

2017 Wildlife Report for Napsbury Park Residents Association

Introduction:

Welcome to the annual wildlife report compiled by the NPRA which includes the annual bird survey performed in conjunction with our local RSPB group. We list the birds that were spotted in four RSPB surveys, during May, April and two in November 2017 and will also discuss hedgehogs, woodpiles and other associated topics.

Swifts, Bats & Tawny Owls:

Last year I mentioned that our Swift population had been severely depleted due to the refurbishment of the old Nurses home, now called Little Nights. As we feared it did not recover during this summer. Well, we have applied for Local Authority funding to help us place four, four-chamber, swift nest boxes back in the vicinity. We hope to get this funding over the winter period so that we can hang the nesting boxes before they fly in late April/early May. In the same plan we have applied for additional funding for three Tawny Owl nesting boxes and four Bat boxes. Both species are under threat and need our help. We also hope to install four new park benches in the spring of 2018 as suitable perching places for humans!!

Nesting boxes

Of the ten nesting boxes that we have installed it would appear that nesting activity has occurred in 8 of the boxes. Sadly, in two boxes we found five dead chicks - 2 in box 6 and 3 in box 9. On the face of it we could consider this to be a breeding failure for that box, but the RSPB advise us that the contrary can be true where the birds have been feeding so well that they have had a second brood. However, late or second broods can run out of suitable food in the late summer months and unfortunately the chicks starve. So sad! This year we decided not to take the boxes down over winter as they can provide good roosting places and shelter from the harsh weather so in November we cleaned out the boxes out and restocked them with meadow hay and rehung them for winter.

Greenfinches:

Last year we reported that although multiple birds were seen of all the species spotted we only saw one greenfinch. This was considered unusual and the RSPB have agreed to provide us with an update on the greenfinch population. It appears that the Greenfinch population crashed between 2006 to 2017 by 80%, due to a disease called Trichomonosis, which affects their digestive system and the poor things starve! The advice is not to feed the birds in summer when the disease is spread from bird to bird via feeding bowls and that to make sure that feeders and water bowls are kept clean when feeding them in Autumn and Winter. The good news is that the UK greenfinch population has recovered well and now stands at about 1.7m pairs. Let us hope that our local population follows suit!

Our New Wood:

Approximately 4,000 trees have been recently planted by Hertfordshire County Council in the old piggery which is located on the railway (west side) side of Little Nights. This is a welcome development even though it will of course take a generation or two to mature. The varieties comprise mostly Common Oak and Hornbeam but also include Sweet Chestnut, Rowan, Small Leaved Lime, Silver Birch, Maple, Wild Cherry and Common Alder. A few Spindle, Crab Apple, Wayfaring Tree and Guelder Rose have been included to add a bit of interest.

Hedgehogs:

Our spikey friends are still in dire trouble. One of the main reasons is that they thrive much better in gardens than outside. In the open park they are subject to attacks by predators but also fall fowl of strimming machines and large mowers. Unfortunately, like most recent housing developments, we have fences that prohibit the movement of hedgehogs between gardens and the wider park areas. If you really want to help these little chaps, please cut a couple of CD sized holes in the base plank of your garden fence, ideally one giving them access to the wider park area and the other to a neighbour's garden. If you can leave a little wild area in a corner of your garden or build a wood pile that will really help. If just a few of us did this, it would help our local population so much. Our local Hedgehog rescue currently has over 75 residents. If you need advice you can contact them on 07867 567464 or visit their website at <http://londoncolneyhedgehogrescue.weebly.com>. If you need further advice the RSPB website has some useful information sheets on hedgehogs.

Wood piles:

Last winter a group of NPRA members built 4 wood piles in the park. We have already added another two this year using the large logs that have resulted from some necessary tree surgery. These wood piles are very good environments and help small mammals and insects breed, which of course in turn, will support our bird life. We have drilled small holes in the logs which will help bumble bees and other insects to breed. My dog's activities indicate that there is already life in last year's log piles as he will often listen intently to the woodpiles and sniff around them. As the tree surgery continues we hope to build more woodpiles, situated out of the way in the undergrowth where the wildlife can breed in relative peace. Children should not play on the woodpiles.



A new woodpile next to one that we built last year



Holes drilled in the logs help insects like Bumble Bees to breed

'Twitchers walk' scheduled for May 2018:

Are you interested in coming along on a bird watching walk in May 2018? The RSPB have offered to get a few of their members together and to lead us around Napsbury Park and the surrounding fields for a couple of hours to look at the local bird life. Whilst not essential, binoculars greatly improve the enjoyment that you can get from bird watching. If you have no binoculars they can be purchased quite inexpensively on the internet, and whilst not up to the specifications of those on the RSPB website, they still work quite well. I recently purchased some NITEHAWK 10-70 x 70 binoculars for about £20 and they are pretty good. Oh, the joy of watching a green woodpecker forage in the grass close-up for a minute or two!! Please let us know if you are interested in attending this walk by emailing us at: comments@npra.org.uk

Spring Survey – list of birds seen:

Blackbird



Blue Tit



Carrion Crow



Robin



Jackdaw



Green Woodpecker



Long-tail tit



Chaffinch



Dunnock



Greenfinch



Great tit



Nuthatch



Collared Dove



House Sparrow



Magpie



Mistle Thrush



Woodpigeon



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Pied Wagtail



Buzzard



Starling



Lesser Black backed Gull



Blackheaded Gull



House Martin



Kestrel



Red Kite



Linnet



Swift



Swallow



Lesser Black backed Gull



Autumn Survey.

The following species were also observed during the Autumn survey and most are already pictured above:

Blackbird, Goldfinch, Blue Tit, Robin, Magpie, Woodpigeon, Carrion Crow, Jay, Green Woodpecker, Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Long-tailed tit, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Great tit, Redwing, Kestrel, Starling, Sparrowhawk.

Those spotted in the Autumn survey but not pictured above are:

Jay



Fieldfare



Goldfinch



Herring Gull



Jackdaw



Redwing



Sparrowhawk



Long tailed Tit



Conclusion:

It seems it has been another good year for the wild bird life in Napsbury Park. As we walk around the park the species that we can see is often be affected by the weather on the day. This year we were a little unlucky with the days in November that that we chose for the survey as there were and high winds and the smaller species go to ground, so we were able to see only a fraction of the numbers of birds that we hope to see. However, this year's variety is still quite impressive, and we encourage residents and visitors alike to take some time out, sit in a quiet place, and enjoy our wonderful park. Let's get those binoculars out!

Acknowledgements:

My thanks go to our local RSPB Walk Leader Colin Rose for his help in documenting the bird life here at Napsbury Park and to Clive Ireland for his assistance with the bird box maintenance.

Keith Loud – NPRA Wildlife Committee