

Beckford Nature Reserve

Last year saw an all-time low level of water at the reserve, which caused some concern, but after a very wet winter and early spring the levels rose to an all-time high resulting, in flooding across the footpaths. We have been fortunate with the recent dry warm spells that have seen the level of the lake fall to its usual level, and the path on the western end is now beginning to dry out. A quick survey of the reserve shows a decline in the number of bee and pyramid orchids this year, probably as a result of last year's wet summer and this year's prolonged winter. Bluebells and other wild flowers seem to have thrived more readily this season with a big increase in ox-eye daisies and buttercups, although owing to the late spring everything seemed to run a month behind.

There was great excitement when a pair of swans decided to nest on the peninsula and ultimately laid six eggs. After sitting for five or six weeks we were very relieved to see a cygnet appear; unfortunately our joy was somewhat short-lived as any sign of it disappeared after a fortnight. The remaining eggs proved not to be viable, and it is possible they were chilled or frozen during the cold spell in April. However, the good news is that three families of little grebes nested and produced chicks - one family directly in front of the Rupert Ellis hide - most of which seem to have thrived and been too quick for the seagull's predatory instincts. In line with the national trend we have seen a decline in the number of spring migrants, but a pair of spotted fly catchers nested, and a pair of willow warblers also raised a brood. There has also been a marked increase in the number of green woodpeckers, and for the first time in some years two kingfishers were seen over the lake early in August. Once again the sand martins have graced the reserve with their presence, somewhat earlier than in previous years; this is surprising as the inclement weather in April should have delayed them.

Early in August, as part of National Moth Week, Jonathan Brock set up moth traps on the reserve and during the course of the evening moths with fascinating names like Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet and Dusky Thorn were recorded and ultimately released; a total of eighteen people turned out for the evening and we are very grateful to Jonathan for bringing this event to us and enabling us to share his passion. See our website for results at <http://www.beckfordnature.org.uk/>

Worcestershire Countryside Council donated a large quantity of young saplings which were duly planted by volunteers on the northern boundary to form a hedge, and also at Court Farm Lane; these mostly seem to have survived the hot weather. Huntsmans Quarries continue to be supportive to the reserve and have donated three large bags of aggregate to resurface the path to the Rupert Ellis Hide

At present the reserve is looking very healthy, but it will always require careful management to encourage different habitats to thrive, and to prevent some of the more vigorous vegetation from suffocating the more delicate species.

Visitors continue to be very appreciative of our efforts in maintaining the reserve, and for this we are grateful to our loyal volunteers and fundraisers, also to our mentors and advisors.