



## FRITTON LAKE Wildlife Watch



### Autumn

The previous unseasonal warm and dry weeks has resulted in a second Spring. The grass is growing like it is May, and even shrubs like Rhododendron are in flower! Everything is a little confused, with many species capitalising on this extended growing season. There is certainly no shortage of food, with lots of lush greenery and nuts being produced. Squirrels and Jays are perhaps the most noticeable of species at this time of year, hurrying to collect and store as much as possible whilst the bumper crop is available.

#### Plants, Trees and Shrubs

With no frosts in sight to stem plant growth, Autumn is arriving late, as there are very few signs of leaves changing colours or leaf fall. Elders are covered in purple berries, and sloes are forming on the blackthorn, and acorns are dropping like raindrops. The usual autumn harvest of blackberries from the Brambles is virtually absent. Normally, the berries form in July, and ripen with the August sun. However, due to low rainfall in September, very few berries formed. Ash are generally the first to lose their leaves, and once the frosts hit, the Autumn colours will be spectacular.

#### Birds



Birds are still active – the Collard Doves on the Carousel have recently fledged, Barn Owls are very active looking for small mammals, and Pheasants are much more noticeable, as they search out new habitats and territories. Last year we were visited by a migrating Osprey, so keep your eyes peeled on the lake. They generally stop off on their way to Africa

The Swallows, swift and house martins all left in September, and along with them the Warblers, although Black Caps tend to remain in the UK because of the mild winters. Look out for Redwings migrating in from Scandinavia in September, and Field Fares in October.

## Insects



Warm evenings and warmer days mean that there are unusually high numbers of insects, which would normally perish from October weather and frosts. There are several species of butterflies flying, including Red Admiral, Peacock and even Holly Blue. Also there are high numbers of garden spiders, which will be depositing eggs in silken

cocoons ready for next spring. Be sure to take your camera to see their webs glisten in the morning dew.

Bees, wasps and hornets are still busy in their paper nest. At this time of year new queens are raised, which leave the colony, to mate and hibernate. They will then emerge in the spring to create a new nest and colony.



## Fungi and Mushrooms

The frequent rainfall in August has produced a high abundance of fruiting bodies. There are several species worthy of note, the Fly Agaric (left), which grows below birch trees, and the Yellow Staghorn Fungus (centre), which is easily recognisable, and the Earth Star (right).



There are also puffballs growing in the woods, as well as stink horns (you'll smell why!) and boletus, often appearing as fairy rings in the meadows. The latter phenomenon is actually a natural process, where the mycelium (roots) grows from one original point, and grows out away from it over many decades. Often a darker or lusher ring of grass is seen, which reflects the mushroom breaking down of nutrients, especially nitrogen.

## Mammals



Bats can still be seen flying on these warm evenings and many will be preparing for hibernating this winter by filling up on the large moths that fly at this time of year. Pipestrelles can frequently be seen over the water, catching midges and mosquitos, whilst the larger horseshoe bats are seen along hedgerows and on the woodland edge.

Hedgehogs have regularly been seen, however these have been mainly this years young, and despite the bountiful August, are still under weight. They need to weigh over 1lb, otherwise they may not survive the winter. Feeding them cat food is beneficial (but not fish flavoured, and not milk either).



## Reptiles, Amphibians

Autumn is the time when temperatures cool sufficiently to prevent cold bloods being active. Snakes and slow worms have buried deep into woodpiles and underground refuges, whilst frogs and toads have found damp, safe areas to wait out the winter. Did you know that frogs and toads have a special blood that contains antifreeze like what is found in cars, to stop their bodies freezing!

## Fish



Autumn is an interesting time in the fishing calendar: Pike (seen here) are still regularly caught, along with Gudeon. Many fish start swimming up to the east end of the lake, where we have created fish shelters as winter refuges, to prevent predation by the hungry Herons.

Please help us, by mentioning to staff any notable sightings. Thank you