

Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve

Newsletter



Issue 20 December 2011

Dear Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve,

It has been a very strange start to the winter with all this sunshine and a distinct lack of rain. Fortunately, with two windpumps distributing water across the reserve, we haven't been too badly affected, but elsewhere across the region, the lack of rain has been a problem.

We are busy at this time of year with winter habitat works. When everything is dormant and starting to hibernate, this is the best time to undertake ditch works, reedbed cutting etc. Though with this uncharacteristic weather for the time of year, I have seen many trees coming into bud, and plants growing that should have been long since dead.

I've programmed in a couple of volunteer tasks to help with the winter works, but we've also got our annual winter bird walk (which had to be cancelled last year because of the snow!) which is always very popular, and there is also an indoor presentation on honeybees and beekeeping. This will be delivered by David Rea of the Ruxley Beekeeping Association and will be well worth attending. David knows all there is to know about bees, and a highlight of the event will be the observation hive that he intends to bring along. Kids will love this, so do feel free to bring family members along, but book a place early as there are a limited number of places available.

I have booked two weeks' leave over Christmas starting 19th December, so I would just like take this opportunity to wish you all a happy Christmas and all the very best for the New Year; and I look forward to seeing you in 2012.

Karen Sutton – Crossness Nature Reserve Manager



David Pressland was visiting the reserve on Saturday 19th November and managed to photograph this kingfisher feeding on all three of the provided perches around the wader scrape area.

Photos used with kind permission

Wildlife records – Jul-Sept 2011

Species	No. throughout quarter	Peak no. recorded	CES number captured	Species	No. throughout quarter	Peak no. recorded	CES number captured
Arctic tern	2	2	0	Lesser black-backed gull	104	100	0
Arctic skua	3	3	0	Lesser whitethroat	3	1	3
Aylesbury duck	1	1	0	Linnet	106	40	2
Barn owl	5	2	2	Little egret	21	2	0
Bar-tailed godwit	2	2	0	Little grebe	5	2	0
Blackbird	18	6	12	Little ringed plover	2	1	0
Blackcap	86	1	82	Long-tailed tit	36	12	21
Black-headed gull	1312	800	0	Magpie	1	1	1
Black-tailed godwit	46	19	0	Mallard	57	30	0
Black tern	12	5	0	Marsh harrier	1	1	0
Blue tit	25	2	23	Meadow brown butterfly	2	1	0
Canada goose	50	45	0	Meadow pipit	4	4	0
Carrion crow	30	30	0	Mediterranean gull	3	1	0
Cetti's warbler	29	3	10	Mistle thrush	2	2	0
Chaffinch	2	1	2	Moorhen	16	8	0
Chiffchaff	28	4	10	Mute swan	8	8	0
Cinnabar moth larvae	20	20	0	Osprey	1	1	0
Collared dove	1	1	0	Oystercatcher	20	3	0
Common blue damselfly	1	1	0	Peregrine falcon	9	2	0
Common darter dragonfly	4	1	0	Pied wagtail	6	4	0
Common hawk dragonfly	2	1	0	Pipistrelle bat	1	1	0
Common sandpiper	43	7	0	Red admiral butterfly	3	2	0
Common scoter	2	2	0	Red-breasted goose	2	1	0
Common shrew	1	1	0	Red-footed falcon	1	1	0
Common tern	257	100	0	Red Kite	1	1	0
Cormorant	12	12	0	Redshank	147	120	0
Duncock	22	6	16	Reed Bunting	13	4	3
Fox	4	2	0	Reed warbler	165	6	151
Gadwall	44	14	0	Robin	15	1	15
Garden warbler	6	1	4	Ruddy Darter	3	3	0
Gatekeeper	14	8	0	Sandwich Tern	2	2	0
German wasp	2	2	0	Sedge Warbler	43	3	33
Goldcrest	3	2	0	Shelduck	9	9	0
Goldeneye	1	1	0	Shoveler	17	17	0
Goldfinch	1170	150	41	Skylark	8	2	0
Great black-backed gull	6	6	0	Small Skipper	1	1	0
Great crested grebe	1	1	0	Small White Butterfly	32	30	0
Great green bush cricket	1	1	0	Snipe	1	1	0
Great spotted woodpecker	3	1	1	Song thrush	1	1	1
Great tit	20	1	20	Sparrowhawk	2	1	0
Green sandpiper	36	5	0	Speckled Wood	4	3	0
Green woodpecker	3	1	1	Starling	514	300	14
Greenfinch	56	1	56	Swallow	71	32	0
Greenshank	2	1	0	Swift	2	2	0
Grey heron	27	5	0	Teal	974	350	0
Grey seal	2	1	0	Terrapin	2	1	0
Grey wagtail	18	4	0	Tufted Duck	43	8	0
Greylag goose	3	3	0	Wheatear	11	4	0
Guillemot	1	1	0	Whinchat	8	5	0
Hobby	3	1	0	Whitethroat	113	6	95
Honey buzzard (juv)	1	1	0	Willow Warbler	3	2	0
House martin	88	40	0	Wood Pigeon	50	50	0
Kestrel	11	2	0	Wren	19	1	19
Kingfisher	4	1	1	Yellow Wagtail	3	1	0
Lapwing	234	50	0	Yellow-legged Gull	7	2	0
Large skipper butterfly	1	1	0				

No. throughout quarter = total number of times species has been recorded during three month period.

Peak no. = peak number of particular species seen at any one time (better indicator of number using the site).

CES number captured (Constant Effort Site) = the number caught during the Dartford Ringing Group's population monitoring (Jul to mid-August when monitoring ceased)

Partnership volunteering

In an effort to control the invasion of *Typha* (commonly known as reedmace) within our newly-created Island Field reedbed, we held a joint volunteer event to handpull the wind-pollinated plant on the 5th October. Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve joined Thames Water staff from the Tidal Thames Quality Improvement Project team and Process Science team, as well as staff from contractors Tamesis and Thomson Habitats.

Over 20 people were involved with some working around meetings and other commitments and subsequently devoting a morning or afternoon, while others committed themselves to a full day of *Typha* pulling.

The team worked incredibly hard in wet, muddy conditions (although the sun was shining which was nice), but were rewarded with, not only the picnic style lunch that my regular volunteers have come to expect, but also filled rolls and a variety of soups supplied by Thomson Habitats.

It was a great day, very productive and there may be a few more *Typha*-pulling days on the horizon so get ready for part two!!

Many thanks to all who gave up their time to help out – you did a fabulous job, thank you so much.



In case you thought I never got my hands dirty... my face certainly did!

Photo by Ralph Todd



Gemma Cooke from Thomson Habitats proudly displays her first pull of the day

Photo by David Pressland



Thames Water's Complex Project Assurance Engineer, Dave Watts (at the back), and Asset Integrator, Steve Summers, familiarise themselves with Typha

Photo by Dave Pressland



Neil Ramsdale of Thomson Habitats discusses health and safety

Photo by Karen Sutton



Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve members, Ralph Todd and Alan Ashby busy among the reedbed

Photo by Dave Pressland



Lunchtime!! Soup and filled rolls provided by Thomson Habitats and picnic-style snacks by Thames Water

Photo by Gemma Cooke



Me! Looking not so very fetching in waders

Photo by Dave Pressland



Friend of Crossness Nature Reserve member, Steve Carter with a bouquet of Typha

Photo by Dave Pressland

Bird monitoring and fox cubs

Unfortunately, the Dartford Ringing Group (DRG) were forced to cease bird ringing on the nature reserve due to pressures from a fox population. With the adjacent area to the west of the reserve currently under development for the sewage treatment works expansion, the resident foxes appear to have moved from their previous home and chosen the protected area of the reserve as the next best safe refuge; the relatively undisturbed and dog-free environment is just too tempting an opportunity to pass up.

The cunning fox(es) have learned that they can get a quick and easy meal by preying on the birds captured in mist nets during the Constant Effort Site bird monitoring programme. Following a severe fox strike which resulted in the death of a number of birds, Roger Taylor of the Dartford Ringing Group had to take the decision to cease mist netting. The group have made several monitoring attempts since, setting up a limited number of nets and providing a constant watch over them, but the foxes have unfortunately returned every time. It would seem that this is a learned behaviour; every time they pick up Roger's scent or see mist nets going up, they associate this with a free lunch and move in.

This is very sad news for us because DRG have provided us with nine years of continuous bird monitoring data. This is invaluable for monitoring bird populations and patterns, and for monitoring the success of our site management plan. It also contributes an astonishing amount of data to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Having the group on site has led to some rarities that might otherwise have gone unnoticed (indeed some, such as Marsh Warbler, can only be accurately identified in the hand by bill and wing measurements etc), and it has undoubtedly provided some fantastic photographic opportunities, not to mention community events when offering the popular bird ringing demonstrations.

What the ringing group will continue to do though, is winter monitoring of the West Paddock for waders, and monitoring of gulls on the sewage treatment works during snow.

On 23rd November, the group undertook monitoring of the shallow pools on the West Paddock and had astonishing results with 71 captures and many more present. The number of birds present were such that they had to close the nets at some points, as numbers were simply too unmanageable. The group captured 65 dunlin, of which two were controls (captured and ringed previously; one in the UK and one on the German Baltic coast), 5 redshank and 1 teal. This was the largest one-night catch of dunlin at Crossness; when asked what the reasons might have been for the particularly good catch, Roger Taylor suggested the following factors:



- The number of birds feeding in this part of the Thames - there are three races of Dunlin present in the UK at some time during the year, *Calidris schinzii* which breed here but winter in west Africa; small numbers of *C. arctica* from Greenland pass through in autumn, also on their way to Africa; and *C. alpina* from northern Scandinavia and western Siberia that winter here and should be the birds on the west paddock at this time of year. However, it is difficult to separate the races and it may be that we have some *schinzii* as well as *alpina*. So the number of birds present could be going up and down as they pass through on migration or just as the winter population moves around in response to the food supply
- There was a good breeding season this year – the number of first year birds caught is mid-range and so not conclusive evidence either way
- The conditions on the west paddock - definitely a factor. Dunlin like to roost in shallow water but seem to like to be on the edge of deeper water which no doubt gives them some protection from ground predators as these are going to make a noise approaching through water and will be more visible
- The weather – the conditions were ideal with very light winds and no moon, although there is a huge amount of light pollution, so not as dark as we would like but even so, relatively low visibility. Wind has a significant effect on the catch as it moves the nets and makes them more visible and less effective in holding a bird that has gone in

Winter bird walk – by Ralph Todd (photos by Dave Pressland)



It was 0 degrees on the thermometer when 9 keen people joined Brenda and I for a pre-Christmas bird walk taking in the Southmere Lake, Southern Marshes, Crossness LNR and the River Thames. However, the sun was shining and a clear blue sky remained with us for the duration of the walk. The sun was sometimes a hindrance when trying to sort out some of the species on Southmere Lake. The majority of birds seen here were black-headed gulls (without black heads), coot and mute swans. We did also find common and lesser-black backed gull, a few cormorant and Canada geese. A small flock of tufted duck seemed unhappy about our presence and flew off in the direction of the Treatment works leaving just one female behind for us to identify. A few moorhen fed on the lake edge and a single, first year, stripe headed great crested grebe showed well.

There was a distinct lack of small birds apart from the occasional blue tit, a few chaffinch, greenfinch and a dunnock feeding under a hawthorn, three blackbirds (probably winter visitors) joined in and Steve saw/heard a mistle thrush. The light overlooking the scrape was much better and we had good views of snipe and teal along with a couple of stock doves feeding on the nearby grass – good comparison with the ever-present woodpigeons. Continuing though the Southern Marshes turned up little other than a hunting kestrel and a small flock of goldfinches.

Crossing the road into Crossness Marshes we were greeted by a singing Cetti's warbler, one of about 3 we heard during this stage of the walk. A large flock of stock doves were feeding with the more common carrion crows and magpies on the grazing marsh. We'd been walking for about 90 minutes by now so the hide within the protected area was a most welcome rest stop though little was present on the scrape. A grey heron flew overhead.

We decided to head straight for the river as high tide was around 1pm and we wanted to maximise our opportunity for any feeding waders, we were just too late. However, with the light behind us, the views of teal, gadwall, shoveler, shelduck, mallard, lapwing, cormorant and an assortment of gulls (mostly black-headed but the odd lesser-black backed and common) were excellent. We could see small groups of waders heading up river and, after a little perseverance we managed one redshank on the shoreline but most impressively was a large gathering of redshank, dunlin, lapwing and one or two turnstone roosting on the river wall though almost totally obscured by the fencing and high wall. The telescope came in handy to get something of a view.

Other species seen were song thrush, wren, house sparrow, great tit, male reed bunting, ring-necked parakeet and robin. With the usual Ridgeway path closed by the golf course, Dorothy led us back towards the football club and out to the main road where Steve found a great spotted woodpecker which gave us a really good view and good end to a very pleasant walk. 34 species seen in all.

Love Where You Live

On 23rd November, we undertook a Great Big Litter Pick event. Forming part of the 'Love Where You Live' initiative which is supported by Thames Water, 13 volunteers helped pick clean the footpath that runs along the southern boundary of the nature reserve. The path (Footpath 1) runs parallel with Eastern Way (A2016) and as such gets littered with rubbish off the road which is very hard to keep clear during the summer months when there is foliage on the trees.

Thinking that we'd run the event at the end of November when the leaves had dropped didn't quite work out. The uncharacteristic weather (the warmest November for 360 years) meant that it was still green and lush and the litter therefore hard to reach, but following morning fog, it meant that we were also treated to a nice sunny work day.

The hard working volunteers collected 37 bags of rubbish, plus tyres, traffic cones, plastic and corrugated sheets among other items. In our informal 'who can find the weirdest piece of rubbish' competition, a parking meter (busted open and money removed) had to take the prize. We did also find a small pair of boltcroppers (with nothing that a bit of WD40 couldn't put right) and a drill!!

A massive thank you to all those who helped. I know that some attendees took the day off work specifically to help out, while others altered their commitments in order to get involved. Your help is very much appreciated and the reserve looking all the better for it – thank you.



Picking litter

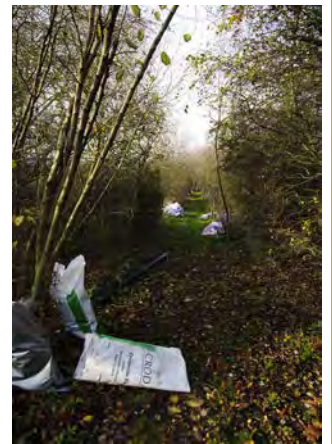


Ann Turvey



David Pressland, our resident photographer

Photos below taken by Dave Pressland, used with kind permission





From left to right: David Pressland, Norman Haynes, Roger Taylor, Ken Sprowles, Dorothy Nears, Nick Eades, Steve Carter, Alan Ashby, Karen Sutton, Martin Petchey, Ann Turvey, Bernard Leahy – thank you to you all.



Showing off our rubbish collection

A bit of a buzz

I was recently invited to give a presentation at this year's Sidcup Beekeepers AGM and open meeting, providing information about Crossness Nature Reserve and our plans for future beekeeping.

We were the grateful recipients of a Capital Bee grant this year. The scheme is part of Capital Growth, a Boris Johnson Initiative to create 2,012 new food growing places in London by the end of 2012. As part of this initiative, Capital Bee was set up to generate new beekeepers in London by offering training, followed by the provision of a bee colony and tools in March 2012. Thanks to the Capital Bee grant, myself and two regular Crossness Nature Reserve volunteers undertook a beginner's practical beekeeping course with Ruxley Beekeepers in Sidcup in the summer. This coming February and March will see the theoretical element of the course covered (which is open to anybody if you fancy getting involved: see www.ruxleybeekeepers.org.uk for details).

It was also Ruxley Beekeepers who kindly undertook our bee extraction last year when a colony of bees decided to set up home in a hydrant chamber, inconveniently (for the bees) located right alongside the main access track and at the time, a haulage route for plant creating the new Island Field reedbed. The kind people of Ruxley kindly removed them for us and gave them a good home, however this piqued our interest in the craft of beekeeping: indeed we weren't averse to having honey bees on site – we are a nature reserve aiming to reverse the decline of certain species after all – but we would have preferred to have them set up home somewhere a little more suitable than a hydrant chamber!

We have now created a home for our forthcoming bee hives within the Protected Area. They will be away from plant, vehicles and pedestrians; protected from ground frosts; and in the midst of numerous food plants.

Of course, with the wonderful help, knowledge and expertise of Ruxley Beekeepers (a subsidiary of Sidcup Beekeepers), I was delighted when asked to present a powerpoint presentation on our beekeeping experience and future plans. I was joined by representatives from local schools (Charlton Manor School, Wilmington Academy and Corelli College) who also gave presentations about their beekeeping experiences or future plans in their school grounds. This beekeeping lark is certainly infectious and it's great to see so many new people getting involved.

On the 19th January, David Rea of Ruxley Beekeepers, will be coming to Crossness to give an indoor presentation about honey bees and bee keeping. This will certainly be worth seeing, so do book your place now.

Look out for our hives this spring and watch this space for Crossness honey!

Involvement with Ruxley Beekeepers



Photos by David Crossland, used with kind permission

Crossness Nature Reserve



Capital Bee and beekeeping training



Crossness Nature Reserve



Below average rainfall

I am frequently asked about the impacts suffered as a result of this year's lack of rain. Fortunately, on the nature reserve, we are fairing better than most, due to our ability to artificially pump water via our two windpumps. However, this isn't the case everywhere and many areas in the south-east are seriously water stressed. The information below was submitted to the national press by our press office last month:

Drought-busting 'back-up' aquifers switched on to boost supplies

Thames Water today urged its 8.8m customers to use water wisely as it boosted supplies by 'switching on' a back-up network of underground aquifer storage for the first time since the 2006 drought.

London and the Thames Valley have seen below average rainfall for 15 of the past 19 months. So far this year only 468mm of rain has fallen against the annual average of 739mm in a region that is classed by the Environment Agency as 'seriously water stressed'. The company said it would need around 80% of its long-term average winter rainfall to avoid the likelihood of drought-related water-use restrictions in the Thames region next year.

It is doing everything it now can to help ensure there is enough water to go around next year, including:

- Switching on the extraction boreholes on the North London Artificial Recharge Scheme (NLARS) - a confined aquifer which the company tops up with treated water all year round to provide an additional 180 million litres of water per day for up to three months when needed (enough to supply over one million people). It can run for longer at a reduced rate. It is currently boosting supplies by 80 million litres a day, but this is likely to increase over the coming weeks. It has only been used four times since it first came into use in 1995.
- Preparing to turn on the Beckton desalination plant, probably in January, if the weather remains dry. This would be the first time the plant has operated, apart from in testing, since it opened last year. The facility is capable of putting an additional 150m litres a day into supply – enough to supply 1m people.
- Continuing to replace worn out Victorian water mains after getting leakage down to its lowest ever level – down by a third since 2004 after replacing 1,400 mile of mains. The company has hit its annual leakage targets for each of the last five years.
- Launching Britain's first local awareness campaign urging people to help protect the long-term environmental future of their local rivers.

Thames Water is also offering all of its customers free water-saving gadgets – including showerheads, tap inserts and toilet cistern devices – which could reduce water use in the home by up to a quarter, and cut water and energy bills by up to £75 a year.

Richard Aylard, Thames Water's director of external affairs and sustainability, said:

"It may come as a surprise to be talking about drought so close to Christmas, but if we don't get close to average rainfall this winter there is a very real possibility of a drought next year.

"This summer may have been mostly grey and dreary, but it has also been consistently dry. Fifteen of the past 19 months have seen below average rainfall, and 2011 has been one of the driest years on record.

"This is not just our problem - it's everybody's problem. We can only supply people with water that has arrived initially as rain. Everyone has a part to play in ensuring there is enough water to go around. We all need to use water wisely, valuing this precious resource and using less of it. The less water we use the less we need to take from the environment, and the more there will be to go around next summer.

"Winter rain is vitally important because it recharges the underground aquifers which drive flows in rivers across our region during the following year. Normally at this time of year we would see this recharge happening already, but as any farmer or gardener will tell you, the ground is still hard and dry, so the first rain we get will just serve to moisten the ground before it can trickle down and refill the aquifers."

The company takes 80% of the 2.6bn litres a day of water it supplies from rivers, and 20% from underground boreholes.

Thames Water customers can visit the company's Waterwisely, www.thameswater.co.uk/waterwisely, website to get water-saving tips and order free water-saving products.

Top five water saving tips:

- Cover outside taps and pipework this winter to avoid bursts and leaks.
- Take shorter showers - the shower uses around 10 litres of water a minute. If everyone cut their time in the shower by one minute a day, nationally enough water could be saved to supply London for between two and four months.
- Turn the tap off when brushing your teeth - one in four people still leave the tap running while brushing their teeth. Turning it off can save six litres a minute, which can save a serious amount of water if everyone does it.
- Fix leaking taps – a dripping tap can waste over 60 litres of water per week.
- Fully load your washing machine – a full load uses less than two half loads.

Fencing

As a health and safety measure, we have recently installed some post and wire fencing alongside two water courses on Crossness Nature Reserve: the deep water area of Great Breach Lagoon, and alongside Great Breach Dyke West which runs alongside Footpath 2 outside the Protected Area. Some more fencing is due to be installed in the paddocks on Crossness Southern Marsh.



Kev digging holes for the posts



Putting post hole digger to use



Post and wire fencing alongside Great Breach Lagoon

Member photos

Do you have photos taken at Crossness that you could contribute to future issues?



Caspian gull, by John Archer



Cormorants having fun in the Thames, by Tracy Frisby



Black-headed gulls, by Tracy Frisby



Common darter, by Tracy Frisby

Forthcoming winter events 2011/12

Crossness Nature Reserve

Date	Event	Meeting details
Thurs 19 th Jan	INDOOR PRESENTATION – BEES AND BEEKEEPING David Rea will be coming to Crossness to do an evening presentation on honey bees and the art of bee keeping. With David's wealth of beekeeping knowledge, this will prove to be a very special event, made even more special by the observation hive that he plans to bring along (a sealed structure with glass walls to enable visibility of the bees in the hive), so do bring family members and children along as I'm sure they will be fascinated. Due to room restriction, this is a bookable event. Please email me your booking at karen.sutton@thameswater.co.uk. Refreshments provided.	19:00 at the Crossness Sludge Powered Generator ground floor meeting room. The address is Crossness Sewage Treatment Works, Belvedere Road, Abbey Wood, SE2 9AQ. I will email directions upon booking. The event will finish at 21:00 following refreshments.
Weds 25 th Jan	PRACTICAL CONSERVATION DAY – vegetation clearance. Please come and help us with our annual winter task of cutting back and raking vegetation. Refreshments will be provided. Wellies will be required.	10am at the entrance to the protected area. The Norman Road gate will be open and vehicular access permitted into the protected area.

Crossness Southern Marshes

Date	Event	Meeting details
Sat 10 th Dec	WINTER BIRD WALK led by Ralph and Brenda Todd. This has become a bit of an annual event, but this year we are extending the walk to take in the Crossness Southern Marshes. We will meet at the Lakeside car park, walk over to the marshes, up through the nature reserve to the River Thames (where high tide isn't until around 14:00) and back down the Ridgeway to Southmere Lake where we will stop for lunch (provided). Please bring binoculars if you have them; there will also be some available for loan.	9am at Southmere Lake/Lakeside Complex car park off Belvedere Road.
Weds 22 nd Feb	PRACTICAL CONSERVATION DAY – Reed clearing. We will be undertaking our winter reed cutting and clearing and need all the help we can get with raking and clearing. Please feel free to join us and we will provide lunch.	10am at Southmere Lake/Lakeside Complex car park off Belvedere Road.



Beautiful photo of the nature reserve (looking north from Footpath 1), Thames Water's Crossness Sludge Powered Generator (left) and Cory Environmental's Riverside Resource Recovery facility (right). Photo by David Pressland, used with kind permission