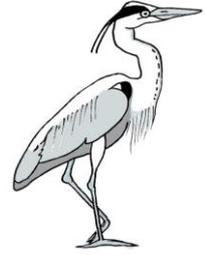




# Weir Wood News



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The Newsletter of the Friends of Weir Wood Society no 105

Summer 2024



## Chairman's Notes

Welcome to our Summer newsletter.

### New Format

This is the second issue of our quarterly newsletter in the new format. Feedback from you so far has been uniformly positive, thank you. We will continue to tweak as we go along and continue with the wider scope so it's not only about the birds!

### Work Parties

The past three months have been relatively "quiet" for the regular Tuesday work party as we were in peak nesting / breeding season and we needed to create as little disturbance as possible to wildlife. Much of our work has focussed both on non-intrusive routine maintenance and on dealing with issues (e.g. fallen trees etc) as they arise. For example, in May, working with the Rangers we replaced an entrance gate to the north of the reservoir which had been destroyed by a fallen tree. In June we cleared a blocked culvert which was causing flooding to the Millennium Footpath.



**Culvert and ditch work – Millennium Footpath – early June**  
**Photo: Martin Jeffree**

Typically, from May onwards, the work parties devote time to wildlife surveys. We have endured a frustrating April and May and the cold wet Spring this year has meant that wildlife has been “delayed”. It was mid-June before we started recording butterflies and dragonflies and damselflies in any number for example. The impact of this unseasonal weather is touched on the Sightings Report later in this newsletter.

Finally, the Friends’ Committee has been discussing how to attract new work party volunteers as none of us is getting any younger! Currently the work party meets every Tuesday which means that most of our volunteers are likely to be retired. We wondered if there was any appetite for a work party to meet on a Saturday, perhaps on a monthly or quarterly basis, in addition to the regular Tuesdays. If you have any views on this or would like to take part in a possible weekend work party, we’d like to hear from you. Send us an e-mail to [work@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:work@weirwood.me.uk) . We look forward to hearing from you.

### Reserve Boundaries

Unlike reservoirs such as Bewl Water and Ardingly, there is no public access to Weir Wood Reservoir. The reservoir is enclosed in its entirety by chain link fencing which was installed when the reservoir was built in the 1950s. Viewing areas are restricted to the Hide car park and the Millennium picnic area. Additionally, the Friends have cut back vegetation in places so that the reservoir can be seen from points along the Millennium Footpath on the north bank.

The lack of access is a double-edged sword. It has ensured that the reserve and the habitat generally surrounding the reservoir have remained undisturbed, which has been to the benefit of the flora and fauna. However it has meant that a minority continue to trespass onto the reserve and the wider SSSI for a variety of reasons, often leaving a trail of damage and rubbish in their wake.

Sadly, little or no maintenance has been carried out to the boundary fencing since installation 70 years ago and in many places it is in a very sorry state. Additionally the trespassers have caused significant damage to the fencing over the years. Although the fishing club and the Friends carry out regular *ad hoc* repairs to the fencing, the task is never ending. The photo below gives you an idea of what we are faced with. There was talk not so long ago that Southern Water (SW) might address this issue, but it has gone quiet. It would be very costly to replace the fencing in its entirety, but it would be a start if SW could replace and upgrade the fencing at the known trespass hot spots – such as behind the Canoeists' car park. We live in hope

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**Damaged Boundary Fence**  
**Photo: Richard Allan**

### Weir Wood Sailing Club

Members may be aware of the ongoing legal dispute between the sailing club and the owner of the leisure rights at the reservoir. You may have spotted an article about this in the national press in May. We have had a couple of queries from members whether this dispute has had or could have any impact on the Friends and our activities. We can confirm that the ownership of the leisure rights excludes the nature reserve and that our legal relationship is with Southern Water and East Sussex CC only. As such, we are not affected by the dispute in any way, but we continue to remain on cordial terms with both parties to the dispute.

### Website

The website now has increased functionality since the update in the last newsletter, with the sightings page updated on a regular basis again. However it is taking us a little longer than anticipated to bring it back up to full working order, but we are making progress. We hope that you will continue to bear with us and we apologise for any inconvenience caused.

## **Dates for your Diary:**

### **21 July 2024 – Open Day**

Our ever popular Open Day will take place this year on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July. Everyone is welcome (children must be accompanied by an adult) and proceedings start from 09.30. Look out for our posters locally and on our website. We hope to have the usual range of activities including pond dipping, bird ringing and bee keeping etc, but some activities such as bird ringing are dependent on fine weather on the day. We will post an update on our website and Facebook page nearer the day if we have to cancel the bird ringing. No need to book, just drop in anytime between 09.30 and 16.00. We look forward to welcoming you to the reserve. Please remember that there are no toilet facilities at the reserve.

### **2 November 2024 – Autumn Walk**

Our annual afternoon walk will take place on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November starting at 13.00, meet in the Hide car park. We will follow our usual format – walking through the Study Area to Pintail Point looking at fungi and other things of interest and then on to Whillets meadows where if the weather is kind we may be able to offer some bird ringing. Further details will be issued nearer the time.

### **Members' Spring Walk - Report**

Seventeen members attended the walk on the morning of Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April. The weather was dry but conditions underfoot were a little muddy. The walk started with a short introductory talk about the heronry and the young Grey Herons and Cormorants on view. Members then had a quick look over the water from the car park. A pair of Common Terns and Black Headed Gulls were showing on the nesting rafts, a pair of Great Crested Grebes were displaying and a few Swallows were evident.

In the Study Area, the woodland spring flowers were now becoming very evident, including Garlic Mustard, a food plant of the Orange Tip butterfly. As members approached what we call the Iron Bog, a rarer small white flowering plant was pointed out - Three Nerved Sandwort considered an ancient woodland indicator, although it can be found in newer woods.

We have many small nest boxes that are used by tits in the area which included a breeding Marsh Tit pair, and we briefly looked into a tit box that held small young.

The next part of the walk was into semi-ancient woodland where the ground was covered in Bluebells and which holds some scarcer White Bluebells. We had been worried that as the Bluebells had started flowering weeks ago they could have gone over by now. Luckily, the recent cold weather held them back and they were still at their best.

We moved into an area of Alder Carr and stopped by a boggy area which held a nice showing of Marsh Marigold and some wild Redcurrant bushes, plus a few of the white flowering small and rarer Marsh Valerian plants.

A nearby nest box held a Stock Dove which our bird ringer Phil kindly showed us in the hand as many people do not usually see this species closely, he then ringed the bird and released it. We then moved on, so the bird could go back to its nest.

Phil checked a Barn Owl box and we were treated to a Barn Owl flying out of the box, which Phil confirmed had been sitting on 4 eggs. We then moved off and started walking back so the owl could return to the box. On the way back Phil also checked a Tawny Owl box which held 2 young.

We had a short break for 10 minutes before starting the second part of the walk over to Whillets Meadows. Along the road we stopped at the heronry for closer views and to see and hear the young Herons and Cormorants.

In the meadows, the beehives were seen, plus a plastic trap hanging from a tree. Traps are now required to be hung near active beehives to control the newly arrived invasive alien Asian Hornet which will attack and kill bee colonies.

At Meadow Pond there were more birds singing, with Blackcap, another Whitethroat and a Garden Warbler both heard & seen. All are summer migrants but the Garden Warblers are only just arriving from their wintering grounds in Africa.

With time now nearing lunchtime, we had a quick look into the third meadow before walking back to the car park.

*This is an extract from the full report by Bob Johnson, which can be found on our website.*



**Members' Walk – April 2024**

**Photo: Bob Johnson**

## Ashdown Forest

Mark Pearson, the new Chief Executive of the Forest has now been in post for nearly six months. Mark has a background in wildlife / conservation and he has made it clear that he wishes to continue and build on James Adler's legacy. He is keen to progress the Bigger, Better and Joined Up initiative (referred to in the last newsletter) in some form and is committed to improving the Forest's many habitats for the benefit of its wildlife. This is good news especially given the proximity of the Forest to Weir Wood.

### Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) 2024

Every year we undertake a BBS in Whillets meadows. Here is Ian Hodgson's summary report from this year's BBS:

"The BBS is focused on smaller birds where territories tend to be restricted to smaller areas. However, the results include some larger birds where there has been known breeding activity.

Six surveys are completed between the end of March and the beginning of June, which involves recording the location of every bird seen or heard. Additional note is taken of any sightings or relevant bird behaviour during other visits to the survey area, such as work party visits. Special note is also taken where birds are paired up, nests are identified or where birds are seen to be carrying food for their young.

Mapping of the 2024 recordings indicated the following number of territories, tabulated with comparable survey results from the previous two years:

<u>Species</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>
Wren	12	11	9
Blue Tit	10	8	8
Chiffchaff	9	11	10
Robin	6	4	3
Blackcap	5	5	4
Blackbird	5	4	3
Great Tit	4	5	3
Reed Warbler*	3	4	8
Common Whitethroat	2	4	7
Song Thrush	2	2	1
Long-tailed Tit	2	1	1
Mandarin Duck	2	2	-
Dunnock	2	1	-
Garden Warbler	1	2	2
Reed Bunting	1	2	2
Goldcrest	1	1	1
Stock Dove	1	1	-
Goldfinch	1	-	-
Treecreeper	-	1	-

Bullfinch	-	1	-
Mallard	-	1	-
Tawny Owl	-	1	-
Nuthatch	-	-	2
Willow Warbler	-	-	1
Kingfisher	-	-	1

\* Recording the number of Reed Warbler territories is particularly difficult as their habitat is largely hidden, restricted to the reedbeds and surrounding vegetation at Whillets Pool. Based on the limited sightings and singing heard, it is estimated that there were approximately 3 breeding pairs in the reedbed this year.

Analysis of the results suggests that in general the number of territories are reasonably consistent with previous years. It was noticeable that the breeding season commenced slightly earlier than in 2023 due to milder conditions, which in turn encouraged greater insect numbers and earlier vegetation growth.

This year's surveys show good territory gains for Blue Tit and Robin, with positive trends for Wren (largest number of territories overall), Blackbird, Long-tailed Tit, and Dunnock, plus Goldfinch becoming a new entry on the list.

On the downside there was a decrease in the recordings of many of the summer visiting warblers such as Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat, Reed Warbler, and Garden Warbler.

The following species were registered only once or twice during the survey period, and/or were often at widely separate locations, making it difficult to justify the existence of a territory: Bullfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Pheasant, Barn Owl, and Kingfisher. In addition, Moorhen, Mallard, Grey Heron, and Canada Goose were occasionally seen in or near Whillets Pool, but were excluded from the survey for territory or breeding purposes."

### **Heronry Census 2024**

Our Chairman, Bob Johnson has been carrying out the annual heronry census at the reserve for some years now. The heronry at Weir Wood is still the largest in Sussex. Here are the results of the census for 2024 (2023 figures in brackets) all numbers relate to **Grey Heron**:

<b>Active Nests</b>	<b>Successful Nests*</b>	<b>Number of Young*</b>
48 (45)	29 (36)	40 (53)

\*Note: the 2024 numbers are lower than those for 2023 because late vegetation growth hid many of the nests from view.

Bob's commentary on the 2024 results is as follows:

"For 2024 we have had another very good heron nesting year, our highest ever. 9 nests had birds residing by 27<sup>th</sup> January. 31 active nests by 11<sup>th</sup> February with 48 active by the 11<sup>th</sup> March, several new nests were built by heron pairs during the late

February period, and further take over of heron nests by cormorants has now slowed. 9 heron nests had young by 2<sup>nd</sup> April with successful nest numbers increasing during April to 20 by 23<sup>rd</sup>. Only 1 nest had more than 2 young (with 3) but many nests only held 1 young. It was a wet, windy and generally cold spring and this may have been a factor. By the 12<sup>th</sup> May the increase in leaf cover and willow growth meant that many of the nests were no longer visible from ground viewing points. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> June we had confirmed 29 nests showing 40 young. There were still active nests, so both the successful nest numbers and young are likely to be an under count. In the past we have been able to view a few late or second nesters that were still active into July, but it was not possible this year.”

**Cormorant** numbers are also monitored as a by-product of the census and the 2024 results are as follows (2023 in brackets):

**Active nests:** 26(26)                      **Young:** 38 from 18 nests (36 from 18 nests).

In the next issue we will say a bit more about the history of the heronry at Weir Wood. It's an interesting story.

### **Wildflower Meadows at Whillets**

As long-standing members will know, the Friends have worked hard over the years to improve the habitat in Whillets meadows which were originally grazing pasture. A notable success has been the creation of wildflower areas in the first two meadows. This has been no mean feat given the heavy clay soil and the high water table which meant that much of the ground remained under water or damp for long periods of the year. The nutrient rich soil meant that grasses, sedges and vigorous plants such as Ribbed Plantain could easily outcompete any wild flowers that might try their luck.

However a consistent programme of grass cutting, control of Meadowsweet, Hemlock Water Dropwort and Bracken and the introduction of Yellow Rattle (a plant which parasitizes grass) has meant that the wildflowers both seeded deliberately and seeds carried on the wind, now have a chance to thrive.

The hard work has paid off and the results are spectacular. In June and July the wildflower areas are a blaze of colour and are popular with butterflies and other insects. Flowers now include: Betony, Devil's Bit Scabious, St John's Wort, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Common Fleabane and Sneezewort and many more. Why not take the opportunity to see for yourself at our Open Day in July when the meadows are open to the public and there will be signs available to help you identify the various flowers.



**Betony – Whillets meadows**  
Photo: Ian Hodgson

### **The Flowers of Weir Wood – Dyer’s Greenweed**

The second in our series features a flower that grows only in one location on the reserve, in the meadows on the north side of the reservoir.

Dyer’s Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) is a Whin and belongs to the same order as Petty or Needle Whin (*Genista anglica*) which is found in Ashdown Forest and which can be seen in the logo of the Friends of Ashdown Forest. Whins are related to Brooms and Gorses and all are members of the larger Pea family.

Dyer’s Greenweed likes heavy soil and unimproved grassland which is something we have here on the reserve. The plant is widespread across England, but can be rare locally mainly due to habitat loss. We were particularly pleased this year to find that our one small and isolated patch of Dyer’s Greenweed has started to spread and now looks to be doing well.

As both its common and Latin names suggest, the plant was once used to produce a bright yellow dye. The plant is notable also for being the food plant of some 20 moths, 5 of which are considered rare.

Fun fact: the Plantagenet kings of England (1154-1485) took their name from this plant species. Every Plantagenet king was a descendant of Geoffrey, Count of Anjou and he was also called Geoffrey Plantagenet as a result of him wearing a sprig of broom (Latin: *planta genista*) in his hat. The modern French for broom is “un genêt”, the circumflex over the “e” indicating that the word once contained another letter - in this case an “s”.



**Dyers Greenweed – Weir Wood – June 24**  
**Photos: Richard Allan and John Edwards**

## **Bird Sightings Report**

### **April**

A curious month weather wise, with a typical April start of sunshine and showers (some quite heavy and occasionally wintry), followed by a long period of relatively dry but cloudy and unseasonably cold weather. A keen northerly wind blew for much of the time. Things got a bit warmer and wetter towards the end of the month.

The month's report has to start with the **Ring Ouzel** which arrived at the reserve at the end of last month. It was expected that it wouldn't hang around and would be on its way north quite quickly. However it was seen every day from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> and then it disappeared, or so it was thought. However a Ring Ouzel was seen in the same spot on the 16<sup>th</sup>! We have to assume it was the same bird. However it hasn't been seen since the 16<sup>th</sup> so it must have flown north at last.

April saw the arrival of more summer visitors and birds passing through. **Common Whitethroat** was recorded on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> and then on most days for the remainder of the month. **Lesser Whitethroat** arrived a little later, being spotted on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. A **Northern Wheatear** was seen on the Dam on the 8<sup>th</sup> and again on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Other arrivals included a **Reed Warbler** on the 20<sup>th</sup> (seen again on the 25<sup>th</sup>), a **Yellow Wagtail** on the 16<sup>th</sup> and a **Garden Warbler** on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Hirundines arrived in numbers during the month with **Swallows**, **House Martins** and **Sand Martins** all seen on the 7<sup>th</sup> and then regularly across all parts of the reservoir for the remainder of the month. A **Swift** was seen on the 14<sup>th</sup> and then 3 were seen on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 4 on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

With the water levels falling a little, there was some wader activity, mostly at the Dam end. A **Little Ringed Plover** was recorded on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Common Sandpiper** were

sighted regularly, with 2 seen on the 7<sup>th</sup> rising to 6 seen on the 14<sup>th</sup> and then in small numbers for the remainder of the month. A **Wood Sandpiper** was a nice surprise on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Equally, a surprising **Avocet** was seen on the 11<sup>th</sup> and a **Ruff** was seen a few days later on the 14<sup>th</sup>. A **Common Redshank** was recorded on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The 25<sup>th</sup> was clearly a good day, with both **Whimbrel** and **Bar-tailed Godwit** being seen. A **Lapwing** was recorded on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

On the raptor front as well as the usual **Buzzards**, **Kestrels** and **Sparrowhawks**, **Red Kites** were seen regularly throughout the month and a **Goshawk** was seen on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. A **Peregrine** was seen twice, on the 7<sup>th</sup> (once as part of the Wetland Bird Survey - WeBS) and again later in the month on the 24<sup>th</sup>. An early **Hobby** was seen briefly on the 9<sup>th</sup> and a **White-tailed Eagle** was seen soaring over the Dam on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was a bit quiet on the **Osprey** front with just one being spotted on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

On the water, **Mallards** and **Tufted Ducks** were seen regularly as were **Mandarins** with 7 seen together on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. **Great Crested Grebes** were seen in ones or twos throughout the month (6 were seen on the 7<sup>th</sup>) with a **Little Grebe** seen on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Of the more unusual sightings, 2 **Shelduck** were seen on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 14 **Common Scoter** on the 30<sup>th</sup>. **Kingfishers** were seen on most days.

Cormorants and Grey Heron continued to be active on their nests with the WeBS recording 43 **Grey Heron** and 30 **Cormorant** on the 7<sup>th</sup>. A **Great White Egret** was seen on the 24<sup>th</sup> and a **Little Egret** on the 20<sup>th</sup>. (See also the Heronry Report above.)

A couple of **Black-headed Gulls** were seen on most days on and around the tern rafts. They may nest there as they did last year. A **Common Tern** was spotted on the 21<sup>st</sup>, two were seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> and two pairs on the 30<sup>th</sup> this time on the rafts. An **Arctic Tern** was seen on the 11<sup>th</sup> with 3 being spotted on the 16<sup>th</sup>. A **Sandwich Tern** was seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> and again on the 9<sup>th</sup> by the Work Party. It is unusual to see this tern so far inland, but there had been storms on the south coast the day before which may have been a factor. **Herring Gull**, **Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were seen regularly, additionally a **Little Gull** was seen on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> with two seen on the 29<sup>th</sup>. 3 **Mediterranean Gulls** were recorded on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

Finally, a **Water Rail** was seen in Whillett's reed bed on the 16<sup>th</sup> and it was spotted again on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. **Reed Buntings** were seen regularly in the same location.

## May

A real mixed bag weather wise with temperatures generally well below the seasonal average. We did get some good weather but it didn't seem to last long before the wind and rain returned. With the ground already saturated from the wet spring, conditions underfoot in the reserve remained boggy and the water level in the reservoir remained high for the time of year. With the seed feeders by the hide taken down for the summer, the avian action was largely on the water and in the air.

On the raptor front **Kestrels**, **Common Buzzards** and increasingly **Red Kites**, were seen regularly throughout the month. Surprisingly **Sparrowhawks** were only seen

twice in the month on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. **Hobbies** were seen on and off throughout the month – 2 were seen chasing mayflies on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1 was seen on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 3 seen on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. There were just two **Goshawk** sightings, with a juvenile being chased by a Kestrel in Whillets on the 5<sup>th</sup> and an adult seen on the 15<sup>th</sup>. **Osprey** sightings were limited also – one during the WeBS on the 12<sup>th</sup> and the other on the 28<sup>th</sup> – catching fish. A **Honey Buzzard** was recorded as a fly over on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

For more information about Heron numbers – see the separate report above. A **Great White Egret** flew over on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebe** numbers increased steadily throughout the month with pairing up starting to take place. 11 were recorded on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 14 on the 12<sup>th</sup> (during the WeBS) and 10 on the 28<sup>th</sup>. There were high hopes of breeding this year.

6 **Tufted Ducks** were recorded on the 19<sup>th</sup> and **Mandarin** were seen regularly and successful breeding was evidence with the sight of a female and 5 ducklings on the 25<sup>th</sup>. **Greylag, Canada** and **Egyptian Geese** were all seen on the water in good numbers and goslings of all 3 species were seen.

**Kingfishers** were seen across the reserve throughout the month.

Hirundine numbers built up gradually during the month – particularly **Swifts**. 18 Swifts were seen on the 6<sup>th</sup> rising to 50 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 60 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> before falling back to 20 on the 28<sup>th</sup>. **House Martins** and **Barn Swallows** were seen less frequently and in much smaller numbers.

On the rafts, the two **Black-headed Gulls** reported last month took up residence on one of them, with signs of nesting reported on the 18<sup>th</sup>. 2 **Common Terns** were reported on the 1<sup>st</sup> with this number increasing to 6 on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Thereafter 6-8 were seen on and around the rafts for the rest of the month. 2 possibly 3 **Black Terns** were reported on the 6<sup>th</sup>. **Great Black-backed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were seen on the 1<sup>st</sup> and again on the 6<sup>th</sup> and were then seen lurking about on and off throughout the month. This is a mixed blessing given both species' habit of preying on sea bird chicks. Both gulls were not common at the reserve in the past, but have been seen more frequently in recent years possibly because of the presence of the rafts – but this is speculation on our part.

With high water level, all the action on the wader front happened at the Dam End where there is a little bit of a "beach". A **Curlew** flew over on the 12<sup>th</sup> during the May WeBS. **Common Sandpipers** were seen regularly in the early part of the month with 5 on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 4 on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 3 on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The 18<sup>th</sup> was clearly a good day for waders with 2 **Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher** and **Green Sandpiper** all recorded. 2 **Sanderling** in summer plumage were seen on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Wader sighting of the month was probably a **Grey Plover** in summer plumage which flew over on the 11<sup>th</sup> – this is a rarity for the reserve.

The usual passerines were spotted during the month with most notably a **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Garden Warbler** seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 2 Lesser Whitethroats seen on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

A **Cuckoo** was seen on the 12<sup>th</sup>. There was just one report of a **Water Rail** – in the reed bed on the 10<sup>th</sup>. There was only one sighting of a **Raven**, on the 11<sup>th</sup>.



Common Tern – Weir Wood May 2024  
Photo: Richard Allan

## June

June started where May finished, with regular downpours, a persistent northerly breeze and very cold nights for the time of year – temperatures in low single figures on some occasions. It wasn't until the middle of June that summer finally arrived. As a result water levels in the reservoir continued to be higher than usual for June and Whillets meadows were much later drying out than in recent years.

There was plenty of action on the rafts and not all of it for the good. 6 **Common Terns** and 3 **Black-headed Gulls** were seen on the rafts on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, 3 Black-headed Gull chicks were seen and then 2-3 Common Tern chicks were seen on the 13<sup>th</sup>. 4 Common Terns were seen sitting on eggs on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 2 were still sitting on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Common Terns were seen throughout the month reaching a peak of 10 at the West End and 5 at the Dam End on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Ominously perhaps, **Great Black-backed Gulls**, **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and **Herring Gulls** were also seen throughout the month with 10 Herring Gulls seen on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 18 on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Then disaster; on the 20<sup>th</sup> 2 Black-headed Gulls were seen sitting on the rafts but the chicks had disappeared and on the 25<sup>th</sup> the 2-3 Tern chicks were not to be seen. We had taken measures to protect the rafts from mink predation, so it is highly probable that all the chicks were predated by other gulls. It is perhaps no coincidence that 3 known nest raiding species – Greater Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull had all been spotted regularly in the vicinity of the rafts around the middle of the month ☹️. Away from the rafts, a **Kittiwake** was seen in the early hours at the Dam End on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

There was plenty of activity at the Heronry – see the report above.

**Great Crested Grebe** numbers remained generally steady with 9 seen on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13 on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The WeBS on the 9<sup>th</sup> recorded 23 Grebes in all, with 3 pairs nesting. The 3 nests were seen again on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Hirundine numbers for the month were disappointing with just a handful of **Barn Swallows** and **House Martins** seen. **Swift** numbers were marginally more encouraging with 16 being recorded on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

It was a fairly quiet month for raptors. **Common Buzzard**, **Kestrel** and **Red Kite** were seen on most days. Just 2 **Hobbies** were reported, seen together on the north bank of the reservoir on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. An **Osprey** with a fish was reported in the early hours of the 1<sup>st</sup> and again in the early hours of the 2<sup>nd</sup>. There was another early morning sighting on the 20<sup>th</sup>. A **Honey Buzzard** flew over on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Garden Warblers** and **Common Whitethroats** were heard singing in Whillets throughout the month. **Reed Warblers** were seen and heard both in front of the hide and in Whillets reed bed on most days. At least 3 were recorded in the reed bed together with signs of nesting activity. An adult bird was seen carrying food for its young on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

2 **Kingfishers** were seen on a regular basis flying to and from their nest in the bank opposite the hide. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, a bird was seen taking a small fish to the nest.

In other sightings, a **Little Ringed Plover** was seen on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 2 **White Storks** flew over on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 3 **Lapwings** were seen flying over Whillets on the 21<sup>st</sup>. 2 **Yellowhammers** were reported in Whillets on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Towards the end of the month, the Work Party were pleased to see **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** which is a rarity for the reserve.

The Report above just gives a “flavour” and a detailed list of sightings can be found on our website at: [www.weirwood.me.uk](http://www.weirwood.me.uk) – click on the “Recent Sightings” link. Remember to check our Facebook page too for regular sightings and photos.

### **And finally .....**

For some time now we have been aware of the presence of Early Purple Orchid growing along the Millennium Path to the north of the reservoir. Frustratingly it never spread across the path into the reserve and so we could not add it to our species records. However that all changed this April with a solitary plant spotted for the first time in the reserve close to the existing plants. At last – hopefully it will now start to spread.



**Early Purple Orchid in the north of the Reserve  
Photo by Richard Allan**

Last year a Southern Marsh Orchid was spotted in the first meadow at Whillets. Although it is not an uncommon orchid, it was a first for the reserve and we took steps to protect it from the deer as it was quite fragile. Our efforts paid off and this year it has come back larger and more vigorous as can be seen in the photo below. We are hoping that now it is established, it will start to spread. It really is a glorious plant.



**Southern Marsh Orchid in Whillets Meadow  
Photo: Richard Allan**

## Useful Information:

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