



Weir Wood News

The Newsletter of the Friends of Weir Wood Society no 109

Summer 2025



Chairman's Notes

Welcome to our summer newsletter. We hope that you have been enjoying the recent warm weather. The reserve is now at its summer peak. Butterflies and dragonflies are on the wing and our wildflowers are at their best. It is a bit quiet on the bird front at this time of year as it is nesting time, but as you can see from the report later in this newsletter, there are still some good "sightings" to be had.

Work Parties

Although our activities are limited during the nesting season, the Tuesday work parties have not been idle during this time. There is always a large number of small jobs around the reserve that need attending to, mostly of a general housekeeping nature. The Rangers have been assisting us with bramble control, bracken clearance and cutting rides through our meadows. The final wooden reserve signs have been installed at the Pintail and North Bank gate entrances, replacing those which had rotted away.



New Reserve Signs
Photo: Bob Johnson

The Rangers have also recently created a new pond for us in the glade we opened up last year in the third meadow at Whillets. This damp area has much vegetation so we hope that the bare earth banks of the pond will soon be covered in plant life. This a great area for butterflies and dragonflies so this pond will quickly become another great habitat for wildlife as it is colonised by invertebrates.

One small but satisfying job, was the installation of large branches on the reservoir bank near the hide to encourage perching kingfishers. Most pleasingly, a Kingfisher was seen perched on one within hours of the branches' installation and two were seen perching the following day.



Installing Kingfisher Posts
Photo: Ian Hodgson

Finally, we were pleased to host a team from Southern Water for a day's volunteering on the reserve on 24th June. They were guided by two members of the Tuesday work party and they did a splendid job removing surplus willow and blackthorn in the meadows on the north bank of the reservoir. The day was much enjoyed by all involved and they have asked to come back again, possibly in the autumn.

New Interpretation Board

We mentioned in a previous newsletter that we had plans to replace the interpretation board in the Legsheath Lane car park. The existing board was over 20 years old and as well as being out of date, was beginning to show its age.

We worked closely with a Sussex firm, The Acorn Workshop, to design a new board which as well as being attractive to the eye, contained lots of helpful and practical information about the reserve. The board also includes a QR code which enables visitors to download our comprehensive information leaflet to their mobile phones.

We were very pleased with the end result and the new board was installed on 10th June by the Rangers. If you get the opportunity or are just passing by, please pop into the car park and have a look. The photos below do not really do it justice.



Photos: Ian Hodgson

Weir Wood Sports and Leisure

The new leisure activities are now fully operational at the dam end of the reservoir with a new management team in place. The café located in the former sailing club building is open for business and the former sailing club car park is open to the public. New signage has been erected showing that operations on site are now being run by the newly created Weir Wood Sports and Leisure company. The new company is holding an event from 12-4 on Saturday 19th June at the former sailing club to formally launch this new venture. The Friends will have a stall there, with the aim of attracting new members and promoting our activities.

Spring Walk April 2025 – Report

A report of the walk which took place on 26th April is attached with this newsletter. Judging by the positive feedback we received afterwards, the event proved popular with members. We were certainly aided by glorious weather on the day.

Early Summer Walk June 2025 – Report

This proved to be another successful event again evidenced by the positive feedback we received from the attendees afterwards. The main aim of this walk was to showcase our display of orchids and they did not disappoint. A report of the walk which took place on 14th June is attached with this newsletter.

Membership Renewal 2025

Thank you to all members who have renewed their membership since the last newsletter, it is much appreciated. Thank you also to the many members who made an additional contribution to their membership fee, this too is most welcome. For those who have yet to renew, you will have received a reminder e-mail from the Membership Secretary with this newsletter.

Dates for your Diary:

Members “Summer Event” (Wildflower Meadows) – Sunday 3rd August 2025

This will be another half day event – just turn up anytime between **9.00am** and **1.00pm**. We will be based in Whillets Meadows for the morning (park in the Legsheath Lane car park and walk to the Whillets gate) and the focus will be on the profusion of wildflowers and attendant butterflies. We will be on hand to help you identify the various flowers and butterflies and anything else that might be around on the day.

We will also put on the usual beekeeping display (and honey for sale) and pond dipping in Meadow Pond during the morning too.

Members Autumn Walk (Birds and Fungi) – date tbc late Oct / early Nov 2025

This will be the usual afternoon walk, heading into the Study Area and onto Pintail Bank to look for fungi. We will then walk over to Whillets Meadows and to the reed bed to observe Reed Buntings coming in to roost. Further details will be issued nearer the time.

Breeding Birds Survey (BBS) - 2025

Each spring 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 2025 recordings indicated the following number of territories, tabulated with comparable survey results from the previous three years:

<u>Species</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>
Wren	11	12	11	9
Chiffchaff	9	9	11	10

Blue Tit	8	10	8	8
Robin	7	6	4	3
Great Tit	5	4	5	3
Blackcap	3	5	5	4
Blackbird	3	5	4	3
Reed Warbler*	3	3	4	8
Common Whitethroat	3	2	4	7
Garden Warbler	2	1	2	2
Goldfinch	2	1	-	-
Song Thrush	1	2	2	1
Long-tailed Tit	1	2	1	1
Mandarin Duck	1	2	2	-
Dunnock	1	2	1	-
Reed Bunting	1	1	2	2
Stock Dove	1	1	1	-
Bullfinch	1	-	1	-
Tawny Owl	1	-	1	-
Marsh Tit	1	-	-	-
Moorhen	1	-	-	-
Goldcrest	-	1	1	1
Treecreeper	-	-	1	-
Mallard	-	-	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 reed beds and surrounding vegetation at Whillet's Pool. Based on the limited sightings and singing heard, it is estimated that there were approximately 3 breeding pairs in the reed bed again this year.*

Analysis of the results suggest that in general the number of territories is reasonably consistent with previous years. Despite some early hard frosts, the breeding season experienced good early leaf growth and improved insect numbers with above average temperatures and sunshine hours. It was also a very dry spring which slowed down the flower and grass growth.

This year's surveys show territory gains for Robin, Great Tit, Whitethroat, Garden Warbler and Goldfinch, with Wren maintaining its position with the largest number of territories overall. Bullfinch, Marsh Tit and Moorhen were the most notable new entrants on the list.

On the downside the most notable decrease in recordings were for Blue Tit (albeit still at 2023 level), Blackcap, and Blackbird.

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: Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green

Woodpecker, Jay, Jack Snipe, and Pheasant. In addition, Mallard, Grey Heron, Water Rail, and Pied Wagtail were occasionally seen or heard in or near Whillet's Pool, but were excluded from the survey for territory or breeding purposes."

Small Nest Box Survey Report - 2025

The Friends currently maintain and monitor 101 small nest boxes in the reserve at the west end of the reservoir. Here are the results from this year's nesting season (with 2024 results shown for comparison purposes):

The following table shows how the nest boxes were used

	2025	2024
Full nests used by birds	45	61
Unfinished nests by birds	13	16
Used by bees	0	0
Used by mice	1	2
Not used	42	30
Total small boxes	101	109

The next table shows how the 45 boxes above were used by birds this year

Species	Boxes Used		Total Birds Fledged		Birds Found Dead In Box		Cold Eggs Found In Box	
	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024
Blue Tit	31	35	150	130	3	55	9	9
Great Tit	13	23	77	97	0	0	7	12
Nuthatch	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1
Treecreeper	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marsh Tit	1	1	5	6	0	1	0	0
Wren	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	45	61	232	235	3	56	16	22

Commentary

After last year's prolonged cold and wet spring, 2025's spring was exceptionally dry, but this does not appear to have had an impact on the overall number of nests compared with 2024. What can be seen clearly however is this 2025's success rate once nests were established, with only a handful of dead birds and cold eggs recorded this year.

The Flowers of Weir Wood – Grass Vetchling

Our feature flower this quarter is the Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*). This tiny plant is a summer favourite of some of the work party members. With its grass like leaves, it is so easy to miss this lovely plant. Once you get your eye in, the bright crimson red pops of colour from the single flower stand out among the grasses. We have found this plant in rough grassland across the reserve, most regularly in the meadows on the north bank of the reservoir. Typically it is a plant of central and southern England although it can be found further north.

As its Latin name suggests, this plant is a member of larger *Fabaceae* family of peas, beans, vetches and clovers. Close inspection shows that its flowers are similar in structure (but not size) to an everlasting sweet pea. The genus name *Lathyrus* identifies the plant as a vetchling and its species name *nissolia* means 'long-stemmed plant'.

Like other members of this family, the Grass Vetchling has root nodules that host nitrogen-fixing bacteria. These make atmospheric nitrogen available to feed the plant and enrich the soil.



Grass Vetchling at Weir Wood
Photo: Richard Allan

Bird Sightings Report

April

The weather for the April picked up where March left off. High pressure was in charge resulting in mostly sunny days with little or no rain. The wind direction was

mostly north / north easterly resulting in chilly nights and occasionally sunny but cold days. The bird feeders were taken down at the end of the month when there is plenty of natural food available.

The main news of the month was all about returning summer visitors. The “winter ducks” **Teal, Tufted, Gadwall, Wigeon** etc were seen during the month, but in ever decreasing numbers.

Sea birds started to appear regularly, most notably **Herring, Great and Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gull**. 61 Herring Gulls were recorded on the 21st. 3 Black-headed Gulls were seen checking out the rafts at the West End on the 1st. 8 Black-headed Gulls were seen on the 13th. 4 **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen flying over during the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) on the 13th. Unusually, 2 **Common Scoter** were seen on the water at the dam end on the 19th.

Common Terns returned to the reserve during the month; usually being seen in ones and twos and at both ends of the reservoir. The first bird was seen at the dam end on the 9th and they were spotted regularly thereafter. Two were seen checking out the rafts at the west end on the 22nd and 23rd and two were seen nesting on the pontoon at the dam end on the 30th. An **Arctic Tern** was seen in a brief flyover at the dam end on the 16th and another was spotted at the same location on the 23rd.

Summer waders appeared at the dam end with a **Green Sandpiper** spotted on the 6th, 8th and 10th. **Common Sandpiper** was also present, with one seen on the 8th also and 3 seen on the 9th. 4 Common Sandpipers were seen on the rafts at the west end during the WeBS on the 13th. A **Little Ringed Plover** was seen on the 10th and 21st and a pair were seen at the dam end on the 23rd, 28th and 30th.

All the usual raptors were present during the month: **Buzzard, Kestrel, Red Kite** and **Sparrowhawk**. They were joined by **Hobby** first seen at the dam end on the 19th and at the west end on the 26th at the start of the Friends' Spring Walk. An **Osprey** was seen on the mornings of the 6th, 7th and 8th at the dam end. Another was seen at the same location on the 11th. Two roosting **Barn Owls** were recorded at the west end during a nest box check (which also contained a Stock Dove nest!). Sadly there was no sign of breeding this year and during the month we found a dead Barn Owl in Whilleys which had died from malnutrition. This bird had been ringed as an adult in 2024 at Gravetye.

Common Snipe were ever present at the water's edge at Pintail Point with two flushed on the 8th and again on the 22nd. Two **Jack Snipe** were seen in Whilleys during the WeBS and again on the 22nd.

Hirundines returned in numbers during the month and were seen on most days. **Swifts, House** and **Sand Martins** were seen in small numbers but **Swallow** numbers were particularly noticeable with 71 being recorded at the Dam End on the 20th.

Summer birds heard all round the reservoir during the month included **Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, Linnet** and **Garden Warbler**. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was

heard but not seen at Whillets on the 6th and a **Nightingale** was seen at the dam end on the 10th.

Other “returning” / passage birds included **Wheatear** with a pair seen at the dam end on the 12th and 28th, **Curlew** – seen flying over the dam on the 17th and 28th and **Whimbrel** – 3 seen at the dam end on the 19th together with a **Dunlin** on the same date.

Reed Bunting were seen and heard throughout the month at Whillets reed bed together with returning **Reed Warblers**. It is always a delight to hear their song. A late **Water Rail** was heard in the reed bed on the 23rd. A **Sedge Warbler** was seen at the dam end on the 21st.

At the heronry, 45 **Grey Herons** and 25 **Cormorants** were counted on the 8th, with 38 **Grey Herons** and 35 **Cormorants** being counted during the WeBS. (N.b. a heronry report will follow in the autumn newsletter.) A **Little Egret** was spotted at the dam end on the 10th and at the west end on the 26th. A **Great White Egret** was seen at the dam end on the 23rd and at the west end on the 28th.

Great Crested Grebes were seen at both ends of the reservoir during the month with pairing up and courtship dances taking place. 21 were counted during the WeBS and nest building was observed at the west end on the 21st.

Kingfishers were ever present during the month.

May

The unusually dry weather from the previous month continued with temperatures rising steadily. There was still little rain fall to speak of and the wind direction was generally easterly / south easterly although there were a few chilly days when the wind swung round from the north.

The star bird of the month was undoubtedly the **Red-footed Falcon** (see below), but the regularly spotted **Osprey** ran it close.

As indicated earlier, **Hobbys** had been seen arriving at the end of April. With the emergence of thousands of mayflies in early May, Hobbys started to be seen in larger numbers, hawking for flies on the north bank of the reservoir opposite the former sailing club. A sharp-eyed birder spotted a smaller and lighter coloured falcon flying with the Hobbys and after much subsequent discussion online it was determined that this was a juvenile female Red-footed Falcon! This is a great sighting as the last record of this bird at Weir Wood was a female seen in 1989. It appears that a number of Red-footed Falcons arrived in England this year with the Hobbys and they have been seen in East Anglia as well as Kent and here in Sussex. This bird is a rare visitor to this country and our specimen attracted a lot of interest from the birding fraternity and was much photographed! The bird was first identified on the 11th and then seen every day thereafter with a final sighting on the 18th. Hobbys continued to be seen daily throughout the month with 11 seen on the 6th and 9 on the 21st.



Red-footed Falcon at Weir Wood – May 2025
Photo: Richard Allan

Ospreys were seen on and off during the month with the first sighting on the 5th, the last on the 23rd. The Tuesday work party were particularly delighted see one flying overhead during their lunch break in Whillets meadows on the 13th.



Osprey at Weir Wood – May 2025
Photo: Richard Allan

In addition to the usual raptors, a **Goshawk** was seen on the 3rd and a **Peregrine** was seen at the west end on the 19th and 27th.

Little Ringed Plover and **Common Sandpiper** were seen regularly around the dam wall during the month. They were joined briefly by **Whimbrel** seen on the 6th and on the 11th (2) and by a **Greenshank** on the 11th also. Other sightings of note at the dam end in the month included 3 **Spoonbills** flying over on the 21st, a **White Stork** flying over on the 12th, a **Spotted Flycatcher** on the 15th, a **Yellow-legged Gull** on the 9th and a **Little Gull** on the 21st. Two **Common Scoter** were seen at the dam end on the 4th and five were seen at the same location on the 15th.

There was a lot of attention paid to three **Little Egrets** which appeared to take up residence in the heronry on the 7th. By the 18th it looked as if two had started to settle in an old Grey Heron's nest. The three were seen regularly and by the 25th it looked as if nesting had commenced. Fingers were firmly crossed. A **Great White Egret** was spotted at the dam end on the 4th.

Terns continued to arrive during the month with 6 **Arctic Terns** seen at the dam end on the 5th. **Common Terns** were seen at both ends of the reservoir, with 19 seen at the dam end on the 6th, 12 on the 7th and 14 on the 9th. There were signs of nesting on the rafts at the west end on the 9th too. By the 20th, four pairs of Common Tern were seen on the west end rafts and this was confirmed during the WeBS on the 25th. Black-headed Gulls had also taken up residence on the rafts; two were seen starting to nest on the 9th.

Hirundines were ever present, but increasing **Swift** numbers especially at the dam end were noticeable. 12 were seen on the 9th and then 20+ on the 24th.

We were pleased to learn that our **Kingfishers** had bred successfully, with two fledglings being fed at the west end on the 29th. **Great Crested Grebes** appear to have bred successfully also with 5 chicks in all, seen at the west end on the 30th.

Otherwise May was generally a continuation from April sightings, but with all winter visitors having departed and all summer visitors having arrived. Finally, an oddity was recorded on the 18th – a hybrid goose believed to be a cross between a Bar-headed and Barnacle!



A very odd-looking goose!
Photo: Bob Johnson

June

The fine weather continued throughout the month, although the first week of June was distinctly changeable. We then experienced a mini heatwave at the end of the month. The interesting bird activity this month was again at the west end of the reservoir. All eyes continued to focus on possible breeding activity on the tern rafts and over in the heronry where it looked for a while as if a pair of **Little Egrets** were about to breed at Weir Wood for the first time ever.

The egrets were seen at the West End every day in the first week of the month. On the 1st, one was seen flying in and feeding its partner on the nest. Then after a night

of torrential rain, no birds were seen on the nest on the morning of the 8th. A **Grey Heron** was spotted standing in the nest where the egrets had been. There were no further signs of nesting or breeding thereafter. It is possible the nest was raided by a Grey Heron or it may be the egrets were too immature and this was their first try at nesting. We do not know. We do know that with little mud or shallow water currently, the west end is not ideal habitat for the egrets to hunt for food for potential offspring. Let us hope that this is not a one off and that egrets try again next year, hopefully when water levels might be a bit lower! Little Egrets (up to four at one point) continued to be seen at the west end for the rest of the month. They were also present at the dam end too. A **Great White Egret** was spotted at the west end on the 6th and 14th and at the dam end on the 20th.

In other breeding news of note, the pair of **Black-headed Gulls** successfully reared three chicks on one of the west end rafts. **Great Crested Grebes** had some success too, with four chicks seen at the west end on the 8th. On the 10th, two pairs of grebes were seen at the west end with four and three chicks respectively. A grebe with four chicks in tow was seen at the dam end on the 29th. 23 grebes were counted across the reservoir on the 11th.

It was more of a mixed picture for the **Common Terns** though. There were two pairs sitting on nests on the rafts at the beginning of the month. The heavy rain of the night of the 7th and 8th appeared to cause these two nest sites to fail. However all was not lost with slightly later nesters appearing to have some success. Two chicks were seen on an adjacent raft on the 9th and 14th. A tern believed to be sitting on eggs was seen on the 15th and by 29th all was reported as going well. Four chicks were seen on the 20th too. There were good Common Tern sightings at the dam end as well, with 13 counted on the 11th. In an unusual sighting, two **Little Terns** were seen briefly flying around the west end on the 18th.

Hirundines continued to be ever present and again **Swift** numbers at the dam end caught the eye with 25+ on the 3rd, 30+ on the 4th, 50+ on the 5th and 35+ on the 15th.

Waders continued to be seen at the dam end in small numbers with **Little Ringed Plover** seen on the 3rd, **Greenshank** and **Dunlin** on the 4th, **Redshank** on the 15th and **Common Sandpiper** on the 22nd and 27th.

The usual raptors were present together with the **Hobbys** which were seen at the dam end on a regular basis. There were no Osprey sightings in the month. A **Peregrine** was seen on the 19th and **Goshawk** on the 20th. The first **Honey Buzzard** sighting of the year was on the 1st and a Honey Buzzard was seen again on the 5th and 14th with two being seen on the 20th. In three instances the bird was seen drifting from Admirals Wood towards the Ashdown Forest where the birds are known to nest.

Other sightings of interest were a **Spotted Flycatcher** at the dam end on the 14th, a **Common Sandpiper** on the west end rafts on the 17th and a flyover of six **Common Crossbills** at the west end on the 20th.

Otherwise sightings generally followed those of May.

The Report above just gives a “flavour” and a full list of sightings can be found on our website at: www.weirwood.me.uk – click on the “Recent Sightings” link. Sightings and photos are also posted to our Facebook page.

And finally

Members will know that we are interested in all flora and fauna on the reserve and not just birds. One of our members spotted a Burnet Moth in the grassland at the dam end in late May / early June. We have recorded Six-spot Burnet Moths on the reserve previously, however closer inspection revealed this to be a rarer Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet and this is a first for the reserve and was an excellent spot!



Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet
Photo: Alastair Gray

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