



Moor Green Lakes Group

November 2025 Newsletter




Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus* - seen over the reserve. See page 2 © Nic Beards

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Progress on the Sale of Moor Green Lakes

The sale of Moor Green Lakes is progressing slowly but positively. More information will be made available when there is something conclusive to report.

Simon Weeks - Chairman 

Recorders wanted

We have a great team of recorders, but there are plenty of species that are not covered such as Moths; Fungi; Bees and wasps; Beetles; Aquatic wildlife.

You may even be able to assist with our current recorders. If you are interested please reach out to us.

Osprey visit

An Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus* - over Moor Green Lakes is a rare event with only 23 reported since 2000, but there is always the hope of a sighting during their spring and autumn migrations. This September several visitors to the reserve had the good fortune to see this magnificent bird of prey with sightings reported on several days between the 12th to 19th. The first sighting was by Jenny Sollick, a regular at Moor Green and something

Work Party Dates

Autumn-Winter 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.

Upcoming dates are:

Sunday 9th of November

Tuesday 11th of November

Sunday 14th of December

Tuesday 16th of December

Sunday 11th of January

Tuesday 13th of January

of an Osprey aficionado, who watched it unsuccessfully attempting to fish over West Fen before flying towards Fleethill Farm. Over subsequent days the Osprey was once again seen over West Fen as well as flying high over Finchampstead Ridges.

MGLG member Nic Beards found himself in the right place with his camera to capture this edition's wonderful cover photograph of the Osprey over the reserve.



Osprey hovering over West Fen on 12th September 2025 © Nic Beards

Willy willy - the dust devil

Dust devils (spiralling vortices of air that pick up dust from the ground) have colloquial names in many countries. In Ireland they are known as 'si gaoithe' or 'fairy wind' while 'dirt devil' and 'sand auger' are among the names used in the United States. However, the most memorable term must be the Australian 'willy willy', which is thought to have origins in the Australian Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' worldview when ancestral figures, some with supernatural powers, inhabited the land. One of these figures, the willy willy whirlwind, moved across the land creating havoc by uprooting trees and causing clouds of dust until he became tired, landed and changed into a man named Virra Birron. One late summer's day in August it appears that willy willy may have paid a visit to Moor Green Lakes.

Like much of the summer, the weather on Friday 22 August 2025 was dry, sunny and calm. Sitting in Colebrook hide in the late morning, a

fellow birdwatcher and I were watching Hobbies feeding over the lake hoping that one would present a good photo opportunity by swooping down low in front of us. Shortly after noon, the tranquillity was abruptly interrupted by the transient sound of something crashing into one of the clumps of willow on the northern shore of the lake. A short while later the water in the channel between the north shore and Plover Island churned up into a column of swirling spray which moved across the channel until it struck the Island and dissipated. The two of us in the hide exchanged bemused glances over what we had just witnessed.

The most dramatic visual appearance of this event was the spinning funnel of spray; however, the initial disturbance of the trees on the north shore suggested an origin over the land. A likely explanation was what we saw was the result of a strong thermal updraft that developed a rapid rotation as it ascended and



Water spout on Colebrook North Lake. © Peter Craig



The water spout continues its journey. © Peter Craig

drifted downwind – a willy willy that became visible through picking up water rather than dust. What had triggered this unusual phenomenon?

Although pleasantly warm, the day was not one of the very hot days of last summer. Around the time the waterspout was seen the temperature reported in the Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR) for nearby Farnborough Airport was a modest 18°C with a 5 knot wind blowing from the west northwest. The modest temperature and gentle breeze indicates that the overall air mass was relatively cool, however, the late summer sun, being still high in the sky, would provide strong ground heating. After weeks without rain, the dry ground of the reserve would readily heat up while areas surrounded by trees, such as the pony paddock and car park, could provide shelter from the breeze enabling the overlying air to remain in contact with the ground and warm. In contrast, to the south, Colebrook Lake, and the air over it, was likely to be relatively cool, providing a localised environment with a sufficient difference in air temperatures for a vigorous

thermal updraft to develop. As it developed, air from the surrounding area would be drawn in to replace the air that was rising; any disturbance to the inflowing air due to surface irregularities would set up a rotation. Similar to the way in which a spinning ice skater can increase the speed of their spin by pulling their arms in, the rotation of the inflowing air would intensify as the updraft rose and stretched vertically with its diameter narrowing. As the rotating column of air crossed from over the land to the lake, water in the channel between the shore and Plover Island was churned into a spiral of whirling foam by the low pressure at its centre; the size and shape of the channel likely contributing to the turbulence, which included the formation of a distinct wave.

Calm returned as abruptly as the chaos had begun. Perhaps like Virra Birron the devil became sapped of energy through its encounter with Plover Island and, having depleted the supply of warm air, faded away until favourable meteorological conditions contrive to reinvigorate him again.

Peter Craig 

Work Party Update

We started the new season with a BVCP work party on Tuesday 9th September. The weather was good, and it gave us the opportunity to meet new BVCP Ranger, Sara Green, who will be taking over responsibility for Moor Green from Matt.



Tinkering with the mower and weeding the pontoon. © Jane Heritage

We all met in the bird feeder paddock and from there, the volunteers were able to carry out a variety of tasks including venturing onto Long Island, the first time for a few years. Access was via the pontoon, which needed weeding, and a path was cut through the bramble to the far end of the island. In addition, an area was cleared ready for a bonfire to be used when a group of scouts are spending a day on the reserve in late October.

Another task was hay cutting the paddock, although the motor mower was playing up and much tinkering took place. The hay was eventually cut and cleared.

The vegetation in front of Colebrook Hide was cleared giving a good view of the lake ready for viewing the birds who visit during the winter.

On the following Sunday, 14 volunteers concentrated on creating a view from Grove Hide by clearing the reeds and some willow. The stream flowing past the hide was clear and flowing nicely by the end of the day. The day was cut short by the arrival of rain, but not

before Peter and Roy were able to complete a separate task, clearing in front of Grove screen.

Twenty-four volunteers, including new volunteer Claire, gathered on Sunday 12th October to work on both Tern Island and Long Island.

A small team was ferried out to Tern Island to clear all the vegetation aiming to leaving just gravel for the birds. Large bags were then used to bring the weeds ashore. Unlike Plover Island, Tern is much easier to clear. The volunteers were all back on shore by late morning. The rest of the group worked on Long Island. Over the last few years, the trees (mostly willow) along the northern shoreline had grown rather large blocking the view along the shore from the hide. This area is often favoured by birds seeking shelter and the ability for them to get out of the water is also important.

Bramble, bracken and reeds were also cleared, dead hedges built and a large amount of brash neatly stacked in the Colebrook Cut that runs through Long Island to provide access points



Who put that there? © Jane Heritage

across the stream but not stop the flow. Now it's rather dry.

On Tuesday 14th October the BVCP volunteers continued the work on Long Island. After a second day of hard work clearing the north shoreline, a fantastic view had been created. The 'before and after' picture shows work in progress and the result of two days hard work. Towards the far end of this shoreline a scrape was lurking but overgrown with many trees. Volunteers cut and stacked some trees before Sara and Matt arrived with chainsaws. They helped with the cutting then finished off while everyone else went for lunch. The team could then concentrate of clearing afterwards. By the end of the day the difference made to this area was amazing. With a good telescope, this scrape can be seen, in the distance, from Colebrook Hide.

The large scrape, much nearer the hide, was cleared of rotting debris exposing pools of water. We hope to do more in this area soon.

Note: A scrape is a shallow excavated pool that provides habitat for feeding wading birds or just an area for birds to get out of the water and relax called 'loafing'.



Ready to leave Tern Island © Mark Hinton

On the north shore of Colebrook Lake North another team cleared the high-level bramble along the track in preparation for the Robomower. This will be used in November to munch its way along the track keeping it wide and accessible. Some overhanging trees were also trimmed.

Many, many thanks to all the volunteers who turn up, work hard and, we hope, have an enjoyable time. Also, the BVCP Rangers whose help and expert advice is invaluable.

Jane Heritage



Left to Right. Before and after on Long Island. Tony clearing the scrape near Colebrook Hide © Sarah Elston

Autumn view from Colebrook hide

The weather for our open hide event was looking a little grim with Storm Amy approaching. Thankfully, on Saturday 4th October it was mostly sunny with only a blustery wind. Did the birds know our plans? As soon as we'd set up, many joined us by landing on the lake and Tern Island with over twenty species seen during the day.

We were thrilled with getting over 70 visitors to the Grove Hide Open Day in July but would we get any visitors this time? Unlike the Grove event, where visitors were mainly drawn from families attending the neighbouring Horseshoe Lake 'Wellbeing and Open Day', this event was aimed primarily at current MGLG members but with non-members also very welcome. Several MGLG members, who visit the reserve regularly, were on hand to point out things of interest while telescopes and binoculars were available to provide a closer view of the wildlife. The first visitors arrived even before we were quite ready and the last as we were packing up.

Over 30 visited us, a mixture of MGLG members (both long-standing and recently joined), local residents and other visitors to the lakes who dropped in to find out about the reserve. Many visitors stayed for a long time and, at times, the hide was quite crowded. We allowed dogs on leads, not normally allowed in the hide, as we didn't want to exclude passing dog walkers who might be interested.

One of the reasons for choosing to run this event in early October was the hope that the timing would correspond with the arrival of species that overwinter at Moor Green but that some of the late departing summer visitors would also still be present. It appeared that we judged this just right.

Early in the day, Peter located a Snipe hunkered down in the reeds near the rail in front of the hide, conveniently marked by a feather blowing in the wind close by. Handy when you are trying to give the location of a well camouflaged bird to both birders and non-birders. Snipe are



Inside the hide before the rush © Steve Arnold

most often seen at the reserve over the autumn and winter with the first of this autumn's arrivals on Colebrook being reported on 29th September. Peter's photograph from earlier in the week helped those who'd never seen a Snipe before. It stayed all day, sometimes sleeping, but at other times showing its plumage and incredible long bill, essential for probing the mud for small invertebrates (including worms and insect larvae). It was still there the next day – one to look out for again.

Of the duck species that overwinter at Moor Green, Widgeon, Shoveler and Gadwall were already well represented along with the occasional, and quite elusive, Teal. Many of the drakes were still moulting their post-breeding 'eclipse' plumage so lacked their usual vibrant colours. Somewhat surprisingly, Mallard and Tufted Duck, which are both resident at the reserve, were scarce on the day – perhaps they knew the best places to shelter from the still gusty wind.

A highlight of the day was the Hobbies, one of the common summer visitors to the reserve that typically arrives towards the end of April

and stays until early October. At times three could be seen hunting over the lake for their favourite food – dragonflies – no doubt feeding up before soon setting off on their migration to Africa for the winter months. During the sunny periods there were quite a few dragonflies (Common Darter, Migrant Hawker) right in front of the hide. Unfortunately, these didn't tempt the Hobbies to come quite that close, but we were still treated to several spectacular low-level swoops over the water and the reeds on the western shore of the lake.

Other than birds, we saw a Muntjac deer running through the meadow north of the lake and, rather worryingly, a Mink on Long Island.

Many thanks to Moor Green volunteers, Alan, Mary, Jon and Joanne who turned up to help. Volunteers and visitors all enjoyed the day and we hope we will get some new members and work party volunteers as a result of our efforts.

Will we do it again? Yes, we'll let you know when.



Peter Craig and Jane Heritage



Colebrook Lake South on the open hide day. © Steve Arnold

River Blackwater water quality

Since 2018, I have been counting the Demoiselles on the River Blackwater on the 900m stretch to the south of Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve. They had been counted by Ken Crick (former MGLG Chairman and my predecessor as dragonfly recorder) at the turn of the millennium and amid fears of insect numbers collapsing, and concerns for the health of our rivers, I was concerned about decline. If the insect life in a river dies, there is nothing for the fish to eat and so nothing for the Herons and Kingfishers.

Ken counted an average peak of 140 Banded Demoiselles when there were no Beautiful Demoiselles in the river. Now, in my 8 years, my average peak is almost exactly 140, when I count the two species together. The shock is that Ken counted an average peak of 100 Blue Tailed damselflies and in 8 years I have never seen more than 25, my peak is a quarter of his average. It turns out that the species is slowly and quietly declining across Southern England. Originally thought to be resistant to pollution, being found on polluted water bodies that other dragonflies avoided, it is now found to be sensitive to pesticide pollution.

One year as I was doing this, suddenly we had heavy rain, and the river was in spate for a few days. I returned afterwards to find the population



of Demoiselles crashed and never recovered that year. One could see where the flood had scoured away the vegetation from the riverbanks. (You often see signs of this on the banks when one looks.)

How could the larvae have survived?

I then thought the threat was a simple mechanical scouring by flash floods - until someone said, "but could it have been something in the water?" This year I have been working with the energetic Sharon Egan and her new group, Blackwater Valley Action for our Rivers (BVAR), to test the chemistry of the water up and down the river which I have been doing monthly at Moulsham Bridge.

We have only been doing it for a few months, and we are still learning, but a few things have become clear.

Phosphate and nitrogen levels, if too high, can cause algal blooms. In particular, high levels of phosphate, which blue green algae cannot fix, would then allow them to bloom. Phosphate levels have declined considerably nationally and on the river Blackwater as a result of a concerted effort to control the amount of runoff from agriculture and should be removed at the sewage works by methods such as by precipitation with iron, which may lead to an increase in the iron content of the river, but this is unimportant since we are on the iron rich Bagshot gravel beds (there are iron rich springs draining directly into Moor Green.) Nitrogen in its various forms such as ammonia is less clear but apart from one very high reading seems not higher than it was in the few tests done at Moor Green in the 90s.

pH, the measure of acidity, has been in the range of 6.8 to 7.8. We used to think that some species of dragonflies were sensitive to pH, but this seems less of a concern nowadays. Hairy Dragonfly has been seen ovipositing in the acid waters of the bund at Grove which was very unexpected. Indeed, a low pH, acid conditions, inhibits the growth of the calcareous shells of

Blue tailed damselfly. The male sometimes sports a beautiful violet waistcoat © Alan Holmes

invasive crayfish, so can have some good aspects.

All these tests are for specific things, but conductivity testing tells us the total concentration of electrolytes in the water, like a school battery science experiment, and warns of a big change but not the specific issue. River-fly testing, pioneered by the angling community, uses standardised procedures to count river life, mainly Mayfly, Stonefly and Caddis fly larvae, in a river. If their numbers crash, it warns of a pollution incident upstream. We have just started to monitor this.

But are there other factors that we are not measuring that could account for the decline?

No routine testing of bacteria levels, including *E. coli*, which famously caused concerns at the Olympic swimming events on the River Seine, but which is considered a threat to humans rather than being of ecological concern, have been performed so it is not possible to exclude microbiological changes as a reason for decline. However, a potential new factor in the past few years is the rise in levels of insecticides such as fipronil and imidacloprid in UK rivers. There is evidence that such broad-spectrum insecticides can pose a risk to dragonflies.

In Japan, where dragonflies are important culturally, and they are recognised as predators on pests of rice, fipronil while used to control the pests is found also to kill the dragonfly larvae. Worse perhaps is that it does not seem to break down in the soil.

Imidacloprid was fully banned for all outdoor use including agriculture in 2018. The following year, however, 2500 kg was still being sold, all of which was destined for the domestic pet market as a parasiticide for treatment of fleas, ticks and mites.

A misconception is that dogs have ticks and fleas all the time. One study showed they only had them a maximum of 20% of the time, and

subsequent studies suggest even this is too high. Do not misunderstand me, these chemicals are safe, but only in the sense that domestic fly sprays are safe - but you would not spray them on your skin every month - and not when there are no flies.

The insecticides are not removed by sewage works. When you wash your hands, as you should, after applying them, the residue ends up in the river. It washes off dogs when they swim in the river.

Until recently vets were trying to sign people up for treatment plans with monthly treatments regardless of whether your pet has fleas and ticks. British Veterinary Association guidance "strongly encourage vets and owners to take a risk-based approach to prescribing or recommending these medicines. Vets will need to consider a pet's specific needs, as well as any risk parasites may pose to the humans they live with." They provide tips for owners [click here](#).

A risk-based approach means using the treatments only when they are needed such as typically in the tick summer season.

The Government has published a plan to address the presence of chemicals from pet flea and tick treatments in UK waterways [click here](#). But if we want to save our rivers and protect our environment for us and our children, we need to be more responsible in line with advice of professional bodies about only using such products when they are needed and not when our pets do not have an issue or it is out of the tick season.



Alan Holmes 

Plant Surveys

We had our last plant survey at the end of July. With the combination of the drought and the friendly bull overstaying his welcome, it was disappointing showing. We should have done another session in August, but for personal reasons I couldn't make it.

Ironically, the highlight of the last survey was discovering a pair of shrews under one of the reptile sheets. This is teamwork in action, as Jane lifts the corrugated iron sheet, I quickly get a couple of snaps in, before whatever is under the sheet disappears. I managed to get one of the shrews.

The Wild Carrot – *Daucus carota* – is worth spending a little time to marvel at its



construction. The complex unfurling structure turns into a large flat landing pad for insects to get on with their job of pollination. Notice the central flower which is often dark.

Above A Shrew, Below Wild Carrot about to unfurl © Steve Arnold





One plant that caught my eye while walking round Manor Farm was a patch of sedge, with tall upright stems, with stunning bracts extending outward, a bit like an inverted umbrella that has lost its cover. Identification uncertain as they were over the fence, a Galingale for sure, probably Pale Galingale – *Cyperus eragrostis* but not 100% certain. I would say this has most likely been introduced with the material Cemex brought in to restore the workings as it is typically used as an ornamental in pond margins.

In late August, Jane took a trip over the fence along the river path to remove some unwanted Himalayan Balsam – *Impatiens glandulifera* - it led to the discovery of a plant not seen before. Skullcap – *Scutellaria galericulata* - a

Above Wild Carrot flower head, below Galingale. © Steve Arnold





Above Galingale close up © *Steve Arnold*
below Toadflax © *Jane Heritage*



plant that likes the margins of ponds and lakes. The common name alludes to the resemblance of the calyx to a miniature medieval helmet.

In September, the BVCP work party had access to Long Island via the pontoon. This was the first visit to the island for about 3-4 years. Several large patches of Common Toadflax – *Linaria vulgaris* – were seen. Usually, only the occasional plant or two are seen elsewhere. Who knows what might be lurking there at other times of the year?



Steve Arnold and Jane Heritage



Skullcap. © Jane Heritage

The Last Word

Mast

The fruit of Beech, Oak, Chestnut, and other forest trees, especially as a source of food for pigs [OED]. Often used in the phrase 'mast year' to describe a year when there is an abundance of which certainly seems to be the case for acorns this year. (I am so not looking forward to weeding out all the mini oak trees in my garden next year).

If you want to know more, the woodland trust has a good article on it. [Click here](#).



Lastly, having read Peter's article on the vortex, I can imagine a young child explaining again, with great exasperation, the path of the water spout to an adult.

"The willy willy went willy-nilly, you silly billy"!

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 are volunteers.
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