

Friends of Weir Wood Newsletter

Newsletter No. 101

Summer 2023



Welcome!

OPEN DAY - Sunday 16th July *by Bob Johnson*

Our popular annual Open Day will be on Sunday 16th July. As usual we will be based at the car park in Legsheath Lane. Many activities will be taking place in our Whillet's flower meadows as before, and all our usual popular events will be included as previously.

In the main car park viewing area there will be volunteers with telescopes set up to show you the birds and wildlife on and around the water and give you close views. We currently have four pairs of Common Terns and a pair of Black-headed Gulls nesting on the rafts (the first time this species has nested at Weir Wood). Great Crested Grebes are nesting near the edges of the water, and possibly some of this year's recently fledged Cormorants and Herons from the heronry will still be around by the time of the Open Day.

Whillet's meadows should be at their best for the flowers, birds, butterflies etc. with information charts to help you.

We will again have our popular bird ringing demonstration by our bird ringers in the meadows (weather permitting), with a chance to see birds close in the hand. In previous years we have seen kingfishers and reed warblers, amongst others. Be aware the bird ringing will finish by early afternoon, so for those particularly interested in the ringing we would recommend a morning visit.

You will also be able to visit our meadow pond and do some pond dipping with experts to tell you about the wildlife you find. Come and see the dragon and damselflies and the wonderful and varied aquatic life of a pond.

We have beehives on site, and you will be able to chat to our beekeepers who will be showing visitors what is inside a beehive box and explaining how a beehive colony works and how they are looked after.

You will be able to watch the hives from a safe distance and be able to understand what is happening inside the box. We will also have jars of local honey available for sale.

We intend to have some moths to show from our moth traps (weather permitting). This has proven to be very popular at previous open days.

We hope to have some refreshments available in the car park. Copies of our 25th anniversary book "The Nature of Weir Wood Reservoir" will also be available for purchase.

We open for visitors at 9:30am at the nature reserve car park in Legsheath Lane. The event will be open until just after 4:00pm but the bird ringing is likely to be finished by 3pm. The event is free and open to all.

Both adults and children alike will love the bird ringing and pond dipping. So please come along and support us, bring your friends. Whillet's meadows are not normally open to the public, so this is an opportunity to see this normally private wetland meadow area at one of its best flowering times.

Free entry – but donations appreciated. Children should be accompanied.

Spring Walk Report of 22nd April *by Bob Johnson*

I had worried the Bluebells may have been past their best by the 22nd but a run of very cold and wet weather meant they were still only in early flower and gave a good spectacle. They actually stayed in flower until mid May.

The walk started with circa 25 people, a quick chat and look over the water before going off into the study area. We soon found an early Dryads Saddle fungus, a first for the reserve, also some late Scarlet Elf Cup fungi. Listening for birds as we walked, a singing Blackcap was heard. We pointed out various plants and fungi before we stopped for a quick look at our pondlet and marsh pool. Moving on we saw Adder's Tongue Fern, a small, uncommon plant. We then reached the Common Spotted Orchids, which had been marked with sticks to prevent them from being accidentally trodden on. In our recent survey we counted 77 flowering spikes.

Those that wanted were able to have a quick look inside a nest box where a Great Tit had eggs, and into a Jackdaw nest box with beautiful speckled blue eggs.

When we reached the older part of the wood, bluebells were starting to show. Ransoms (Wild Garlic), Primroses, Dogs Mercury, Wood Sorrel and Violets were dotted about. Further on the Bluebells made a lovely wood carpet of blue. Crossing Plaw Hatch Stream we were now in Alder Carr where there were striking groups of Marsh Marigolds in the wet areas. Marsh Valerian, another uncommon plant, was also just in flower and near the river there were stands of wild Red Currant. Reaching Pintail Point we looked at a rare Black Poplar tree and checked under some refugia tins, finding Field Voles, Wood Mice and Toads. Everyone enjoyed the views from this open vantage point and were also able to see our wader scrape area.

We then retraced our steps back to the car park for a short coffee break before we set off for Whillet's Meadows. We noted the yellow flowers of Coltsfoot at the roadside before stopping by the heronry to watch and admire the spectacle of the nesting Grey Herons and Cormorants with young, hearing the young's begging calls. We also saw our new prototype floating nesting platform intended for Great Crested Grebes. This had been built with a starter nest of twigs, however the herons and cormorants quickly managed to steal every last one!

In the first meadow there was plenty of Cuckoo Flower (food plant of Orange Tip butterflies) and as we walked around to our new reed bed viewing platform a male Orange Tip was seen. Reed Warblers were heard singing in the reeds.

The second meadow had some beehive colony activity. The riverside hedge/tree line was white with the flowers of Blackthorn where a Garden Warbler showed well. Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Blackcap were all heard singing. A Kestrel and two Buzzards were overhead.

More Orange Tips and a Peacock butterfly were seen. We visited meadow pond to see and admire our brand-new dipping platform and had a look over the pond generally, but by then we were running out of time. Some went on to have a quick look in the third meadow before we all headed back to the car park.

My thanks to all the members that supported us and volunteers that assisted. The feedback was good with people saying they thoroughly enjoyed their visit.

An earlier separate report by Tom is on our website which if you have not seen it includes a nice lot of pictures taken on the day and this can be viewed at <https://www.weirwood.me.uk> – check the homepage.

Great Crested Grebe – Regular (counts over 7), 11 on 20/4 & 29/4, 8 on 1/5, 11 on 13/5, 12 on 18/5, 13 on 21/5, 16 on 28/5 then up to 15 until 18 on 7/6, 14 on 8/6, 15 on 19/6.

Cormorant – Regularly up to 20 (counts over), up to 46 from 13/4 to 20/4, 47 on 25/4, 57 on 27/4, 73 on 29/4, 55 on 1/5, 57 on 2/5, 52 on 14/5, 71 on 21/5, 65 on 1/6, 53 on 4/6, 48 on 6/6, 55 on 8/6, 30 on 19/6. (26 nesting pairs, of 26 nests -18 nests had young with a minimum of a 36 young total).

Night Heron – 1 on 22/6.

Grey Heron – Regularly up to 25 until 14/5 (counts over), 26 on 13/4, 32 on 16/4, 27 on 18/4, 28 on 25/4, 33 on 1/5 & 2/5, 30 on 14/5, 19 on 21/5, then up to 16 until 8 at end of period. Up to 45 active nests, over the period 36 nests produced at least 53 young.

White Stork – 1 on 31/5, 2 on 1/6, 1 on 6/6.

Mute Swan – Regular (Counts over 2), 5 on 16/4, 3 on 19/4 & 16/5, 5 on 18/5 & 21/5, 6 on 31/5 & 4/6, 9 on 6/6, 7 on 8/6 & 11/6, 6 on 19/6, 8 on 20/6 & 22/6.

Greylag Goose – 4 on 13/4, 21 on 16/4, 11 on 20/4 then up to 7 until 2/5, 10 on 18/5, 21 on 21/5, 34 on 31/5, 31 on 1/6, 43 on 4/6, 67 on 6/6, 38 on 8/6, 85 on 11/6, 92 on 19/6, 87 on 22/6.

Canada Goose – Regular (counts over 12), 15 on 16/4 & 20/4, 14 on 25/4, 19 on 29/4, 27 on 1/6, 47 on 6/6, 99 on 8/6, 53 on 11/6, 61 on 19/6.

Feral White Farmyard Geese – 3 still at Dam end.

Canada/Greylag hybrid Goose - 5 on 21/5, 1 on 1/6, 4 on 6/6, 9 on 16/6.

Egyptian Goose - 2 regularly (counts over), Up to 5 on 13/4, 4 on 18/4, 3 on 9/5, 2+9Young on 7/6 & 19/6.

Mandarin – Regularly up to 2 (counts over), up to 4 from 16/4 to 28/4, 3 on 14/5, 4+7young on 16/5, 7 on 21/5, 4 on 19/6, 9+11young on 22/6.

Mallard - Resident, (counts over 6), 22 on 16/4, 8 on 18/4, 16 on 20/4, 14 on 25/4, 11 on 29/4, 12 on 2/5, 11 on 12/5, 7 on 13/5, 13 on 1/6, 9 on 6/6, 10 on 7/6, 7 on 8/6, 20 on 11/6, 24+16young on 19/6, 22 on 22/6.

White Feral Duck – 1 on 16/4, 1+5young on 11/6.

Tufted Duck – 8 on 15/4, 11 on 16/4, 1 on 18/4 & 19/4, 5 on 22/4, 8 on 25/4, 3 on 27/4, 1 on 28/4, 7 on 1/5, 2 on 2/5, 5 on 13/5, 4 on 21/5, 1 on 4/6, 7/6, 11/6, 19/6 & 22/6.

Wood Duck – 1 female on 13/6, 19/6 & 22/6.

Shelduck – 1 on 16/4.

Common Scoter - 1 on 16/6.

Red Kite – 1 on 16/4, 19/4, 20/4 & 29/4, 1 on 12/5, 1 on 12/5, 25/5 & 27/5, 2 on 29/5, up to 4 on 31/5, 1 on 6/6, 7/6, 13/6 & 19/6.

Goshawk – 1 on 18/5 & 22/5

Hobby – 1 on 12/5, 3 on 15/5 & 18/5, 2 on 20/5, 1 on 22/5, 27/5, 11/6 & 19/6.

Sparrowhawk – 2 on 16/4, 1 regularly from 17/4 to 23/4, 1 on 31/5, 1 on 5/6 & 11/6.

Common Buzzard – Up to 2 regularly (counts over 2), 3 on 16/4 then 5 until 20/4, 3 on 1/6, 6/6, 7/6 & 19/6.

Honey Buzzard – 1 on 25/5 & 27/5, 1 on 5/6 & 19/6.

Osprey - 1 on 13/4 & 14/4, 1 on 9/5, 20/5, 26/5 & 28/5, 1 on 4/6, 16/6 & 17/6, 2 on 19/6, 1 on 20/6.

Kestrel – Up to 2 regularly (counts over), 3 on 20/4.

Coot – Regular (counts over 3) 5 on 16/4, 4 on 18/4 & 20/4, 6 on 22/4, up to 5 from 28/4 to 2/5, 4 on 13/5, 7 on 21/5, (counts over 2), 3 on 1/6, 4 on 5/6, 3 on 8/6, 11/6, 19/6 & 22/6.

Pied Avocet – 1 on 12/5.

Little Ringed Plover – 1 on 18/4, 1 on 4/6.

Sanderling – 1 on 27/5.

Lapwing – 1 on 20/4 & 16/5, 2 on 5/6.

Whimbrel – 1 on 19/4, 2 on 27/4.

Greenshank – 2 on 27/4.

Green Sandpiper - 1 on 12/6, 2 on 13/6.

Common Sandpiper – 1 on 17/4, 2 on 21/4 to 24/4, 11 on 27/4, 2 on 28/4, 5 on 29/4, 33 on 3/5, 1 on 12/5 to 15/5, up to 3 from 21/5 to 27/5, 1 on 29/5.

Black Headed Gull – Up to 2 intermittently until 3 on 31/5, (counts over 2), 5 on 6/6, 3 on 7/6, 6 on 11/6, 4 on 13/6, 18 on 19/6, 16 on 22/6.

LBB Gull – 1 regularly throughout period (counts over), 6 on 20/4, 2 on 23/4, 4 on 2/5.

GBB Gull – Up to 2 regularly (counts over) 7 from 17/4 to 20/4, up to 3 from 27/4 to 1/5 then up to 2 intermittently.

Herring Gull – Up to 3 from 16/4 to 18/4, 18 on 19/4, 8 on 20/4 & 21/4, 31 on 23/4, 1 on 15/5, 13 on 21/5, 12 on 31/5 then up to 3 until end of period.

Little Gull – 2 on 19/4, 5 on 21/4, 1 on 27/5.

Black Tern – 1 on 27/5, 5 on 1/6, 1 on 17/6.

Common Tern – 1 from 14/4 until 5 from 18/4 to 20/4, then up to 3 until 4 from 29/4 onward then 6 on 14/5, 10 on 16/5 were then seen regularly as nesting pairs - 4 at West & 1 at Dam End, 6 chicks seen on 22/6.

Stock Dove – 4 on 13/4, 3 on 16/4, 4 on 20/4, 2 on 27/4, 1 on 25/4, 29/4 & 1/5, 2 on 1/6 & 4/6, 1 on 6/6 & 8/6, 2 on 19/6. Several pairs nested in boxes within the reserve and raised young.

Collared Dove – Up to 4 on 16/4, 1 on 18/4 & 19/4.

Feral Rock Dove – 20 on 19/4.

Wood Pigeon – Ubiquitous - No counts over 30.

Barn Owl – 1 seen on 16/6, a pair are nesting within the reserve and have young.

Tawny Owl – 2 pairs nested within reserve and fledged young.

Swift – 1 on 18/4 & 24/4, 4 on 27/4, 5 on 1/5, 40 on 12/5, 3 on 13/5, 10 on 15/5, 13 on 21/5, 2 on 27/5, 5 on 31/5, 3 on 1/6, 10 on 4/6, 5 on 5/6, 7 on 6/6, 3 on 7/6, 1 on 11/6, 6 on 19/6, 2 on 22/6.

Kingfisher – 2 on 13/4, then 1 regularly until 22/4, 2 on 27/4, 1 on 28/4, 1 on 6/6, 2 on 11/6, 1 on 19/6, 2 on 22/6.

Gt Spotted Woodpecker – 2 on 16/4, 1 from 18/4 to 22/4, 2 on 21/5, 1 on 19/6.

Green Woodpecker – 1 on 16/4 & 20/4.

Sand Martin – 1 on 17/4, 3 on 18/4, 8 on 19/4, 2 on 20/4, 20 on 21/4, 6 on 23/4, 2 on 24/4, 10 on 27/4 & 10/5.

Swallow – Regular - counts over 2), 6 on 13/4, 85 on 18/4, 21 on 19/4, 7 on 20/4, 80 on 21/4, 6 on 23/4 20 on 27/4, 4 on 28/4, 30 on 12/5 & 13/5, 4 on 21/5, 6 on 27/5, 3 on 1/6, 12 on 11/6, 5 on 19/6.

House Martin – (Regular - counts over 4), 8 on 18/4, 17 on 19/4, 8 on 20/4, 20 on 21/4 & 27/4, 6 on 27/5, 8 on 31/5, 10 on 1/6, 5 on 4/6 & 6/6, 6 on 22/6.

Grey Wagtail – Up to 2 intermittently throughout the period.

Pied Wagtail – Up to 2 regularly (counts over 2), 9 on 13/4, 3 on 16/4 & 13/5, 4 on 15/5, 10 on 18/5, 6 on 27/5, 4 on 31/5, 6 on 1/6, 5 on 7/6, 6 on 13/6 & 19/6.

Woodlark – 1 on 22/4

Robin, Blackbird & Wren – Regular and resident reported in low numbers (no count over 5).

Dunnock – Regular (counts over 3), 6 on 13/4.

Northern Wheatear – 1 on 13/4 & 14/4.

Song Thrush – 2 on 13/4, 1 regularly from 16/4 to 23/4, 2 on 27/4, 1 on 1/5 & 8/6.

Mistle Thrush – 1 on 13/4, 2 on 19/4, 1 on 20/4 to 23/4, 4 on 25/5, 1 on 11/6.

Reed Warbler - 1 on 20/4 to 23/4, 3 on 1/5, 6 on 13/5, 4 on 14/5, 1 on 16/5, 2 on 20/5, 3 on 21/5, 4 on 22/5, 25/5 & 29/5, 4 on 4/6 & 11/6, 3 on 19/6, 1 on 22/6.

Whitethroat – Regular, 1 from 16/4 until 3 on 23/4 (counts over 2), 3 on 1/5, 9 on 13/5, 3 on 16/5, 5 on 21/5, 3 on 6/6, 6 on 19/6.

Lesser Whitethroat – 1 on 19/4 & 20/4.

Garden Warbler – 1 on 22/4, 24/4 & 12/5, 2 on 13/5 & 14/5, 1 on 16/5 & 21/5, 2 on 25/5 & 26/5, 1 regularly from 29/5 until 11/6.

Blackcap – Regular, (counts over 2), 3 on 13/4 & 16/4, 7 on 20/4, 3 on 22/4 & 25/4, 4 on 29/4, 3 on 1/5, 13/5, 14/5, 29/5 & 11/6, 4 on 19/6.

Chiffchaff – Regular (counts over 2), 3 on 13/4, 12 on 16/4, 20 on 20/4, 5 on 22/4, 7 on 29/4 & 13/5, 3 on 1/5, 6 on 29/5, 3 on 6/6, 11/6 & 19/6.

Goldcrest – 1 on 13/4, 2 on 20/4, 1 on 27/4, 3 on 26/5, 1 on 11/6 & 19/6.

L.T. Tit – 2 on 13/4, 3 on 16/4, 2 on 21/4, 1 on 27/4 & 1/5, 4 on 29/4, 7 on 13/5, 1 on 4/6.

Marsh Tit – 4 on 16/4, 2 on 18/4, 1 on 20/4, 2 on 21/4 & 23/4, 1 on 6/6.

Coal Tit – 1 on 16/4, 20/4, 22/4 & 25/4.

Blue Tit - (counts over 5), 6 on 13/4, 7 on 22/4.

Great Tit – Regular - No counts over 5.

Nuthatch – 1 regularly until 20/5 (counts over), 2 on 13/4, 16/4 & 20/4, 2 on 9/5.

Tree Creeper – 1 on 23/4, 29/4, 1/5 & 15/5, 1 on 7/6 & 11/6, 2 on 19/6.

Jay – 2 on 13/4, 3 on 16/4, 2 on 19/4 & 21/4, 1 on 22/4 & 29/4, 1 on 31/5, 11/6 & 22/6.

Magpie & Carrion Crow – Resident with regular reports (No counts over 5).

Rook – 4 on 13/4, 21 on 16/4, 26 on 23/4, 22 on 29/4, 36 on 21/5, 5 on 4/6, 3 on 11/6.

Jackdaw – Occasional sightings of up to 4.

Raven – 1 on 17/4, 3 on 19/4, 1 on 28/4 & 29/4, 2 on 13/5, 1 on 16/5, 25/5 & 26/5, 2 on 27/5, 1 on 6/6 & 11/6.

Starling – 3 on 21/5, 2 on 19/6.

Chaffinch – Occasional, 3 on 16/4, 2 on 20/4, 1 on 23/4, 3 on 13/5, 1 on 21/5, 2 on 1/6 & 22/6.

Goldfinch – Regular (counts over 5), 11 on 13/4, 7 on 16/4, 8 on 20/4, 6 on 21/4 & 23/4, 8 on 29/4 then up to 5 intermittently until end of period.

Bullfinch – 1 on 16/4 & 29/4, 2 on 13/5.

Yellowhammer – 1 on 13/4.

Reed Bunting – 1 on 16/4 & 23/4, 1 on 13/5, 14/5 & 21/5, 2 on 29/5 & 31/5, 1 on 4/6, 2 on 6/6, 1 on 11/6, 3 on 19/6.

Reserve News *by Bob Johnson*

Since my last newsletter the work parties have carried out work at the dam end. We cleared some willow trees that had fallen across the south bank reed bed enclosures, sadly the phragmites reeds have failed to establish due to the continuing high water levels, a point that has repeatedly been made to Southern Water. We are maintaining the enclosures if only to assist other waterside plants to establish such as Reed Canary Grass.

On the north bank side, a great deal of Willow was previously cut down by fishery work parties and left stacked in piles within the meadows. These were affecting some important flora at the water's edge so we decided these piles should be suitably cleared. A drain feeding water to the reservoir under the north bank public footpath was blocked and making a section of the footpath very muddy, so we dug out the blocked ditches and pipes and this has cured the problem.

At the picnic area we repaired fencing where there had been illegal trespassing, cut the hedges and grass and tidied the area. We intend to carry out repairs later this year to the picnic table and seats that have been vandalised and are in poor repair. We also cut down and stacked some Willow at the water's edge directly in front of the picnic area to retain waterside views. We intend to further improve the view after the nesting season by clearing some bramble/blackthorn that is directly in front of the picnic area.

Within the reserve we have cut all the access paths, cleared areas of bracken including in front of the car park viewing area whilst still carrying out all our spring and summer wildlife survey work and other usual weekly jobs such as rubbish removal, trimming hedges etc. We also had some illegal trespass into the nature reserve with fences being cut, we have repaired these to deter others.

Of interest within Whillet's meadows was our first Southern Marsh Orchid, it arrived naturally, we have had to put a cage around it to stop it being eaten by deer which are a problem. We have Common Spotted Orchids in the study area (77 flowering spikes were counted) but have found they also get their flower heads eaten before they are able to set seed, so have caged a few to try and get some natural re-seeding.

We have noticed that there are less butterflies and dragonflies around the reserve this year and suspect this could be the results of the very dry summer last year and recent cold wet spring.

The results of bird flu had less noticeable effect on our breeding water birds – the heronry has had a very good year with numbers of Grey Herons and Cormorants up on last year.

We have seen increased numbers of Geese this summer, an Egyptian Goose pair had 9 young at the dam end, broods of both Canada and Greylag Geese have also been seen.

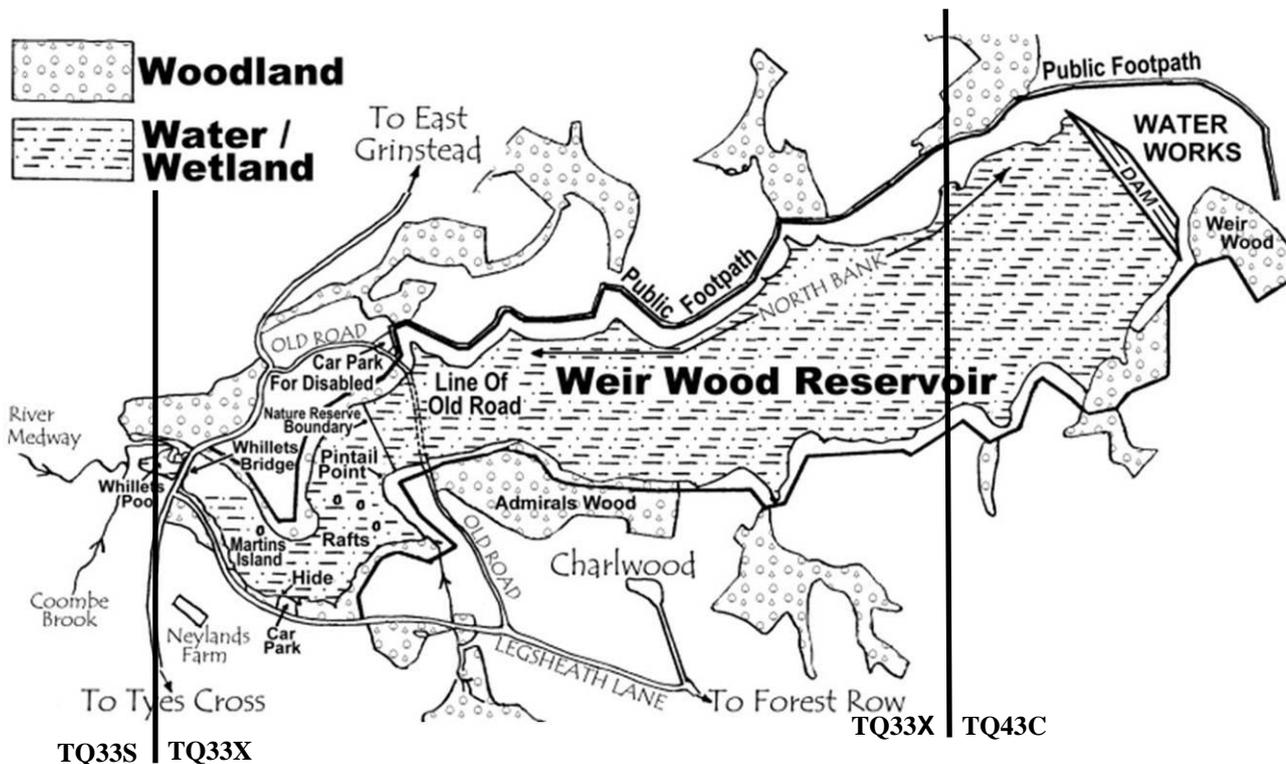
Reserve News continued

Four pairs of Common Terns are nesting on our rafts and have produced 6 young so far. Another pair are nesting at the dam end. A pair of Black-headed Gulls are also nesting on the rafts – a new breeding species for the reserve. Great Crested Grebe numbers have dropped to less than 20 but we have still seen at least 7 nests at the west end, although no young seen yet. At least 2 pairs of Mandarin ducks had young and 4 broods of Mallard have been seen, plus, interestingly, the White Feral duck paired with a Mallard produced 5 whiteish ducklings.

The nest boxes have been used by many Blue and Great Tits, there were successful broods also from Marsh Tit and Nuthatch. Two pairs of Tawny Owl bred, and a Barn Owl pair have 4 young being fed on the many voles within the reserve. Several Stock Dove pairs have had fledged young and a Jackdaw pair nested and laid eggs in a box but an unconfirmed result.

At Whillet's the reed bed holds 4 Reed Warbler and 1 Reed Bunting territories. The meadows area holds multiple breeding Wren, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Whitethroat territories, also 2 territories of Garden Warbler, 1 territory each for Bullfinch, Treecreeper and Long Tailed Tit, 2 Song Thrush territories and another Reed Bunting pair. The Grass Snake numbers are always slow to build (7 so far) and will be most numerous by July/August. There are plenty of small frogs and toads and masses of small grasshoppers and crickets and other insects within the meadows.

Since the 16th June there have been regular Osprey sightings, this happened in June last year and is unusual for this time of year when adult Ospreys should be at their normal breeding sites. There are no known breeding Osprey sites in Sussex. Even more intriguing is that two were seen together at the reservoir on the 19th June – could they be a pair and be breeding nearby? The birds seem to always fly away with any fish they catch!! They have also been quite regular with sightings in both mornings and afternoon/evenings on the same day.



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