

Acton Park nature report spring 2017

Trees: Although all trees came into full leaf by the end of April some of the newly planted specimens, particularly the oaks near to Jeffries Road which have suffered due to the lack of rain. However they are likely to recover once the rains return as they undoubtedly will.

The horse chestnuts are already laden with young conkers ready to fall in autumn and the plum cherry trees are covered in ripe fruit providing a feast for our numerous woodland birds. Our ancient oak, near the Japanese garden, has once again said hello to a new summer which it has done for the last 400 years. This tree continues to provide a home for numerous insects including its resident swarm of honey bees.



Woodland birds: The vast majority of our nest boxes have once again provided a great maternity ward for our smaller woodland birds in particular blue tits, wrens and great tits. Some of the boxes are currently being used for a second time – watch in particular for the lighter coloured young tits feeding ravenously around the lake.

There are several nuthatches and tree creepers nesting inside the vacated woodpecker holes around the Gorsedd area - the nuthatches can usually be heard singing early in the morning. They make their nests by using mud to narrow old woodpecker holes thereby reducing the chance of predation by crows and magpies.

Although I've seen no evidence that the sparrowhawk is nesting in its usual place in the park, I have seen the female on several occasions above the old rose garden which suggests she is using a different tree - let me know if you have found it.

That chiff chaffs and warblers returned in May and can be heard regularly near to the thickets around the Japanese garden.

Flowers and shrubs: The highlight of the spring so far has been the success of the three small wildflower areas which the friends' group planted earlier on in the year. The two small triangular areas near the entrance to Tapley car park are not only providing nectar for the insects but also give a great splash of colour for the local residents. The area near the Old Lodge entrance to the park looks magnificent – it's well worth a look if you haven't already done so.



Once again the wildflowers around the edge of the lake are looking great – it's been a particularly good year for the flag irises. Look closely whilst you're walking past especially on sunny days and you will probably see some of our several dragonflies hovering around them.

The cow parsley and wild geraniums, in the wild area along from the lake provide an intoxicating aroma of summer.

The bramble and raspberry bushes are already in flower – in a couple of months, with luck they will be full of fruit ready to forage.

Lake birds: It has been a wonderful breeding season for our Lake birds.

For the first time in many years Canada geese have bred at Acton Park Lake. When the goslings first appeared there were seven - unfortunately we have lost 3 to predators but four strong almost full-sized youngsters remain. As with other wildfowl Canada geese have large broods to take into account losses. A pair of Canada geese only needs to produce to maturity two youngsters every two years - all being well they have achieved their goal for the next four years.



A pair of tufted ducks also bred on the lake. Unfortunately all have been lost – the female is trying again - incubating the eggs on one of the smaller islands. We wish her better luck this time.

The number of mallards reduced dramatically at the beginning of spring from about 70 to less than 20 – this is quite normal early in the breeding season. The numbers have now returned to a around about 50 which include several new young additions. I expect the numbers to be back to between 60 and 80 by the time autumn arrives.

Another great year for the coots with several broods increasing numbers from about 15 to 20. Coot parents are very aggressive and protect the young extremely well. There have also been five or six broods of moorhen this year almost doubling the number on the lake.

Unfortunately it seems that our great crested grebes have once again failed to reproduce. It is now several years since the last young grebes were born at Acton Park and I wonder whether, through age, either one or both of the potential parents is now sterile. Having said that the female is still sitting on what I assume are eggs so I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

During the summer the friends group along with our seasonal ranger will be having a bread amnesty day whereby we will offer to swap the bread for more nutritious food. As I'm sure most of you know bread can be very detrimental to a duck's health and can cause disfigurement amongst other things. Bread also contributes to the blue green algae which can currently be seen on the lake.

Photographs courtesy of Carolyn Givenchy-Large