

Fobney Monitoring Report 2015

Dragonflies

The monitoring transect is as follows:

- The first section runs from the eastern gate along the path on island to the 1st hide, then across the island on the bank dividing the two main areas of water and back to the eastern gate along the bank between the eastern lake and the river. Where possible, the transect stayed close to the water's edge so as to include all Odonata on the water.
- The second section runs from the eastern gate along the canal towpath to the weir, then back through the western gate to the western hide. The river is checked from the weir.
- The western lake is checked from the path where possible and from the hides at both ends, though these are not close enough to the water to pick up most species
- In addition, 2 surveys (May and June) were carried out along the path on the south bank of the R. Kennet.

Surveys were carried out by walking the above route at a slow pace and counting all Odonata within an imaginary box 5m in front, behind and above and 2.5m either side.

Five surveys were carried out in 2015: 13th May, 11th June, 9th July, 11th August and 10th September. Apart from the May survey, when the temperature was 16°C, all surveys were carried out when the temperature was 17°C or above and wind was F3 or less. Cloud cover varied – the August survey was carried out under 100% cloud, the rest of the surveys were clear or mainly sunny.

12 species were recorded during the year. Numbers for most species were down this year; the exceptions were Migrant Hawker, Broad-bodied Chaser and Blue-tailed Damselfly which were stable and Common Blue Damselfly with an increased count.

There was no floating vegetation present this year until the water levels dropped so far that submerged vegetation was above the surface. The drop in water levels also meant that all plants which could be used by emerging dragonflies were some distance from the edge of the water.

Species recorded on survey for the first time in 2015:

Beautiful Demoiselle (although this species has been recorded previously by John Lepiniere)

Species recorded in previous years but not recorded in 2015:

Small Red-eyed Damselfly

Ruddy Darter

Southern Hawker

Species showing evidence of breeding:

Common Blue Damselfly (probable breeding)

Broad-bodied Chaser (possible breeding)

Black-tailed Skimmer (confirmed breeding)

Common Darter (probable breeding)

The following species were recorded in 2015:

Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*). Recorded at the western end of the island by the gate on the towpath and on the southern bank of the river. This species seems to prefer the shady spots near fast running water such as the weir and the riffles in the river. Maximum counts were in May with 12 on the south bank and 8 on the island.

Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*). Lower numbers than the previous two years with a maximum count of 60 in July. Normally plentiful along the southern edge of the island, but the maximum number seen there this year was just 18. Also occurs along the canal towpath – maximum count there this year was 42. No breeding observed. It may be that the dip in numbers this year is fairly general and not specific to Fobney.

Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrosoma nymphula*). A single record of one adult in May. Based on the data from the last two years, I presume that this species is not yet resident on the island and that this is a visitor from elsewhere.

Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*). Very low maximum count of 13 in May, all on the canal. This species likes to perch on floating vegetation and there was none this year on any of the lakes on the island. The only records from the island were one in June perched on a floating plastic bag and three in August perched on vegetation exposed by the very low water levels.

Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*). Maximum count 660 (up on 2014), often with more flying over the lake. Mainly found on the lakes and in the grass on the island with some also occurring along the canal towpath. Teneral and breeding pairs were recorded, so it is probable that it is breeding on the island.

Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*). 10 recorded in July on the lakes and along the canal towpath. This was the only survey when they were found.

Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*). Two adults recorded in July hawking over the island and the canal. This was the only record.

Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna mixta*). Maximum count 4. Occurs on both the island and the adjoining canal, probably moving between the different habitats.

Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*). Maximum count 3, all on the island. No breeding observed.

Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*). Recorded in May, June and July. Maximum count was two – a breeding pair was seen in both May and June.

Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*). Surprisingly few with a maximum count of 9 – well down on 2014. Mostly occurs on or around the lakes but with a few on the canal towpath, they are often seen at rest on the gravel paths. This species is confirmed breeding in the eastern lake - one was found emerging (in the rain) during the dragonfly walk in June, four other exuvia were found on the same day and teneral were observed on two other occasions.

Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*). Lower numbers than in the last two years with a maximum count of just 8. These were mostly on or around the lakes, but with a few on the canal towpath. They are often seen at rest on the gravel paths. Breeding observed with one female egg-laying, but no teneral present.

I led a dragonfly walk on 28th June, which was attended by 16 other people. The walk was advertised on BDS website, Freegle events page and Friends of Fobney Facebook page, all of which attracted people. Unfortunately the weather was pretty poor: warm but cloudy with rain setting in shortly after the start. The highlight was finding an emergent Black-tailed Skimmer on low vegetation about 6ft from the water. The only other dragonfly was about six Common Blue Damselflies. Other species found during the morning included a Puss Moth caterpillar on some of the willow by the eastern lake and a Scarlet Tiger Moth by the bridge at the eastern end. Everyone had good views of both, which partly made up for the disappointing dragonfly count.

Reptiles

Fourteen squares of roofing felt (0.5m x 0.5m) were put out on the island, mainly along the reserve side of the scrub between the reserve and the canal towpath, but with one on the edge of the eastern lake and 3 at the western end of the island (see maps below), 2 of which were by the straw bales. Felts 1-10 were put out on 10th April and felts 11-14 on 22nd April.

Monitoring visits commenced on 22nd April. Apart from July, when there was only one visit, the felts were checked twice a month. Visits were normally late afternoon, although there were also two mid-morning visits. As the summer progressed, some felts were not checked every time as they could not be found in the long vegetation; in particular felts 7 & 8.

Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) was recorded on three occasions; twice there was a single adult under or near felt 6 and once when two (a female and a male or sub-adult) were found under felt 11.

Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*) was recorded on 12 occasions. All records came from the felts along the boundary. Felts 4 and 5 were the most popular, with up to five slow worms under each. The maximum total number recorded on a single visit was eight. There is a breeding population present on the island with males, females and juveniles (including some born this year) all present.

There were no records of reptiles from the western end of the reserve or from the single felt (7) on the edge of the eastern lake.

The picture below shows locations for Slow Worms (red circles) and Grass Snake (green circles).



The felts were removed on 7th October.

My thanks to Malcolm & Elaine Butler for helping with the survey and to John Lerpiniere for his records.

Orthoptera

No formal survey was carried out. However a bat detector was used on 10th September to check for the presence of grasshoppers and crickets. The following species were recorded:

Dark Bush Cricket (*Pholidoptera griseoptera*). Single record

Roesel's Bush-cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*). Common

Long-winged Cone-head (*Conocephalus fuscus*). Common

I hope to carry out a proper survey in 2016.

Mammals

Small mammal nests/runs were found under reptile felt 7 by the eastern lake and a vole (species not recorded) was found under felt 14 at the western end. A small mammal (probably a vole sp) was seen on 7th October.

Mike Turton
October 2015