

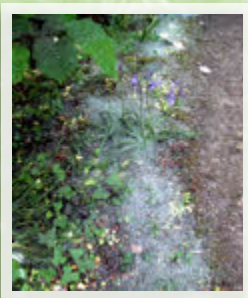
WEATHER

The month started with indifferent weather and was followed by a dry and sunny couple of weeks. Mid month, a frosty, cold snap came as a shock and caused damage to young fern (*right*) and bracken fronds leaving them scorched.



The lack of rainfall caused a drop in water level and by the 17th of May there was no overflow of water over the dam. Since then there have been a couple of periods of very heavy rainfall and the level has risen again. During the sunny days there was a delightful aroma of pine resin in the forested areas of the reserve.

USE & CONDITION OF THE WALK



The walk has been heavily used and several large groups of walkers were encountered during Walking Week. There have been the usual dog walkers and joggers with a good number of fishermen on the dam and exposed shores throughout the month. As expected, there are many visitors' cars and the leaflets have proved popular, having to be 'topped up' quite frequently. The sunny, warm and moist conditions have brought a growth spurt and it has been necessary to snip Brambles, Nettles, Bracken and Hogweed which encroached the path.

The fat white Aspen catkins have littered the path and on one day there appeared a strange phenomenon as an abundance of Willow fruit (*above left*) fell on the path edge giving it a foggy appearance.

OBSERVATIONS

Many more pairs of breeding Coot have been seen this year. Four nests have been observed - one in a reed bed - and as many as eleven young were seen one day. One pair tended to five chicks. They have appeared protective and territorial and were seen to be in dispute with Moorhens on a number of occasions. Mallards and young have also been seen this month but not in the number observed in April. Little Grebe have been breeding and were often seen.

The appearance of Greylag Geese seems, again this year, to coincide with the flowering of Amphibious Bistort. There was a one sighting of a pair of Tufted Duck mid month. The Grey Heron and Little Egrets have not been seen during visits this month.

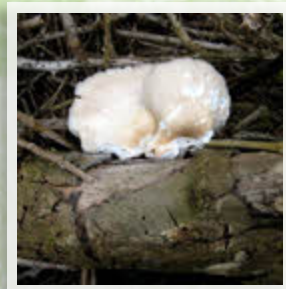
It was a real treat to observe a family of Blue Tits (in a birdbox) being fed by their parents. Goldfinches were seen in the region of the eastern car park where they have been noted in the past. Blackcaps, Chaffinches, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes have been in full voice and the characteristic deep purring call of the rare Turtle Dove was heard on several occasions in one location this month. Long-tailed Tits were seen in numbers flitting about and the calls of Pheasants and Peacocks echoed in the reserve.

Spring flowers were on the wane towards the end of the month with most Bluebells in fruit and only a few blossom and leaves of the Violets, Lesser Celandine and Primroses in evidence. Splashes of pink were presented by the Red Campion, Herb Robert, Little Robin, Doves Foot Cranesbill, Foxglove and Common Mallow flowers. Early on in the month spikes of delicate pink Amphibious blossom graced the surface of the water in the arms of the reservoir and the yellow Flag Iris stand proud – especially in the reed bed near the Padin’s stream arm.

Another water-loving plant – Figwort – has small brown, velvety flowers which are such a delight when inspected at close range. The very pale pink/lilac flowers of an Oxalis, possibly Pale Pink-sorrell, made a brief appearance mid-month but vanished as quickly as they appeared making identification difficult.

The eastern car park looks neat, tidy and cheerful with the self-seeded Echium, Fuchsia, Scarlet Pimpernel and Greater Celandine in bloom. The roadside banks have been clad in Honeysuckle, Sheep’s Bit Scabious, Silverweed, Common Sorrel, Sheep’s Sorrel, Smooth Sow Thistle, Prickly Sow Thistle, Hedge Bedstraw and Cleavers flowers. The lilac Ground Ivy flowers brighten the area below the Monterey Pines in the west and patches of the yellow Cat’s Ear, Spotted Medic, Meadow Buttercup and Creeping Buttercup grace the edges of the path.

Hawthorn, Elder, Holly and the Apple tree have produced copious blossom throughout the reserve and their falling petals appear as confetti on the path. The trees are in full leaf and many such as Lime, Hazel, Ash and Sycamore bear fruit which are fast developing. The dry weather seems to have suppressed the development of Fungi with few in evidence – an Amanita species and an Oyster Fungus (*right*) growing on decaying Elm. Insect life is stirring and there were sightings of Speckled Wood, Large White, Red Admiral and Holly Blue Butterflies and a lone Damselfly.



The reserve has taken on a more mysterious appearance as leaf canopy obscures the light from above and Bracken streak up to great heights and overtop the path in a number of spots.

Spring has gradually evolved into Summer and the developing fruit on the trees almost beckon Autumn already! Another delightful month for a wander along the Millennium Walk.

MISCELLANEOUS

Unfortunately, the newly-planted Scots Pines have not been given a fair start with the spell of dry weather. One or two look ‘uncomfortable’ but hopefully, many will survive to join the solitary specimen which gives such pleasure with its pretty pink bark.

Rhiannon Cook and Val Bloese