

## Fobney Island Monitoring Summary 2018

The monitoring arrangements are summarised in Table 1. Plants (Renee Grayer), butterflies (John Lerpiniere), dragonflies and damselflies, grasshoppers and crickets, reptiles (Mike Turton), birds (Renton Righelato), bats (Giles Sutton).

During the 2017/8 winter water levels recovered somewhat from the dry summer of 2017 and there was some flooding of the scrapes in the conservation area, helped by the lowering of the west end bank. After a cold and wet early spring, 2018 was again a very dry summer. Low water levels have allowed the scrapes to become largely overgrown with *Typha*, *Phragmites* and a range of marsh annuals. However, the work to dig out the worst of the willow mat around the scrapes proved successful. Most surveys have been done as in past years, together with a repeat of the plant survey carried out in 2015.

**Table 1: Fobney monitoring summary: January-December 2018**

<b>Taxa</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Plants</b>	Renee Grayer and Trish Marcuse	Last in 2015	Although not as thorough as the major survey in 2015 and the dry summer meant that many species had finished flowering, 113 species were recorded, including 11 that had not been found earlier. Several of these are indicators of botanically good wetlands, such as Yellow Loosestrife, Tufted Forget-me-not and Meadow-rue. Some others were probably garden escapes.
<b>Birds</b>	Adrian Lawson, Renton Righelato and others via <a href="http://berksbirds.co.uk">berksbirds.co.uk</a>	Approx. Monthly casual recording.	Casual coverage of island + towpath + south bank of river. 78 species in 2018. A total of 105 species have now been recorded since 2012. <b>Breeding:</b> 32 species probably bred in the survey area, with a further 15 possible breeding, including Nightingale, which was singing on the south bank of the river in May. <b>Passage:</b> No unusual species. A Dartford Warbler nearby in November is worthy of note.
<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 and 2017.
<b>Other mammals</b>		No survey	Roe Deer and Mole recorded.
<b>Butterflies</b>	John Lerpiniere	Weekly in spring and summer	A poor year for many species perhaps because of the hot, dry summer. However, Large and Green-veined Whites were plentiful and Marbled White was found for the first time on the island, bringing its species total to 24.
<b>Dragonflies, damselflies</b>	Mike Turton	May, July, + casual records	17 species were recorded, Azure damselfly being new for the reserve.
<b>River fly</b>	R&DAA/EA		No data for 2018
<b>Orthoptera</b>	Mike Turton	July, September	Three species recorded.
<b>Reptiles</b>	Mike Turton		One Slow-worm. The hibernacula were lost in dense vegetation and one damaged in mowing.
<b>Amphibia</b>	Mike Turton	August	Common Toad reported

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 was again flooded early in the year but dried during the summer. It held good numbers of Teal, Wigeon, Gadwall, Snipe and Lapwing in the winter months. Green Sandpiper were present much of the year. Lapwing bred. Gadwall probably bred. There were at least two Water Rail territories, though birds appeared not to be present in July when the field had dried out. A Little Owl again used a hole in a Willow on the south side. The meadow has attracted a number of scarce species, including in 2018 Cattle Egret and Water Pipit. The records for this area are not included in the Fobney Island survey data.

## 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 stays 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.

Only two full surveys were carried out in 2018: 23<sup>rd</sup> May and 12<sup>th</sup> July with the south bank route being included in both surveys. The survey on 6<sup>th</sup> September was abandoned due to deteriorating weather conditions. In addition, casual records were collected on 3<sup>th</sup> July and on 15<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 cloudy with the weather deteriorating during the survey.

17 species were recorded during the year, the most recorded in a single year. The season started late, hence the late date for the first survey and numbers for most species has been low, despite the generally hot weather throughout the summer.

### Species recorded on survey for the first time in 2018:

Azure Damselfly

### Species recorded in previous years but not recorded in 2018:

Large Red Damselfly (this appears to be an occasional visitor)

Emerald Damselfly

### Species showing evidence of breeding:

Azure Damselfly

Common Blue Damselfly

Emperor Dragonfly

Broad-bodied Chaser

Common Darter

### The following species were recorded in 2018:

**Beautiful Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx virgo*). 114 were recorded along the south bank in May (the highest total so far for Fobney), but only one in July.

**Banded Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx splendens*). Recorded on both the island and the south bank on the July visits, but only in very small numbers with a maximum count of seven. It was completely outnumbered by Beautiful Demoiselle on the south bank.

**Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma najas*). Recorded in July, although numbers were a long way down with a maximum count of just three. There may have been more, but most of the lakeside was inaccessible through the long grass.

**Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*). Recorded in May and July, although numbers were a long way down with a maximum count of just three. There may have been more, but most of the lakeside was inaccessible through the long grass.

**Azure Damselfly** (*Coenagrion puella*). This was recorded in May on both the island (mainly on the small eastern pond) and along the south bank. Given the numbers recorded (100+) and the presence of egg-laying females, it is likely that this has been missed in previous years.

**Common Blue Damselfly** (*Enallagma cyathigerum*). Very low maximum count of 120 on 12<sup>th</sup> July (56 on island, 43 on the canal towpath and 21 on south bank), but there are normally more flying over the lake. Well-established breeding on site.

**Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*). Recorded on all visits with a maximum count of seven on 12<sup>th</sup> July, an average year.

**Brown Hawker** (*Aeshna grandis*). Recorded on both July visits with a maximum count of six on 12<sup>th</sup> - a good year based on previous counts.

**Migrant Hawker** (*Aeshna mixta*). A poor year with just one recorded on the September visit, though this may be due to the inclement weather on that day.

**Southern Hawker** (*Aeshna cyanea*). Two recorded on 12<sup>th</sup> July – one on the main island and one on the south bank.

**Emperor Dragonfly** (*Anax imperator*). Recorded in May and July with a maximum count of eight on 12<sup>th</sup> July (six on the eastern lake and two on the canal) – the highest maximum for a year to date. An egg-laying female was recorded on the main lake.

**Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*). Five recorded on the eastern lake in May. Second year in succession that this species has been recorded.

**Four-spotted Chaser** (*Libellula quadrimaculata*). Five recorded in May and one in July on the small pond and eastern lakes. A good number, but there is the potential for numbers of this species to increase.

**Broad-bodied Chaser** (*Libellula depressa*). This species has had a very good year and now appears to be well-established with 12 present on the eastern lake and small pond in May, including an egg-laying female, and two on the south bank.

**Black-tailed Skimmer** (*Orthetrum cancellatum*). Recorded on every visit, but numbers never got above 10. Maximum recorded was on 12<sup>th</sup> July with seven on the island, one on the canal towpath and two on the south bank.

**Common Darter** (*Sympetrum striolatum*). A poor year with just seven recorded on the September visit, though this may be due to the inclement weather on that day.

**Ruddy Darter** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*). Recorded in July with a maximum count of four.

John Lerpiniere and I led a butterfly & dragonfly walk on 15<sup>th</sup> July, which was well attended. The weather was fine and nine species were recorded.

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

## Butterflies

*Butterflies were counted weekly from 1<sup>st</sup> April to end of September along a set transect route. The route is split into six habitat sections. Section 2 covers the east half of the island and the route loops round along the south shore back to the start at the car park. Results are recorded on Butterfly Conservation website and this contributes, along with the Breeding Bird Survey, to government measures of well-being of the environment. Thanks to Anne and John Booth for covering half of the weeks.*

March weather was very cold resulting in late emergence of butterflies but as suitable condition developed normal numbers appeared albeit a bit later than usual. But this was soon followed by the long lasting heat wave with the result that later species emerged earlier than normal, the usual July species out from mid June, but numbers tailed off very early leaving numbers low from late July on. This national pattern was reflected at Fobney with one or two exceptions.

**Green-veined White** (*Pieris napi*) enjoyed the warm moist conditions of the south shore. The area had become quite flowery, thus providing nectar, this a result of the considerable willow pollarding letting more light into the area. This species has a liking for the damper, sheltered conditions here. Numbers peaked here at a very high 65 during the week beginning 8<sup>th</sup> July, this section 5 runs along the western half of the riverside path along the south shore.

**Large White** (*Pieris brassicae*), many of which arrive from the continent, and **Small White** (*Pieris rapae*) were present in very good numbers.

**Small Copper** (*Lycaena phlaeas*) has been a species of concern nationally in recent years but in autumn there were some extraordinarily high counts. The species only occasionally appears at Fobney and this year was unfortunately no exception with just one sighting in July.

**Brown Argus** (*Aricia agestis*) showed no surprises nationally but pleasingly had a good year at Fobney. It only appears in small numbers and 12 were counted, eight of them during the week beginning 5<sup>th</sup> August. Like Common Blue it likes flowery grassland so appeared on the island and a flowery patch of the south shore.

**Common Blue** (*Polymmatas Icarus*) has fluctuated over recent years causing it to be a species of some concern but this year a very high 105 were counted on transect visits. The second brood peaked at 30 on the count in the first week of August, most of these on the island. This indicates a good mix of herbs and may point to successful grassland management of the island at least for this species.

The coloured butterflies, **Red Admiral** (*Vanessa atalanta*), **Small Tortoiseshell** (*Aglais urticae*), **Peacock** (*Inachis io*) and **Comma** (*Polygona c-album*), had a surprisingly poor year both nationally and at Fobney.

Probably the continued high temperatures were not to their liking. Usually numbers are good in section 6 along the sunny edge facing Smallmead and it may indicate a subtle change in the habitat there.

**Speckled Wood** (*Parage aegeria*) had a good year and were counted on almost every week of the count, almost all of them on section 5 along the south shore. They clearly benefited from the lighter woodland conditions created by the south shore willow management.

**Meadow Brown** (*Maniola jurtina*) and **Gatekeeper** (*Pyronia tithonus*) usually appear in very high numbers but were relatively poor this year. **Ringlet** (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) numbers however were only down a little, surprising as they prefer damper conditions than do these other two browns.

A **Marbled White** (*Melanargia galathea*) appeared on the island, the first ever sighting so a new species for the list bringing the total number of species to 24. The immigrants **Painted Lady** (*Vanessa cardui*) and **Clouded Yellow** (*Colias croceus*) were not seen neither was **Small Heath** which has just appeared once on the Smallmead grassland section 6.

It is thought that the food plants of some species had a short life and were desiccated due to the summer heat and that this may result in a poor 2019 for some.

Lastly a point to consider - **Small** and **Essex Skippers** (*Thymelicus sylvestris* and *lineola*) are present in only small numbers on the island but at least they are present. They winter as eggs or larvae on grass stems so if all grass is cut they are very scarce. It appears they are finding some refuge of uncut grass to survive but a proportion of grass left uncut on rotational basis should increase numbers. This is an action that was mentioned at the last Friends meeting.

## Reptiles & Amphibians

The refugia round each of the hibernacula which were built last year were checked on one occasion during the spring, but monitoring was abandoned when it became impossible to find the refugia in the tall vegetation. Although the vegetation was trimmed back in the late spring, the weather then become too warm for the refugia to be used. Several of the refugia were destroyed by mowing in September and will need to be replaced this winter. A more concentrated effort needs to be made in 2019 to determine the current status of the population on the island compared to the 2015 survey.

**Slow-worm** (*Anguis fragilis*). A single slow worm was found next to the hibernacula nearest the pond on 25<sup>th</sup> April.

**Common Toad** (*Bufo bufo*). There continue to be 2<sup>nd</sup> hand reports of juvenile Common Toad crossing the path from main eastern lake to the scrub by the towpath.

## Small Mammals

No records of small mammals for 2018.

## Orthoptera

Orthoptera were recorded on two occasions – one in mid-July and one in early September - using a bat detector and net. The following species were found:

Meadow Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*).

Common Green Grasshopper (*Omocestus viridulus*).

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

## Bats

A single survey was carried out by Giles Sutton who led a demonstration walk on 14<sup>th</sup> August. As in previous years, Small numbers of Soprano (2 – 4) and Common Pipistrelle (2 – 4), Daubenton's (2) and Noctule (2-3) were recorded.

## Birds

Species Recorded 2012-18	2018	Breeding code	Notes
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>47</b>	
Mute Swan	●	FL	
Greylag Goose	●	FL	
Canada Goose	●	FL	
Egyptian Goose	●		
Shelduck			
Mandarin Duck	●	H	
Wigeon			
Gadwall	●		No breeding evidence 2018
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	●		
Hobby			
Water Rail	●	H	3 July - no evidence April/May
Moorhen	●	FL	
Coot	●	FL	
Oystercatcher			
Little Ringed Plover			
Lapwing	●		
Snipe			
Common Sandpiper			
Green Sandpiper	●		
Redshank			
Greenshank			
Black-headed Gull	●		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	●		
Herring Gull	●		
Black Tern	□		
Common Tern	●		
Feral Pigeon	●		
Stock Dove	●	T	
Woodpigeon	●	UN	
Collared Dove	●		
Ring-necked Parakeet	●		
Cuckoo	●	H	
Barn Owl			
Swift	●		
Kingfisher	●	H	
Green Woodpecker	●	H	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	●	H	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker			

Species Recorded 2012-18	2018	Breeding code	Notes
Skylark			
Sand Martin	●	H	
Swallow	●		
House Martin	●		
Meadow Pipit	●		
Grey Wagtail	●	T	
Pied-White Wagtail	●	H	
Wren	●	T	
Dunnock	●	T	
Robin	●	FL	
Whinchat	●		Passage
Stonechat	●		Wintering
Nightingale	●	S	Singing late May
Wheatear			
Redstart			
Blackbird	●	T	
Fieldfare	●		
Song Thrush	●	T	
Redwing	●		
Mistle Thrush	●		
Cetti's Warbler	●	T	
Sedge Warbler	●	T	
Reed Warbler	●	T	2 territories
Blackcap	●	T	
Garden Warbler	●		
Lesser Whitethroat	●	T	
Whitethroat	●	FL	
Dartford Warbler	□		
Chiffchaff	●	T	
Willow Warbler	●		
Goldcrest	●	T	
Long-tailed Tit	●	T	
Blue Tit	●	FL	
Great Tit	●	FL	
Nuthatch	●	T	
Treecreeper	●	H	
Jay	●	H	
Magpie	●	H	
Jackdaw	●	H	
Rook			
Carrion Crow	●	ON	
Raven			
Starling	●	T	
Chaffinch	●	T	
Greenfinch	●	T	
Goldfinch	●	T	
Siskin			
Linnet	●		
Lesser Redpoll			
Bullfinch	●	S	
Yellowhammer			
Reed Bunting	●	FF	

There has been little flooding of the island since 2015 as a result of which the wet scrape areas have become overgrown and unsuitable for most waders and wildfowl; hence no evidence of breeding Lapwing and Gadwall this year. However, the development of areas of Phragmites (planted in the eastern section and naturally colonising some of the scrapes in the conservation area), has brought Reed Warblers as a new breeding species.