

Old Woodstock Line (OWL) Nature Reserve : Report 2008

Bob Pomfret



snow on the reserve in April 2008

The Reserve is owned and maintained by Woodstock Town Council

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Looking back over our third year it really feels like the reserve is a success: it has become a popular place for people to walk; the tree and hedge planting we did back in Jan 2006 is getting established and it is enjoyed by a variety of birds and animals. There has been some littering but no vandalism.

We have been supported hugely by work parties from the **Green Gym** and by money raised by the **Woodstock Natural History Society** and we've worked closely with the **Marlborough School** to manage and map the Bee Orchid colony on the land adjacent to the reserve.



Holly Blue butterfly on flowering bramble

Managing the Reserve

Since the reserve was set up the ethos of the management has always been to maintain a balance between supporting the local wildlife and welcoming the public. We have a mixed habitat of trees, scrub and grassland with areas to sit and enjoy the wildlife. We learnt very quickly that, left to its own devices, the reserve would soon be overcome with brambles and nettles. In the first 18 months it was a bit of a struggle to keep on top of them but then the Green Gym came to our rescue.

The Green Gym is a really great initiative getting local people involved in community projects like the nature reserve. With regular work parties we have kept the brambles at bay and even managed to extend the grassland a little. In 2008 we had five Green Gym visits usually with 10 to 15 volunteers and achieved a huge amount of work. Mainly this has been cutting back and uprooting brambles but we also cut down a group of dead elms close to the Sansom's Lane entrance. The highlight of the year for me and many of the Green Gymers was taking on the survey of the Bee Orchid Colony. More of that later.



Bee Orchid Survey : June 2008

In June **The Woodstock Natural History Society** offered to use the raffle at their annual coffee morning to raise money for the reserve. They raised more than £70. Mostly for new nest boxes but I also bought a sheet of corrugated bitumen. I'd seen them make reptile refuges from corrugated sheets on Springwatch on the telly and thought I'd give it a go. I cut the sheet into three pieces and placed them round the reserve in July. Within a week there were 4 slow worms under one of them and they were regular visitors through the summer. The last I saw before it got too cold was on October 12.

The Woodstock Town Council also fund an annual grass cut along the path in September that really helps to keep the path clear without intruding on the rest of the reserve.

The Wychwood Project expressed an interest in establishing some projects on the reserve working with the local schools. I would really like this to happen and talked with Jane Bowley from the Project. A project based around the reptile refuges might be a good idea.

Information. I put up information signs every month to tell visitors about what is happening on the reserve, what birds and animals to look out for and invite them to join any work parties we are organising.



Birds on the Reserve

We get a surprising variety of birds on and around the reserve. All in all I saw 38 different species actually on the reserve in the year and 16 more nearby or overhead. See Appendix 1 for a full list.

We have 7 Red List species (The Red List is an internationally recognised list of birds of conservation concern) which are regular visitors to the reserve: Song Thrush, Marsh Tit, Starling, House Sparrow, Linnet, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer.

Of these I am confident that Linnets and Bullfinches nest on the reserve in the patches of Blackthorn towards the Sansom's Lane end of the reserve. I also watched a Song Thrush feeding young on the reserve this summer. I think the other species on the red list nest in the neighbourhood but are frequent visitors to the reserve throughout the year. We will continue to manage the reserve to encourage all of these species.

Other highlights of the year have included regular visits from both Greater Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, watching a Barn Owl hunting on the reserve in May and a brief visit from a Cuckoo the following month.

Butterflies on the Reserve

Frankly this dull wet summer was not great for butterflies and a disaster for Marbled Whites, one of the species that I've been trying to encourage on the reserve. I found only one on the reserve in early July. There were a few more on the adjacent field but it was a bad year. Let's hope this is not repeated in 2009.

We had 16 species on the reserve in the year. The first to appear was a Brimstone on March 30th and the last a Comma on October 21st. Two species that did okay in the dull summer were Ringlets, 17 or more on the reserve every week from mid June to mid July and Gatekeepers. They reached a peak of 23 in the week starting July 20 when their favourite food plant the bramble was in flower.

See Appendix 3 for full results.

Slow Worm Refuges

I put out three refuges (corrugated bitumen sheets) on the reserve on July 21. Four days later when I first returned to check there were four slow worms under one of them.

Refuge 1, at the Banbury Road end of the reserve was the most frequently used with a peak of seven individuals present on September 13. Refuge 2 was never visited by slow worms but occasionally I found field voles as well as an ants nest that might have been the reason for the absence of slow worms. Refuge 3 further along the reserve was being used by single slow worms on five of my visits.

In 2009 I intend to add three more refuges further along the reserve towards Sansom's Lane. See Appendix 2 for results.



The Bee Orchid Survey

Alongside the Nature Reserve there is a playing field. A part of it was left as rough grassland for several years. I first noted bee orchids there in 2001.

The field is now being used by The Marlborough School and was mown and cleared in the autumn of 2007 and used for sports fields over the winter. After consultation between myself and Simon Bult (Asst. Site Manager – Grounds) the school agreed not to use the site after March 2008 and it was left uncut until the summer. The rough grassland came back quickly and with it good numbers of orchids. With the help of volunteers from the Green Gym we carried out a survey in June.

The results were astounding. We recorded 1266 individual plants. Bee orchids are known for producing hybrid variations and we found around 200 in total of three variations. There was also 1 Pyramidal orchid. For further information I have produced a separate report on the Bee Orchid survey.

Bob Pomfret Volunteer Warden

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Bibliography

David Lang : Britains Orchids, a Field Guide www.britainso orchids.fieldguide.co.uk

RSPB : The Population Status Birds in the UK : Birds of conservation concern: 2002–2007
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science/report/2001/monitoring/bocc.asp

Bill Temple (Conservation Officer Hardy Orchid Society) : Bee Orchid Care

Appendix 1 : Birds on the Reserve 2008

This a monthly checklist of the birds I have seen on, or from, the reserve.

Key: X = birds seen on the reserve | O = birds seen from the reserve (overhead or nearby) |

** = Red List Species | * = Amber List Species

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	X	O	Total
1	Canada Goose			O					O	O		O			4	4
2	Mallard								O						1	1
3	Pheasant	O	O	O	O	O	O					O	X	1	7	8
4	Cormorant*	O		O	O						O	O	O		6	6
5	Grey Heron							O							1	1
6	Red Kite*		O	O											2	2
7	Sparrow Hawk							X	X		X			3		3
8	Buzzard	O		O	O		O			O	O				6	6
9	Kestrel*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		11		11
10	Black-headed Gull*	O	O	O		O		O		O	O	O	O		9	9
11	Lesser Black-b. Gull*	O								O	O				3	3
12	Woodpigeon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
13	Collared Dove	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
14	Cuckoo*						X							1		1
15	Barn Owl*					X								1		1
16	Tawny Owl				O	O				O	O				4	4
17	Common Swift					O	O	O	O						4	4
18	Green Woodpecker*	X				X	X	X	X	X		X		7		7
19	Great.Sp.Woodpecker	X	X	X	X				X	X		X	X	8		8
20	Skylark**			O	O	O	O	O			O		O		7	7
21	Swallow*					O		O	O	O					4	4
22	House Martin*					O	O	O	O	O					5	5
23	Meadow Pipit*				O					O	O	O			4	4
24	Pied Wagtail	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10		10
25	Wren			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10		10
26	Dunnock*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
27	Robin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
28	Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
29	Fieldfare*	X	X	X	X							X	X	6		6
30	Song Thrush**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
31	Mistle Thrush*	O		O								X		1	2	3
32	Redwing*	X	X	X							X	X		5		5
33	Common Whitethroat					X	X		X	X				4		4
34	Blackcap	X			X	X	X	X	X					6		6
35	Chiffchaff			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			8		8
36	Goldcrest*		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		8		8

37	Long-tailed Tit	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11		11
38	Marsh Tit**	X		X					X	X	X			5		5
39	Coal Tit						X		X	X	X	X	X	6		6
40	Blue Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
41	Great Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
42	Magpie	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	11		11
43	Jackdaw	O	O	O	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	3	9	12
44	Rook	O	O	O	X	X	X	O	X	O	O	O	O	4	8	12
45	Carrion Crow	O	O				O		O	O					5	5
46	Starling**	X	X	X	O	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	10	1	11
47	House Sparrow**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
48	Chaffinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
49	Greenfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
50	Goldfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
51	Linnet**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	10		10
52	Bullfinch**	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	9		9
53	Yellowhammer**	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X		8		8
54	Ring Neck Parakeet	O													1	1
Total (on reserve)		26	24	27	25	26	29	28	28	26	24	27	22	38		
Total (overhead/nearby)		10	6	10	7	7	6	8	7	11	9	6	6			

Appendix 2 : Slow Worm Refuges 2008

This chart indicates the number of slow worms found under each refuge on 14 visits to the reserve from July to October. I've also indicated other species found under the refuges. Refuge 1 is under brambles closest to the Banbury Road end of the reserve, Refuge 2 is on grassland and Refuge 3 on the edge of grass/brambles. See map on back page.

Date	Refuge			Other Species/ Comments
	1	2	3	
July 25	4	-	-	only four days after putting out the refuge
August 1	1	-	-	
9	1	-	1	
13	2	-	-	
15	3	-	1	
18	-	-	-	field voles under refuges 2 and 3
23	4	-	1	ants nest under 2 (stayed all summer after that)
28	6	-	-	
September 6	4	-	1	field vole under refuge 3
13	7	-	1	field vole under refuge 3
21	1	-	-	
30	1	-	-	
October 12	1	-	-	field vole under refuge 1
18	-	-	-	field vole under refuge 2

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