

# Old Woodstock Line (OWL) Nature Reserve : Report 2011

Bob Pomfret



Comma butterfly resting on brambles April 2011

The Reserve is owned and maintained by Woodstock Town Council

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It's hard to believe the reserve has been open for six years. It is well used by walkers (with dogs and without) and others looking for a quiet place to sit. It's also well known by fruit pickers looking for Blackberries, Elderberries and Sloes in the late summer and early Autumn. Now that the new housing has been built in Banbury Road, alongside the swimming pool I think the number of users is rising as it's part of a nice circular walk. To make it feel even more established it's clearly visible on Google Earth, right down to the benches!

Littering, particularly dog litter, can sometimes be an issue but I can still report that vandalism has not been an issue.

We have been supported hugely by work parties from the **Woodstock and Chipping Norton Green Gym** and by The **Woodstock Town Council**.

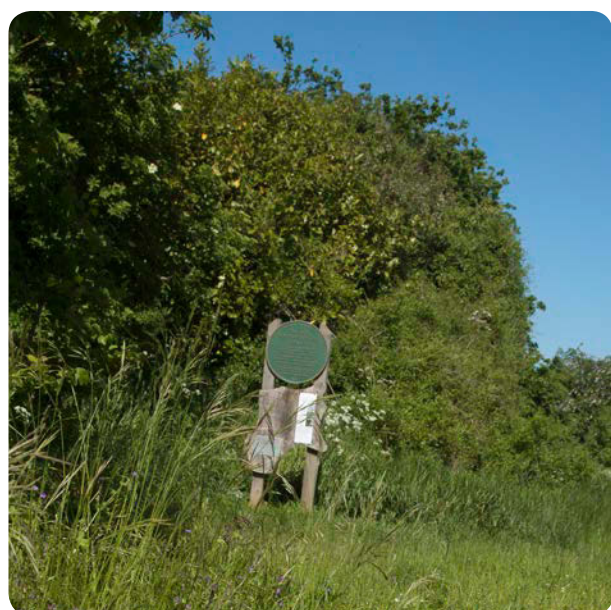
## Managing the Reserve

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. At first we had a bit of a struggle to keep on top of the job but since the Green Gym came to our rescue 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



Green Gym in action June 2011



A bright day in May

wooden benches. In 2011 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. In the summer of 2011 we carried out a bee orchid survey and continued to pull ragwort on the orchid field.

A family living in Budds Close, alongside the reserve, donated some oak saplings in memory of a family member. We planted these in February.

**Information.** I continue to 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 volunteers to join any work parties we are organising.



## Birds on the Reserve

The number of different species of birds on and around the reserve stays fairly constant. All in all I saw 40 different species on the reserve in the year (39 in 2010, 40 in 2009) and 18 more nearby or overhead (20 in 2010, 19 in 2009). 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 visitors to the reserve: Song Thrush, Marsh Tit, Starling, House Sparrow, Linnets, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer. Happily after not recording a Marsh Tit in 2010 there was one back on the reserve in August.

Two of those species House Sparrow and Bullfinch were seen on the reserve in every month of the year. Linnets in 11 months, Starlings in 10, Song Thrush in 9 and Yellowhammer in 5. Crucially all of these species were present during the breeding season and I'm confident that Song Thrushes, Linnets and Bullfinches actually nest on the reserve.

2011 was a good summer for warblers with six on the reserve: Chiff Chaff, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Garden Warbler. The first four all bred on the reserve or nearby.

See Appendix 1 for full results.

## Butterflies on the Reserve

Another better year for butterflies on the reserve. I saw 19 species on the reserve (19 in 2010, 17 in 2009). The most numerous butterfly was the Ringlet that peaked at 16 individuals seen in early July which wasn't as good as 2010 but coincided with the worst weather of the summer. Earlier in the year there were good numbers of Orange Tips peaking at 10 in the last week in April and it was also the best year for Small Skippers, with up to five on the wing in early July. Sadly the influx of Common Blues that we had in 2010 was not repeated. I saw only one of these pretty little butterflies in the first week in August.

For the first time ever there was a Silver Washed Fritillary but I only saw it once in early July.

As usual the last butterfly I saw was a Red Admiral on October 24, exactly the same date as the last one in 2010.

See Appendix 3 for full results.



Ringlet



Comma



Orange Tip

## Slow Worm Refuges

The slow worm refuges continue to be a success. Originally I put out 3 in 2008 and increased that number to 6 in 2009.

The refuges (Number 1 and 6) at the Budds Close end of the reserve are the most frequently used and although the numbers did not reach the levels of 2010 there were 8 present twice in April and once in September. Like 2010 there were occasional visits from grass snakes in April and May.

The slow worms and snakes don't appear to bother each other, see the picture on the right. The refuges again attracted a range of small mammals: voles, mice and shrews but early in the year nesting bumble bees under Number 1 unusually kept the slow worms away from there until June. See Appendix 2 for more details.



## The Bee Orchid Survey

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



After two fabulous years where we saw around 1000 orchids on site we have now had two bad years. In 2010 we did not carry out a survey. Instead we concentrated on removing the ragwort from the site – this 'listed injurious weed' is potentially deadly to livestock and there is a lot of it on site, but I noted only 22 bee orchids on the field when I searched myself.

This year we recorded 38 (933 in 2009) individual plants. Of these 12 (88) were considered to be var. trollii (wasp orchids), 5 (58) var. belgarum and 0 (9) var. flavescens. There were also 5 bee orchids in flower on the reserve, up from just one in 2009. In addition we found 8 Pyramidal orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) up from 5 in 2009.



I asked Bill Temple from the Hardy Orchid Society for advice about the huge reduction in numbers. He thinks it was the very dry spring weather that stopped the flowering in 2010 and 2011. He assured me they will come back.

It is interesting that the drier weather did not seem to bother the pyramidal orchids which have increased from only 1 in 2008 to 8 in 2011. Also, on the more sheltered grassland on the reserve the bee orchid numbers have also increased from 1 in 2009 to 5 in 2011.

**Bob Pomfret, Volunteer Warden**

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## Bibliography

Ken Davies : *Ragwort Poisoning in Livestock - Prevention and Control*, 2005, SAC

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 2011

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	Mute Swan						0		0						2	2
2	Canada Goose								0	0					2	2
3	Pheasant			0	0	x	0	0		0	0	x		2	6	8
4	Cormorant*		0						0		0		0		4	4
5	Grey Heron		0	0	0	0									4	4
6	Lapwing**										0				1	1
7	Red Kite*	0							0						2	2
8	Buzzard						0	0	x	0	0			1	4	5
9	Kestrel*									0	0				2	2
10	Common Tern							0							1	1
11	Black-headed Gull*	0	0	0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0		10	10
12	Lesser Black-b. Gull*	0	0					0	0	0	0		0		7	7
13	Woodpigeon	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
14	Collared Dove	x	x	x	0	0	0	x	x	x	x	x	x	9	3	12
15	Tawny Owl			0				0	0	0	0	0			6	6
16	Common Swift*					0	0	0							3	3
17	Green Woodpecker*	0	0		0			x	x	0	0	0	0	2	7	9
18	Great.Sp.Woodpecker		x	x	x	0	0	x	x	0	x	x	0	7	4	11
19	Skylark**	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0			9	9
20	Swallow*				0	0	0	0	0	0					7	7
21	House Martin*						0	0	0	0					4	4
22	Meadow Pipit*				0					0	0	0	0		5	5
23	Pied Wagtail	x		0	x			0		0	0	0	x	3	5	8
24	Wren	x			x	x	0	0	x	x	x	x	x	8	2	10
25	Dunnock*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
26	Robin	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
27	Blackbird	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
28	Fieldfare*	x		0	0							x	x	3	2	5
29	Song Thrush**		x	0	x	x	x	x	x	x	0	x	x	9	2	11
30	Mistle Thrush*							x			0			1	1	1
31	Redwing*	x	x									0	x	3	1	4
32	Common Whitethroat*					x		x	x	x				4		4
33	Lesser Whitethroat				x	x	x	x						4		4
34	Blackcap			x	x		x	x	x	x				6		6
35	Garden Warbler					x								1		1
36	Chiffchaff			x	x	x	x	x	0	x	0			6	2	8
37	Willow Warbler*				x	x								2		2
38	Goldcrest*	x		0							x			2	1	3
39	Long-tailed Tit	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
40	Coal Tit			x			x		x	x				4		4
41	Blue Tit	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
42	Great Tit	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
43	Marsh Tit**								x					1		1
44	Magpie	x	x	0	x	0	x	x	x	0	x	x	x	9	3	12
45	Jackdaw	0	0	x	x	x	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	12
46	Jay										0	0	0		3	3

continues over

47	Rook	0		x	x	x	x				0		x	5	2	7
48	Carrion Crow		x		0		x			0				2	2	4
49	Starling**	x	x	0	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0	10	2	12
50	House Sparrow**	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
51	Chaffinch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
52	Greenfinch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
53	Goldfinch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
54	Linnet**	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11		11
55	Bullfinch**	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12		12
56	Yellowhammer**	x			0		0	x	0	x	x	x	0	5	4	9
57	Reed Bunting*										x			1		1
58	Cuckoo*					0									1	1
Total (on reserve)		22	19	20	26	23	22	25	25	22	21	21	21	40		
Total (overhead/nearby)		7	6	11	10	9	11	13	12	17	17	9	10	18		

## Appendix 2 : Slow Worm Refuges 2011

Date	Refuges (showing number of slow worms seen)						Comments and other species seen
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
19/03	-	-	-	-	-	1	1 vole under No 2
27/03	-	-	-	-	-	2	
10/04	-	-	-	-	-	8	1 grass snake (No 6), Bumble Bees nesting (No 1), 1 vole (No 2)
17/04	-	-	-	-	-	8	1 grass snake (No 6), Bumble Bees nesting (No 1)
24/04	-	-	-	-	-	4	Bumble Bees nesting (No 1), 1 vole (No 3)
08/05	-	-	-	-	-	5	1 vole (No 2), 2 voles (No 3)
21/05	-	-	-	-	-	2	1 vole (No 2), 1 shrew (No 4)
28/05	-	-	-	-	-	6	1 grass snake (No 6)
04/06	1	-	-	-	-	1	
11/06	1	-	-	-	-	2	1 vole (No 1), 1 vole (No 2)
19/06	-	-	-	-	1	3	
25/06	2	-	-	-	-	1	1 shrew (No 3), 1 vole (No 4)
03/07	1	-	-	-	-	1	
10/07	3	-	1	-	-	-	1 vole (No 6)
18/07	1	-	-	-	-	-	1 vole (No 2), 1 vole (No 4), 2 voles (No 6)
26/07	2	-	-	-	-	2	1 vole (No 4)
07/08	-	-	-	-	-	-	
14/08	1	2	-	-	1	2	
21/08	1	-	-	-	-	1	1 vole (No 2), 1 mouse (No 5)
28/08	-	-	-	-	-	-	nest of voles (No 2)
03/09	4	-	-	-	-	4	1 mouse (No 5)
11/09	2	-	-	-	-	1	
25/09	1	-	-	-	-	1	1 shrew (No 1), 2 voles (No 4)
02/10	1	-	-	-	-	-	
09/10	-	-	-	-	-	-	

Species	First seen	Week starting																																					
		March		April			May			June			July			August			September			October																	
		13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23					
Small Skipper	22/06																																						
Brimstone	16/02*				3	3	2																																
Large White	25/04						1								1																								
Small White	03/05											1			1	1	1	5	7	4	5	4	10	7	3	5	5	3	4	1									
Orange Tip	10/04				5	8	10	4	3	2																													
Common Blue	07/08																					1																	
Holly Blue	17/04						1	1																															
Red Admiral	26/07																				1												1	8	1				
Small Tortoiseshell	17/04						1	2										1	1	1																			
Peacock	17/04						1	2	1	1																													
Comma	19/03	1					1	1	1																														
Silver Washed Fritillary	03/07																																						
Speckled Wood	26/07																																						
Marbled White	26/06															1																							
Gatekeeper	10/07																																						
Meadow Brown	19/06																																						
Ringlet	19/06																																						

**Appendix 3: Old Woodstock Line Nature Reserve Butterfly weekly count 2011: Biggest total at any one time**

\* One very early Brimstone

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