



Hi all,

The approach of autumn is always a reflective time at the park, as one season closes and another opens. For many reasons, autumn is the most beautiful season at the park, but also one of great reflection and contemplation, as the shorter days herald the end of another summer. Autumn is a time of great activity for our wildlife here in the park, as birds feast on an inexhaustible supply of fruit and berries, and the last few butterflies and moths imbibe on the last blooms of ivy. The year so far has been full of new discoveries, with new species of birds, bats and moths recorded. Interest in the park's wildlife and biodiversity continues to grow, and the momentum of this could never be more apparent than Stroud district council's proposals to initiate a 10 year management plan, currently under discussion with the Stratford Park management group. This directive will embrace the work we have been doing at the park in recent years, and form a cohesive strategy for biodiversity and sustainability, not only by conserving and creating habitats, but also utilising the resources we have in the park through recycling. I do not just see this development through the vision of my own eyes, but also of the others associated with the park, organisations and individuals who share the same passion and commitment as I, to these 53 acres of green space. Last month's festival of nature once again highlighted what we have at Stratford Park and what is available to see if you look closer. At the time of writing, it is the hottest October day on record. No doubt we will be clearing snow in 4 weeks!

Mike





News from the Supervisor's Trap



Bat roosts discovered in woodland

3 Noctule bat roosts have been discovered in Stratford Park woodland. Ash Ryder who is continuing his work on the park's bats, located 3 roosts in old woodpecker nest holes. The bats are using the large decayed poplar tree by the 2nd model railway bridge, and an adult was seen emerging from this roost on the evening of 13th September. The second roost site is in another large poplar between the two model railway bridges. A third roost has been located in the far oak tree on the north-east elevation of the park, again in an old woodpecker hole. Ash and I have been observing these bats on their night time hunting flights, and they usually fly at higher altitudes than the other species of bats. The Noctule is our largest British bat. Also on the 13th September, we were able to observe the courtship flight displays of Pipistrelle bats by the dipping pond.

Black Poplar comes crashing down!

Having only just reported the discovery of a bat roost in the old poplar tree in the woodland (above), the very same tree came crashing to earth on the afternoon of 21st September, straddling the model railway bridge in the process. This tree, almost 100ft high, and one of the largest in the woodland, has been very important for wildlife over the years. Treecreepers have nested beneath its bark for several decades. Great-spotted woodpeckers also nested in the decaying trunk, and ironically this year, Noctule bats have been roosting in these old nest holes. During the summer, we have observed several species of Bees nesting in the upper decaying trunk. Tree maintenance contractors were informed of the bat roost, and ensured that the recovered tree trunk sections were positioned with the roost holes exposed, to allow any possible survivors, an exit from the fallen tree.

It was indeed a sad day for me to see this grand old poplar end its days in 3 huge pieces. Somewhere under the debris, are the remains of our treecreeper box. However, this monolithic tree will now rot down and provide another habitat for other wildlife.

Unusually warm weather prompts Rook activity

The end of September has seen the warmest temperatures since 1985. This has prompted another flush of flowers around the park, and a surge in the number of Speckled Wood butterflies in the woodland. Even more interesting is the activity of Rooks in the park's rookery

by the outdoor pool entrance. These birds have been seen actively repairing nests, and showing signs of early courtship. This is very early behaviour, as Rooks usually start repairing nests in December. Our Rookery is a cacophony of chatter and activity already. The birds may get caught out though, as some say that this very unusual warm weather is a prelude to the hardest winter since 1963. There were 2 rookeries in the park, but the one on the Stratford road was deserted this spring, for reasons unknown. All of the park's rook population now breed in the remaining rookery by the outdoor pool entrance. The occurrence of crane fly larvae 'leatherjackets' in adjacent Callowell fields, is the main food source for these birds in Spring. Rooks can also be blamed in part for the park's litter problem, as when they are feeding their young in March, they can shred a plastic rubbish bag to pieces to obtain scraps, a regular sight for park staff, when they arrive at work in the morning!



Another good score for biodiversity

Stratford Park has once again received a high score for conservation and biodiversity in the 2011 Heart of England in Bloom awards. The park received 9 out of a maximum 10 points for the following areas of achievement in the section for environmental responsibility, **'Amazing amount of conservation and biodiversity at Stratford Park'** **The Stroud Festival of Nature** **'Increased number of bird boxes and introduction of bird baths'** **'Monthly biodiversity newsletters'**. Britain in Bloom judges visited the park in July, and were given a tour around the park, and shown the areas we are developing for wildlife, including the new pond and butterfly garden at the orangery.

The total score for Stroud (in all categories) out of a possible maximum of 200 was 163, which achieved a Silver-Gilt award.

Hot weather brings in migrant moths

The exceptionally hot weather of the weekend October 1st and 2nd produced a large influx of moths to the park's moth trap, among these, several immigrant species including Pearly Underwing, Dark sword-grass, *Nomophila noctuella* and The Vestal. All of these moths have arrived from southern Europe and North Africa, and have been brought over by the stream of warm air. Native moths were also up in numbers, with many species producing a second generation. Also seen in the park, was a 'Hummingbird Hawk moth' feeding from *Sedum* at the orangery flower bed. I also had a Hummingbird Hawk in the garden at Whitminster during the same weekend. The warm weather has also extended the flight period of some butterflies.

Hummingbird Hawk Moth
Macroglossum stellatarum



Nuthatches show decline in breeding

After showing a marked increase in numbers during 2009/10, no Nuthatch nests were located in the park this year. Numbers had increased considerably during the last 2 years, mainly due to the introduction of nest boxes in the woodland. Previous to this, the species was declining rapidly due to the loss and lack of suitable nesting holes. With new nest boxes erected they seemed to be on the up again. However, this year, despite much searching, no active nest was located in the park, and none of the Nuthatch boxes were used. In general, Nuthatches have been conspicuous by their absence this summer, and the familiar piping call has been less in evidence. Single birds have been seen in the park, but nowhere near the numbers of the past 2 years. Little has changed in their woodland habitat, so it is a mystery why they have not nested. The severe winter at the beginning of the year may have increased mortality rates, but the winter previous to this was equally harsh, yet Nuthatch numbers were high in 2010.

I can only conclude that the birds are not using our boxes because they have had anti-squirrel steel plates fixed onto the entrance holes. Nuthatches like to 'customise' their entrance holes by applying mud. It is possible that the steel plates have discouraged the birds from using the boxes. Other birds such as Blue and Great tits have used the boxes with the new plates. During the winter, we are going to remove some of the steel plates from boxes that Nuthatches have previously used, and monitor them next spring. If the birds start to use them again, we will then know that the plates are the reason for them not using the boxes.



Nuthatch

More trees planted around Park

Park staff has been planting more trees throughout the park. An area behind the orangery has been levelled and graded, and young trees have been planted there to increase biodiversity. Trees have also been planted in the new corridor extending from the rough grass area on the top fields.

Moth event at the orangery 8th October

Although we missed the previous weekend's heat wave, a small group assembled at the orangery for this evening's moth event. Before our party arrived, Ann (Taylor), and I were discussing previous events, when suddenly, a moth flew in which instantly attracted my attention. With the conversation coming to an abrupt end, and with Ann racing back to the museum for her camera, I secured the moth in a container and was delighted to record a *Merveille de jour*, (a first for the park). This beautiful moth (see below) is normally a denizen of mature oak woodland, on which its larvae feeds. The species is present in the Forest of Dean, but I have never recorded it in the Stroud area. Sadly, this propitious start was not emulated for the rest of the night, as not many moths arrived at the trap. Conditions were good, with an overcast sky, and some moths did come to the lamp, including another new species for the park, Large Wainscot. Those present were extremely interested and excited to see this moth, and there was a combined call of 'Mike, quick, what's this one'? During the evening, I must have answered at least 100 questions from people about moths, especially the children, and during this time, I was able to show them some Hawk moth specimens I had brought along, including one from Argentina showing its extended proboscis.

This was our last moth event of the year, and it was my most enjoyable. Sometimes, it's not all about quantity, but quality, and on this night, we had 2 quality species to add to the parks growing list. I would like to thank Ann and Abigail for all their enthusiasm and assistance in organising these events throughout the year, and Ann was again, resplendent in her high viz waistcoat!

The beautiful *Merveille du jour* Moth



Large Wainscot Moth



As a footnote to this year's last moth event, there will be a national moth night in 2012, and we hope to organize our own event in the park to contribute to this. Watch this newsletter for future details.

Wildlife to see now in Stratford Park

BIRDS: Fieldfare and Redwing (arriving from Scandinavia) feeding along the top field perimeters. Goldcrest (showing well this month in the arboretum) Adrian Watts and I came within 3 ft of one by the bowling green on 3rd October. Sparrowhawk (still by the woodland nest). Buzzard (soaring most days over the park). Cormorant (at the lake on 8th October P.Woodward) Little Owl (1 bird still in the oak tree on the main field) Black-headed, Lesser black-backed and Herring gulls feeding on the top fields. Starling (large flock in callowell fields). Pheasant (2 spotted in the woodland). Kingfisher (1 on the lake 2nd October).

BUTTERFLIES / INSECTS: Speckled Wood (due to the recent hot weather, the butterflies are still on the wing along the stream and in the woodland. Comma and Red Admiral feeding on the ivy blossom by the walled garden. Lots of hoverflies also on the ivy.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Bird walk in Stratford Park Sunday 30th October 2011. Meet in the museum courtyard at 2.00pm. Sturdy boots or wellingtons recommended. Go to www.museuminthepark.org for details.

CONTACT: Mike McCrea Tel: 07833091294 E-Mail: MMccrea@thelandscapegroup.co.uk
mike@media-maker.com

