



with March and April both the sunniest, 7th sunniest May and 9th sunniest June, resulting in the 2nd sunniest Spring.

Rain. Surprisingly, only March was exceptional, being the 4th least rainy. But Spring was the 3rd driest on record. Curiously the driest Spring ever was back in 1893 while the second driest was more recent in 2011.

Note that the Met Office defines Spring as March, April and May, which makes comparisons easier, rather than Astronomical Spring which starts on 20th March through to 21st June.

Work Party Dates

Autumn 2025

Thinking of joining a work party? You would be most welcome. We are a very friendly group.

Email: workparties@mglg.org.uk

Or turn up to the Car Park on the day at 10:30. Check the website for the latest dates.

Planned dates are:

Sunday 14th of September

Tuesday 16th of September

Sunday 12th of October

Tuesday 14th of October

Sunday 9th of November

Tuesday 11th of November

The Bull Dog Incident

Although most of the practical work involved in maintaining the reserve in good order is carried out during volunteer work parties over the autumn and winter, there are occasions when work is required outside these times. One such task was the seemingly simple one of strolling around the footpaths on a pleasant summer's day putting up posters to advertise the Open Hide event in early July. However, nature had other intentions.

Perhaps due to the prolonged period of dry weather, a large limb of an Oak tree had fallen across both the bridleway and footpath a short way south of the car park. Although it was possible to squeeze past we decided that we would clear the path before putting the posters up, so set to work with our bow saws. We soon had the footpath clear and, while discarding the brash over the fence into the reserve, Jeffrey, the bull, sauntered along the northern track to investigate what was going on. He appeared satisfied with our work, even showing his approval by helping us dispose of the waste as he started to munch away on the freshly cut leaves, allowing us to turn our attention to

tackling the next part of the task - clearing the obstruction from the bridleway. Then, seemingly from nowhere, a German Shepherd appeared and began to torment the bull through the gate. With no owner to be seen, Jane restrained the dog by its collar and read out the number written on its tag which John started dialling.

'0 - 7 - 7 - 6....Ohhh..' with a sudden twist of its neck the dog was free and off at high speed towards the car park leaving the three of us looking on in bemusement. Our bemusement turned to alarm as we turned to see Jeffrey also on the path looking towards the car park, having stealthily managed to push his way through the stock fencing and barbed wire.

Although the cattle that graze the reserve are the small Dexter breed, a bull can weigh around 450kg so is not easily restrained and soon, following the lead of the German Shepherd, Jeffrey also set off towards the car park. Our only hope now was to beat him to the gate and close it before he got onto the road. Leaping into action, Jane on the footpath and

Peter on the bridleway, we joined the stampede to the car park. Anyone watching may have been forgiven for thinking that we were in training for the Pamplona Bull Run as, amazingly, we outran Jeffrey, arriving at the gate before him. With the gate shut, we caught our breath feeling smug that the



Jeffrey as seen on a recent Plant Survey before 'the incident'. © Steve Arnold

situation was now contained. Jeffrey, however, had a different opinion and, finding a gap between the car park and pony paddock, was out onto Lower Sandhurst Road – time for us to call for backup.

‘What is the nature of the emergency?’ the 999 police operator inquired.

‘Err... an escaped bull that was last seen proceeding in an easterly direction along Lower Sandhurst Road’ was Jane’s tentative reply, wondering what response she would receive.

However, having asked for further details so that they could take full stock of the situation, the operator said that a patrol car was on its way.

A short while later it appeared that we had the situation back under control as, having explored a couple of gardens, Jeffrey was coaxed into heading back towards the car park; however, with a last minute dummy, he once again evaded restraint and continued along the road to the fruit farm. By now, Simon our chairman had arrived accompanied by a runner

who had seen Jeffrey on the road and, fortunately, knew his owner so gave him a call.

‘The bull that you have grazing at Moor Green Lakes has got out; can you come and help us retrieve him?’

‘I would, but I’m on holiday in Wales.’ Not exactly the reply that we were hoping for but he did add that he would phone a friend.

Reinforcements, in the form of three policemen and the grazier’s friend, Gary, were soon on the scene but, by then, Jeffrey had decided that he had explored enough of the fruit farm and had found his way across the road, through the hedge and into the New Workings. Off we set along the track, with Gary shaking a bucket of pebbles to try to entice Jeffrey into thinking there was food on offer (apparently, this works with sheep, which Gary was more used to handling), Jane with a dog lead at the ready to restrain the errant beast, all of us with our eyes on stalks hoping to spot him. Luckily, there were few others out walking that afternoon (no doubt put off by the extreme temperature) as



Gary (left), and Jane’s husband John, cajoling Jeffrey into walking back to the car park when he clearly would have preferred to feast on the vegetation along the way. © Jane Heritage

anyone seeing this posse may well have been concerned that they were becoming delirious in the heat.

Eventually, Gary received a message from the grazier, who had managed to find a location in deepest Wales with internet signal, providing a location from the tracker around Jeffrey's neck – he was in the far SW corner of the New Workings. Assessing that we now had the situation under control, and having received a call to attend another incident (though we were somewhat dubious when they said they were required for a stakeout), the policemen departed. Soon we had Jeffrey in sight not far from the sewage treatment works but, to our horror, heading towards the gap in the fence onto Longwater Road. More frantic dashing to block his exit was this time successful and, after a final struggle, with Jeffrey putting his nose close to the ground keeping the ring out of reach, he was at last restrained by Jane attaching the dog lead. The long trudge back to the car park then began, interrupted by Jeffrey stopping and attempting to feed on the New

Working's flora along the way.

Eventually the car park was reached and along with it the very welcome sight of another of the grazier's friends with a cattle trailer. The farmer greeted the bull with a genial 'Hello Oxley' at which point the bull became completely docile and happy to be led into the trailer leaving the rest of us to quizzically inquire 'If he's Oxley, who is Jeffrey?' Avoiding any debate about the name, the trailer was hurriedly secured and Oxley, aka Jeffrey, was on his way back to his owner's farm.

'Why did we call him Jeffrey?' I asked somewhat rhetorically; 'Oh, that was just a name that one of the other volunteer leaders decided to call the bull' was the reply. So the moral of the story: always have the contact details for the grazier; keep a dog lead to hand; but, most importantly, know an animal's name and never shout 'Jeff-Free'.

Peter Craig



At last, a cooperative beast - if only we had known his name from the start, he might have been well behaved for us too. © Jane Heritage

Grove Hide Open Day

Back in March we were invited by the Horseshoe Lake Activity Centre to take part in their Wellbeing Open Day on Saturday the 12th of July.

This looked like an opportunity to tell the public about Moor Green Lakes Group, so Peter and I took on the task of making this happen. We decided to open Grove Hide for the day, as it had the advantage of being on a Horseshoe Lake 'Open Day' nature trail – and we could target anyone walking the river path as well as those at the Open Day.

As things turned out, it was also a very pleasant, shady place to be on a very hot day.

To demonstrate what a vast range of wildlife we have at Moor Green, Peter prepared displays of

pictures; thanks to all those who provided extra photographs to add to the fantastic ones from Peter's own collection. Not much to see from the hide at this time of year with the reeds so tall, but we were able to show people Reed Warblers flitting about, a Tufted Duck with chick, a singing Reed Bunting, a few common Terns passing by and some very impressive dragonflies – Brown hawker, Black-tailed skimmer and Lesser Emperor (this one has only been seen at Moor Green in the last 3 years).



For the children we had colouring, which was very popular, and some interesting specimens for them to look at and identify: Mary's Emperor dragonfly exuvia, together with slow worm and snake skins, created much interest.

Was it successful? We were thrilled to have over 70 visitors during the day, far more than we thought we would get, so the answer is yes!

Top entrance to the hide, below the display board. © Jane Heritage



Artists at work. © Jane Heritage

Thanks to John who helped with the posters before and after the event. Also to Mary, Alan and Joanne who helped Peter and me on the day.

Please note, pictures of children are included with kind permission from their respective parents, thank you.

Jane Heritage 

Work Party Update

In July BVCP held a work party with the main aim being to clear the paths from the car park to the river and then in each direction along the river path. This annual task is essential otherwise brambles, nettles and overhanging trees become a real problem for walkers. Goosegrass - *Galium aparine* (also known as cleavers and sticky willy) had also covered the laid hedge like a blanket. Thankfully, the ride-on mower makes light of much of this work, but the high-level hedge trimming could only be done by individual volunteers and the cleavers

removed by hand. In addition, the path to Colebrook hide and the area in front of Colebrook South screen were also cleared.

A separate team removed some debris from the river, including two traffic cones and a rather large piece from the front of a car. Duncan supervised a repair to the large overflow non-return flap valve where the soil around the valve had been washed away. Water drains from Colebrook Lake South into the River Blackwater through this valve situated on the riverbank. The area was then fenced.

Litter picking was done and some Himalayan balsam - *Impatiens glandulifera* - removed from alongside the bridle path.

Thanks to everyone who turned up on a very hot day.

Jane Heritage 



Top - Cleared path

Below left - River erosion

Below right - David on the ride-on-mower

© Jane Heritage



A Strange Year for Dragonflies

This year began warm then has continued with long dry spells. This contrasts with last year when Spring came late and the summer, never really got going. Last year, species appeared relatively late (black line in the first graph below.) But this year a magnificent 7 species were seen in April, plus Black Tailed Skimmer - *Orthetrum cancellatum* - on Manor Farm. This is even more than the previous record five seen in 2023.

Some species we had are remarkably early, for example, Emperor Dragonfly - *Anax imperator* - and Black Tailed Skimmer were seen maybe two weeks before the previous earliest record. Two early species, Hairy Dragonfly - *Brachytron pratense* - and Large Red Damselfly - *Pyrrosoma nymphula* - did especially well. But other species like Red Eyed Damselfly - *Erythromma najas* - seemed not to be affected at all. This year the timings simply could not be taken for granted.

Many have remarked that it's been a good year for insects this year. For example, there have been far more bodies, splatted on the car than last year. However, the drought has affected some such as the Common Blue Damselfly - *Enallagma cyathigerum*. This uses the meadows of the nature reserve as its jungle for hunting for aphids and feeds up before returning to the water to breed. This year, the numbers are well down (dark red line in the second graph). 2020 was our last very dry year when numbers were also low. However, it is difficult to explain 2019, which was not especially warm or dry. There is much we do not understand.

It is worth mentioning that we have now for the third year had Lesser Emperor Dragonfly -

Anax parthenope. Two species that we do not normally see, have been seen nearby, the Golden-ringed Dragonfly - *Cordulegaster boltonii* - , hiding from the heat under trees on the Blackwater Valley, and Emerald Damselfly - *Lestes sponsa* - on Fleet Farm shortly followed by it turning up on the reserve itself where it

has not been seen for some years.

The adult phase of dragonflies is their dispersive phase and, you never know where they might turn up. An extreme example of this is a site in Dorset,

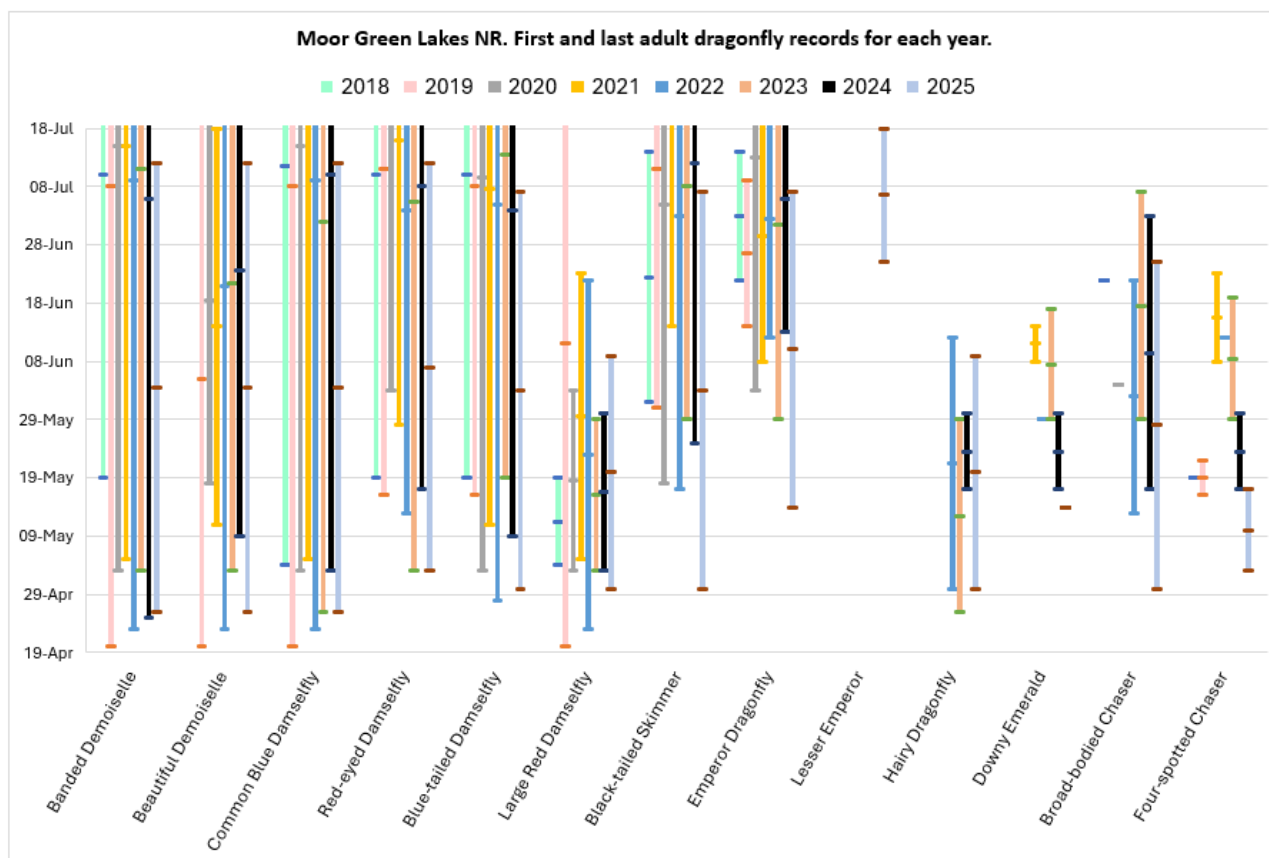
a former gravel pits very like Moor Green, which seems to be the first breeding site for Scarlet Darter - *Crocothemis erythraea* - together with a strong population of Red Veined Darter - *Sympetrum fonscolombii*. These are winners in climate change and give an indication of how Moor Green might be in the future with even more formerly exotic species becoming standard. Already this year, Red Veined Darter has been seen in Yateley.



Top - Emerald Damselfly - *Lestes sponsa*

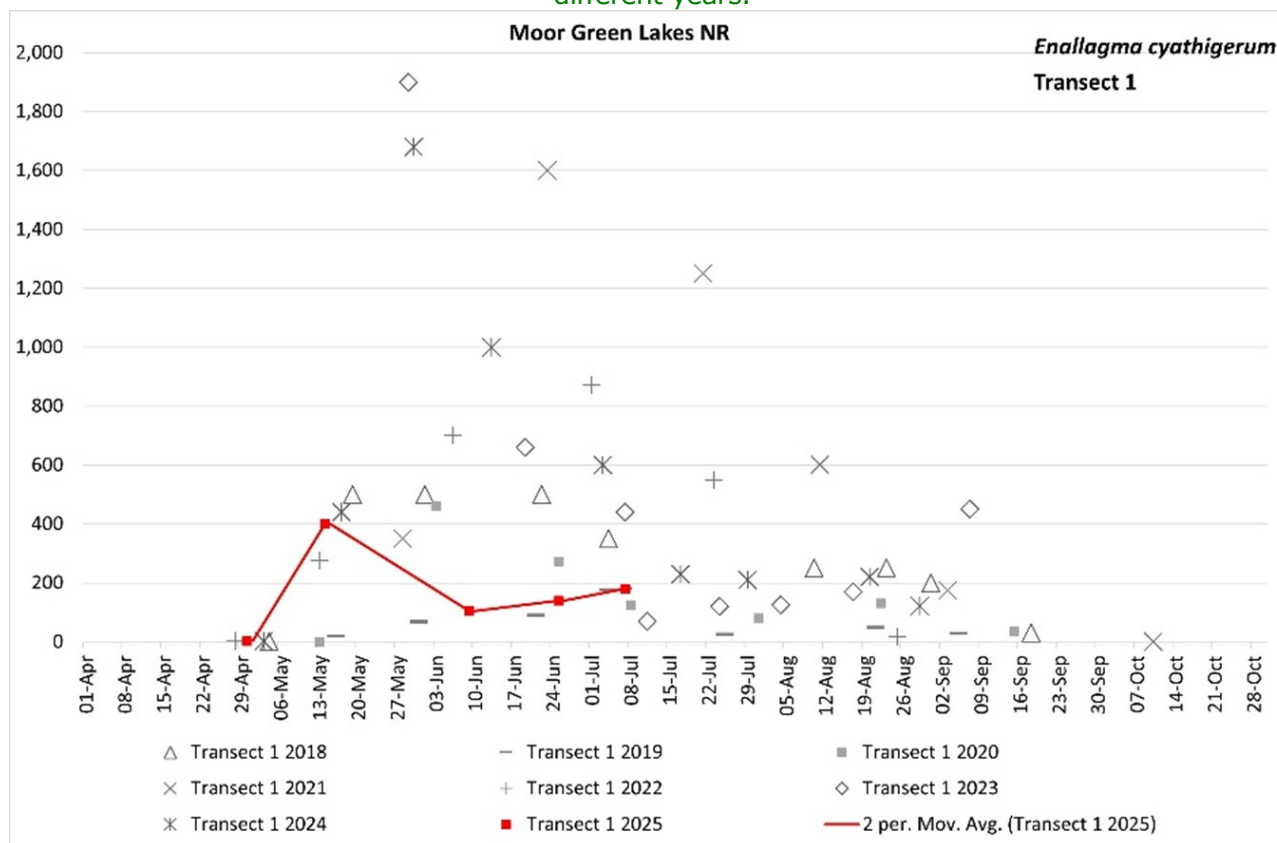
Bottom - Golden-ringed Dragonfly - *Cordulegaster boltonii*

© Alan Holmes



Above - Chart showing appearance timing of species over different years.

Below - Chart showing numbers of Common Blue Damselfly seen versus time of transect over different years.



Alan Holmes



Around the Reserve - Oystercatchers

Although a common breeding bird around the UK coastline, Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* have extended their breeding range to inland sites, which, since 2014 has included the Moor Green reserve and the neighbouring Horseshoe Lake. The first sighting on the reserve this year was on 5 Feb when a pair appeared on Tern Island. There were further regular sightings over the following weeks with an occasional third bird also recorded. By March one pair was seen regularly on the eastern end of Plover Island – the location that has become most favoured for breeding over recent years.

Frustratingly, it has been several years since the Oystercatchers have nested in view of Colebrook hide and this year was no exception. It was only the sight of an adult bird repeatedly returning and disappearing from view in the same spot on the NE side of Plover Island that suggested the presence of a nest. Later in the spring the Oystercatchers were frequently seen flying up to chase off crows and other potential threats – a good indication that they were defending a brood; successful breeding was confirmed on 10th of May with a report of four chicks near the SE corner of the island. The next day three chicks could be seen in the same location on Plover Island though by the following week only two chicks were ever seen; these, however, were clearly thriving. Something that struck me as interesting during this period was where the adult birds were collecting food from for the chicks. In previous years, it has been common to see the adults collecting worms from the scrape in front of Colebrook hide then flying back to the chicks bearing a beak-full of food. However, this year the adults mainly headed off from Plover Island in a south easterly direction returning with food in their beak though, instead of worms, they were bringing in freshwater mussels. I

wondered whether this switch in feeding was due to some environmental change that meant there was an increase in mussel supply but found a more likely explanation in articles that Roger Murfitt (former MGLG bird recorder) had written for the 2014 annual report and Aug '24 newsletter: the reason why worms were not the preferred food source this year was likely due to the ground being too dry. Roger's article also highlighted a further interesting consequence of molluscs being the main food source in that, according to Birds of the Western Palearctic, juveniles receiving a diet consisting predominantly of worms become capable of feeding themselves within 6 weeks, whereas, when the main food source is bivalve molluscs juveniles take much longer to become competent in feeding themselves resulting in the family group staying together for 12 – 26 weeks.

The family of two adults and two chicks continued to thrive and, for a further week, could often be seen close to the gravel shore of the SE corner of Plover Island, where overhanging vegetation provided useful shade for the growing chicks. Then, on arriving at the hide on the 23rd of May, I was met with the sound of the adults' alarm calls as they both flew in a frenzy along with a mass of gulls. As much as I looked, I could not locate the chicks; clearly there had been some threat though I did not know what it was or whether it had resulted in an attack. Following further noisy calling, the adults settled down, one on the W end of Plover Island the other on Tern Island leaving me to wonder whether they had lost their chicks or if they had concealed themselves in the vegetation. A couple of days later I had my answer: the chicks were unharmed and were once again reunited with the two adults and even joined by a third adult on the 30th of May.



Oystercatchers on Plover Island on 25 May 2025. Both adults can be seen keeping a close watch on the juveniles. The smaller juvenile was typically seen to stay closer to one of the adults than its sibling did – a pattern of behaviour that persisted until fledging. © Peter Craig

Both chicks continued to develop well though by the end of May there was a distinct difference in size with the larger one appearing more independent and inclined to venture further away from the adults. Although the wings of both the young were developing well, and some short hops into the air were seen, I was surprised to read a report of two Oystercatcher chicks in front of the hide on the afternoon of the 1st of June. Could these be the same two that I had seen earlier in the day on Plover Island? My conclusion the following day, based on their sizes and the fact that no Oystercatchers were evident on Plover Island, was that they most likely were but had they really flown across the lake? Robert Godden suggested an alternative explanation – perhaps they didn't fly but swam. Although not commonly seen, there are reports of young Oystercatchers swimming, the most frequently quoted reference that I can find being with regards to American Oystercatcher having the ability to swim in excess of 400 m (Tomkins I R 1954. Life history notes on the American Oystercatcher. Oriole 19: 37-45) so it appears that the Moor Green juveniles could be capable

of swimming the 250 m between Plover Island and the scrape.

Whether they took the aerial or surface route, the two young Oystercatchers remained on the scrape for the following 10 days where they continued to receive food in the form of freshwater mussels. Surprisingly, only one of the adults was ever seen bringing food to the scrape leaving me to wonder where the second parent had gone. Feeding time was inevitably accompanied by a display of competition between the juveniles with the smaller one almost always succeeding in securing the largest portion. Nonetheless both continued to develop well and in between their bouts of sibling rivalry they would often settle down together while they awaited the arrival of their next meal. By the second week in June both birds were capable of short flights between the two sections of the scrape and by the 11th of June both had gone.

In the absence of any tags, once the young have dispersed it is virtually impossible to be certain of their fate. However, as I approached the west end of the New Workings later on the morning of the 11th June I heard the



Oystercatcher adult with two juveniles on CLN scrape; 2 June 2025. Note the difference in size between the two juveniles and the more downy head of the smaller one. © *Peter Craig*

unmistakable call of an Oystercatcher. Sure enough there was an adult and juvenile in the vegetation in the south-west corner of the New Workings both of which took off towards the east, landing briefly on the new track along the way. The ensuing weeks have seen several reports of juvenile Oystercatchers across the New Workings, both the islands Colebrook Lake

North and the scrape so, despite some ambiguity over the breeding success of individual pairs, it appears that 2025 has been a good year for this species at the reserve.

Peter Craig 



Feeding time on the scrape invariably resulted in a tussle between the two juveniles with the smaller one often ending up winning the lion's share. © *Peter Craig*



The smaller of the juveniles devours a juicy mussel while its sibling probes around for any scraps remaining in the shell .. © *Peter Craig*



A tranquil period of sibling bonding before the next meal arrives and a return to squabbling.
© *Peter Craig*

Plant Surveys

Jane and I with our mentor Peter Scott, have been out 3 times onto the reserve this year, which has sadly been disappointing. The combination of the very dry weather and jeffrey/Oxley who overstayed his welcome, meant we have not seen the grand swathes of flowers as we have done in previous years.

In April, one of the delights was an increase in the number of Cowslips - *Primula veris* - compared to last year.

Our May visit was almost a safari; we disturbed a stag deer and then came to the attention of the Dexter Bull - jeffrey featured in the earlier article.

The trip around the reserve including the North

side of Grove Lake didn't reveal any surprises. I took a few photos of lichen (not plants), but sadly photographer and camera were not in harmony, and they all suffered from camera shake.

Jane and I did a special grass survey in June, walking round the bird feeding station, grabbing some samples to take to the hide, where we laid them out and tried to work out what we had picked. We identified six species, but nothing new. Oh, and it rained that day!

During our proper plant survey in June, the three of us noticed the drought/bull effect, with diminished flowers. However, a personal highlight was seeing Goatsbeard - *Trachopogon pratensis* just in the reserve slightly north of the bird feeding area. I first became aware of



Cowslips in Spring. © Steve Arnold

this plant two years ago on Manor farm where at the time it was quite prolific (I have not seen it there since). The seed head looks like a dandelion seed head on steroids, being noticeable larger.

We also did an excursion along the new path on Manor Farm South side, where there was a lot of Weld – *Reseda Luteola*, as well as a big clump of common reed – *Phragmites australis* and a couple of large clumps of field horsetail – *Equisetum arvense*.



Horsetails had their heyday in the carboniferous period some 350 million years ago, well before flowering plants came into existence, perhaps around 140 million years ago. Of course, these ancient plants have continued to evolve, so to call them living fossils is bit of a misnomer. Horsetails are often hated by gardeners, as being invasive and hard to eradicate. Perhaps these plants with an ancient pedigree should be venerated.



If I remember I hope to get out a bit earlier next year to see the horsetails with their cone bearing shoots.

Steve Arnold 

Left - Weld on Manor Farm.

Top Right - Goatsbeard - seed head seen in June.

Bottom Right - Bee nesting on bare earth, possibly a Green-eyed flower bee.

Next page - Jane looking for that specific piece of grass.

© Steve Arnold



The Last Word

Petrichor

A word coined in the 1960s and is that pleasant smell that accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather. It is believed to be caused by a mixture of organic compounds which have collected in the ground and rain. Personally, it is one of my favourite smells, and as I write this in the heatwave in early July preceded by months of very little rain, something I am looking forward to smelling again. Its origin is petro (relating to rocks) and from Greek

mythology, ichor a fluid that flows like blood in the veins of the gods.

Another great smell is the seaside, assuming you are not near a sewage discharge, or red algae, or too much coconut sunscreen. This smell is not ozone as once claimed, and nor is it good for you as the Victorians might have had you believe. It is in fact dimethyl sulphide and is released by microbes that live near plankton and marine plants. Incidentally, if the seaside smell was ozone - which is odourless - that would be really bad for you.

Steve Arnold



Don't forget to check out the website at www.mglg.org.uk which includes information on how to volunteer. To reach out to us, please use the contact form, or if you see one of us, speak directly. Most of us are friendly!

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Editors Steve Arnold, Peter Craig and Jane Heritage.

This newsletter is made by real people, all of whom are volunteers.

Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter - 1 August 2025