

# Friends of Weir Wood Newsletter

Newsletter No. 78

Autumn 2017

## Welcome!



### Review of Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July Open Day

As forecast the rain stopped early, the sun came out and we enjoyed lovely summer weather for the whole of our Open Day. A good steady stream of visitors attended, it was good to see families with children and to meet some of our members.

At the car park and hide: bird watching; book sales; refreshments and a live moth display. Two of the moth species displayed, Dot Moth & Striped Wainscot, were new species for the reserve.

A Serengeti moment occurred when a flock of Greylag Geese on Pintail Point suddenly put up a commotion. A fox had crept up on them and grabbed one. The eventual ensuing wrestling match ended with the fox dragging the goose off into the undergrowth, a rare experience for those watching!

Birding highlights included: Common Terns, Green Sandpiper; Common Sandpiper; Kingfisher; Buzzards, Grebes and Herons. Interestingly one of our recently fledged young Cormorants was watched as it sat on a perch in front of the hide being fed by thrusting its head deep down its parent's throat.

At Whillet's Meadows: bird ringing; pond dipping; wildflowers: reptile and small mammal refuges.

The reptiles were evident with Grass Snakes and Slow Worms. The bird ringing produced birds for the visitors to see in the hand. In total 16 birds which included 6 Reed Warblers of which 2 were juveniles. Interestingly in 2014 Open Day we ringed a juvenile Reed Warbler which was then trapped again at both the 2015 & 2017 Open Days.

There were also good numbers of insects enjoying the warmth notably numerous were grasshoppers.

The pond dipping was as popular as ever. Some of the wildlife found included young newts & larvae of Diving Beetle, Dragonfly & Damselfly plus a myriad of other small pond creatures.

The day was successful in increasing public awareness of the activities of the Friends, and the wildlife attractions and beauty of the reserve.

Our thanks go to all our volunteers and helpers who worked so hard to make the day a success, and to the recorders who sent us photographs and records of the day. Also Paul for providing part of the moth display and Goughs Pet Store in East Grinstead for letting us use their gazebo.

Finally thanks to all those who came along and supported us, the feedback was that you had a very enjoyable day.

### Fungi Foray Walk on 15<sup>th</sup> October

Just to confirm, there will be a Fungi Foray walk open to our members on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October within the Nature Reserve led by Nick Aplin who leads the Crawley Fungi Group.

Meet at the hide Car Park in Legshead Lane at 9:45 for 10:00 start, with finish at approx. 1PM. No need to book, just turn up. Could be wet underfoot, advise you have suitable footwear.

I can confirm that Nick has also kindly agreed to give us a talk on fungi as our guest speaker at our AGM which has been confirmed for Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at our usual venue.

### Southern Water Volunteers Day

Southern Water kindly offered to use one of their staff volunteer days to help us carry out some Nature Reserve work. On the 18<sup>th</sup> July fifteen of their volunteer staff arrived at our hide Car Park. We then arranged for them to help some of our regular volunteers to clear Willow trees from the water edge on an area of North bank opposite the viewing area. This was an area where we wanted to further clear the willows extending out into the water, to increase the water edge for resting wildfowl and further open the views to towards the fields and meadows behind.

Only using hand saws and loppers, the Southern Water volunteers cut down a massive amount of Willow growing along the water edge that day, which was piled up ready for future burning.

Their hard work was much appreciated and benefits for bird watching are already being seen. Some further work is still intended to complete the improvements to the habitat at this area.

We also found some time to show them around Whillet's meadows, most had never seen the reserve and included some ecologists who were suitably impressed. We hope this successful volunteer day will help bring a closer relationship between Southern Water and ourselves.

*by Bob Johnson*

### Bird Hide Windows

We have had ongoing problems with people trespassing into the reserve. We have already tried to overcome the problem by putting barbed wire below the windows, but recently we have had a further spate of people getting into the reserve in spite of this. The windows still being their main means of access & egress. We therefore needed further deterrents, deciding that some barring across the windows was probably the only effective option.

In order to be strong enough to deter, but open enough to still allow bird watching we decided to fit a very open type reinforcing mesh to the hide windows. This should still allow easy binocular and telescope use, the bars seemed to cause minimal visual impact. The feedback we have had so far from our users is good, with people advising it is hardly being noticed.

I am aware that some photographers have been unhappy with the new arrangement, worrying about scratching expensive lens bodies, but others are advising that it causes minimal problems and easy to work around.

Since we fitted the bars we have had no further trespass incidences and therefore for the time being we are continuing to monitor the situation. The concern will be if we start to remove some of the bars to give some larger open areas, this will reduce the strength and the deterrent will be compromised.

*By Bob Johnson*

**Little Grebe** - 1 + 2 young on 6/8 to 8/8, 13/8, 14/8 & 23/8, 2 on 24/8, 1 on 27/8, 2 on 28/8, 1 on 10/9.  
**Great Crested Grebe** – Regular (counts over 40), 57 on 19/6, up to 75 from 21/6 onwards until 80 on 11/7 & 12/7, 91 on 14/7, 65 on 16/7, 3 Young seen from 18/7, 74 on 23/7, 100 on 30/7, 81 on 13/8, 55 includes 4 Juv on 26/8, 50 on 27/8, 70 on 10/9.  
**Cormorant** – Regular (2 pairs bred 4 young) (Counts over 10), 12 on 19/6, 26 on 22/6, 18 on 8/7, 23 on 23/7, 40 on 30/7, 12 on 8/8, 23 on 12/8, 30 on 13/8, 14 on 18/8, 18 on 22/8, 19 on 27/8, 22 on 10/9.  
**Little Egret** - Up to 2 regularly (Counts over) 40 on 20/6, 3 on 13/8, 15/8 & 29/8.  
**Mute Swan** – 1 on 2/7, 4/7 & 11/7, 1 on 13/8.  
**Grey Heron** – Regular - (Counts over 6), 9 on 19/6, 14 on 22/6, 12 on 25/6, 17 on 8/7, 13 on 23/7, 10 on 8/8, 9 on 12/8, 25 on 13/8, 7 on 22/8, 16 on 27/8, 20 on 10/9.  
**Greylag Goose** – Regular (Counts over 30), 66 on 13/6, 64 on 22/6, 94 on 24/6, 74 on 25/6, 79 on 26/6, 68 on 30/6, 39 on 11/7, 72 on 23/7, 98 on 30/7, 101 on 31/7, 38 on 7/8, 31 on 8/8, 48 on 13/8, 209 on 18/8, 62 on 10/9. Occasional white feral geese seen with 7 feral hybrids seen on 18/8.  
**Canada Goose** – Regular (Counts over 10), 22 on 11/7, 20 on 19/7, 23 on 23/7, 66 on 7/8, (counts over 50), 72 on 8/8, 78 on 13/8, 102 on 14/8, 20 on 22/8, 66 on 26/8, 15 on 27/8, 122 on 29/8, 47 on 8/9, 190 on 10/9.  
**Egyptian Goose** – 3 on 23/7, 1 on 7/8, 2 on 2/9.  
**Mandarin** – Regular (Counts over 3), 8 on 19/6, 4 on 20/6, 18 on 21/6, 15 on 22/6, 34 on 25/6, 24 on 26/6, 4 on 8/7 & 11/7, 13 on 13/7, 8 on 14/7, 6 on 16/7, 9 on 18/7, 12 on 23/7, 9 on 30/7, 10 on 12/8, 11 on 13/8, 4 on 27/8, 2 on 10/9.  
**Gadwall** – 4 on 22/6, 2 on 25/6, 1 on 3/9. **Shoveler** - 1 on 29/8.  
**Teal** - 2 on 14/ & 16/7, 2 from 30/7 to 7/8, 5 on 13/8, 4 on 14/8, 5 on 22/8, 6 from 26/8 to 29/8, 3 on 2/9 & 3/9, 4 on 9/9 & 10/9. 8 on 12/9. **Common Scoter** – 3 on 14/8.  
**Mallard** - Resident - (counts over 15), 16 on 19/6, 25 on 22/6, 33 on 25/6, 39 on 25/6, 56 on 12/7, 40 on 14/7, 43 on 23/7, 32 on 30/7, 84 on 13/8, 41 on 22/8, 22 on 27/8, 47 on 2/9, 49 on 10/9.  
**Tufted Duck** – 1 on 21/6, 2 on 24/6, 1 on 25/6 & 26/6, 3 on 2/7, 1 regularly from 12/7 until end of period.  
**Sparrowhawk** – 1 on 2/7, 6/7, 30/7 & 31/7, 1 on 6/8, 13/8, 24/8 & 26/8, 2 on 27/8, 1 on 12/9.  
**Common Buzzard** – up to 2 regularly with 3 on 30/6 (counts over 2), 5 on 2/7, 3 on 6/7, 4 on 27/7, 3 on 30/7, 31/7 & 13/8, 3 from 22/8 to 28/8, 4 on 2/9, 3 on 10/9 & 12/9.  
**Kestrel** – 1 seen regularly throughout June, 2 on 2/7, 1 on 12/7, 6/8 & 13/8, 1 from 23/8 to 28/8 with 2 on 26/8, 1 on 2/9, 4/9, 10/9 & 12/9. **Red Kite** - 1 on 30/6, 2 on 17/7, 1 on 7/8.  
**Hobby** – 1 on 14/7. **Peregrine** – 1 on 28/8.  
**Osprey** – 1 on 4/9 & 9/9.  
**Pheasant** – Resident & regular - (counts over 5), 7 on 10/9.  
**Moorhen** – Up to 2 regularly (counts over 2), 3 on 25/6, 7 on 26/6, 6 on 13/7, 5 on 30/7, 4 on 13/8 & 22/8, 3 on 27/8 & 10/9.  
**Coot** - 1 on 18/7 & 1/8, 1 on 14/8 & 15/8. **Water Rail** - 1 on 26/8.  
**Dunlin** – 1 on 28/7. **Oystercatcher** – 1 on 27/7.  
**Lapwing** – Up to 4 regularly (counts over) 12 on 26/6, up to 6 from 2/7 to 8/7, 11 on 11/7, 8 on 12/7, up to 23 from 13/7 to 16/7, 11 on 18/7, 21 on 23/7, 29 on 25/7, up to 30 from 30/7 to 6/8, 37 on 7/8, 5 on 13/8, up to 22 from 14/8 to 20/8, 25 on 23/8, 12 on 24/8, 14 on 27/8, 15 on 28/8, 21 on 10/9.  
**Greenshank** – 1 on 25/6, 2 on 15/8. **Redshank** – 1 on 14/7.  
**Black-tailed Godwit** – 1 on 4/7.  
**Green Sandpiper** – 1 regularly from 25/6 until 2 on 3/7, (counts over 2) 4 on 25/7, up to 5 from 27/7 to 30/7, 4 from 31/7 to 4/8, 3 on 6/8 to 8/8, 4 on 13/8, 4 from 29/8 to 3/9, 3 on 9/9, 4 on 10/9 & 12/9.  
**Common Sandpiper** – 1 regularly (counts over), 2 on 27/6, 3 on 23/7, 4 on 30/7, up to 3 from 6/8 to 8/8, 2 on 13/8, 3 on 15/8, 2 on 20/8, 5 on 23/8, 2 on 24/8, 28/8 & 30/8, 1 on 10/9 & 12/9.  
**Wood Sandpiper** – 1 on 27/7. **Woodcock** - 1 on 11/8.  
**Black Headed Gull** – 3 on 21/6 & 25/6, (counts over 3) 20 on 11/7, 12 on 18/7, 55 on 20/7, (counts over 50) 145 on 30/7, 85 on 8/8, 97 on 13/8, 360 on 14/8, 185 on 23/8, 200 on 21/8, 280 on 28/8.  
**LBB Gull** – 1 intermittently throughout period (counts over) 5 on 4/7, 3 on 19/7, up to 7 from 6/8 to 14/8, 3 on 23/8, 7 on 25/8.  
**GBB Gull** – 1 on 19/7.  
**Herring Gull** – 17 on 21/6, 70 on 4/7, 1 on 8/7, 65 on 11/7, 40 on 19/7, 7 on 23/7, 35 on 6/8, 49 on 7/8, up to 42 from 8/8 to 20/8, 10 on 23/8, 12 on 25/8, 7 on 27/8, 1 on 28/8, 3 on 10/9.  
**Common Tern** - (Counts over 7), 10 on 19/6, 13 on 20/6, 15 on 22/6, 17 from 25/6 to 4/7 with 18 on 2/7, 15 on 6/7, 14 on 11/7, 13 on 13/7, 9 on 14/7, 10 on 18/7, 19 on 19/7, 16 on 23/7, 26 on 30/7, then numbers dropped, 7 on 7/8, 5 on 13/8, 3 on 20/8 then 1 until end of August.  
**Stock Dove** – Up to 2 regularly (counts over) 4 on 18/8, 22/8 & 10/9.  
**Wood Pigeon** – Ubiquitous (No counts over 20).  
**Barn Owl** - 1 on 19/7, 20/7 & 22/7. **Tawny Owl** – 2 on 14/8.  
**Swift** – 2 on 25/6, 1 on 30/7, 4 on 7/8, 2 on 13/8, 1 on 14/8, 3 on 20/8.  
**Kingfisher** – up to 2 regularly (counts over) 3 on 19/6 & 20/6, 4 on 24/6, 4 on 6/8, 13/8 & 27/8.  
**Green Woodpecker** – 1 on 7/8, 2 on 8/8, 1 on 22/8, 2 on 23/8.  
**Great Spotted Woodpecker** – 1 on 22/6, 1 on 26/6, 2/7, 15/7 & 23/7, 1 on 4/8, 2 on 13/8, 1 on 22/8 & 4/9.  
**Sand Martin** – 1 on 6/7 & 23/7, 50 on 30/7, 4 on 6/8, 1 on 7/8, 6 on 8/8, 4 on 12/8, 1 on 15/8 & 20/8, 4 on 27/8, 1 on 2/9, 2 on 4/9, 20 on 9/9, 8 on 10/9, 20 on 12/9.  
**Swallow** – (Regular - counts over 5) 6 on 30/6, 80 on 30/7, 6 on 4/8, 35 on 7/8, 20 on 8/8, 16 on 12/8, 20 on 13/8, 100 on 14/8, 20 on 15/8, 70 on 18/8, 10 on 23/8 & 24/8, 33 on 27/8, 80 on 30/8, 40 on 2/9, 30 on 3/9 & 4/9, up to 20 from 8/9 to 10/9.  
**House Martin** – (Regular – counts over 6) 10 on 11/7, 12 on 23/7, 16 on 30/7, 28 on 20/8, 35 on 23/8, 10 on 24/8, 7 on 28/8, 50 on 2/9, 200 on 3/9, 20 on 4/9, 30 on 10/9.  
**Grey Wagtail** – 1 regularly from 19/6 to 25/6, 1 on 2/7, 23/7, 30/7 & 31/7, 1 on 4/8, 20/8 & 25/8, 1 on 3/9, 2 on 10/9, 1 on 12/9.  
**Pied Wagtail** – 1 on 18/6, 3 on 19/6, then up to 2 regularly until 13/7 (counts over 2), 3 on 23/7, 8 on 30/7, 12 on 12/8, 10 on 13/8, 4 on 23/8, up to 6 from 24/8 to 27/8, 5 on 10/9.

**Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird Nb.** All are regular and resident – No counts over 4 reported.  
**Whinchat** – 1 on 16/7, 1 on 26/8 & 27/8. **Northern Wheatear** – 2 on 24/8, 1 on 28/8.  
**Song Thrush** - 2 on 11/7, 1 on 15/7, 16/7 & 23/7, 1 on 27/8.  
**Mistle Thrush** – 26 flyover on 27/8.  
**Reed Warbler** - 1 on 18/6, 4 on 19/6, 1 on 20/6, 2 on 30/6, 9 on 2/7 then up to 2 until 3 on 16/7, 1 on 18/7, 13 on 20/7 (breeding confirmed), 8 on 30/7, 2 on 6/8, 1 on 7/8, 4 on 13/8, 1 on 22/8, 1 on 3/9.  
**Sedge Warbler** – 2 on 20/7, 1 on 24/8, 2 on 28/8.  
**Whitethroat** – Regular (Counts over 2) 5 on 13/7, 4 on 14/7, 7 on 16/7, 5 on 30/7, 4 on 13/8, 3 on 28/8 was last sighting within period.  
**Garden Warbler** – 1 on 20/6, 15/7 & 23/7, 3 on 20/8, 1 on 26/8, 2 on 27/8.  
**Blackcap** – 1 Regularly (counts over), 3 on 6/8 & 8/8, 2 on 9/8, 5 on 13/8, 7 on 20/8, 2 on 23/8, 12 on 27/8, 16 on 28/8, 2 on 10/9.  
**Chiffchaff** – Up to 2 reported regularly until 3 on 13/7 (Counts over 3), 4 on 15/7 & 20/7, 6 on 6/8 to 8/8, 27 on 13/8, 8 on 15/8, 4 on 18/8, 26 on 20/8, 15 on 23/8, 6 on 24/8, 20 on 26/8, 25 on 27/8, 32 on 28/8, 4 on 2/9, 7 on 3/9.  
**Willow Warbler** – 1 on 18/6, 1 on 7/8, 9/8, 13/8 & 18/8, 2 on 20/8, 1 on 22/8, 2 on 26/8 & 27/8, 11 on 28/8.  
**Grasshopper Warbler** – 1 on 20/8.  
**Goldcrest** - 1 on 13/7, 17/7 & 30/7, 4 on 31/7, 1 on 6/8, 2 on 13/8 & 22/8, 3 on 20/8 & 28/8, 1 on 2/9.  
**Spotted Flycatcher** – 1 on 30/7, 1 on 13/8, 18/8, 22/8 & 27/8.  
**Long Tailed Tit** – 42 on 30/6, 1 on 16/7, 15 on 27/7, 1 on 9/8 & 13/8, 15 on 24/8, 1 on 26/8 & 27/8, 6 on 28/8.

**Marsh Tit** – 1 on 13/7, 2 on 23/7 & 30/7, 1 on 9/8 & 13/8, 3 on 20/8, 2 on 22/8, 1 on 24/8, 27/8, 3 on 28/8, 1 on 4/9.  
**Blue Tit** – Regular in low numbers (counts over 5), 7 on 20/8 & 22/8, 12 on 27/8, 6 on 28/8.  
**Great Tit** – Regular in low numbers (counts over 5), 6 on 27/8.  
**Coal Tit** - 1 on 27/8 & 28/8.  
**Nuthatch** – 1 on 8/8, 2 on 27/8.  
**Treecreeper** – 1 on 19/6, 4 on 2/7, 1 on 7/8 & 9/8, 1 on 28/8.  
**Starling** – 6 on 23/8, 5 on 24/8.  
**Jay** – 1 on 25/6, 1 on 4/8 & 27/8, 1 on 4/9. **Magpie** – Resident (Up to 3 regularly).  
**Jackdaw** – Occasional (Counts over 4) flyovers - 150 on 23/7, 140 on 30/7, 150 on 8/8, 250 on 14/8.  
**Rook** – 1 on 27/8, 2 on 10/9. **Raven** – 1 on 20/8, 28/8 & 10/9.  
**Carrion Crow** – Resident - Up to 3 regularly reported.  
**Goldfinch** – Regular (counts over 4), 6 on 8/7, 27 on 11/7, 25 on 16/7, 10 on 18/7, 43 on 6/8, 110 on 14/8, 80 on 23/8, 8 on 4/9.  
**Bullfinch** – 2 on 19/6, 1 on 4/7 & 15/7, 2 on 18/7, 3 on 23/7, 2 on 30/7, 2/8, 13/8 & 20/8, 10 on 28/8, 1 on 4/9 & 10/9.  
**House Sparrow** - 2 on 13/8. **Linnet** – 1 on 26/8.  
**Reed Bunting** – 1 on 20/6, 2 on 13/7, 3 on 14/7, 1 on 16/7, 3 on 13/8, 1 on 10/9.

**Nature Reserve News****Autumn 2017****Breeding Birds**

This year our three Common Tern rafts each had a nesting pair of Common Terns residing and they successfully raised 8 chicks with broods of 3, 3 & 2, one of our best years. There were a few moments of concern when some chicks managed to prematurely fly from their raft when only wing flapping to strengthen wings, and then found they were unable to take off again once landing in the water. Luckily these birds were so close to full fledging, they were eventually able to manage that flight from water and return to the raft safely. Originally our rafts were designed with a ramp to allow chicks to easily get back onto the raft if they fell off. This also allowed predators such as mink easy access onto the raft, and we experienced losses of young chicks. Therefore the ramps were removed and "keep" wires raised so chicks could not fall off, and predators were kept out. The last of our nesting Terns migrated at the end of August.

The Great Crested Grebe breeding was not so successful. Of the many pairs we had displaying, very few nests were actually seen, and as far as the West End Reserve was concerned only one pair were successful. Initially they had three young, but one went missing after a couple of weeks and we presume it was predated. The other two can still be seen in the Nature Reserve with their parents. Another pair had 2 young at the dam end.

*by Bob Johnson***Whillet's Meadows bridges**

In the Spring of 2016 it was found that the bridge over the river Medway, that allowed our grass cutting tractors to reach the meadows, had notable rot in its sleepers and was officially condemned as unsafe for vehicles.

Grass cutting is an important part of the 2015 – 2020 Management Plan that was agreed with Southern Water. No funding was made available by Southern Water during 2016 for this work and that Autumn we could not cut the meadows.

In an effort to resolve this unsatisfactory situation and help reduce Southern Water costs for carrying out this work, we confirmed our volunteers would safely carry out the physical work of decking renewal, so saving outside contractor costs, if Southern Water covered the material costs (Over £3000).

I am pleased to say Southern Water finally agreed with us carrying out the work and funding was found. Materials were purchased and work has just been completed on both bridges. It may even be possible we could organise some late season Whillet's meadow grass cutting, and this is being looked into.

*by Bob Johnson*

### Grove Park School visit to Whillet's Meadows

We were contacted by our neighbours at Blacklands Farm who asked if we could show some wildlife to a small group of children with learning difficulties from Grove Park School in Crowborough. This was to be part of a special treat being organised for them. Permission was obtained from Southern Water and a date of Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June was agreed.

It was arranged that teachers from the school and staff from Blacklands Farm would supervise the children, while some of the Tuesday volunteers would be on hand to organise some wildlife activities.

The weather on the day was fine and dry. The children spent the morning with us, and were able to do some supervised pond dipping, see some birds in the hand and enjoy the wild flowers. They then stayed on to have a picnic lunch in the meadows.

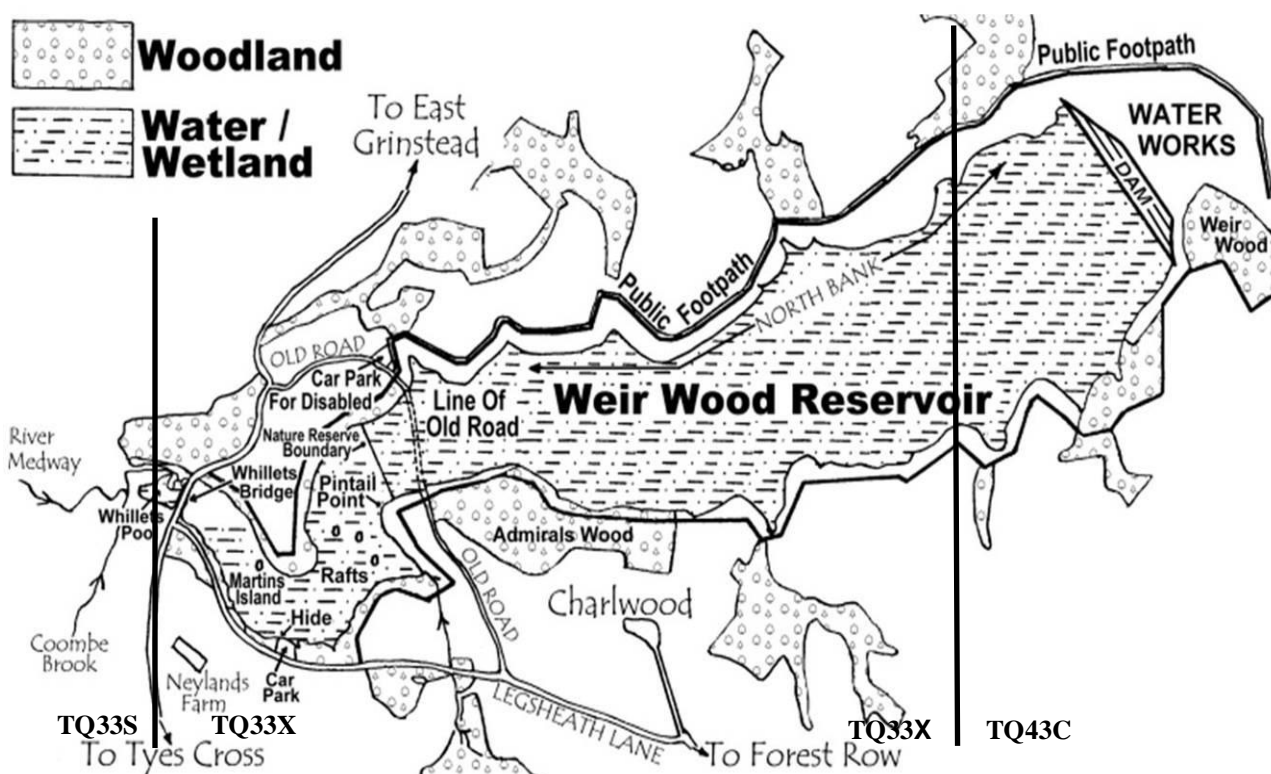
The children were very well behaved and the staff were marvellous with them. Our volunteers did everything to give them a worthwhile visit. We had a nice reply thanking us for making it such a wonderful treat. It was obvious the children loved it, also the staff from comments on the day.

*by Bob Johnson*

### Dragonfly Brain Technology

To catch a ball humans must anticipate its arrival point. Mammals are better at tracking smooth trajectory targets but dragonflies need to capture darting prey. Australian scientists studied dragonfly brains and found that they have specialised neurons more sensitive to movements just ahead of their prey's current position. They can even forecast where their prey will reappear from behind an object. Previously only mammals were associated with such visual tasks. This knowledge could be applied to artificial vision systems.

*by Peter Erridge*



### Friends of Weir Wood Society General Information

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