

## Fobney Island Monitoring Summary 2017

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).

2017 was again relatively dry year. Water levels fell steadily in the second half of the year in main pool and the scrapes dried almost completely by autumn. By the year end, the river level had risen and some flooding of the scrapes occurred in November. Again, a low Willow layer developed around the scrapes from the flailed off stools from 2016, the dense cover making 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
<b>Plants</b>		No survey	An excellent floral display mid/late Summer.
<b>Birds</b>	Renton Righelato et al. / BOC	Approx. Monthly casual recording.	Casual coverage of island + towpath + south bank of river. 82 species in 2017. A total of 105 species have now been recorded since 2012. <b>Breeding:</b> 30 species probably bred in the survey area, with a further 15 possible breeding species. Ring-necked Parakeet are now using the area and may breed in the near future. <b>Passage:</b> New species this year were Whinchat, Redstart and Wheatear.
<b>Mammals (excluding bats)</b>			No formal survey. A nest of a Harvest Mouse was found.
<b>Bats</b>	Giles Sutton (RBC)	Survey in September	A single monitoring survey in August found four species of bat (Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, Daubentons, Noctule, though rather low numbers, similar to 2016).
<b>Butterflies</b>	John Lerpiniere Anne & John Booth	Fortnightly in summer	Data entered into Transect Walker for the national Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. 21 species recorded. Numbers of individuals a little below average due to a wet July.
<b>Dragonflies, damselflies</b>	Mike Turton	May, June, July, September	15 species were recorded, Hairy Dragonfly being new for the reserve.
<b>River fly monitoring</b>	R&DAA/Graham Scholey		No data for 2017
<b>Orthoptera</b>	Mike Turton	August	Five species recorded
<b>Reptiles</b>	Mike Turton		No records
<b>Amphibia</b>	Mike Turton Renton Righelato	August	Common Frog and Common Toad recorded

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 again been flooded all year and held wildfowl and waders, including Garganey during April. Snipe, Lapwing and Green Sandpiper were present in the winter months. Lapwing bred. Gadwall may have bred. There appears to be a lot of exchange between this field and Fobney Island. At least three pairs of Water Rail bred on the meadow and several downy young were seen. A Little Owl used a hole in a Willow on the south side and a Barn Owl used a box on the north side. Several Grasshopper Warblers were singing in the area in April. These are not included in the Fobney Island survey data.

## Butterflies

530 butterflies were counted over 22 weeks of the 26 weeks survey period. This included 21 species of the total 23 listed for the area. Of the less frequent species Brown Argus, Small Copper and Painted Lady were seen but not Clouded Yellow or Small Heath. The total was a little below average due to a wet July when large numbers are the norm. Spring was dry and spring species did well – Orange Tip 60 compared with the average of 23, and Brimstone 28, average 19. June was hot and this, combined with the dry spring, brought summer species out early.

But this did not last and numbers quickly tailed off ending the season very early due to the wet July. Comma and Red Admiral did well but Peacock numbers were surprisingly low. These species are most frequent on the sunny edge of Smallmead grassland. Speckled Wood had a very good year but found along the wooded south bank not on the island. This all follows national trends. Large Skipper had a good year for the transect count. Green-veined White also did very well being commoner here than Small White because of the cool damp conditions it favours particularly along the south bank of the river.

On the island itself transect section 2 crosses the eastern half. There were once again plenty of flowering plants to provide nectar along the footpath and Common Blue was well represented here. Nationally and locally numbers have puzzlingly fluctuated over recent years. They are attracted to the nectar plants and feed on Birdsfoot Trefoil. Numbers from 2013 on are – 102, 23, 21, 2, 43 so quite a good year for them. Most of the rest of this half of the island is dominated by grass but the 'cut and collect' management on the whole seems to be quite successful. Hopefully this is also of benefit to many other invertebrates.

Estimates over 26 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> April:

Small Skipper	4	Holly Blue	7
Essex Skipper	2	Red Admiral	31
Large Skipper	11	Painted Lady	2
Brimstone	28	Small Tortoiseshell	13
Clouded Yellow	not recorded	Peacock	16
Large White	2	Comma	39
Green-veined White	56	Speckled Wood	92
Small White	29	Gatekeeper	58
Orange Tip	60	Meadow Brown	126
Small Copper	1	Small Heath	not recorded
Brown Argus	2	Ringlet	14
Common Blue	43		

Thanks are due to Anne and John Booth, who shared the surveying with John Lerpiniere.

## Dragonflies

The monitoring transect is as follows:

- The first section runs from the eastern gate along the path on island to the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.
- During the nesting season, 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. Later in the summer and depending on the density of the grass and willow scrub, it is sometimes possible to gain access to the ponds at this end.

- 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 2017: 16<sup>th</sup> May, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 10<sup>th</sup> August and 17<sup>th</sup> September. In addition casual records were collected on 9<sup>th</sup> July during a guided dragonfly and butterfly walk. All surveys were carried out when the temperature was 17°C or above and wind was F3 or less. Most of the surveys were done in clear or mainly sunny conditions apart from the September survey which was mainly cloudy. The south bank route was only surveyed in June and the western ponds in September.

15 species were recorded during the year. The spring and early summer species did fairly well due to the warmer weather, but poor weather from mid-July onwards had a marked effect on all species later in the season.

The amount of submerged, emergent and floating vegetation has improved greatly this year and this has encouraged the dragonflies to stay and breed.

#### Species recorded on survey for the first time in 2017:

Hairy Dragonfly

#### Species recorded in previous years but not recorded in 2017:

Large Red Damselfly (absent for 2<sup>nd</sup> year running)

Southern Hawker (absent for 3<sup>rd</sup> year running)

Ruddy Darter

#### Species showing evidence of breeding:

Banded Demoiselle (on river)

Common Blue Damselfly

Red-eyed Damselfly

Small Red-eyed Damselfly

Brown Hawker

Emperor Dragonfly

Black-tailed Skimmer

#### The following species were recorded in 2017:

**Beautiful Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx virgo*). Two were recorded in June on the southern bank of the river and none at the western end of the island. Maximum counts were again well down on previous years.

**Banded Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx splendens*). Numbers were significantly lower than in previous years with a maximum count of just 22 in June – 13 on the island and 9 on the south bank. It is normally plentiful along the southern edge of the island, but very few were seen there this year. It appears that numbers in Berkshire have generally been low this year.

**Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma najas*). The increase in aquatic vegetation seems to have encouraged this species with a maximum count of 31 in August including coupled pairs and egg-laying females.

**Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*). The increase in aquatic vegetation also seems to have encouraged this species with a maximum count of 23 in August, including egg-laying females.

**Common Blue Damselfly** (*Enallagma cyathigerum*). Maximum count 425 in June (252 on island and 173 on south bank), often with more flying over the lake. Mainly found on the lakes and in the grass on the island; very few along the canal towpath this year. Teneral and coupled breeding pairs were recorded.

**Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*). Recorded in June, July and August with a maximum count of eight recorded in August.

**Emerald Damselfly** (*Lestes sponsa*). Two were recorded in August.

**Brown Hawker** (*Aeshna grandis*). Only record was of two in August, one of which was an egg-laying female. Very low numbers possibly due to poor weather in the latter part of the summer.

**Migrant Hawker** (*Aeshna mixta*). Migrant Hawker had a poor year with a maximum count of five in September. This reflects a generally poor year for this species.

**Emperor Dragonfly** (*Anax imperator*). Recorded in June, July and August with a maximum count of five, all on the island. Egg-laying females were seen in all three months.

**Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*). One on the eastern lake in May. First record for Fobney Island.

**Four-spotted Chaser** (*Libellula quadrimaculata*). Five recorded in June on the small pond and eastern lakes

**Broad-bodied Chaser** (*Libellula depressa*). Singles recorded in May and June.

**Black-tailed Skimmer** (*Orthetrum cancellatum*). Numbers picked up this year with a maximum count of 19 in June and 10 in July and August. Coupled pairs and egg-laying females were seen.

**Common Darter** (*Sympetrum striolatum*). Maximum count of 14 in August and 9 in September, down on last year, but this is not surprising given the downturn in the weather just as they started to emerge. No breeding behaviour noted.

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	Hairy Dragonfly
Common Blue Damselfly	Four-spotted Chaser
Blue-tailed Damselfly	Broad-bodied Chaser
Emerald Damselfly	Black-tailed Skimmer
	Common Darter
	Ruddy Darter

John Lerpiniere and Mike Turton led a butterfly & dragonfly walk on 9<sup>th</sup> July, which was well attended. In contrast to previous walks the weather was fine. Good views were had of five species.

## Reptiles

The refugia round each of the hibernacula which were built last year were checked on two occasions during the spring, but nothing was found. Monitoring was abandoned when it became impossible to find the refugia in the tall vegetation. These need to be relocated over the winter when the plants have died down and a better method found to secure access throughout the year. The felts will be more attractive to reptiles if they are not covered in grass and nettles.

## Amphibia

There was a 2<sup>nd</sup> hand report of 2 juvenile Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*) crossing path from main eastern lake to the scrub by the towpath. On a rainy evening bat walk, both Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) (2) and Common Toad (1) were seen on the footpath.

## Orthoptera

One survey was carried out in mid-August using a bat detector and net. The following species were found:

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

Meadow Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*).

Field Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*).

Common Green Grasshopper (*Omocestus viridulus*).

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

## Small Mammals

No formal small mammal surveys were undertaken this year, but a work party in October found the nest of a **Harvest Mouse** (*Micromys minutus*) in tall grasses by the eastern lakes.

## Bats

A single survey was carried out by Giles Sutton who led a demonstration walk on 7<sup>th</sup> August. The weather was poor, with moderate rain. Small numbers of Soprano (2 – 4) and Common Pipistrelle (2 – 4), Daubenton's (2) and Noctule (2) were recorded.

## Birds

Species Recorded 2012-17	Recorded in 2017	Breeding code	Notes
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>		
Mute Swan	●	FL	
Greylag Goose	●	FL	
Canada Goose	●	FL	
Egyptian Goose	●		
Shelduck	●		
Mandarin Duck	●	P	
Wigeon			
Gadwall	●	P	
Teal	●		
Mallard	●	FL	
Shoveler			
Garganey			
Pochard			
Tufted Duck	●		
Pheasant	●	H	
Little Grebe			
Great Crested Grebe			
Cormorant	●		
Little Egret	●		
Grey Heron	●		
Red Kite	●		
Sparrowhawk	●		
Buzzard	●		
Kestrel	●	H	
Hobby	●		
Water Rail	●		Present November-December
Moorhen	●	FL	
Coot	●	FL	
Oystercatcher	●		
Little Ringed Plover			
Lapwing	●	H	
Snipe	●		
Common Sandpiper	●		
Green Sandpiper	●		One bird wintering 2016/7
Redshank	●		
Greenshank			
Black-headed Gull	●		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	●		
Herring Gull	●		
Black Tern			
Common Tern	●		
Feral Pigeon	●		
Stock Dove	●	S	
Woodpigeon	●	N	
Collared Dove	●		
Ring-necked Parakeet	●	H	
Cuckoo			
Barn Owl			
Swift	●		
Kingfisher	●	H	
Green Woodpecker	●	H	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	●	H	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker			
Skylark	●		
Sand Martin	●		

Species Recorded 2012-17	Recorded in 2017	Breeding code	Notes
Swallow	●		
House Martin	●		
Meadow Pipit	●		
Grey Wagtail	●	T	
Pied-White Wagtail	●	S	
Wren	●	T	
Dunnock	●	T	
Robin	●	T	
Whinchat	●		Passage
Stonechat	●		Wintering
Nightingale	●		
Wheatear	●		Passage
Redstart	●		Passage
Blackbird	●	T	
Fieldfare	●		
Song Thrush	●	T	
Redwing	●		
Mistle Thrush	●		
Cetti's Warbler	●	T	
Sedge Warbler	●	T	
Reed Warbler	●		
Blackcap	●	T	
Garden Warbler			
Lesser Whitethroat			
Whitethroat	●	FL	
Dartford Warbler			
Chiffchaff	●	T	
Willow Warbler	●	S	
Goldcrest	●	T	
Long-tailed Tit	●	N	
Blue Tit	●	FL	
Great Tit	●	FL	
Nuthatch	●	T	
Treecreeper	●	T	
Jay	●		
Magpie	●	H	Flyover
Jackdaw	●	H	
Rook			
Carrion Crow	●	H	
Raven			
Starling	●	T	
Chaffinch	●	T	
Greenfinch	●	T	
Goldfinch	●	T	
Siskin			
Linnet	●	S	
Lesser Redpoll			
Bullfinch	●	S	
Yellowhammer			
Reed Bunting	●	P	