

Friends of STOCKER'S LAKE



NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 84

May 2020

Message from our Chair, Nigel Daley

Dear Member

I hope that you are all keeping safe and well during these strange and challenging times and even though you may not have been able to enjoy walking around Stockers Lake please remember to check out our website for news and updates to events/meetings etc. www.fosl.org.uk. Hopefully things will start looking up in the not too distant future.

I was hoping that this message would have a strong focus on HS2 and the warehouse building project in Maple Cross and whilst these are still on the medium to long term horizon for all of us, there is unfortunately a more immediate issue.

Owing to the Corona virus emergency and the necessity for social distancing and isolation FoSL suspended all its organised meetings, walks etc. and the AGM meeting scheduled for 16 April was called off. Meanwhile your Committee will continue to serve and do what is necessary to keep Stocker's Lake safe for the wildlife and visitors. As there is a reduced footfall around Stocker's, could I ask those members who are exercising on the reserve, to keep an eye out over the lake and in the first instance, if you have any concerns, please phone me on 01923 282844.

Also regrettably we called off our annual Heron Watch which had been scheduled for 29th March. Keep an eye on our web page and Facebook page for further stunning pictures and videos as the herons continue to incubate and brood their young.

Over the next few months, there will be many people requiring help or support given the sudden change in their circumstances. There may also be people with time on their hands and with an inclination to help and support the vulnerable and needy within our community but we all need to ensure that we do not make matters worse by spreading this nasty virus by taking the necessary precautions. It's not so much about protecting ourselves (although that is reason

enough!), it is more about protecting others around us, people perhaps we do not even know. With this in mind, I wanted to publish details about various groups that are being set up to help and support all of us over the coming months. These groups are also looking for volunteers who are not 'Covid-19 vulnerable'. This umbrella group is called 'Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK' and they are starting up thousands of local support groups and it looks like they are using Facebook as their communication medium. Apologies to those FoSL members that can use Facebook, (I myself cannot!) but I am sure that our members could get a younger member of the family to make initial contact through Facebook followed by an exchange of telephone numbers with the following local groups if support is needed or indeed help can be given:-

- Ricky Covid Mutual Aid
- CW Corona Support Group (Chorleywood)
- <https://www.st-andrews.org.uk/chorleywoodcoronasupport>
- Watford & Bushey Coronavirus Mutual Aid
- Coronavirus community help for Northwood, Northwood Hill, Pinner & Ruislip
- Uxbridge Covid- 19 Mutual Aid
- Covid-19 Mutual Aid Group - Ruislip & Surrounding areas
- Harrow Covid-19 Community Support Group
- Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector Forum
- Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative
- Northolt COVID-19 Mutual Aid

WORK ON THE RESERVE

Work Party Sunday 5 January
Ian Watson

This was a splendid morning's work preparing the reserve for planting 149 Gandhi anniversary trees in March. The first group cleared thick brambles along the river Colne to make way for trees. We never forget that brambles give wonderful safe nesting for small birds but these bramble patches had grown to well over 20 feet deep so we only cut about 6 or 7 feet away. The second group tidied and strimmed the



Friends of Stocker's Lake is a registered charity No.1080501. It aims to support conservation at Stocker's Lake Local Nature Reserve.

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bramble area we had cleared at our last work party whilst a third group cleared up some of the brambles and willow encroaching on our fourth meadow. The branches from the willow clearing have been used to create a long staked dead-hedge that will provide a vital habitat for hibernating hedgehogs and for low-level nesting birds. This was really hard work, cheerfully done. Our thanks to Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Phil and Julia Davies, Nilesh and Varsha Dodhia, Phillip Gibbs, Tony and Sheila Lee, Ray Kristofiak, Rob and Alex Liddell, Alison Marriott, Andy Schofield, Paul Ward, Ian Watson and Jack Westbrook.

Work Party Sunday 2 February

Jack Westbrook

Despite a gloomy forecast, the weather was mild and dry with even a bit of sun and we broke our record with 24 members turning up for work. Work continued on preparations for a possible fourth field. This included cutting back encroaching willow and using the waste material to create habitat for the local wild life community. We have Nick Maksimovic to thank for guidance with the habitat methods and the heavy duty tree pruning. In addition to helping with these preparations a small group also carried out a litter sweep. The large amount they retrieved proved how essential the task is. We may need a larger flask for tea and coffee in future due to the exceptionally large turnout today.



Our thanks for good work go to Russell Ball, Emma Brading, Nigel Daley, Ken Davies, Phil Gibbs, Nilesh and Varsha Dodhia, Evelyn Fox, Ray Kristofiak, Mike Lansdowne, Sheila and Tony Lee, Alex and Rob Liddell, Eileen Petch, Andy Schofield, Nilfa and Ashik Shah, Bob Sheeren, Rosemary and John Toy, Paul Ward, Jack Westbrook and of course Nick Maksimovic, our grazier.

Work Party Sunday 1 March

Ian Watson

Another good and hard morning's work on what may in time become our fourth cattle meadow, which will help the wild flowers. It will also help preserve unimproved grassland – an increasingly rare habitat throughout England. Tree work is already being undertaken by FoSL which should increase the meadow area by 40-50%. The final fencing should allow us to create another hedge with 500-600 hedgerow plants – more great habitat for small birds and mammals.



We also recruited 4 new members who paid up on the spot. A splendid morning thanks to Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Ken Davies, Julia and Phillip Davies, Peter Ewer, Philip Gibbs, Ray Kristofiak, Mike Lansdowne, Tony and Sheila Lee, Alison Marriott, Eileen Petch, John Toy, Ian Watson and Jack Westbrook.

EVENTS ON THE RESERVE

Wildfowl Walk 12 January

Dick Beeden lead the walk which was attended by 6 other people. Like last year it was windy and cool but clouds scudding across the sky in the strong winds gave periods of bright sunshine on and off throughout the morning. This gave pretty good light for identifying the birds most of the time. There were a good number on the lake but the surrounding trees etc were fairly quiet but we saw all the species we heard and ended with a tally of 30 species (half a dozen less than last year).

The full list was:

Great-crested Grebe; Cormorant; Grey Heron; Little Egret; Mute Swan; Canada Goose; Egyptian Goose; Mallard; Shoveler (probably 150 or so); Red-crested Pochard (two groups of 6 or so at each end of the lake); Pochard; Tufted Duck; Wigeon (maybe a dozen compared with a lot last year); Gadwall; Wren; Goldeneye; (males and females in modest numbers with one male displaying); Moorhen; Coot; Lapwing (more than we thought out on the islands once you got your eye in); Black-headed Gull (lots); Lesser Black-backed Gull (several); Woodpigeon; Ring-necked Parakeet; Jay (good views); Robin; Blue Tit; Great Tit; Long-tailed Tit (at least two flocks); Goldfinch; Magpie. There were some noticeable absentees apart from Smew and Goosander namely; no raptors; Kingfisher; Woodpecker; Dunnock; Chaffinch; Starling; Blackbird; Wren; siskin and Carrion Crow.



Not counted in the tally was the unexpected sighting of an American Wood Duck being fed along with 2 swans and a few Mallards by the seat in the North West corner of Bury Lake as we made our way back along the causeway. It would be nice to think this was a very rare migrant blown across the Atlantic (winds are strong enough at the moment) but it is much more likely to be an escapee used to humans being around and a source of food. Still like others on the walk I have never seen one in the wild before.

We also stopped in Kingfisher hide to have a look at the heronry through the nest cameras out on the islands. Interestingly several birds were occupying nest sites but not yet displaying nesting behaviour (unlike my visit a few days later when at least two pairs looked like they were into nest building). Given that the earliest eggs might well be laid at the end of January this is not unexpected.

Wildfowl Walk 16 February

Dick Beeden

As expected given the arrival of storm Dennis on Saturday and overnight into Sunday, no-one turned up

for the walk and it was very wet underfoot. In any case it would have been a bit disappointing as there was not a lot to see, in part because of the strong winds and in part because it has just not been cold enough to drive the migrants this far south.

On Bury Lake (from the causeway) there were some widgeon, lots of coot and tufted ducks, a few great crested grebe, a few swans, a few cormorants and the odd mallard.

On Stockers there was a flotilla of over 50 Canada geese (which took off en masse, rather spectacular), coot, tufted ducks, a large number of shoveller, a pair of golden eye (in front of Kingfisher hide), black headed, lesser black back and herring gulls, herons and not much else. Small birds were definitely keeping their heads down. I saw none. Unexpectedly the flooded meadow on Stockers Farm was also very quiet.

I did make good use of the time though as I was able to monitor the heron nests out on the island using our cameras. There is nesting behaviour going on at quite a lot of nests and it is possible that a couple have eggs with herons sitting tight. This picture of nest 4 looks promising for chicks fairly soon. Expect 3 to 5 eggs. Incubation is about 25 days so we might get chicks in the last week in Feb. Fledging takes a further 6 to 8 weeks. So watch this space.



There were also **Brimstone**, orange tip, small and large white and, **peacock butterflies** flitting about in small numbers.

So things are really coming alive. Unfortunately as the trees come into leaf on the island the view of a number of nests are becoming obscured but I think we will be ok for viewing at least three nests.



Wildflower Survey on the cattle meadows

Linda Ascroft



Report from Dick Beeden 15 April

Having, I think, now recovered from the dreaded virus (6 weeks and counting), on 15 April I took a short walk from Stockers House to Kingfisher Hide to undertake my weekly heron nest camera survey. There were a few walkers along the path but fewer than might be expected now that they have closed the Aquadrome car park. The herons and egrets are nesting and the heron chicks range from just out of the shell to nearly mature. The egrets look as though they are getting down to nesting and breeding but so far I do not have a good view of an egret nest. Here's hoping.

But that was not all. I saw my first **Swallow** of the year over Stockers Farm; A pair of **pieb Wagtail** were enjoying the muddy margins of the flood meadow (along with countless **Canada geese** and **blackheaded gulls**). Three Canada geese were out cropping the field by Stockers House; not something you see that often because there are usually too many people and dogs. I was serenaded by the usual **wrens, robins, tits** and **chaffinches** but also **blackcap** and **Cetti warblers**.

Last year, as many of you will be aware, cattle were reintroduced to Stocker's Lake meadows. One of the main reasons for this is to manage and improve the grassland for the benefit of wildflowers. To get a good picture of the wildflowers presently growing on the meadows we decided to start a methodical survey of the 3 meadows. This will be done, probably 3 times, during each year, thereby creating an annual record of how the wildflowers in these meadows change over time. In early March an email went out to all members seeking volunteers with good/some knowledge of wildflowers and grasses. We have 9 volunteers in total but are always pleased to have more – so if anyone else is interested then please contact me.

By the third week in March, with the invaluable support of Josh Kalms from Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, we were ready to mark out the fields and to have our training day. Unfortunately, at the same time, face to face meetings were being curtailed due to Covid-19 and the rest is history. So, for now our survey is on hold.

Needless to say the wildflowers will still be there when we are able to re-start our survey and we look forward to this time.

Rickmansworth Festival

FoSL Recruitment Days

Unfortunately owing to the Corona Virus outbreak the Rickmansworth Festival was cancelled and consequently our recruitment drive has been postponed for the time being.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Working Parties for 2020

Hopefully these will be able to take place in the Autumn and we would welcome any members who would like to get more involved in practical conservation work. The work parties last about 2½ hours. Please bring wellies/boots, strong gloves and also garden cutters if you can

FoSL Committee Members

Nigel Daley (Chairman)	01923 282844
Ian Watson (Warden)	01923 282136
Dick Beeden (Treasurer & membership)	0208 4219958
Larry Hurst (Fundraiser, publicity)	01923 848440
Simon Jones (Web Site)	01923 285763
Linda Ascroft (Events organiser)	01923 772170
Susan Thomas (Newsletter editor)	01923 240764
Russell Ball (Membership recruitment)	07884426671
Emma Brading (Volunteers organiser)	07428 790460
Steve Carter (Wildlife recorder)	07917 796976 Text preferred

Working Parties 2020

Sunday 6th September 2020

Sunday 4th October 2020

Sunday 1st November 2020

Sunday 6th December 2020

All start at 09.55am

Meet: usually at the Fisherman's car park (next to the wooden bridge from Inns Lake) but it is a good idea to check with Emma (07428 790460) before the date just in case we have changed the meeting place.

HELP REQUIRED

The Committee is looking for a secretary.
Any volunteers out there?

Leaving a Lasting Legacy

If you enjoy nature, a legacy can ensure the future of our wonderful reserve. Please consider leaving a Gift to Friends of Stocker's Lake in your Will. There are inheritance tax advantages in leaving a legacy to a charity.

AGM

Friends of Stocker's Lake AGM

Thursday 16 April 2020, 19.30 - Mill End Baptist Church, Field Way, Rickmansworth

As you know, the AGM of the Friends of Stocker's Lake was cancelled

The Peace of Wild Things 

By Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
In fear of what my life and children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
Rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds
I come into the peace of wild things
Who do not tax their lives with forethought
Of grief. I come into the presence of Stillwater.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
Waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free

*******Stop Press*******

Cows back at Stocker's in June

By popular demand, the Dexter cows will be back on the reserve in late June. Now we, as members, need to play our part in helping to look after them.

Nick Maksimovic, our grazier, who owns the cattle isn't actually a full time farmer but keeps them as he was brought up on a farm and loves them so. However, as any responsible owner would do, he does like to see them each day to make sure that they are all okay. This is a tough commitment to fit in alongside a very busy day in the building trade.

This is where we, as FoSL members, can help!

A group called "**Stockers Lookers**" has been formed to report that the cattle are all present and correct, look healthy with access to water and that all the gates are secure. The group reports in to Nick using WhatsApp on their mobile phone whenever they visit the reserve. This would alert Nick should there be any issue that needs his attention but, if everything is alright, this would of course mean that he needn't visit every day. Nick has become a good friend of FoSL and we are glad of his cattle because their grazing will help in our long term aim of restoring this to a wildflower meadow. In turn it only seems fair that we support him.



By Martin Taylor

We set up the group last Summer and it worked so well that we are continuing with the group this year when the cattle come on in June. Many thanks to last year's "lookers" who made reports including some people without WhatsApp who have sent via text or email. That is, Anthony Aberjian, Linda Ashcroft, Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Wendy Durrell, Barbara James, Bryan, Simon Jones, Josh Kalms, Lonneke Klein-Aarts, Krishna Kumar, Mike Landsdown, Nan and Phil Millette, David Neal, Eileen Petchy, Ian Phillips, Pam Pike, Andy Schofield, Hina Shah, Duncan Stubbs, Tony Lee, Josh Wells, and Ian Watson.

Whilst the job is an important one, it is not at all onerous and we would welcome any member who would like to become involved this year. The more the merrier as the saying goes! To play your part or to find out more, simply contact me:

Bob Sherren by email (bob_sherren@hotmail.com) or phone (079 2939 4120)