

Fobney Island Monitoring Summary 2019

The monitoring arrangements are summarised in Table 1. Reports were provided by John Lerpiniere (butterflies), Mike Turton (dragonflies and damselflies, grasshoppers and crickets, reptiles), Linda Fenwick (hoverflies), Renton Righelato (birds).

Although not as dry as the previous two years, for most of the year water levels were low, leaving the scrapes mostly dry in summer. However, heavy rains in November and December almost completely flooded the island by the end of the year. The areas of Phragmites and Typha continue to expand in the wetter margins. Despite manual clearance, there has been regrowth of Willow in and around the scrapes which will need attention in 2020 if it is not to dominate much of the conservation area.

Table 1: Fobney monitoring summary: January-December 2018

Taxa	By whom	Frequency	Comments
Plants	Renee Grayer and Trish Marcuse	Last survey in 2018	Management plan involves: (a) August/September mowing of two thirds of meadow areas, leaving wide margins that are cut alternate years, (b) removal of Willow from meadows and lake/scrape margins.
Birds	Adrian Lawson, Renton Righelato and others via berksbirds.co.uk	Approx. Monthly casual recording.	Casual coverage of island + towpath + south bank of river. 81 species in 2019. A total of 105 species have now been recorded since 2012. Breeding: 42 species probably bred in the survey area, with a further 5 possible breeding. Nightingale, which was singing on the south bank of the river again in May is considered a probable breeder. The Reed Warbler population has increased from two territories in 2018 to six. Passage: No unusual species.
Bats	Giles Sutton (RBC)	Survey in late summer	No survey in 2019.
Other mammals		No survey	Roe Deer and Mole recorded.
Butterflies	John Lerpiniere	Weekly in spring and summer.	23 species recorded, including Green Hairstreak for the first time. For most species numbers were low, though numbers of Small and Large white were very high.
Dragonflies, damselflies	Mike Turton	May, July, + casual records	16 species recorded with four showing evidence of breeding. There were no new species seen and the total number of species recorded since 2012 is 20.
River fly	R&DAA/EA		No data
Hoverflies	Linda Fenwick	Single survey	Five species recorded in a single survey on 15 August
Orthoptera	Mike Turton	June, July	Roesel's Bush Cricket and three species of grasshopper were found in sweep net surveys in June and July.
Reptiles	Mike Turton		Grass Snake and Slow-worm were recorded.
Amphibia	Mike Turton	August	Common Toad was 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 was again flooded early and late in the year but dried during the mid summer months. 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. No Water Rail surveys were done, but birds were present through the breeding season. A Little Owl again used a hole in a Willow on the south side. Records for this area are **not** included in the Fobney Island survey data.

Butterflies

Although another warm summer resulted in a good butterfly year generally results on the island, section 2 of the transect, were a little disappointing. This despite a reasonable showing of flowering plants. Common Blue, and the 'browns' were present but in only average numbers considering the good conditions.

Pleasingly 23 of the 24 species so far recorded were in evidence and this includes Green Hairstreak which was new for the reserve. Only the occasional immigrant Clouded Yellow was absent. Common Blue numbers were a little disappointing on the island but Brown Argus numbers continue to increase both on the island and now on the south bank too.

Green-veined White had a very poor year. This species is usually present in good, sometimes very large, numbers on the south shore but two hot summers are not to their liking and may be the cause of their scarcity. However, Small and Large Whites, boosted by many immigrants, were present in unprecedented numbers..

Other species generally followed national trends with Comma, Red Admiral and Peacock numbers a little disappointing. Numbers here were especially low along the hedge-line facing Smallmead grasslands, usually a stronghold for them.

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 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.

Four full surveys were carried out in 2019: 15th May, 27th June, 29th July and 19th September. The south bank route was included in the June and September surveys. In addition, casual records were collected on 31st July during a guided dragonfly walk. The weather was variable with only the June and July surveys being carried out in temperatures above 17C with clear skies, although numbers on the June survey were affected by the breezy conditions.

The increase in both *Typha* and *Phragmites* beds along the edge of the eastern lake mean that there are areas of the lake which cannot be checked from the shore. This will probably have resulted in artificially low counts of the species using the lake, especially Red-eyed and Small Red-eyed Damselflies which are not as mobile as some of the larger dragonflies.

Overall numbers, especially for the damselflies, were well down on previous years due to the weather and visibility of the lake.

15 species were recorded during the year. The season started late, hence the late date for the first survey and numbers for most species were low, despite the generally hot weather throughout the summer.

Species recorded on survey for the first time in 2019:

No new species were recorded this year.

Species recorded in previous years but not recorded in 2019:

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

Emerald Damselfly

Southern Hawker

Broad-bodied Chaser

Species showing evidence of breeding:

Azure Damselfly

Common Blue Damselfly

Emperor Dragonfly

Common Darter

The following species were recorded in 2019:

Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*). The highest number recorded in 2019 was just seven (in May), but the south bank was not checked on this survey. One was recorded on the south bank in June

Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*). Recorded on the island, canal towpath and the south bank, but again only in small numbers with a maximum count of 25 on the canal towpath in July and 18 on the south bank in June.

Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*). Very few again with five on the island in June. See comment above on the impact of emergent vegetation.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*). Three recorded in July on the eastern lake. See comment above on impact of emergent vegetation.

Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*). Only recorded on the May survey with 28 on the island. A single exuvia was found, showing that the species is breeding.

Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*). A low maximum count of 210+ on 27th July (130 on island, 37 on the canal towpath and 46 on south bank), although numbers were probably affected by the windy weather. Well-established breeding on site.

Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*). Recorded in May, June and July; a maximum count of five in June.

Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*). Recorded in June and July with a maximum count of two in July.

Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna mixta*). A total of six recorded on the island, canal and south bank on the September visit.

Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*). Recorded in June and July with a maximum count of six in June and seven in July, all apart from one on the island. Three egg-laying females were recorded on the eastern lake.

Hairy Dragonfly (*Brachytron pratense*). Two recorded on the eastern lake in May. This species is now established on the island.

Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*). Two recorded in June on the eastern lake.

Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*). Surprising not to find this species in 2019 as it was doing well in 2018. The poor weather on the May survey may be one cause.

Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*). Surprisingly few. Recorded in June and July, but numbers never got above eight.

Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*). Another poor year with a maximum of 13 recorded in July and eight in September.

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

Mike Turton led a dragonfly walk on 31st July as part of the week-long Wild About Reading event. This was well attended 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

Hoverflies

Five species of Hoverfly were recorded in a survey by Linda Fenwick on 15 August 2019.



Cheilosia sp (female)



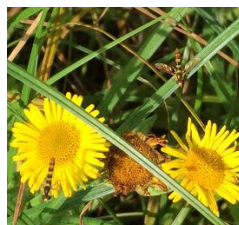
Eristalis tenax (male)



Eristalis tenax (female)



Myathropa formea (female)



Sphaerophoria sp (male)



Volucella zonaria (female)

Reptiles & Amphibians

Of the two hibernacula on the north side of the island, one was damaged by mowing at the end of 2018 and the other one was subsiding. Both were rebuilt during a CROW workparty on 29th May and the refugia resited. The refugia were checked on four occasions – April (when nothing was found), May (two checks, one during the CROW workparty) and September. The hibernacula and refugia on the southern side of the island have almost disappeared under the grass, but there have never been any records from there.

Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*). A single slow worm was found under refugia next to the hibernacula nearest the pond on 15th and 29th May and two on 5th September. All were adults.

Grass Snake (*Natrix helvetica*). A single adult was found under a refugia next to the hibernacula nearest the pond on 29th May during the CROW workparty.

Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*). A small adult toad was found under one of the reptile refugia in February.

Small Mammals

No records of small mammals for 2019 other than Moles, with numerous molehills along the river bank.

Orthoptera

Orthoptera were recorded on two occasions – one in late June and one in late July using a sweep net. The following species were found:

Meadow Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*).

Field Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*)

Common Green Grasshopper (*Omocestus viridulus*).

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

Incidental Records

The following non-target species were recorded during surveys:

Butterflies

Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*)

Orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Comma (*Polygonia c-album*)

Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*)

Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*)

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)

Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*)

Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*)

Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*)

Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)

Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)

Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*)

Moths

Cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*)

Six-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*)

Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet (*Zygaena lonicerae lonicerae*)

Other Insects

Water Ladybird (*Anisosticta novemdecimpunctata*) 7-spot Ladybird (*Coccinella septempunctata*)

Four-banded Longhorn Beetle (*Leptura quadrifasciata*) Bug (*Rhabdomiris striatellus*)

Sloe Shieldbug (*Dolycoris baccarum*)

Spiders

Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*)

Four of these colourful spiders were recorded in webs on the island during the Wild About Reading walk.

Bats

No survey in 2019.

Birds

Species	● present w winter only S summer only	Breeding code	Notes
Total species	81	47	
Mute Swan	●	FL	
Greylag Goose	●	FL	
Canada Goose	●	FL	
Egyptian Goose	●		
Shelduck			
Mandarin Duck	●	H	
Wigeon			
Gadwall	● w		
Teal	● w		
Mallard	●	FL	
Shoveler			
Garganey			
Pochard			
Tufted Duck	● w		
Pheasant	●	P	
Little Grebe	● w		On river
Great Crested Grebe			
Cormorant	●		
Little Egret	●		
Grey Heron	●		
Red Kite	●		
Sparrowhawk	●		
Buzzard	●		
Kestrel	●	♀	
Hobby	● S		
Water Rail	●	T	
Moorhen	●	H	
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	● S		
Feral Pigeon	●		
Stock Dove	●		
Woodpigeon	●		
Collared Dove	●		
Ring-necked Parakeet	●		
Cuckoo	● S	H	
Barn Owl			
Swift	● S		
Kingfisher	●	H	
Green Woodpecker	●	H	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	●	T	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker			Drumming 200m N of Fobney Lock in April

Species	● present w winter only S summer only	Breeding code	Notes
Skylark			
Sand Martin	● S	H	
Swallow	● S		
House Martin	● S		
Meadow Pipit	● w		
Grey Wagtail	●	T	
Pied-White Wagtail	●		
Wren	●	T	
Dunnock	●	T	
Robin	●	T	
Whinchat			
Stonechat	● w		
Nightingale	● S	T	Singing from scrub on south bank of river April/May
Wheatear			
Redstart			
Blackbird	●	T	
Fieldfare	● w		
Song Thrush	●	T	
Redwing	● w		
Mistle Thrush	●		
Cetti's Warbler	●	T	Singing at two sites - south bank of river and canal bank
Sedge Warbler	● S	T	
Reed Warbler	● S	FL	6 territorial birds
Blackcap	● S	T	
Garden Warbler	● S	T	At the usual site in scrub at west end of island
Lesser Whitethroat	● S	S	Probably a passage bird
Whitethroat	● S	FL	
Dartford Warbler			
Chiffchaff	●	T	
Willow Warbler	● S		
Goldcrest	●	T	
Long-tailed Tit	●	T	
Blue Tit	●	FL	
Great Tit	●	FL	
Nuthatch	●	T	
Treecreeper	●	T	
Jay	●	H	
Magpie	●	UN	
Jackdaw	●	T	
Rook	●		
Carrion Crow	●	UN	
Raven			
Starling	●	T	
Chaffinch	●	T	
Greenfinch	●	T	
Goldfinch	●	T	
Siskin			
Linnet	●		
Lesser Redpoll			
Bullfinch	●	S	
Yellowhammer			
Reed Bunting	●	P	

With the development of areas of Phragmites the numbers of Reed Warblers (a new breeding species in 2018) has grown to six territories and Water Rail may now be breeding. However, low water levels and denser vegetation in the scrapes have made the island less attractive to waders and to most wildfowl.