

Friends of Weir Wood Newsletter

Newsletter No. 89

Summer 2020



Welcome!

Covid 19 and the reservoir.

The pandemic showed us some of the best in mankind with consideration, generosity and compassion, many people generally complying with the lockdown laws for the benefit of society as a whole.

It also showed us some of the worst, people totally ignoring the lockdown restrictions, illegally breaking into and damaging property, with little regard for anyone else but themselves.

Unfortunately the reservoir seemed to attract some of the latter. At times large groups of people turned up and climbed over fences etc. to illegally sunbathe and swim in the reservoir. We had groups of people wanting to have barbecues and night parties where the police had to be called to evict them, and it was a constant battle to keep people out.

During the lockdown we had reports of people getting up onto the dam wall where it is dangerous, they broke into the wildlife reserve, and along the North Bank meadows there was some attempted illegal camping.

The Fishery is now fully open again, as the sport can easily comply with distancing rules, but while the fishery was closed the bailiff had a spate of people trying to fish illegally.

The Blacklands camp site and canoeists area remains closed at the moment. The canoeists area car park caused a constant problem with people arriving and then illegally breaking in to get to the water.

The Sailing Club is again open for sailing, but the clubhouse is still restricted.

The hide car park has remained open during the pandemic, we hoped we could rely on common sense from people to comply with distancing rules.

You are welcome to visit the hide and viewing area, but please remember to keep to the 2 metre distancing guidelines until the distancing rules are changed.

Please also send us at sightings@weirwood.me.uk your wildlife sighting records or photos of interest from your visits, these are added to the wildlife records for the site, as well as being put on our website and facebook for others to enjoy.

By Bob Johnson

Forthcoming events

Unfortunately, it will not be possible to hold the Open day this year. Besides all the Covid restrictions, a lot of the volunteers are in the vulnerable age groups and will not want to put themselves at risk unnecessarily, so the Open Day for 2020 has been formally cancelled.

Depending on the restrictions for groups, it may be possible towards the Autumn to hold some sort of

organised walk for members. We will give this consideration once restrictions are lifted sufficiently for this to be able to work.

Wildlife Bird News

In the last newsletter just before lockdown the heronry was in full swing with 48 nests noted on 16/3 with 6 nests showing young. However our next visit was not until 22/4, by then this nest number had dropped to 37 viewable nests with 11 nests showing 15 young.

The leaf vegetation was already starting to hide many nests and it was proving impossible to see the nests well enough to count young. In the end we proved 16 nests produced 29 young, and interestingly some young chicks were seen in June on one or two nests indicating possible 2nd broods or late nesting occurring. The count is likely to be low this year due to all the access limitations.

The Common Terns arrived in April and towards late May we had up to 9 pairs, with at least 8 pairs looking to be nesting on the rafts with everything looking good. But by the end of May we started to see different behaviour. Less birds on the rafts and not so many sitting on nests. The numbers have now dropped to about 3 pairs. We think at the end of May a mink may have got onto the rafts and taken/eaten most/all the eggs. We know a Mink had been sighted in the area. It is possible we may still eventually see a Tern chick on a raft this year, but the signs are currently not good.

The Heronry includes nesting Cormorants, with 13 active nests being confirmed, Cormorants nest slightly later than the Herons, so early monitoring of these nests was not carried out. Most of those 13 nests seemed to have produced young usually 2 to 3 but we have no formal count of the total.

We have seen only 2 Great Crested Grebe nests at the West end, with lessening numbers of Grebe pairs seen. This species does not seem to favour the current conditions, the constant high water levels has removed the Purple Loosestrife stems that they used to like to nest in and perhaps that's a factor.

It may have been a better year for breeding ducks with several young broods of Mandarin & Mallards seen. Grey Wagtails also bred at the dam end with several young being seen.

Interestingly for the Reserve, a Nightingale was reported being heard holding territory in Whillet's meadows for about 3 weeks. We were unable to confirm if it was breeding as it was rarely seen. Once paired they do stop singing or perhaps, if it was unpaired, it decided to move on.

By Bob Johnson

Due to Covid-19 restrictions no visits for sightings were carried out at the start of the period. It was not until 17th April when government restrictions on travel had been lifted enough, that a few who lived nearby were able to legally visit for local exercise and record what they saw, and we started accepting records.

Little Grebe – 1 on 4/5, 17/5, 24/5 & 27/5, 1 on 6/6 & 6/6.

Great Crested Grebe – 1 on 17/4, 6 on 24/4, 1 on 6/5 & 9/5, 8 on 10/5, 6 on 15/5, 25 on 17/5, 6 on 24/5, 13 on 26/5, 26 on 28/5, 39 on 1/6, 28 on 7/6, 25 on 12/6 (1 nest seen), 21 on 14/6.

Cormorant – Regular – (counts over 12), 13 on 17/4 & 22/4, (13 nests within Heronry), 34 on 10/5, 29 on 15/5, 33 on 17/5, 32 on 26/5, 34 on 7/6, 30 on 12/6.

Little Egret – 2 on 25/5, 3 on 11/6.

Grey Heron – Regular, (Heronry - 37 nests suspected of being occupied on 22/4), Visible counts - 4 on 3/5, 8 on 10/5, 14 on 15/5, 15 on 17/5, 21 on 26/5, 14 on 7/6, 6 on 12/6.

Mute Swan – 1 immature bird regularly from 17/4 to 27/4, 1 on 10/5 & 17/5, 3 on 20/5, 1 on 26/5, 5 on 2/6, 2 from 7/6 to 14/6.

Greylag Goose – 2 on 15/5 & 17/5, 9 on 21/5, 22/5 & 26/5, 44 on 1/6, 74 on 7/6, 61 on 12/6, 83 on 14/6.

Canada Goose – 6 Regularly from 17/4 (counts over), 11 on 10/5, 9 on 15/5, 36 on 17/5, 26 on 22/5, 24 on 25/5 & 31/5, 42 on 7/6 included 19 young in a creche with 6 or 8 adults.

Egyptian Goose – 2 on 17/4, 2 on 20/5.

Mandarin – Regularly up to 2 (counts over), 3 on 17/4, 23/4, 24/4 & 3/5, 5 on 15/5, 3 + 8 chicks on 17/5, 14 on 25/5, 17 on 25/5, 17 + broods of 7Y=young & 2Y on 7/6.

Mallard - Resident - (counts over 8), 16 on 17/4, 12 on 19/4, 28 on 26/4, 21 on 10/5, 6 + 4Y on 15/5, 32 + 5Y on 17/5, 11 on 26/5, 49 + 11Y on 7/6, 12 on 12/6. Also 1 feral hybrid reported on 17/5.

Gadwall - 3 on 1/6, 1 on 12/6.

Tufted Duck – 4 on 17/4 & 22/4, 2 on 19/4, 3 on 26/4, 2 on 27/4, 3/5, 10/5 & 22/5, 1 on 27/5 & 14/6.

Red Kite – 1 on 26/4, 15/5, 24/5 & 31/5, 1 on 7/6 & 11/6.

Sparrowhawk – 1 on 9/5, 15/5 & 1/6, 2 on 7/6.

Common Buzzard – Up to 2 throughout the period (counts over 2), 4 on 19/4, 6 on 26/4, 3 on 9/5, 4 on 15/5 & 31/5, 4 and possibly 5 on 1/6.

Honey Buzzard – 1 on 7/6.

Osprey – 1 on 15/5 & 27/5, 2 on 29/5, 1 on 30/5.

Kestrel – 1 on 19/4, 1 on 3/5, 17/5, 20/5 & 24/5, 2 on 26/5, 1 on 31/5 & 1/6.

Hobby - 1 on 11/5, 2 on 15/5 & 17/5, 1 on 31/5.

Pheasant – Regular - (no counts over 4).

Red-legged Partridge – 1 on 24/5.

Moorhen – Resident – 2 on 19/4 & 3/5, 1 on 4/5, 6/5, 21/5 & 26/5, 1 on 1/6, 7/6 & 12/6.

Coot – 1 on 26/5.

Little Ringed Plover – 2 on 20/5, 22/5 & 26/5, 1 on 1/6, 2 on 6/6 & 7/6, 1 on 11/6 & 14/6.

Dunlin – 1 on 25/5.

Greenshank – 1 on 25/5.

Sanderling – 1 on 25/5.

Redshank – 1 on 6/6.

Lapwing – 1 on 20/4, 1 on 1/6, 5 flyover on 14/6.

Common Sandpiper – 1 on 19/4 & 20/4, 6 on 3/5, 2 on 17/5, 3 on 20/5, 2 on 22/5, 3 on 25/5, 1 on 26/5, 4 on 27/5.

Green Sandpiper – 1 on 17/4 & 20/4.

Black Headed Gull – 1 on 10/5, 1 on 7/6.

LBB Gull – 2 from 17/4 until 22/4, 2 on 3/5, 1 on 17/5, 24/5 & 26/5, 5 on 27/5.

Herring Gull – 2 on 10/5 & 17/5, 4 on 26/5, 6 on 27/5, 2 on 7/6.

Arctic Tern – 6 on 21/4.

Common Tern - Up to 3 until 22/4, 4 on 24/4, 8 on 26/4 & 27/4, 4 on 3/5, 12 on 4/5, 14 on 10/5 & 15/5, 11 on 17/5, 12 from 22/5 to 26/5, 18 on 28/5 & 31/5, 16 on 1/6, 12 on 7/6, 4 on 12/6 (Although up to 8 pairs had been on rafts nesting by end of May, it has now become evident that the nest must have been predated shortly after, as numbers are now dropping and birds are no longer sitting on nests – We guess the most likely cause is probably a mink getting onto the rafts and taking the eggs).

Black Tern – 1 on 19/4

Stock Dove – Up to 2 regularly (counts over), 4 on 26/4, 3 on 27/4, 5 on 10/5.

Collared Dove – 1 on 17/4 & 15/5 flyovers

Wood Pigeon – Ubiquitous, no significant counts reported.

Barn Owl - 1 on 26/4.

Tawny Owl – 1 on 8/5, 16/5, 22/5, 24/5 & 29/5.

Swift – 3 on 3/5, 2 on 6/5, 1 on 17/5, 6 on 22/5, c100 on 24/5, 3 on 26/5, 20 on 27/5, 3 on 31/5, c100 on 6/6, 55 on 7/6, 2 on 11/6.

Kingfisher – 1 on 9/5, 2 on 15/5 & 22/5, 1 on 24/5, 2 on 7/6.

Cuckoo – 1 on 3/5 & 4/5, 1 on 19/5 & 26/5.

Green Woodpecker – 1 on 3/5, 6/5, 10/5, 24/5, 31/5 & 1/6.

Gt Spotted Woodpecker – 2 on 22/4 & 26/4, 1 on 15/5, 24/5 & 26/5, 4 on 27/5, 1 on 2/6 & 7/6.

Sand Martin – 1 on 19/4.

Barn Swallow – 50 on 17/4, 9 on 19/4, 3 on 20/4, 4 on 21/4, 2 on 26/4 & 3/5, 4 on 15/5, 3 on 17/5, 2 on 22/5 & 26/5, 4 on 31/5, 1 on 1/6 & 7/6, 2 on 11/6, 1 on 12/6.

House Martin – (Regular - counts over 4), 5 on 17/4 & 21/4, 8 on 3/5, 5 on 17/5 to 22/5, 9 on 26/5, 5 on 27/5, 30 on 6/6, 10 on 7/6, 6 on 16/6.

Grey Wagtail – 4 on 19/4, 1 on 3/5, 2 on 24/5, 3 on 26/5, 5 on 7/6.

Pied Wagtail – 4 on 17/4, 1 on 24/4, 3/5 & 15/5, 4 on 17/5, 5 on 19/5, 9 on 26/5, 1 on 1/6 & 2/6, 9 on 7/6, 1 on 12/6.

Wren, Robin, Dunnock, Blackbird – Regular and resident reported in low numbers. (No count over 3).
Nightingale – 1 Regularly from 23/4 to 10/5.
Wheatear – 1 on 19/4 & 20/4.
Song Thrush – 2 on 24/4, 3 on 3/5, 2 on 4/5, 1 on 17/5 & 21/5 to 26/5, 1 on 1/6, 5 on 7/6, 2 on 14/6.
Mistle Thrush – 2 on 20/5, 6 on 24/5, 1 on 31/5, 2 on 7/6.
Reed Warbler - 1 on 17/4, 3 on 19/4, 4 on 22/4, 3 regularly from 24/4 to 6/5, 4 on 9/5 & 10/5, 2 on 15/5, 3 on 17/5, up to 4 regularly from 21/5 to 27/5, 3 on 7/6, 2 on 12/6, 3 on 14/6.
Sedge Warbler – 1 on 19/5.
Common Whitethroat – 2 on 17/4, 6 on 19/4, up to 3 regularly (counts over), 5 on 23/4, 8 on 26/4, 14 on 3/5, 5 on 4/5, 8 on 17/5, 5 on 1/6, 7 on 7/6, 5 on 14/6.
Lesser Whitethroat – 1 regularly from 19/4 to 3/5, 1 on 24/5, 2/6, 7/6 & 14/6.
Garden Warbler – Up to 2 regularly (counts over), 3 on 23/4, 7 on 3/5, 4 on 15/5 & 17/5, 3 on 1/6.
Blackcap – 2 Regularly (counts over), 3 on 17/4, 9 on 19/4, 3 from 20/4 to 26/4, 4 on 3/5, 10 on 4/5, 3 on 10/5, 7 on 17/5, 4 on 24/5, 3 on 26/5, 4 on 7/6.
Chiffchaff – Regular (counts over 3), 10 on 17/4, 14 on 19/4, 5 on 22/4, 5 on 23/4 & 26/4, 9 on 3/5, 6 on 4/5, 4 on 9/5 & 10/5, then up to 3 regularly until end of period.
Goldcrest – 1 on 19/4, 23/4, 26/4, 9/5 & 22/5, 2 on 7/6, 1 on 14/6.
Spotted Flycatcher – 1 on 24/5.
L.T. Tit – 1 on 4/5 & 10/5.
Marsh Tit – 1 on 15/5, 5 on 1/6, 1 on 2/6.
Coal Tit – 21 on 24/5.
Blue Tit & Great Tit – No counts received over 3 but are common in good numbers.
Nuthatch – 1 on 22/4, 24/4 & 27/4, 3 on 4/5, 1 on 15/5, 2 on 17/5, 1 on 21/5.
Tree Creeper – 1 on 17/4.
Jay – 2 on 19/4, 1 on 22/4 & 3/5, 1 on 24/5, 26/5 & 31/5.
Magpie – Resident & regular - No counts over 4.
Jackdaw – 1 on 27/4, 2 on 4/5 often just flyovers and not recorded.
Carrion Crow – Resident in low numbers, No counts over 3.
Raven - 1 on 17/4, 2 on 9/5, 1 on 17/5.
Starling – 7 on 6/5.
Chaffinch – 1 on 19/4 & 26/4, 2 on 17/5, 1 on 24/5, 26/5, 1/6 & 9/6.
Linnet - 2 on 4/5, 1 on 17/5.
House Sparrow – 1 on 26/5.
Goldfinch – 2 on 26/4, 6 on 3/5 & 4/5, 7 on 6/5, 3 on 9/5, 1 on 10/5, 2 on 15/5 & 17/5, 4 on 31/5, 2 on 1/6, 3 on 7/6, 6 on 11/6.
Bullfinch – 2 on 19/4, 1 on 22/4, 4 on 26/4, 2 from 3/5 to 9/5, 1 on 20/5, 2 on 22/5 to 26/5, 1 on 1/6, 2 on 7/6.
Yellowhammer – 2 on 19/4, 1 on 20/5 & 24/5, 1 on 1/6, 2/6, 7/6, 11/6 & 14/6.
Reed Bunting – 2 on 19/4, 1 on 21/4, & 24/4, 5 on 3/5, 2 on 6/5 & 9/5, 1 on 17/5, 20/5 & 21/5, 2 on 24/5, 3 on 26/5, 1 on 2/6, 3 on 7/6, 1 on 9/6, 11/6 & 12/6, 2 on 14/6.

Nature Reserve News**Summer 2020**

Work Party Update - The Covid-19 restrictions meant our work parties were cancelled from mid March to the end of May, apart from the odd site safety check and permitted animal welfare health checks on our bee hives by our licensed bee keepers.

It was not until June that the regulations allowed us to bring in the Rangers to carry out some work. They had to work separately from us in line with their own ESCC Covid rules regarding volunteers. We could also now legally have a few of our own volunteers on site to do any jobs we could carry out which allowed us to keep the social distancing rules.

In fact in the last few weeks the Rangers in particular have achieved a lot. Using a grass cutting tractor they cut all the unwanted Bracken in the North bank meadow, opposite the viewing area, to improve the habitat and cleared some vegetation down to the water's edge to encourage water fowl to use this previously over grown area. This has already proved worthwhile, with Geese in particular now being seen using this meadow, which will help keep down the sward height to encourage grass growth and wild flowers.

Our volunteers were elsewhere cutting back Hemlock Water Dropwort at Whillet's meadows, a poisonous plant we control and that we need to remove from the hay cutting areas. We also cleared some vegetation around meadow pond.

Following people illegally accessing the reserve, we carried out a full survey of the fencing, and carried out some fence repairs generally around the reserve. We also tidied up the hedges at the viewing area and carried out some repairs at the hide.

The following week the Rangers cut all the transect survey access paths at Whillet's meadows with the tractor, and also the unwanted Bracken on Pintail bank meadow.

We have carried out some full grass snake survey checks including re-marking all the survey tins. Up to 13 Grass snakes have been recorded in the meadows so far.

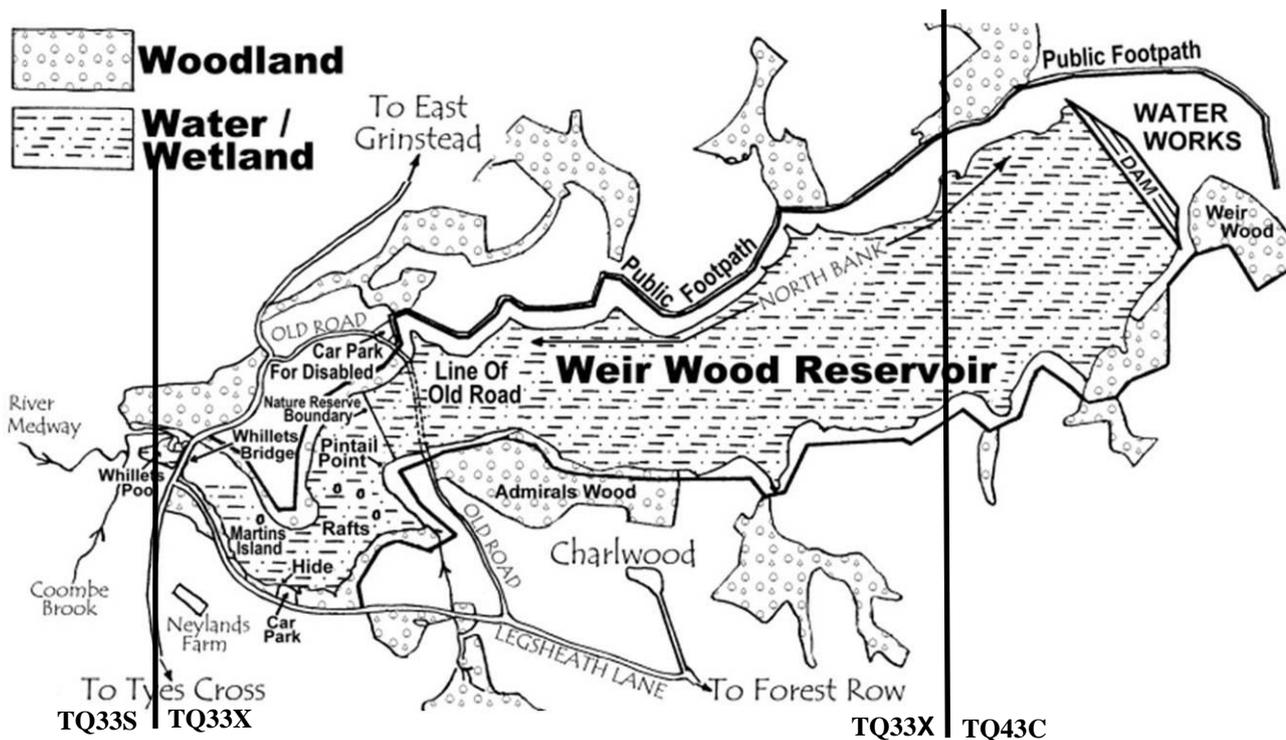
You will also be pleased to know that last week we also completed fill-in repairs to most of the pot holes in the car park using 2 tons of ballast. I know this has been an on-going grievance with a lot of members regarding the state of the car park, so hopefully this surface will now prove to be a little kinder on everyone's car's suspensions.

Butterfly News – The severe winter flooding at Whillet's meadows made us wonder whether it would affect butterfly numbers, particularly on species that over winter on the ground. The recording season got off to a good start with up to 8 Orange Tips being regularly seen during April/May. Last year we saw only 2 Small Tortoiseshell butterflies all year, this spring we have already seen a pair regularly and some young caterpillars. Up to 4 Peacock butterflies have been seen regularly during April / May. These have been very busy, as several groups of 50+ caterpillars have been noted on their stinging nettle food plant, which is very evident this year at the meadow edges where we stacked the grass cuttings last Autumn. Nettle, providing it is controlled is a very good wildlife plant which a lot of insects use as a breeding plant.

Although in low numbers the other usual regular spring species have been seen, namely Common Blue, Comma, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Large White, Green-veined White, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper, a Small Copper and Holly Blue plus an early season Small Heath. However, it is still early for our meadows which normally peak for butterfly numbers from late June through to the end of July.

Finally on the 7th June we estimated there were circa.100 Azure Damselflies paired up and ovipositing ie: egg laying at Meadow Pond.

By Bob Johnson



Friends of Weir Wood Society General Information

Chairman:	Bob Johnson, 01892 661548	E-Mail: info@weirwood.me.uk
Membership Secretary:	Tom Howard-Jones, 01293 883039	E-Mail: membership@weirwood.me.uk
Treasurer:	Bob Hastings, 01825 763573	E-Mail: treasurer@weirwood.me.uk
Newsletter Editor:	Peter Johnson, 01892 661548	E-Mail: newsletter@weirwood.me.uk
Website Editor:	Tom Howard-Jones, 01293 883039	E-Mail: sightings@weirwood.me.uk

Other Contact Information

Tuesday Work Party Volunteers: work@weirwood.me.uk **Website Photos:** photos@weirwood.me.uk
Friends General E-Mail address: info@weirwood.me.uk

Friends of Weir Wood Website Address: <http://www.weirwood.me.uk>