

Fobney Island Monitoring Summary 2016

The monitoring arrangements are summarised in Table 1. Butterflies (John Lerpiniere), dragonflies and damselflies, grasshoppers and crickets, reptiles (Mike Turton), birds (Renton Righelato), bats (Giles Sutton), other mammals (Damian Carter).

2016 was again relatively dry year, despite a cool wet early summer. Water levels fell steadily in the second half of the year in main pool and the scrapes dried almost completely by autumn and with no substantial rain by the year end, the New Year started with low water levels. Again, a low Willow layer developed around the scrapes from the flailed off stools from 2015. The dense cover again made the west end unattractive to ground-nesting waders. However, the meadow and marshy scrapes produced an excellent floral display, though no plant survey was carried out this year.

Table 1: Fobney monitoring summary: January-December 2016

Taxa	By whom	Frequency	Comments
Plants		No survey	An excellent floral display mid/late Summer.
Birds	Renton Righelato et al. / BOC	Approx. Monthly casual recording.	Casual coverage of island + towpath + south bank of river. 90 species in 2016. A total of 101 species have now been recorded since 2012. Breeding: 37 species probably bred in the survey area, with a further seven possible breeding species.. Passage: New species this year were Black Tern and Greenshank.
Mammals (excluding bats)	Damian Carter, Berkshire Mammal Group	Survey in September + casual observation	Woodmouse, Short-tailed Vole and Harvest Mouse (BAP species) trapped. Signs of Otter. Fox and Roe Deer seen outside survey.
Bats	Giles Sutton (RBC)	Survey in September	A single monitoring survey in August found five species of bat, though rather low numbers, similar to 2015.
Butterflies	John Lerpiniere	Fortnightly in summer	Data entered into Transect Walker for the national Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. A poor year due probably to the cool wet early summer.
Dragonflies, damselflies	Mike Turton	May, June, July, September	A species not previously recorded was Emerald Damselfly. Overall, 14 species were recorded.
River fly monitoring	R&DAA/Graham Scholey		No data for 2016
Orthoptera	Mike Turton	August, September	Four species detected: Dark Bush-cricket, Long-winged Cone-head, Meadow Grasshopper, Roesel's Bush-cricket.
Reptiles	Mike Turton		Survey abandoned due to loss of felts. A number of Slow-worms were translocated to hibernacula constructed on the island.

Butterflies

2016 was a disappointing year for butterflies generally and this was reflected in numbers on the island. This was because, although June was very wet, July and August were nearer normal with temperatures slightly above average, but butterfly numbers were little better than the poor year of 2014. Reasons for this are not understood. This was a very flowery year on the island when the flowers that were seeded came into their own. Three species especially give cause for concern:

Small Tortoiseshell numbers have been picking up in recent years but were clearly down this year. Numbers on the island reflect this from 26 in 2013, then 13 then 16 but only four seen this year.

Common Blues have shown a steady decline but this year numbers plummeted giving much cause for concern. Again, island figures happen to show a similar pattern to the national picture from 82 in 2014, then 16 then 16 again but only two in 2016. Both sources flowers and food plant, Birdsfoot Trefoil, are present for them.

Small Copper This species is showing worryingly low numbers, but it only occasional occurs on the island with just three in 2013.

Meadow Browns and **Gatekeepers** were present in reasonable numbers at Fobney but perhaps lower than might be expected as they fly from the end of June well into August when the weather was reasonable. (Meadow Brown 185 - 9 - 97 - 26 and Gatekeeper 34 - 0(?) - 28 - 25). In addition, the north side of the large lake had a good show of flora and it would be expected that the flowers would have attracted larger numbers of butterflies. If this floral display continues with the flooding and cutting regime then butterflies should be present in agreeable numbers.

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.
- The final section is 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.

Four surveys were carried out in 2016: 20th May (south bank only), 27th June, 26th July and 13th September. In addition, casual records were collected on 3rd May, 31st July and 24th August. All surveys were carried out when the temperature was 17°C or above and wind was F3 or less. Cloud cover varied – the survey in June was carried out under 75%-100% cloud and the south bank section of the surveys in July was carried out under 100% cloud, the rest of the surveys were clear or mainly sunny. The main May survey didn't happen because of poor weather.

14 species were recorded during the year. A number of the spring and early summer species continued to show a decline due to very changeable weather during May and June. However, the weather improved through July and on into September, which benefitted the later species.

There was no floating vegetation present again this year until the water levels dropped so far that submerged vegetation was above the surface.

Species recorded on survey for the first time in 2016:

Emerald Damselfly

Species recorded in previous years but not recorded in 2016:

Large Red Damselfly

Southern Hawker

Broad-bodied Chaser

Species showing evidence of breeding:

Common Blue Damselfly (probable breeding)

Migrant Hawker (possible breeding)

Common Darter (probable breeding)

The following species were recorded in 2016:

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 well down on 2015 with a maximum count of eight in May (all on the south bank). There was just one casual record from the western end of the island.

Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*). Like Beautiful Demoiselle, there were significantly lower numbers than in the previous three years with a maximum count of just 18 in June – 10 on the island and

eight on the south bank. It is normally plentiful along the southern edge of the island, but the maximum number seen there this year was just 12 in July. It is likely that numbers have generally been low this year.

Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*). Just five recorded in June and not recorded on any other visits. This species likes to perch on floating vegetation and there is still a distinct shortage of this, although more began to emerge as the water levels dropped.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*). First recorded in 2014, but absent last year, this species was again present on the eastern lakes with a maximum count of eight in September.

Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*). Maximum count 586 (down a bit on 2015), 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, coupled breeding pairs and egg-laying females were recorded.

Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*). Recorded in June and July with a maximum count of five recorded in June on the lakes and along the canal towpath.

Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*). A single record in September was the first record of this species for the site.

Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*). Recorded in July, August and September with a maximum count of seven in July; three on the island and four hawking along the path on the south bank.

Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna mixta*). Migrant Hawker had its best year yet recorded at Fobney with a maximum count of 25. This reflects higher than usual numbers reported elsewhere.

Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*). Maximum count of four, all on the island.

Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*). One recorded in June on the small pond. Neither Four-spotted Chaser nor Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*) seems to have become established at Fobney.

Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*). Once again numbers were down with a further drop in the maximum count from nine to five, mainly on the gravel paths or edges of the lakes and pond. No breeding records this year.

Ruddy Darter (*Sympetrum sanguineum*). A single record in September, the first for three years. This species is more often found on smaller densely-vegetated ponds, so the site is not particularly well-suited for it.

Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*). Common Darter had its best year yet recorded at Fobney with a maximum count of 23. These were mostly on or around the lakes, but with some on the canal towpath and the south bank. They are often seen at rest on the gravel paths. Breeding observed coupled pairs and one female egg-laying.

John Lerpiniere and I led a butterfly & dragonfly walk on 10th July, which was attended by 3 other people. The walk was advertised on the Friends of Fobney Facebook page. Unfortunately the weather was grey and damp – not good for viewing either dragonflies or butterflies. The only dragonflies found were a Common Blue Damselfly and a Blue-tailed Damselfly.

The full species list for Fobney Island is as follows:

Banded Demoiselle	Brown Hawker
Beautiful Demoiselle	Migrant Hawker
Large Red Damselfly	Southern Hawker
Red-eyed Damselfly	Emperor Dragonfly
Small Red-eyed Damselfly	Four-spotted Chaser

Common Blue Damselfly	Broad-bodied Chaser
Blue-tailed Damselfly	Black-tailed Skimmer
Emerald Damselfly	Common Darter

Reptiles

Eighteen squares of roofing felt (0.5m x 0.5m) were put out along the path to the south of the river, between the trees and the open grassland. Felts 1-17 were put out on 14th April and felt 18 on 20th May once the area for it had been cleared of litter.

Monitoring visits commenced on 3rd May by which time felts 16 and 17 had been taken. One further visit was made on 20th May. Nothing was found on either visit. The weather in June and early July was not suitable for reptile surveys and by July all the felts had either been taken or had become hidden in the long vegetation, so the survey was abandoned.

At the request of ecologists working on the development of a light industrial site on Island Road, in November, a number of **Slow-worms** *Anguis fragilis* were translocated to three hibernacula constructed on the island.

Small Mammals

A one-off small mammal survey was carried out by Berkshire Mammal Group on 3rd/4th September. 20 pairs of baited Longworth traps were put out in the conservation area on the evening of the 3rd approx 15 paces apart. A young male **Wood Mouse** (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) and young female **Short-tailed Vole** (*Microtus agrestis*) were caught on the northern edge of the area; these indicate the presence of a breeding population of these two species. An adult male **Harvest Mouse** (*Micromys minutus*) was caught on the river bank on the south side of the area. This species is listed as a priority action species under the 2007 UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Unfortunately, the grass had been recently cut through most of the reserve, which may have affected the numbers caught.

This survey provides a snapshot of the small mammals present on the reserve. To obtain a fuller picture, a more intensive survey would need to be carried out, involving several visits to traps per day over the course of several days. Berkshire Mammal Group does not have people available to carry out such a survey, but would be willing to lend traps and train members of the Friends group to carry out the survey.

Thanks to Damian Carter and Berkshire Mammal Group for running the survey and documenting the results. A full report is available.

Other mammal information: possible signs of **Otter** (*Lutra lutra*) were found on the pre-survey site visit for the mammal survey. There are also anecdotal records of sightings by anglers.

Anglers also reported not having seen **Water Vole** (*Arvicola amphibius*) for at least a couple of years.

The following recommendations were received from the Berkshire Mammal Group:

- Carry on managing the site as at present.
- Retain tall rough vegetation around the edges of the conservation area, particularly the bramble banks. Tall vegetation is necessary for small mammals to escape flooding and for harvest mouse to use for nests.
- Retain some rough vegetation around the ponds as this is where water shrews may be.

Orthoptera

Two surveys were carried out at the end of August and beginning of September using a bat detector. The following species were found:

Dark Bush-cricket (*Pholidoptera griseoptera*).

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

Meadow Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*). The most abundant species on site.

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

Other Invertebrates – casual records

The following species was also recorded during the summer: Twin-lobed Deerfly (*Chrysops relictus*)

BIRDS	Recorded in 2016	Breeding code	
Species Recorded 2012-16	90		
Mute Swan	●	FL	
Greylag Goose	●	FL	
Canada Goose	●	FL	
Egyptian Goose	●		
Shelduck			
Mandarin Duck	●		
Wigeon	●		
Gadwall	●	P	
Teal	●		
Mallard	●	FL	
Shoveler	●		
Garganey	●		Two pairs in April
Pochard			
Tufted Duck	●		
Pheasant	●	H	
Little Grebe			
Great Crested Grebe			
Cormorant	●		
Little Egret	●		
Grey Heron	●		
Red Kite	●		
Sparrowhawk	●		
Buzzard	●		
Kestrel	●		
Hobby	●		
Water Rail	●		
Moorhen	●	FL	
Coot	●	FL	
Oystercatcher	●		
Little Ringed Plover			
Lapwing	●	T	
Snipe	●		
Common Sandpiper	●		
Green Sandpiper	●		One bird wintering 2016/7
Redshank	●		
Greenshank	●		Flyover
Black-headed Gull	●		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	●		
Herring Gull	●		
Black Tern	●		
Common Tern	●		
Feral Pigeon	●		
Stock Dove	●	T	
Woodpigeon	●	UN	
Collared Dove	●		
Cuckoo	●		
Barn Owl	●		
Swift	●		
Kingfisher	●		
Green Woodpecker	●	H	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	●		
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	●		

Skylark		
Sand Martin	●	
Swallow	●	
House Martin	●	
Meadow Pipit	●	
Grey Wagtail	●	T
Pied-White Wagtail	●	
Wren	●	T
Dunnock	●	T
Robin	●	FL
Stonechat	●	
Nightingale		
Blackbird	●	T
Fieldfare	●	
Song Thrush	●	T
Redwing	●	
Mistle Thrush	●	
Cetti's Warbler	●	T
Sedge Warbler	●	T
Reed Warbler	●	H
Blackcap	●	T
Garden Warbler	●	H
Lesser Whitethroat	●	H
Whitethroat	●	FL
Dartford Warbler		
Chiffchaff	●	T
Willow Warbler	●	
Goldcrest	●	T
Long-tailed Tit	●	T
Blue Tit	●	FL
Great Tit	●	FL
Nuthatch	●	T
Treecreeper	●	S
Jay	●	
Magpie	●	UN
Jackdaw	●	T
Rook	●	
Carrion Crow	●	H
Raven	●	Flyover
Starling	●	T
Chaffinch	●	T
Greenfinch	●	T
Goldfinch	●	T
Siskin	●	
Linnet	●	P
Lesser Redpoll		
Bullfinch	●	P
Yellowhammer		
Reed Bunting	●	T

The area recorded includes Fobney Island, the contiguous Kennet and Avon Canal and the strip of woodland to the south of the River Kennet owned by Reading Borough Council.

The nearby field to the north of the Thames Water plant has been flooded all year and held wildfowl and waders, including Garganey during April and early May. There appears to be a lot of exchange between this field and Fobney Island.