



Little Budworth Common - Spring Watch

An Update from Ranger Charles Baillie

Species of the season

Luzula sylvatica-Woodrush

Some areas of Beech Road Heath were cut last year where rosebay willowherb was beginning to dominate; and in its place has grown woodrush! I've noticed it in any great quantity in other areas of the common, and it great to see some more diversity! Keep an eye out for a small plant with flat, linear leaves with hirsute edges (white fluffy hairs along the leaves), and densely clustered, brownish, inflorescence.



Around the pond



Our resident reptiles - grass snakes and (not at all) common lizard- have been very active over the last few weeks enjoying the fine weather. Although, neither of these species is harmful, please try not to disturb by getting too close.

Grass snakes also secrete a pretty nasty smelling chemical as an anti-predator defence, so it is advisable not to pick them up unless you want to smell like a freshly manured field! They do, however, make excellent subjects for a photograph if you can see them...



Frogs have also been very busy and it looks like it's going to be a bumper year for tadpoles, which will hopefully keep the snakes happy next spring.

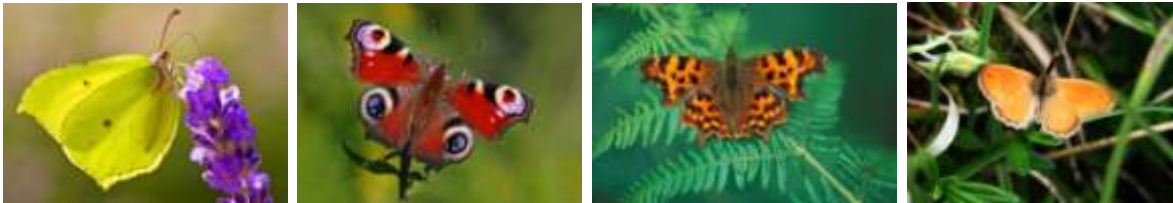


We should be seeing the first Odonata emerging by the end of the month if the sunshine remains – the first being large red damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*).

The sign put up at the east edge of the pond has become a little faded already, but the request remains the same: please keep dogs out of the pond between April and the end of August.

Elsewhere

All over the common the active flight period for many butterflies seems to be well under way. Brimstones and peacocks in particular, but I've also spotted the odd comma and my first small heath of the year.



Birds

The most exciting news to report is that at least two of the bird boxes constructed by the Friends of Little Budworth Common are occupied! The sun was in my eyes but they both looked to be blue tits. If you have the time and a pair of binoculars you can see them in the Beech trees in the car park.

The woodpeckers are, of course, very active – all three breeding UK species have now been confirmed to be present on the Common this year.

In more harrowing nature news, I watched a crow take a blackbird chick this week. Needless to say the parents were going berserk. Let's hope the rest of the clutch doesn't suffer the same fate.



Access



New steps are going in to the east of the pond and mire, where there used to be a muddy slope. This will form part of the new signposted loop around the pond, extending in metres, and interest, the heathland trail.

In the same area, on the south side of the pond, we have cleared a brilliant view point. It should also be possible (I'm

hoping) to ID dragonflies from there with a decent lens, but at the very least it will be an enjoyable spot for a rest and/or picnic.

As per Dave's last email, the 'stumpery' is now in and people are encouraged to use it, which will help the path bed down. Over the coming seasons it should vegetate over and become a nice feature as well as great invertebrate habitat.



Gates have been moved to several places around the Common, where I'm trying to balance access issues. I know a couple of people who ride horses with carriages have asked me for a key – that is not a problem, just get in touch. There are a few more to be moved, and then I will be removing all the bollards along the gallops so it can be harrowed again, hopefully eliminating the wetter patches.

Please could you try to avoid parking in front of the gates in case access is required.