



Biodiversity Newsletter

September 2011



Hi all,

Standing in the park under a cathedral of stars on a clear August night is a wonderful experience. Continuing my nocturnal exploits into the fascinating world of bats has opened up a whole new world for me, thanks to Ash (Ryder), who is conducting ongoing research into the movements and distribution of bats in Stratford Park. Learning to decipher the various harmonics, sonograms and echo location frequencies for each species, is initially, a daunting task, but one which I am gradually grasping. Separating a Noctule from a Serotine is a rewarding challenge. Once you have identified the frequency of a Pipistrelle, you then move on to identifying their social calls. What sounds like a mixture of 'plops', 'squeeks' and static clicks through the bat detector, is your gateway into the world of these amazing creatures, and once you have mastered their identification calls, observing them becomes a real treat.

Autumn has arrived early to the park this year, and many trees are already dropping their leaves. The gold and russet colours of autumn are already evident a month earlier than normal. With a prolonged dry spring and cool summer, many of our larger conifers are showing signs of stress. The Wellingtonias appear to be suffering the most, especially by the orangery where the trees there are showing signs of 'needle drop'. The adjacent monkey puzzle tree has also suffered badly from two severe winters and dry summers.

We have extended the butterfly garden at the orangery, sited a new bench and placed a bird bath, which will greatly enhance that area. I have also planted some sweet Williams (Royal mix), which I sowed from seeds, commemorating the recent royal wedding in April. These will give a splash of colour next spring. The orangery will also be enhanced next month with the planting of tulip bulbs.

During the coming autumn, park staff will be working on enhancing certain areas around the park, clearing and planting new shrubs and flowers. In many ways, I look at the park as a puzzle on a board which you always want to



complete. Every extra piece you add fills in the gaps and brings added satisfaction. Enjoy the park this autumn.

Mike

News from the Supervisor's Trap



Black-headed Gulls flock on fields

Anyone visiting the park this month will notice large flocks of gulls feeding on the main fields. The majority of these are Black-headed gulls. To most, gulls are greedy, boring birds associated with scavenging at the seaside. However, they are very successful and adaptable birds and worthy of closer investigation. At the park we have 4 species of gulls occurring, Black-headed, common, Herring and Lesser-black backed. The latter two species are fierce predators, and visit the park in spring to predate young Mallard ducklings and Moorhen chicks. These large gulls nest on top of large buildings, mainly in Gloucester city. During the summer, our Black-headed gulls can be seen around the lake showing their characteristic brown heads. During autumn, the birds lose the brown head and adopt a winter plumage (above left). Separating gulls in winter is quite hard for the inexperienced, but as a matter of separation, the black-headed is distinguished from the Common gull by its black wing tips and white along the edge of the forewing, also its red legs. Our birds will soon disperse throughout the country and further abroad. When park staff mows the field, they can always be seen in large numbers feeding on the insects and worms disturbed by the tractor.

Often amongst these will be larger Lesser-black backed gulls. A dead gull (the victim of a Sparrowhawk kill), was recently discovered by the woodland, and as these hawks take prey the size of a wood pigeon, a gull is no problem.

Holly Blue has bumper year

With such a warm dry spring this year, some of the park's butterflies have enjoyed a bumper season. One such species is the Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*. The park is ideal habitat for this butterfly and provides plenty of food-plant for the caterpillars (ivy). There is two generations per year, the first in April and May, and the second in August. Numbers have been up on last year, and the butterfly can be seen amongst the shrub areas below the museum throughout the summer, and feeding on the flower beds at the orangery. The male is a light pastel blue with a pale, dotted underside, and the female, which is slightly larger, can be distinguished by its black markings on the wing tips. Females were recently observed laying eggs on the ivy growing by

the gates of the works compound. Of the 5 species of *Lycaenidae* (blues) found in the park, the Holly Blue is the first to be on the wing, and is always a welcome spring butterfly.



Holly Blue (female)



Holly Blue (underside)

Moth event at the orangery August 19th

At last, the conditions were favourable for our moth event, held through the museum in the park, and with a cloudy sky overhead, I was optimistic of a good catch. The previous moth event in June had been cancelled due to wet weather, so it was with enthusiasm that I set up the mercury vapour lamp in front of the orangery in the hope of adding new species to the park's growing list. Within 10 minutes, this was soon realised, with a fresh Dark-sword grass, a migrant species not previously recorded in the park, and one which I have not seen for many years. This good start was consolidated by the arrival of a steady number of moths including Setaceous Hebrew-character, Lesser broad-bordered yellow underwing, Willow beauty (new for the park), Tawny speckled pug and Dun-bar. The group established a sugar round by the pond and amongst the trees below the mansion house, and this proved productive with some lovely fresh specimens of Copper Underwing. I was able to show those in attendance, the moths using their proboscis to suck up the sugar, which fascinated all. Children always love this part of a moth event, and scramble from tree to tree in the hope of finding an interesting moth. Unfortunately, the moths are sensitive to the intrusion of a multitude of torch beams, and fly off! However, on this occasion Ann (Taylor) was able to keep the group together, so good views of moths at the sugar patch were enjoyed by all.

In every group attending a moth event, there is always one or two that have an advanced interest in moths, and one person had brought his field guides and was diligently engaged with me in the identification of moths as they landed on the sheet. This interaction with the public is always a personal bonus, and if in leaving an event, one person has had their knowledge of moths enriched by their visit then a good night has been achieved. Next moth night is on Saturday 8th October, at the orangery. www.museuminthepark.org for details.



Butterfly Garden / Orangery receives another facelift

It is no surprise to know that one of the park's successes over recent months has been the creation of the butterfly garden / perennial bed at the orangery. I have lost count of the many people visiting the park, who have commented on how lovely this looks in the summer. In large, the flower beds have remained un-vandalised, but there have been some isolated incidents of damage this year, which sadly is the age we live in. However, throughout summer, the beds have been a splendid show of colour, attracting a multitude of Bees and other insects. With the festival of nature imminent, Rozelle (Jachowicz) and I discussed extending the flower border towards the woodland side of the orangery, creating a corner where visitors could sit and enjoy the sounds of the woodland birds. Park staff dug the area and laid a concrete base for a new bench. A bird bath was sited on the bank, and a rustic brick edging was laid to create the new bed. New plants and shrubs were then sourced and planted on festival day. This corner will undoubtedly enhance this lovely part of the park and improve biodiversity. We intend creating a 'buddleia' area behind this to encourage more butterflies.



500 New trees for Stratford Park

Stratford Park has received 500 new trees as part of ongoing initiatives to improve biodiversity. The small saplings including Hawthorns, Holly, Ash, Oak, Whitebeam and Blackthorn arrived at the park for planting at the festival of nature. Planting has started adjacent to the dipping pond, where Paul Rutter and members of the public planted a mixed hedge, which will eventually create a screen along the bank there, and provide nesting sites for birds. Park staff will continue planting saplings around the park over the coming weeks. A big thank you to Steve Roberts for helping to provide these trees for the park.

A 6th species of Bat for Stratford Park

I have received confirmation from Ash Ryder that Whiskered Bat has been recorded at the park, bringing the total number of species to 6. Two single bats have been detected hunting at 2 locations; above the play area and as Ash calls it, 'the angler's gate' by the dipping pond. The discovery of this new species is the result of Ash's diligent fieldwork, which is greatly improving our knowledge of the distribution of bats at the park. At the time of completing this month's newsletter, Ash has also informed me that he has now located 2 active Noctule roosts in the woodland which I hope to bring you news of next month.

In the next newsletter, I will provide a more comprehensive overview of Ash's bat recording and observations this season.



Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

BIRDS: Sparrowhawk (has been observed taking prey from a garden bird feeder adjacent to the park) (photos submitted by Sharon Tucker). 'e-mail for copies'. Buzzard (frequent over the woodland). Mixed gulls feeding on the fields. Kingfisher and Heron at the lake, Autumn finches starting to form flocks along the top fields, including Goldfinch and Chaffinch. In the woodland, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Wren, Great-spotted woodpecker Dunnock.

BUTTERFLIES: Red Admiral (feeding on Sedums at the orangery). Comma (feeding on ivy blossom around the walled garden). Small Copper (a few late specimens on the wild flower bank) Painted Lady 2 observed feeding on fallen plums by the walled garden September 1st Speckled Wood (a few last generation butterflies can be seen in the woodland on sunny mornings).

OTHER INSECTS: It is worth looking at the large areas of ivy by the walled garden, where a multitude of hoverflies and bees can be seen feeding on the opening blossom.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Moth Event: Saturday October 8th at the orangery through the museum in the park. Join us for this year's final moth event, where we hope to see some of the park's lovely autumn moths. We will once again establish a sugar round below the mansion house to attract migrant species such as pearly underwing and dark sword-grass. Please go to www.museuminthepark.org for details.

Anyone interested in butterflies, moths and all other insects will be interested to know that the Amateur Entomologist's Society will be holding their annual 'bug fair' at Kempton Park race course in Sunbury on Saturday October 1st 2011. This is a great day out for the family. See www.theaes.org for further details.

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Insects feeding at ivy blossom

