



Moor Green Lakes Group

July 2026 Newsletter



Common Terns - *Sterna hirundo* - engaged in courtship feeding with the male enticing his mate by offering a fish that he has caught - see page 10. © Peter Craig

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Chairman's Update

MGL - Charitable Status

As most readers will be aware Moor Green Lakes Group were successful in securing the long term future of this valued site, following the CEMEX decision to sell the freehold. As a result of the exceptional generosity of a Finchampstead based benefactor, the site was acquired in December 2025 and the freehold gifted to Finchampstead Parish Council. They have in turn granted Moor Green Lakes Group a long term lease. The Parish Council has also established the Moor Green Lakes Trust, a charitable body, although the Charity Commission has a huge backlog of applications and we have been advised this will not be finalised before the autumn.

The Trustees are drawn from both Finchampstead Parish Council and the Moor Green Lakes Group committee. Once the charitable status is confirmed this will open up potential new sources of grant funding for the Group. It will also give us the opportunity to consider using Gift Aid to increase the value of subscriptions we receive from our membership.

Annual Report Editor

Unfortunately Iain Oldcorn has had to resign from the role of editing our comprehensive annual report. I must thank Iain for his 12 years as Editor. Despite having to collect and collate articles and reports from our committee

members, recorders and members, he has done this with great efficiency (and tolerance!). The end result is a professional report that now runs to 90+ pages. Iain will continue as a valued committee member.

This will inevitably result in a small delay completing and distributing our 2025 Annual Report. However I am very grateful to Steve Arnold our Treasurer who has picked up this project.

Membership secretary

David Bishop has been our Membership Secretary for 18 years but has now resigned. I must thank him for his extraordinary commitment to this administratively demanding role, over such a long period. Whilst Dave's role has been "behind the scenes" it was crucial to our continuation as a successful and thriving group. Without our members we simply don't exist. Dave is to be rewarded by being granted Moor Green Lakes Group lifetime membership status.

Of course this means we will be seeking someone to take on this role, although we do have an interim arrangement already in place. If you are interested in the role of Membership Secretary, which should be a lot easier with membermojo, please contact myself or our Secretary Duncan Clark.

Simon Weeks - Chairman



Tern Island. © MGLG

Membership Changes

Hopefully you will have received an email about changes to how we handle membership. As a reminder future notices, including renewal reminders will come from mailer: mglg@membermojo.co.uk.

One additional change that we can now manage is switching to an annual membership based on when you paid, rather than tied to our financial year.

This means if you join in February, your membership will expire the following February. For anyone who joined this year between June and August, we will still honour the free period, extending the membership to the end of August the following year.

We think this is a fairer way of handling membership, and is more aligned to what actually happens. Plus in the longer run it will simplify the accounts side (Something I will

personally appreciate with my treasurer's hat on). This should be reflected on the website soon.

On a personal note, Dave Bishop has stood down as membership secretary. I have worked with Dave since 2012 on handling membership (my role being on the banking side). It has had its moments of head scratching, such as who has just paid us when there has been no corresponding email or letter, but generally, it has worked well and efficiently. Thank you Dave, I appreciate your help over the years and best wishes for your future.

Steve Arnold - Treasurer



Work Party Dates

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 at the Moor Green Car Park on the day at 10:15am.

Planned dates are (but check the website for the latest dates nearer time).

Sunday 13th of September

Tuesday 15th of September

Sunday 11th of October

Tuesday 13th of October

Sunday 8th of November

Tuesday 10th of November

Sunday 13th of December

Tuesday 15th of December

Hear from Marie Kenyon one of our regular volunteers.



"I joined the MGL group when both my children were at Uni and I suddenly had weekends to myself. I had seen the signs up on my walks and as I'm a local, decided to come along one Sunday. I'm so glad I did! Everyone is friendly and you soon feel part of the team. The leaders guide you through each task and show you how to use the tools safely. For me, the best bits are being outdoors, even when the weather isn't kind, meeting new people and making a difference to the local environment. I look forward to the 2nd Sunday of the month and really miss it when I can't come!"



Jane Heritage



Work Party Update

February

By the time we got to February almost constant rain had caused the River Blackwater to flood the river path in two places and there was a possibility the work party might be cancelled. Our plan was to coppice coupes along the river path. On the Saturday the path was flooded between where the volunteers would park and where Jane and Sarah planned to park and set up base camp. Would the water be too deep to walk through?

Thankfully, the water level went down overnight, and we didn't have to cancel but had already made the decision to meet in the bird feeder paddock rather than along the river path. This meant a bit of a trek to the coupes.

With twenty-four Moor Green volunteers signing up we were able to do the planned work and, in addition, more hedge-laying extending

the stretch started in January. This was led by volunteers Adele and John, and it gave new volunteer, Val, the opportunity to try her hand at this task - she thoroughly enjoyed it. Just a month later the hedge was looking great.

The three coupes we cleared had plenty of large hazel trees that were suitable for harvesting the stakes and binders. Stakes and binders for the hedge-laying and more stakes for the dead hedges. The first coupe was full of bramble and took a while for volunteers to gain access but, by the end of Tuesday, with the help of ranger Sara and her chainsaw it was clear. The largest coupe was tackled by a large group of volunteers who worked hard and used the brash to build a very large dead hedge.

The BVCP volunteers continued to work along the river and made short work of three more coupes, but it was a bit of a rush at the end to clear up before the rain arrived.



Adele and John admiring the laid hedge. © Jane Heritage



One month later and the hedge is greening up nicely. © Jane Heritage



Above - Coupe cleared with the help of Sara's chainsaw. © Jane Heritage

Below - Working hard to finish the largest coupe. © Jane Heritage



March

No problem with flooding by the time March arrived. On the Sunday, another excellent turnout of 25 volunteers continued to clear the coupes along the Blackwater working towards Horseshoe Lake. Access for those with the tools was along the river path from the Mill Lane end and this surprises many walkers when unexpected traffic approaches. Not all are very diligent about the whereabouts of their dogs!

Another dry day on the Tuesday when BVCP volunteers managed to finish the clearance of all coupes planned for the year. In one coupe large trees with ivy were left as they provide a good habitat for wildlife.

Working along the river path gave the volunteers an opportunity to make some repairs to the dog steps into the river and other points of erosion. Access to one end of a set of steps was restricted by driving in hazel stakes, using hazel binders for the fence and filling the centre with brash.

BVCP regular volunteer, Edmund, often with help from others, has a mission to clear all litter whenever he is on a work party. Hauling things from the river as well as the usual litter

(dog poo bags, sweet paper, cans, etc, etc.) from the path, hedgerows and often thrown over the fence into the reserve. We are all amazed, and a little saddened, by the amount found.



Repaired dog steps. © Jane Heritage

Jane Heritage



Introducing one of our ex-volunteers

Hannah Kirby who was a volunteer at Moor Green Lakes, left to head north to Lancashire. Below is her description of what she has been doing up North. We wish her all the best - Jane Heritage.



Hannah Kirby

Hello, my name is Hannah Kirby. I volunteered a handful of times at Moor Green Lakes before I then went off to North Lancashire to be a residential volunteer.

I have now been a residential volunteer at RSPB Leighton Moss for 3 months and I have been able to take part in a lot of amazing work. The main habitat we have is reed bed, as well as salt marsh and limestone woodland. Therefore visitors come along to see Marsh Harriers, Bittern, Bearded Reedlings, Otters and more.

One of the bird species that makes the reserve a specific site of interest is Bittern, I have taken part in booming bittern surveys where we spread out across the reserve at dusk and

make note of any of the males' unique mating calls - better known as 'booms'. By having multiple people in different areas you can map where they are calling within the reed bed, this is difficult as their boom can be heard up to 3 miles away.

Part of my responsibilities has been to monitor any nesting Avocets on our salt marsh and seeing the chicks through to fledging. We monitor the water levels of salt marsh pools and adjust them depending on when the birds are nesting and when their eggs will hatch so that food is made available from wet muddy patches.

In the limestone woodland where lots of yew, hazel and ash are growing we have a lot of deer, mostly red as well as fallow. I have been carrying out deer impact assessments and during them have come across big groups of hinds and lots of signs of deer browsing. I have also been working on repairing a lot of the drystone walls within the woods that the deer have damaged.



Leighton Moss. © Hannah Kirby



Left - Deer damaged drystone wall. © Hannah Kirby



Right - A bowl of elvers (I'll stick to my sandwich. Ed) - © Hannah Kirby

During summer months European eels in their juvenile state (elvers) come from the sea and swim inland to freshwater areas including our reed beds. Since we use sluices to control water levels we also install elver passes that allow them cross over these barriers into Leighton Moss. These allow us to trap them and release them multiple times a week so that we can monitor the amount of elvers we get each year.

There is always lots to be done and I've really enjoyed what we've done so far, it's such a great opportunity to learn about the wildlife around us.



Leighton Moss is North of Lancaster near Carnforth and only 250 metres from Silverdale station. It has the largest reedbed in north-west England and features a skytower with views of Morecambe Bay. And you can enjoy coffee and cake in the cafe.

Cool fact, the reserve features a bird hide named after the comedian and avid birdwatcher, late Eric Morecambe.

Open Hide

Following the success of the similar events that were held last year, the first 'Open Hide' of 2026 enticed a large number of visitors to Colebrook hide. Throughout the day, more than fifty visitors, a mixture of MGLG members, novice birdwatchers and people whose curiosity had been aroused by the notices around the reserve, came to the hide to learn more about Moor Green Lakes and its wildlife.

Despite the morning of Saturday 11th of April being overcast with some light drizzle, several eager visitors arrived at the hide immediately after we opened. The pair of Oystercatchers, that have been at the reserve since January, foraging on Plover Island provided an interest for our early guests. Surprisingly, Tern Island was initially totally devoid of gulls, though the familiar squawking built throughout the morning as mainly Black-headed Gulls, but also a few Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, returned to the island.

Some visitors stayed for just a short time but those of us hosting the event did our best to point out something of interest for them to see, while visitors who stayed longer saw more of the 37 different species that were recorded on

the day. Amongst the species seen were House Martin (the first sighting of this species at Moor Green Lakes this year); Reed Bunting; Little Egret; Cetti's Warbler, while a Great Crested Grebe provided some of our afternoon visitors with prolonged close-up views as it spent several minutes trying to swallow a large fish that it had caught. In addition to the variety of bird species, both Roe and Muntjac deer were seen.

Sadly we forgot to take any photos of the day, as we were so engrossed with talking to our visitors.

Many thanks to Moor Green Volunteers Mary, Joanne, Marie, Jon, Robert, Steve and Simon for their help. Thanks also to all of the enthusiastic members and other guests who visited throughout the day and made it such an enjoyable event. We intend making these Open Hide sessions regular spring and autumn events at Moor Green with the next event planned for Saturday 3rd October – watch out for further information closer to the date.

Peter Craig and Jane Heritage 



Black-header Gull watching the observers in the hide on the open day. © Steve Arnold

Around the Reserve

Spring 2026 was recently declared by the Met Office to have been the warmest on record; however, this headline masks some marked changes in the weather patterns throughout the season. Alternating dry and wet spells were reflected in a parallel effect on the water level in Colebrook Lake and a scrape that waxed and waned.

A feature of the early spring was fewer gulls on Tern Island than is typical with a very slow build-up in the breeding colony, which only reached around a hundred birds – about a third of the usual colony. The reduced gull colony meant that there wasn't the usual competition for nesting space on the island, a factor that the arriving Common Terns took advantage of.

The first Common Terns arrived in early April and, as is usually the case, were first reported on East Fen before moving across to Colebrook, with up to six birds on Tern Island by early May. Frequent displays of courtship were seen along

with evidence that breeding territories were being established. Despite the lack of crowding, the first pairs of Terns on the island chose to avoid the upper level of the island to nest and instead settled on the shingle shelf at the western end, which, following several weeks of dry weather was more extensive than usual. The ensuing weeks saw several more pairs of Terns setting up territories on the island with nine nests established by the end of the month, providing the potential for one of the best breeding seasons for this species at the reserve in recent years. A couple of periods of wetter weather caused concern for the initial nests, one of which ended up very close to the rising water level. Fortunately, a return to drier weather, together with the work of volunteers to maintain sufficient outflow from the lake via Colebrook Cut, meant that none of the nests were inundated and the first chick was seen on 9th of June.



Two- and three-day old Common Tern chicks along with their mother wait in eager anticipation of the arrival of their next meal. © Peter Craig

The arrival of the first Common Tern chick coincided with the hatching of the first Black-headed Gull chicks with broods of three chicks each hatching from two nests. Following the slow build-up in the colony, the appearance of the first Black-headed Gull chicks was only a few days later than in recent years, on the other hand, the Common Tern hatching was a week to 10 days earlier.

Activity on Colebrook Lake was not restricted to the islands there also being plenty of interest on the scrape in front of the hide. The rise and fall of the water level meant that there was always soft mud in front of the hide, which provided opportunities both for feeding and for collecting material for nest building. Amongst the birds attracted to the scrape, that I was fortunate enough to see and photograph, was a Temminck's Stint - *Calidris temminckii*.

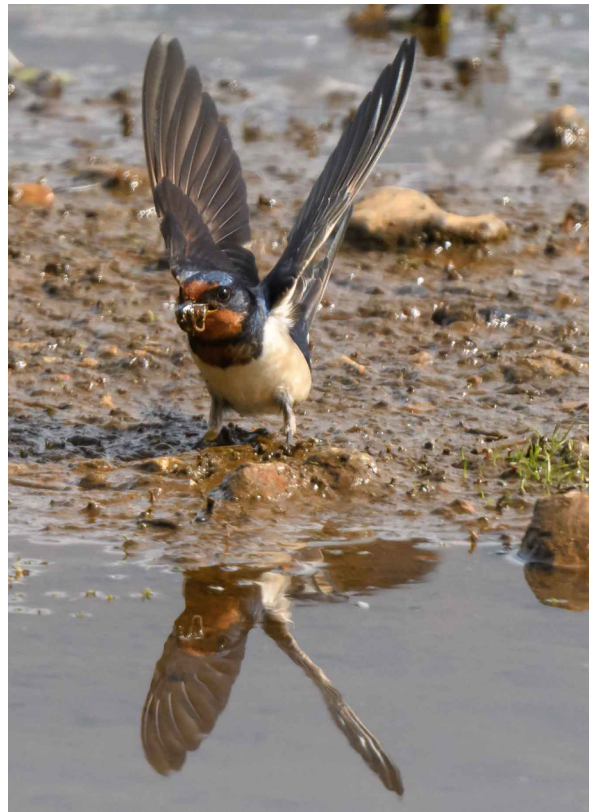


A Temminck's Stint on Colebrook scrape on the morning of 12th of May. The previous record of this species at the reserve was in 2008 © Peter Craig

This diminutive wader and rare visitor to Moor Green Lakes spent over an hour feeding on Colebrook scrape alongside a pair of juvenile Pied Wagtails on the morning of 12th of May. It was only when one of the wagtails landed close to the stint that I appreciated just how small the Temminck's Stint was. Meanwhile a pair of Swallows -*Hirundo rustica* repeatedly flew to and from the scrape; on each visit collecting mud in their beaks, no doubt for use in nest building.

A pair of Great Crested Grebes - *Podiceps*

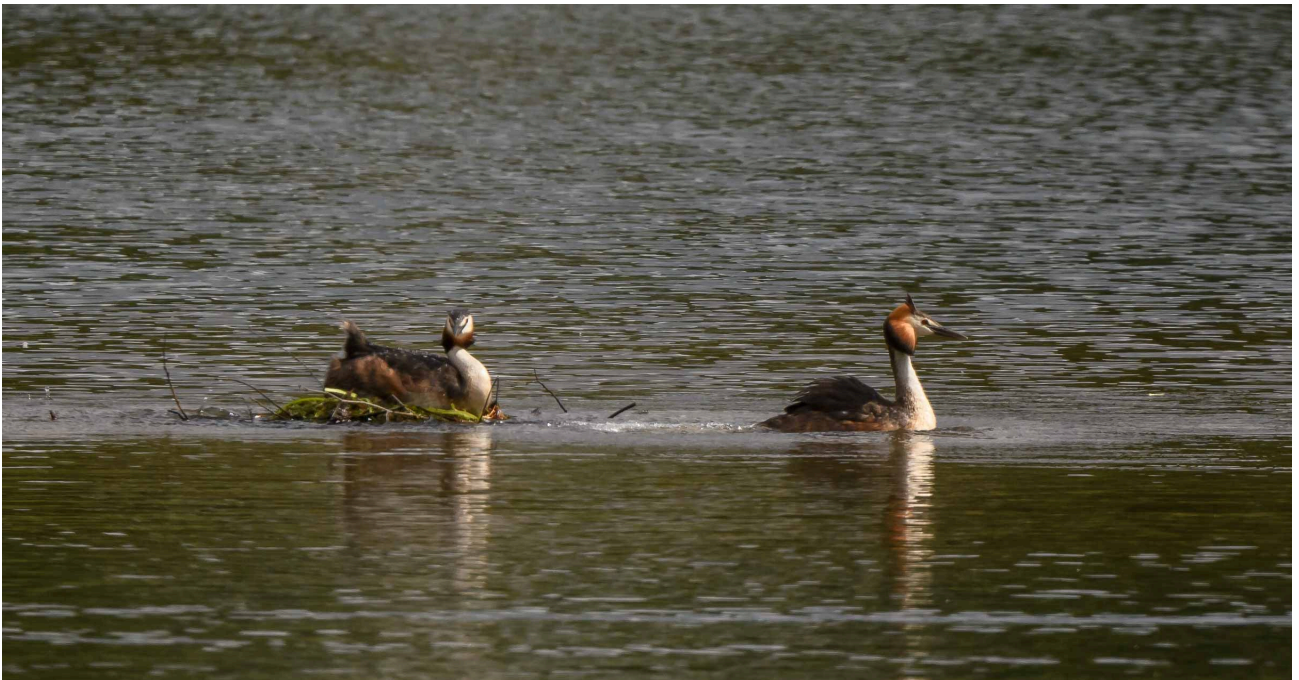
cristatus - have been a regular spectacle gliding elegantly across Colebrook Lake and occasionally engaging in their beak tapping courtship display. Following several years where this species has failed to breed on the reserve the appearance in mid June of a nest floating a short distance from the western end of Tern Island raises hope that we may have the delight of seeing young 'humbugs' riding on their parent's backs later in the summer. Certainly, a nest to watch during the coming weeks.



Left - A Pied Wagtail catching a damselfly over Colebrook scrape.

Right - A Swallow about to fly off Colebrook scrape with mud that it has collected for nest building.

© Peter Craig



Great Crested Grebe pair and their floating nest on Colebrook Lake North. © Peter Craig

Peter Craig



Island-hopping Oystercatchers

As has been the case for the past several years a pair of Oystercatchers - *Haematopus ostralegus* - nested this year on Plover Island. Their nest on the south side of the island allowed monitoring from Colebrook hide though this became increasingly difficult as the surrounding vegetation grew up. Eventually, it was only possible to glimpse an occasional view of the sitting bird when it shifted position or moved to allow its mate to take over incubation duty. Having a good idea of when the eggs had been laid, I anticipated hatching around mid



Adult Oystercatchers with their two recently hatched chicks on Plover Island on Sunday 18th of May. © Peter Craig

May; sure enough, on Thursday 15th I saw one of the adults fly from the nesting area carrying a large piece of eggshell indicating that at least one chick had hatched. It was not until the following day that a chick was first seen as the adults coaxed it out into the open. Over the ensuing weekend the Oystercatcher family (two adults with two chicks) could be seen near the water's edge on the south shore of Plover Island, where a clump of nearby vegetation provided a convenient place for the chicks for the hide from any threat. All appeared quite serene and I expected to be able to follow the chicks' development over the next few weeks

from the comfort of the hide – I ought to have learned by now that nature is seldom so predictable.

Visiting the hide on Monday 18th of May, I scanned Plover Island for the Oystercatchers but found no sign of either the adults or the chicks. As I was thinking that perhaps they had moved to the sheltered northern side of Plover Island, an unmistakable Peep Peep rang out as an adult Oystercatcher flew into view from the south carrying a worm in its bill. Half way across the lake it made an abrupt left turn and disappeared from view as it landed on the north side of Tern Island. I left the hide and headed along the path toward the car park stopping at every vantage point that afforded a view towards the north shore of Tern Island where the adult had landed. Eventually, I found a place from where the far north east corner of the island could be seen and there I saw an Oystercatcher chick closely watched over by both of its parents.



Adult Oystercatchers with one chick on NE corner of Tern Island on Monday 19th May © Peter Craig

Although parts of Tern Island are obscured from view from outside the reserve there had been no indication that Oystercatchers had nested on that island so the appearance of a chick of similar size to those seen on Plover



The month-old Oystercatcher flying to the scrape in front of Colebrook hide. © Peter Craig

Island the previous day strongly suggested migration between the two islands. While there has been evidence of movement of young Oystercatchers between the islands in previous years, such as last year when, at approximately three weeks of age, two juveniles migrated from Plover Island to the scrape in front of the hide, this year migration had occurred at only 3 – 4 days old so the only means that it could have covered the distance of at least 75m between the two islands would be by swimming (it would not even have been assisted by the wind which was from the southwest) . Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are few reports of similar behaviour in the ornithological literature but some do provide evidence that Oystercatcher chicks will take to the water as a means of escaping a threat. In his observations of American Black Oystercatchers - *Haematopus bachmani*, Morgan (1994) describes both surface paddling using the feet and swimming underwater with the wings to provide propulsion. Minton (2001) and Dowding, (2020) both also describe similar underwater swimming in Oystercatchers. In both of these

reports underwater swimming was observed in chicks with well-developed wings the only tentative evidence that very young chicks can propel themselves underwater is from an unverified social media video. Like the fate of its sibling, exactly how this year's Moor Green chick moved between the islands will remain in question but provides a demonstration of its strong survival instinct.

During its first week on Tern Island the chick was confined to the shingle ledge around the eastern end with the weathered mud 'cliff' seeming to be an insurmountable obstruction to reaching the top of the island. However, this location appeared to provide a good environment for the chick out of harm's way from the many skirmishes amongst the residents of the upper level, while the numerous fissures in the mud turned into readily accessible hiding places should a threat occur. As the only remaining chick receiving an abundant supply of food from its parents it grew rapidly and became increasingly mobile. By two weeks of age it was seen regularly on the south side of the island and was strong



The juvenile Oystercatcher (left, with pale orange bill and legs) and one of its parents exploring Colebrook scrape for a tasty worm. © Peter Craig

enough to clamber up onto the top level while by three weeks it was even bold enough to face-off threats from the Jackdaws. The juvenile's development continued and by four weeks post hatching its wings were sufficiently strong for it to make short flights. An early flight that I witnessed started very strongly with the juvenile setting off from Tern Island in pursuit both of its parents that had flown across to the scrape. However, the impressive start ended with the youngster belly-flopping into the water a few meters south of the island and an unceremonious swim back to terra firma. I visited the hide again the following day hoping to see more of the juvenile's early aerial escapades but the Oystercatchers surprised me once more as this mobile family had relocated back to Plover Island. By then, the juvenile had truly found its wings and over the ensuing week was seen extending its range around the lake. This included a visit to the scrape to feed with one of its parents, which finally providing the opportunity for a couple of much hoped for close-up photos.

References

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- Minton, Clive (2001) Waders Diving and Swimming Underwater as a Means of Escape, *Wader Study Group Bulletin*: Vol. 96: No. 1, Article 15.
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Peter Craig



Plant Survey - Spotlight on two Plants

Steve and I carried out plant surveys on the 14th of April and the 28th of May, flying solo, without the help of previous plant recorder, Peter Scott, whose help in previous surveys has been invaluable. We hope he will join us again this year.

The first half of April started with a mini heat wave followed in the second half by rather more unsettled weather and much needed rain. Our first survey of the year was at the end of the warm period. May started with some cold weather and frosts and ended with an historic late-month heat wave. These weather variations have an effect of the progress of plants at Moor Green and it became very evident in May as we approached the large meadow north of Colebrook North Lake that can be seen from Colebrook Hide. Usually, by

May, the vast amounts of purple Betony - *Betonica officialis* - and yellow Common Bird's Foot Trefoil - *Lotus corniculatus* - growing there are flowering but this year they were mostly lying limp, on the ground, with only the occasional evidence of a Betony flower bud and a few Common Bird's Foot Trefoil flowers. Betony is a very important plant for bees, hoverflies and butterflies, especially the Meadow Brown. Bird's Foot Trefoil is a critical nectar source for a multitude of insects including bees and butterflies. It's also important for several different caterpillars.

Two plants we did find with interesting properties were Climbing Corydalis - *Ceratocarpus claviculata* - and Perforate St John's Wort - *Hypericum perforatum*.



Climbing Corydalis. © John Heritage

The Climbing Corydalis likes shady areas of well drained acidic or peaty soils and can be found growing in profusion under the trees at the far end of Colebrook North Lake and along the track between Colebrook Lakes and Grove Lake. Gardeners will be familiar with its relative, the rather invasive perennial, Yellow Corydalis - *Corydalis Lutea*. Both belong to the Poppy family Papaveraceae.

Climbing Corydalis has pale creamy flowers and rather pinkish, weak, scrambling stems growing up to 1m tall. Claviculata means having tendrils which help it climb. The flowers are attractive to bees and hoverflies while the seeds have lipid-rich elaiosomes highly attractive to ants. These are nutrient-rich appendages attached to seeds of many plant species. These are carried away by ants; they eat the elaiosomes and discard the seeds thus spreading them. How clever is that!

Perforate St John's Wort is so named because of what looks like tiny holes in the leaves when observed closely with a loupe. These are translucent glands that give off a 'foxy' smell (I must have a sniff next time we see it). The bright yellow star-shaped flowers are dotted with black dots. These are dark secretory glands containing hypericin – a red pigment and chemical compound. Pinch an unopened flower bud and a bright blood-red juice is released.

This plant has been used for centuries in traditional medicines such as a soothing treatment for sores, cuts, wounds and sprains. Perhaps this is why it was carried by the crusaders to the Holy Land. It is approved in the EU as an antidepressant but not in the UK. However, it is approved here as a herbal supplement. The tops can also be used to produce an orange dye.



Perforate St John's Wort © John Heritage



Jane's finger after squishing the flower bud of Perforate St John's Wort to show the blood-red juice. © John Heritage



Perforate St John's Wort leaf showing the translucent glands (whitish dots) © Steve Arnold

Jane Heritage



The Last Word

Gravitropism

This is the growth response of the plant to gravity, causing roots to grow down and stems to grow upwards, also called Geotropism.

Plants perceive gravity with the help of dense particles called statoliths, which store starch and this is denser than the surrounding cytoplasm in the cell and they sink to the bottom. This settling happens inside statocytes which are specialised gravity-sensing cells. These regulate the growth hormone auxin accordingly, causing roots to develop in a

downward direction and stems in an upward direction.

Andrew Knight some two centuries ago attached germinating seeds to a vertical wheel that he kept spinning at around 150 rpm. After several days, the seeds had roots pointing outwards and shoots inward, treating the centrifugal force as artificial gravity.

Note that phototropism is the orientation of a plant in response to a light stimulus, again using auxin to regulate growth.

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.

Moor Green Lakes Group Newsletter - 1 July 2026