

# Old Woodstock Line (OWL) Nature Reserve : Report 2009

Bob Pomfret



Bee Orchid on the reserve in June 2009

The Reserve is owned and maintained by Woodstock Town Council

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Four years on and the reserve has become a popular place for all sorts of visitors: from regular dog walkers, to children finding a place to enjoy their school lunches and others who just want a quiet, calm place to get close to nature. The trees and hedges we planted back in Jan 2006 are established and being enjoyed by a variety of birds and animals. We do get some littering but to date I have no vandalism to report.

We have been supported hugely by work parties from the **Woodstock and Chipping Norton Green Gym** and from the **Wychwood Project** working with students from the **Marlborough School**.



Painted Lady butterfly

## 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 taken over by brambles and nettles. In the first 18 months it was a bit of a struggle to keep on top of them but the Green Gym came to our rescue and the work feels manageable now.

The local **Green Gym** is a really great initiative getting people from West Oxfordshire involved in community projects like the nature reserve. The regular work parties have helped to keep the brambles at bay. We have also managed to extend the grassland a little, particularly around the wooden benches. In 2009 we had four Green Gym visits usually with 10 to 15 volunteers and we achieved a huge amount of work. Mainly this has been cutting back and uprooting brambles but we also carried out another survey of the Bee Orchid Colony. More of that later.



Jane Bowley from the **Wychwood Project** with students from the **Marlborough School** made regular visits to the reserve in the Autumn and Winter of 2009. They helped to clear the entrance from the Sansom's Lane end of the reserve and did a major job of taking the many hundreds of plastic sleeves off of the hedge that we planted four years ago.

**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.

**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 to 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 40 different species on the reserve in the year (up from 38 in 2008) and 19 more nearby or overhead (16 in 2008). 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 Song Thrush, Linnet and Bullfinch all nest on the reserve in the patches of Blackthorn towards the Sansom's Lane end of the reserve. The other species I think nest in the neighbourhood and are frequent visitors to the reserve through the year. We will continue to manage the reserve to encourage all of these species.

Two birds that I saw on the reserve in 2008 were missing this year. The Cuckoo, which I did not hear anywhere locally in 2009 and the Barn Owl. The owls do nest locally but you need to get lucky to see them. Four species turned up this year that were not seen in 2008: Carrion Crow and Reed Bunting both locally common but only occasional visitors to the reserve and two warblers: The Willow Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. I was really pleased to hear the Lesser Whitethroat singing, alongside its close relative the Common Whitethroat. These are both exactly the sort of species I've been trying to encourage on to the reserve by managing the scrub and brambles.

## Butterflies on the Reserve

Like 2008 it was not a great Summer for butterflies with very few Marbled Whites, one of the species that I've been trying to encourage on to the reserve and no Holly Blues seen at all. However a mild Spring was good for early butterflies and like 2008 two species that did well in mid-summer were Ringlets, at least 48 on the wing at the end of June and Gatekeepers. They reached a peak of 18 in the week starting August 2 when their favourite food plant the bramble was in flower. The Painted Lady invasion that hit the UK this year brought some of these butterflies on to the reserve although we don't have many plants to suit them. We also saw two individual Small Heath butterflies for the first time. When a single Red Admiral turned up on a sunny 14th of October we finished with 17 species seen on the reserve, one more than 2008.

See Appendix 3 for full results.



**Green Gym coffee break**



**Pyramidal Orchid**



**Juvenile Goldfinch**

## Slow Worm Refuges

Following the success of the three refuges (corrugated bitumen sheets) I put out on the reserve in 2008 I added three more in 2009.

The new refuges were put out towards the Sansom's Lane end of the reserve. As it turned out none of them was visited by slow worms in 2009 and this obviously leads me to the conclusion that they only occupy the end of the reserve closest to Budds Close. I'll keep an eye on them in 2010 before deciding whether to move them. I did move No 6 in September 2009 after rats nested under it. I moved it close to No 1 after Carder Bees set up a nest under that one.



Refuge 1, at the Budds Close end of the reserve was again the most frequently used with a peak of eight individuals present in August. Refuges 2 and 3 each attracted occasional visits. Alongside the slow worms there were frequent visits by Voles (Field voles I think) and Shrews.

See Appendix 2 for more details.

## 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 during the Spring 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 2008 and found 1266 individual plants.



In 2009 we carried out two surveys. First in February with Bill Temple from the **Hardy Orchid Society** looking for them before they flowered (and before the grass had grown) and then with the **Green Gym** in June. The numbers in each survey were similar and a little down on last year. 1043 in Winter Survey and 993 in the Summer one. The full results are available in a separate document 'Bee Orchid Survey: Woodstock 2009' by Bob Pomfret.



One very nice surprise was to find one bee orchid on the reserve itself, see the front cover.

## Bob Pomfret Volunteer Warden

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## Bibliography

David Lang : Britains Orchids, a Field Guide [www.britainsorchids.fieldguide.co.uk](http://www.britainsorchids.fieldguide.co.uk)

RSPB : Birds of conservation concern: 2009 [www.rspb.org.uk/Images/BoCC\\_tcm9-217852.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/BoCC_tcm9-217852.pdf)

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

## Appendix 1 : Bird Survey 2009

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	Pheasant	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	O		X		O	2	8	10
3	Red Legged Partridge					O									1	1
4	Lapwing**			O	O										2	2
5	Golden Plover*												O		1	1
6	Cormorant*		O	O						O		O	O		5	5
7	Grey Heron			O	O		O			O					4	4
8	Red Kite*				O										1	1
9	Sparrow Hawk		O					X						1		1
10	Buzzard		O	O			O	O	O	O	O				7	7
11	Kestrel*		X	X	X		O	O	O	O	O		X	4	5	9
12	Black-headed Gull*	O	O	O				O	O	O	O	O	O		9	9
13	Lesser Black-b. Gull*		O				O		O	O	O				5	5
14	Woodpigeon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
15	Collared Dove	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	8	4	12
16	Stock Dove*									O					1	1
17	Tawny Owl								O			O	O		3	3
18	Common Swift*				O	O	O	O							4	4
19	Green Woodpecker*		X		O	O		O		O	X			2	4	6
20	Great.Sp.Woodpecker	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	10	2	12
21	Skylark**			O	O	O	O			O	O	O			7	7
22	Swallow*				O	O		O	O	O					5	5
23	House Martin*						O	O	O	O					4	4
24	Meadow Pipit*			O						O	O	O			4	4
25	Pied Wagtail		X	O	O		X		O	O	O	O	X	3	6	9
26	Wren		X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10	1	11
27	Duncock*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
28	Robin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
29	Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
30	Fieldfare*	X	X	X							O	X	X	5	1	6
31	Song Thrush**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	11		11
32	Mistle Thrush*		O	X				O			O	O		1	4	5
33	Redwing*		O	O							X	X	X	3	2	5
34	Common Whitethroat*					X	X	X	X	X				5		5
35	Lesser Whitethroat				X	X								2		2
36	Blackcap			X	X	X	X		X	X				6		6
37	Chiffchaff			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			8		8
38	Willow Warbler*								X	O				1	1	2
39	Goldcrest*	O	X				X	X				X		4	1	5
40	Long-tailed Tit		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		10		10
41	Marsh Tit**								X	X				2		2
42	Coal Tit	X	X	X					X		X			5		5
43	Blue Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
44	Great Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
45	Magpie	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11	1	12
46	Jackdaw	O	X	X	O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	X	5	7	12
47	Rook	O	X	X	X	X	X		O	O				5	3	8

48	Carrion Crow	O	O		O				O	O	O	X	O	1	7	8
49	Jay								O	O	O		O		4	4
50	Raven												O		1	1
51	Starling**	O	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	11		11
52	House Sparrow**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
53	Chaffinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
54	Greenfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12		12
55	Goldfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	11		11
56	Linnet**	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		O	9	2	11
57	Bullfinch**	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	9		9
58	Yellowhammer**	X					O		X	X	X	X		5	1	6
59	Reed Bunting*		X							X				2		2
Total (on reserve)		19	27	27	23	22	24	19	25	24	24	23	22	40		
Total (overhead/nearby)		7	11	10	12	8	10	11	15	19	14	8	9	19		

## Appendix 2 : Slow Worm Refuges 2009

Date	Refuges (showing number of slow worms seen)						Comments and other species seen
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
08/03	1	-	-	Put out on the reserve today			1 vole under No 2
13/03	1	-	-	-	-	-	1 shrew under No 3
29/03	4	-	-	-	-	-	
04/04	5	-	-	-	-	-	1 shrew under No 2
13/04	2	-	-	-	-	-	
18/04	3	-	-	-	-	-	2 voles under No 2
26/04	3	-	1	-	-	-	1 vole under No 1
03/05	3	-	1	-	-	-	
11/05	3	-	-	-	-	-	
16/05	1	-	1	-	-	-	a red tailed bumble bee nest under No 3 (the bees stayed until mid July)
20/05	1	-	1	-	-	-	1 vole under No 2 / 1 shrew under No 5
24/05	3	-	1	-	-	-	2 voles under No 2
13/06	2	-	-	-	-	-	1 shrew under No 3
20/06	-	-	1	-	-	-	1 vole under No 6
24/06	5	-	1	-	-	-	1 vole under No 1
11/07	2	1	-	-	-	-	
18/07	4	1	1	-	-	-	1 vole under No 5
24/07	4	-	1	-	-	-	1 shrew under No 5
02/08	3	1	-	-	-	-	1 vole under No 3
07/08	7	1	-	-	-	-	
15/08	8	-	-	-	-	-	
01/09	2	1		-	-	-	1 adult vole + 2 young
05/09	-	1	-	-	-	-	a Carder bees nest under No 1 (the bees remained until the winter) 1 vole under No 5 / a nest (rat?) under No 6
13/09	-	1	-	-	-	-	Rat droppings under No 6 and the bees nest under No 1 prompted me to move No 6 close to No 1
20/09	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 shrew under No 4
23/09	1	-	-	-	-	-	
05/10	-	-	-	-	-	-	
31/10	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 vole under No 4

Species	First seen	Week starting																																
		March			April			May			June			July			August			September			October											
		15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11		
Brimstone	15/03/09	2		2		2	4		2			1	1	1																				
Peacock	21/03/09	1			2	4	1	1	3			1	1							1	2	1												
Small Tortoiseshell	21/03/09	1																		1	2	1												
Orange Tip	04/04/09			1		5	3	7	3	6	3	3	1																					
Comma	13/04/09					1			1								1	3	2	2	2		4	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1
Speckled Wood	03/05/09							2				1	1								1	2	3	3	3	2	3	1						
Small White	23/05/09										2	1		1	1	1	5	11	12	5	5	6	21	16	6	3	3	1	1					
Large White	25/05/09											2					2	2	1				7	10										
Painted Lady	25/05/09											2	1							4			8	4										1
Common Blue	30/05/09											1	1	1	1						1		2	4	1									
Meadow Brown	20/06/09													4			5	3	2	2	2		2											
Ringlet	20/06/09													2	4	48	2	2	2															
Small Skipper	04/07/09																2	2	1															
Gatekeeper	04/07/09																1	6	12	12	18	4	3											
Marbled White	11/07/09																3																	
Small Heath	11/07/09																1						1											
Red Admiral	14/10/09																																	1

### Appendix 3 : Butterfly weekly count 2009: Biggest total at any one time

No count made in the weeks starting July 26 or August 23. No butterflies found after October 14.

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