

Diary - 2009

7 July

I really must try to find more time for this diary, though I'm not sure if anyone reads it? So what has happened since I last put pen to paper; Ian and I ran a couple of moth traps overnight on 28th June and caught 75 moths of 35 species. Nothing very unusual but it brought the total number of species at The Watercress beds to 107. It was also noteworthy that whilst setting out one of the traps at dusk we encountered about 20 Ghost Moths "dancing" low over the meadow just below the road bridge – a spectacular sight.

We think we have a mink on site but it may be living elsewhere and just calling in from time to time as the traps have had no success and the young mallards and moorhen seem to be surviving.

The butterfly numbers have been high – certainly when compared to last summer. With the gatekeeper pictured here, which was my first this year for Ewelme, the total number of species is now at 19. It was also good to see a couple of marbled whites around today.



27 May

Some catching up to do after my holiday. Ian ran a moth trap outside the centre while I was away and, although numbers were low, he did catch a Tissue Moth which has only been found on one other occasion, in seven years, in the area covered by the Upper Thames Branch of butterfly conservation. Whilst on the subject of moths Ian and I ran three traps overnight on 23 May and caught 123 moths of 33 species including three of the large Hawk moths. The range of butterfly species has been somewhat poor but enlivened somewhat by a huge influx of Painted Ladies from the south on 25/6 May. This influx occurred throughout the southern part of the country and was also reported from northern Europe. It was not easy to obtain good views of these as they shot through at high speed but I was lucky enough to get a photo of one taking a rest on one of the compost heaps.



The workday seemed to go well whilst I was away and the gate over the Nellie Bridge was completed. We welcomed Wallingford Green Gym for a work session on 26 May and started on the never ending task of clearing side channels through the beds to keep the water flowing. On this occasion we were working on the bed just below the Road Bridge.

26 April

My weekly butterfly survey revealed 21 individuals of 7 species but nothing unusual. The Highlight, though, was the discovery by Ian of Adder's Tongue Fern.



Not just one but considerable numbers. This plant is described as "... can be difficult to detect, especially after early Spring, as other plants often hide it. Because of its appearance, in the days of sympathetic medicine it was commonly believed to be a cure for snake bites. It prefers old pastures that have not been ploughed. Over the years suitable habitats have been declining and hence adder's tongue appears in various threat categories on

European red lists. It is protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981."

22 April

The beautiful weather continues and the reserve is probably at its very best at the moment. A good range of birds seen this morning with 2 warblers (Blackcap and Chiffchaff) and both the Swallows and House Martins were busily collecting insects in the skies above the beds. Even though it was too early for the best of the butterflies several species including Orange Tips and Speckled Woods were active. The highlight of the visit, though, was an obliging Water Vole allowing me to click off over 60 photos like this one.



5 April

Guided walk day with 34 customers. During walk round a female Mallard with 12 young in tow and a busy Sedge Warbler feeding up near the Mill. This is only the second record of this species and somewhat early. It was probably only passing through but I live in hope that one day a pair will nest here.

30 March

27 species of bird today including both Chiffchaff and Blackcap singing but whether they are newly arrived summer visitors or overwintering birds we will never know. The only other birds of note were a Siskin near the centre and a friendly Song Thrush that posed for this photograph.



19 March

Spring really seems to be in the air. It is always good to hear the first Chiffchaff singing though it does become a bit repetitive after a month or so. A pair of Canada Geese were sitting in the beds at the lower end of the site giving the appearance of owning the beds. In addition to the above and two each of Small Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies a pair of Long-tailed Tits were seen nest building. Water rail still present.



18 March

Our luck with workday weather continues – another sunny, warm day. Most of the work was directed towards “spring cleaning”. The meadow received its final cut of the winter and the paths their first of the summer. The weed suppressant material was removed from the bottom end of the site, various piles of arisings removed to compost sites and the area beyond the bramble hedge in the butterfly

meadow cleared. Spring is really in the air – I almost tripped over the first Mallards nest of the year with a clutch of about 12 eggs.

17 March

The beautiful weather continues and during a quick walk round this afternoon 5 butterflies were seen comprising 2 each of Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks and a single Comma.

13 March



22 species of birds counted today but a different list to that of 8th. Highlights were a Water Rail, a Skylark and a female Blackcap. I was wondering what had happened to our overwintering warblers so pleased to see the latter. Although it is getting near the time for the first of the summer visitors to arrive the Blackcap was almost certainly overwintering as my garden bird is still a regular visitor. A stoat was seen very briefly near the site of the Mill and an



unidentified butterfly (probably Small Tortoiseshell) seen in the top meadow.

8 March

Did my regular bird count – cold wind was probably partly responsible for a fairly low count of 22 species, the highlight being a Water Rail still present under the Privet Bush below the Mill.

7 March

Workday with the usual fine weather that we seem to be blessed with. About 30 volunteers in all split evenly between the Sonning Common Green Gym and “the rest”. Whilst walking down the beds to check on the GG I saw 2 “plate sized” Trout just below the ford.

6 March

I thought it was about time I revised this part of the web site. A brief walk round today, after working on the compost bins, revealed the Snowdrops just going over but being replaced by Daffodils, Violets, Celandines and the first few Coltsfoots (or should it be Coltsfeet?).

A Water Rail was still around yesterday though not seen today. The first of the frogspawn is in the Trout Pond extension and my first Butterfly on the site, a Small Tortoiseshell, was sunning itself just below the mill weir. (Des reports one of these earlier but also points out that he only recorded one during 2008 whereas my records indicate 9 sightings with a maximum of 4 individuals on 13 September last year).



