

Friends of STOCKER'S LAKE



NEWSLETTER NO. 93 MAY 2023

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Nigel Daly

Many thanks to Josh Kalm's from the West Herts and Middlesex Trust Wildlife Trust for his excellent AGM presentation at the end of April on Water Voles in and around Stocker's Lake. These can now be seen regularly. Everyone present is now clearly aware of the difference between rats and water voles, water voles are cute, and rats are not! A very entertaining and enjoyable 30 minutes was had by all. The minutes from the AGM can be found on the FoSL website. Many thanks to all on our committee who helped to make this event so successful. Also a big welcome onto the FoSL committee to Giles Lury, Cathy Green and co-optee, Nilesh Dodhia.

Finally, after nearly five years working as Newsletter Editor, Susan Thomas has stepped down to pursue other interests. Our thanks and appreciation from members and committee go to Susan for her patience, diligence and hard work during this time.

Time flies, as the saying goes, so we're already planning 2024, or more specifically the **FoSL 2024 calendar**.

The 2023 one was a great success, selling out completely, drawing lots of compliments and providing income for FoSL. Given that success we are planning to produce another in similar style and format for 2024. This time we intend to feature an even more diverse range of the attractions - the flowers, the animals, the insects, butterflies and dragonflies, the distinctive landmarks, though we will continue to feature the birds.



To reflect this intention the entry criteria for photographs will be a little different this year.

ENTRY CRITERIA

1. Contributors need to be members of FoSL;
2. Photographs to be landscape in format and reasonably hi-res (1Mb+) as they will need to be crisp and clear when printed (A4 size);
3. All shots need to have been taken at or around the lake and within the last 3 years;
4. We won't be re-using any shots used in 2023 so please don't resubmit those;
5. Please let us know when (the month and year) and where on the reserve your photographs were taken; and
6. There are 4 categories and each photographer can submit up to **6** photos but no more than **2** in any one category:
 - a. Landscapes;
 - b. Birds;
 - c. Other fauna; and
 - d. Flora.

DEADLINE

The deadline for entries is 31 **JULY**. So please start reviewing any shots you have taken or come down to the Lake and take some more!

ORDERING

We are also hoping to streamline ordering so this can be done online via the website. Details to follow. Finally, if you can help with distribution, please let me or Simon know. (This would entail you being a collection point with people coming to you to collect their calendars).

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

www.fosl.org.uk

www.facebook.com/friendsOfStokersLake

Twitter @FoStokersLake

CONTACTS

For more information, to submit photographs or to volunteer help with distribution please contact:

- **Giles - giles.lury@hotmail.com**
- **Simon – webmaster@fosl.org.uk**

GENERAL

The next newsletter will be taking a new format and will be circulated more frequently and will be produced by Giles Lury as I am stepping back after more than four years. Sue Thomas

More photographs and details of birds, flowers and fauna are available on the website.

If you get this newsletter by post but have an email address we can use, please email it to treasurer@fosl.org.uk

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Please help if you can

We are looking for volunteers/surveyors to help us with the following activities and exciting projects:

Surveyors: with a reasonable/some knowledge of wildflowers (and possibly grasses) wanted for FoSL's monthly wild flower surveys on the 3 cattle meadows during the months April – October. Time required is half a day, once a month. The information is collated by HMWT, with a view to seeing how the wildflower population changes as the years go on.
Please contact Linda Ascroft 07791 971 323

Work Party Volunteers: for a few hours on the first Sunday morning most months (though you don't have to do every month) to help maintain our beautiful Stocker's Lake.

Contact Jack Westbrook 07716 296 093

Recruitment: to help at our recruitment days in May and possibly September.

Please contact Russell Ball 07884 426 671

Committee Members/Contact Details

Nigel Daley Chairman	07921 650322 ndaley@ntlworld.com
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Richard Beeden Treasurer & membership	07711 655 078 treasurer@fosl.org.uk
Jack Westbrook Lead Warden	07716 296093 warden@fosl.org.uk
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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Further details and updates will be on the website

<https://www.fosl.org.uk/upcoming-events>

June 2023

Sunday 4th Work Party 0955 hrs

Check location with Jack Westbrook

Sunday 18th Wildflower Walk

Meet at the Causeway Seat 1400 hrs

July 2023

Sunday 2nd Work Party 0955 hrs

Check location with Jack Westbrook

Sunday 23rd Dragonfly and Butterfly Walk

Meet at the Causeway Seat 1030 hrs

August 2023

Sunday 6th Work Party 0955 hrs

Check location with Jack Westbrook

September 2023

Sunday 3rd Work Party 0955 hrs

Check location with Jack Westbrook

Sundays 10th & 24th Recruitment Drive

Details nearer the time. Let Russell Ball know if you are available to help.

October 2023

Butterfly Survey & Wildflower Count ends

October

Sunday 1st Work Party 0955 hrs

Check location with Jack Westbrook

Please check our website for the latest info. Reminder emails for work parties may say meet elsewhere. Walks are free, about 2.5 km (1.5 miles) and take about 2.5 hours. Wear stout shoes or wellies. Bring insect repellent if you need it and gardening gloves to work parties. To help you find where to go please use the what3words app. Some locations are given below

Fisherman's Car Park: tester.goal.pipe
Iron Bridge films.wink.tile
Causeway Seat list.chase.from
Stockers House entrance verse.track.hint

Wildfowl Walk 15 January

Dick Beeden lead the walk which was attended by 9 other



people. Thanks too to Mike Kerrison for his support and excellent record keeping. Like last year the weather was mainly sunny and cold with only a light breeze. This gave good light for identifying the birds most of the time. The number of birds on the lake and in the surrounding trees etc was disappointingly low. We saw all the species we heard and ended with a tally of 31 species.

The full list was:

Canada Goose; Coot; Tufted Duck; Woodpigeon; Magpie; Pochard; Cormorant; Great-crested Grebe; Wigeon; Shoveler; Black-headed Gull (lots); Mute Swan; Mallard; Red Kite; Ring-necked Parakeet; Carrion Crow; Starling; Goldfinch; Robin; Blue Tit; Great Tit; Long-tailed Tit; Goldeneye (not seen on last year's walk); Kingfisher; Blackbird Lesser Black-backed Gull; Lapwing; Moorhen; Redwing; Jay and Redcrested Pochard.

There were some noticeable absentees apart from the Smew seen last month, namely Grey Heron; Little Egret (the nest cameras did not find any either); Egyptian Goose; Gadwall; Wren; Herring Gull; Siskin; Dunnock; raptors (except for the kite); Woodpecker and Chaffinch.

Wildfowl Walk 19 February

Dick Beeden

Thirteen people joined the walk on a very mild, clear, calm and sunny day. We were rewarded with a good variety of birds mainly on the water. However overall Bird numbers were quite low probably in part because it has just not been cold enough this winter to drive the migrants this far south.

The birds were pretty spread out all the way round and so by the time we got back to the causeway we had seen:

Kite, Great Crested Grebe (in good numbers including one still in its white and black winter plumage), Coot, Tufted Duck (lots), Wigeon (a few), Mallard, Cormorant, Robin, Wren, Bluetit, Great tit, Blackbird, Goldfinch, Dunnock, Magpie, Ring-necked Parakeet, Grey Heron (the heronry is filling up so good numbers of birds visible on nests and flying in), Shoveller, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull, a solitary Common Gull (which are anything but common in these parts), Mute Swan, Goldeneye (both male and female but quite a long way off), Lapwing, Canada Goose, Blackcap (heard), Cetti's Warbler (heard on the causeway), Little Egret, Fieldfare, Gadwall, Pochard. Moorhen and Carrion Crow. We had heard that the Smew was still around and 2 of the party were fortunate

enough to catch glimpses of it from the riverside path shortly before reaching the signpost. Including the Smew we ended with a grand total of 34 species under our belts.

Work Party 15 January

Jack Westbrook

This month we continued with hedge laying. This involves clearance ahead of the hedge laying and preparing stakes, foraging for 3 metre binders to secure the hedge and of course laying the hedge.

Another party worked in the cattle field removing a small section of creeping thistles to control the spread. These thistles are a valuable food source to bees, butterflies and other pollinators, many insects feed on the plant, and some songbirds also feed on the thistle seeds, however the cattle don't eat them and left unchecked they would reduce the grazing.

Our D of E group carried out some planting of whips along the path of the cattle fields and preserving of fence posts.

Finally, it remains to be said that the weather was atrocious, ranging from drizzle to heavy downpours, so many thanks to everybody for braving the appalling conditions - Nilesh Dodhia, Mike Lansdown, Phil Gibbs, Christine and Nick Gray, Philip and Julia Davies, Hazel Wickham-Youngs, Peter Ewer, Alex Popple, Mrs Quiroz-Patel, Nicola Pazdzierska, Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Hattie, Hannah, Stanley and Chaya.

Work Party 5 February

Jack Westbrook

This month we worked on widening the access path to the cattle corral gate, removing brambles on one side and cutting back overhanging branches on the field side hedge. Many hands make light work, so after that task we were able to continue rooting out some more creeping thistles from field 3.

A smaller group finished a section of hedge laying. This was our third session along this stretch and required some final binding along the top to hold the hedge in place.

Litter picking isn't our favourite sport but it's a never ending problem, made less arduous on a bright and

sunny day at the start of February; a pleasant stroll round the lake can't be all bad.

The Duke of Edinburgh group did some hedge planting along cattle field 1.

Many thanks to Ken Davies, Mike Lansdown, Tony and Sheila Lee, Rob Liddle, Christine and Nick Gray, Philip and Julia Davies, Peter Ewer, Cathy Green, Mrs Quiroz-Patel, Simon Parrish, Russell Ball, Nicola Pazdzierska, Nigel Daley, Hattie, Mimi, Stanley and Chaya.



Work Party 5 March

Jack Westbrook

It always surprises me how much we achieve in the space of a few hours. Today was no exception. We had a group straightening the cattle fence posts and another group tensioning the wire mesh. (We love the Dexter cattle, but they seem adept at eating beyond the fence which gives rise to leaning posts and concertinaed wire mesh.)

The view from Fort Drew needed a haircut of the reed bed, which if left would obliterate the view. It's a boggy area and waders were required. The area was checked first to ensure we weren't disturbing any of the wild life.

We carried out a bit more clearance of brambles around the corral section to ensure the Grazier can access the fields when transporting the cattle.

Once more, control of the creeping thistle was carried out.

Finally, the Duke of Edinburgh team worked on preserving the cattle posts and infrastructure.

Many thanks to: Ken Davies, Nilesh Dodhia, Mike Lansdown, Tony & Sheila Lee, Rob Liddle, Phil Gibbs, Chris & Nick Grey, Alison Marriott, Marita Quiroz-Patel, Nicola Pazdzierska, Simon Parrish, Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Stanley, Hannah, Mimi, Hattie and Chaya.

Heron Watch 26 March

Richard Beeden

Not the best weather but at least Peter Jenkins and I did not get wet! However the threatening weather obviously put a lot of people off from going for a walk round the lake and so viewers were more of a trickle than a flood.

Like last year we set up binocular leaning post on the canal side path. Again we posted notices from the causeway and Peter Jenkins and I were able to show people a variety of nests with Herons on them plus lots of Little Egrets setting about nesting. There were a good few oo's and ah's as they saw Herons, Heron Chicks and Little Egrets up close for the first time. Most were surprised that they were looking at the far side of the lake.

Just for the record incubation period for the Herons is about 27 days with fledging 50 to 55 days from hatching. Given the size of some of the chicks those eggs must have been laid either late January or early February. In contrast the Little Egrets were just starting nesting and egg laying. We have pictures and videos on our web site so go to www.fosl.org.uk for more.

What else was about? To tell the truth not a lot. I think the cold was keeping the other birds quiet and inactive. There were some small birds. Tits, Chaffinches, Wrens and Dunnock, flitting about with calls from Black Caps and Cetti's Warbler now and again. The odd Red Kite flew over but Swallows or Martins were yet to appear. There was a scattering of ducks out on the lake (Tufted, Mallard, Shoveler), some Canada Geese, Cormorants and Swans as well as Coots, Moorhens, Great-Crested Grebe, plus some Lesser Blackbacked and numerous Black Headed Gulls in full breeding plumage.

Overall a successful afternoon despite the weather.

Work Party 9 April

Jack Westbrook

Another enjoyable morning, although recent rain had left its mark on the pathways and fields which made work a bit tricky.

We have now completed the work on the cattle field fences in spite of some areas being quite waterlogged. With warmer weather we should see strong growth of the grass ready for the return of the cattle.

A group of our members carried out a litter picking sweep around the lake. It's always surprising and a little saddening how much we find.

We also joined forces with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to install a Water Vole information board where there are signs that voles are returning to this area of the River Colne.

For some months our Duke of Edinburgh youngsters have worked tirelessly on preserving bird hides, fences and gates and, with this week's work, are close to completing the mammoth task.

Many thanks to Mike Lansdown, Philip & Julia Davies, Nick and Christine Gray, Nilesh Dodhia, Marita & Chaya Quiroz-Patel, Cathy Green, Josh Kalms, Nicola Pazdzierska, Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Hattie & Stanley.

Nick Gray and I spent an enjoyable if tiring day last Tuesday 4 April replacing the old leaky roof on Kingfishers Hide.

Work Party 4 May

Jack Westbrook

This Sunday the Duke of Edinburgh group joined our volunteers to clear undergrowth around the Jain trees. Some trees sadly didn't make it through the winter so these will be replaced in the Autumn.

Another group did a similar task clearing undergrowth around the Gandhi commemorative oak near Stocker's house. They then went on to do some dead hedging to close off an unwanted path (particularly at this time when birds are nesting) to the lake side.

Many thanks to Tony & Sheila Lee, Nilesh Dodhia, Mike (Ken) Lansdown, Alison Marriott, Cathy Green, Simon Parish, Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Stanley, Hannah. & Mimi,

Warbler walk Spring Chorus Walk 14 May

Dick Beeden

A popular walk again this year. 16 of us gathered on the causeway at half past eight for a walk round the lake. The first hour or so was a bit chilly but by the end the sun came out and it was pretty perfect weather for the latter part of the walk. We saw, or in many cases only heard, most of the expected birds. There were swifts and swallows over the over the lake but no martins. We had only glimpses of most birds. They were really well buried in the foliage which was in most cases well developed. Cetti's Warbler and Wren were present in large numbers and called from many points round the lake but with just one exception for each, as ever, remained well hidden. Reed and Sedge Warblers were few and far between but Garden Warblers, Blackcap and Chiff Chaff were heard quite a few times. Just one Whitethroat and no Lesser Whitethroat this year. Otherwise Blackbirds, Robins and plenty of Blue, Great and Long Tail Tits were seen and serenaded us as we passed along. We saw several Reed Bunting so perhaps they are making a comeback. Common Terns were quite abundant with some with what looked like nests on our rafts. A pair of Greylag geese paddled down the lake with their brood of half a dozen goslings. No raptors seen apart from one red kite. There were numerous Heron flying around but oddly we saw no Little Egret. There were a several Pochards a few Moorhens and small numbers of Tufted Ducks, Coots, Canada and Greylag Geese out on the lake. One highlight was the Cuckoo heard at various points and seen by some of the party in the poplars at the western end of the Lake. Including the other common species like Woodpigeon, Crow, Magpie and so on, we spotted and or heard about 42 species altogether (see list on website)

Given the fine weather surprisingly few butterflies. All in all a good morning.

Live streamed Heronry nest

Simon Jones

In early February, just as our herons' breeding season was starting, we installed a new, special, livestream camera in our lake's offshore heronry. That camera has

been sending a continuous stream of live video pictures to our YouTube channel ever since. Unfortunately the nest concerned turned out not to be occupied this season, although those of us monitoring its pictures have been entertained by regular visits from Herons, Egrets and even an occasional Moorhen.

Although it is disappointing not to have witnessed a full blown nesting attempt in this way this season, we are encouraged that we have now apparently overcome all of the various technical obstacles which had been facing us. Our plan now is to await the close season, when we can make changes without disturbing the birds currently successfully breeding on other nests, and then relocate the camera to a better nest site and/or upgrade it from a fixed position type to a 360° rotatable pan, tilt and zoom type. So watch this space for more and hopefully better news early in 2024.

In the meantime you can view some recorded footage (captured using a different camera) of our breeding herons and egrets from this and earlier seasons by visiting our YouTube channel. Our YouTube channel can be reached either by searching on "FoSL" within YouTube or else by clicking on the YouTube icon from the footer section of any page of our website.

