

Acton Park nature report – summer/autumn 2017

So that was summer - a nice week at the beginning of June followed by mainly grey overcast days with the odd glimpse of the sun... and so to autumn ... *'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'*.

Trees: Early summer brought the usual many shades of green to our wonderful trees which we are privileged to see each year. As the season moved on and the fruit began to grow, the colours faded and the leaves are now turning into those beautiful colours of red, ochre, orange, yellow and finally brown before the autumn storms blow them away.

Several new young trees were planted by WCBC during the spring including various varieties of oak, yew and willow all of which, apart from one, has survived its first year in the park. We look forward to seeing them grow into adolescence over the next few years. Our grandchildren will see them into middle age and beyond.

The fruits and nuts are being collected and stored away by our large population of squirrels and corvids but there are plenty of sweet chestnuts already fallen ready for us humans to enjoy from now to Christmas.



A tinge of regret is that there are so many conkers left on the ground – that would never have happened when I was young!



Plants and shrubs: As a result of the work carried out by the Friends group there was a magnificent display of wildflowers around the Tapley Avenue area towards the end of the summer including cornflowers, poppies and daisies. The area will be managed at the beginning of spring next year in the hope that it will be even better in 2018.

The Friends of Acton Park spent much of the summer at the Japanese garden and other areas weeding and replacing shrubs and flowers which were been stolen by less savoury visitors to the park.

Please remember that if you would like to help the friends group by doing a little light gardening once a month please see our website at www.thefriendsofactonpark.co.uk or check the notice boards.

Although during July and August the blackberries looked promising by the beginning of September very few had ripened which disappointed me greatly. It seems the lack of sun and a number of dull days failed to give us the harvest we had hoped for.

We now look forward to the sight of snowdrops in December and daffodils in March.

Woodland birds: A very successful breeding summer yet again for our woodland birds most of whom have or will soon migrate into our gardens as the natural food diminishes.

Although there were plenty of blue tits, great tits, wrens, sparrows etc. in the park this summer there were very few finches. I only saw chaffinches and one bullfinch all season - a very worrying trend. In fact the only greenfinch I have seen all year was on the West Coast of Scotland.

Over the next few months we will inspect the bird boxes, clean them out and return them for next year's breeding season. I will let you know the success rate in the next nature report.

There have been regular sightings of raptors over the season including a female sparrow hawk and a buzzard who was constantly harassed by crows. Heard but not seen has been a tawny owl also evidenced by discarded feathers. Owl feathers (**see inset**) have a comb-like or fringe-like leading edge of the primary wing feathers known as "flutings" or "fimbriae". This effectively muffles the sound of the air rushing over the wing surface and allows the owls to fly silently when hunting for prey.



Lake birds: A great breeding season for our lake birds with all our species apart from the Great Crested Grebes having broods which reached maturity.

The highlight of the season was that a pair of Canada Geese, despite losing 3 youngsters to predation and sickness, managed to raise another 3 to maturity. They left the lake in early August for pastures new and may even be in Iceland or Greenland for the winter. We look forward to their return in spring.



The other main high spot was that a pair of Tufted ducks decided to breed and attempt to bring up a family on the lake. Despite losing an entire early brood of 6 to predation, they tried again: 6 more were born and despite predation of 2 or 3 the remainder were raised successfully by the female.



No Mallard chicks survived in 2016 – in 2017, however, at least 6 broods made it to maturity increasing the number on the lake to between 60 and 70 – probably the density dependency limit of this species for the park.

Coots and moorhens increased their numbers to around 18 and 20 respectively in what is now a 'full' lake for winter.

Above: Female tufted duck
Below: Male tufted duck