



THE FRIENDS of PRIORSLEE LAKE
www.priorslee.org.uk

Report No.5 on Priorslee Lake

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The "Friends of Priorslee Lake" is a group of people interested in the wildlife, and particularly the birds, to be found on and around Priorslee Lake, Telford.
- 1.2 The aims of the Group are to study the wildlife on and around the Lake, to encourage the watching and recording of birds on the Lake, to try and protect the site from damage from any cause and to enhance the natural qualities of the site.
- 1.3 The Group also believes that the site should receive some classification as befits its importance as an area for birds.
- 1.4 This report is a further update on the current position regarding development close to the Lake and on related issues. It also gives brief details of the reasons for the wildlife value of Priorslee Lake and some idea of the sort of protection it needs in any forthcoming development if it is not to be destroyed in the process.

2. About the Lake

- 2.1 The Lake is the property of Severn Trent and is a man made balancing lake for the water system in the area. It was made a number of years ago by damming the eastern end and is now believed to be 20/30 years old.
- 2.2 It has for many years been used for sailing, similar water sports, model boating and for fishing. During this time the wildlife on and around the Lake has developed naturally.
- 2.3 Although at the time when it was first formed it was no doubt devoid of most trees and water plants, and so also devoid of most wildlife, it has considerably matured over the intervening years. It has become a valuable ecosystem in its own right
- 2.4 Priorslee Lake is now a jewel in the wildlife system of Telford. There is no doubt that no other lake in Telford comes anywhere near it for the number and variety of birds which it supports. Together with the Granville Country Park and the Ironbridge Gorge nature areas, it makes for a variety of habitats so necessary to the bird life in and around the Telford area.

3. The Surrounding Area

- 3.1 It has to be understood that Priorslee Lake is not a solitary bird spot in a completely desolate surrounding area. Priorslee Flash is also a good bird area, though not as good as Priorslee Lake, and the Wesley Brook acts as a wildlife corridor from the Flash to the Lake and even beyond towards Shifnal.
- 3.2 It is therefore essential that this corridor is maintained to enable birds to pass along it to and from Priorslee Lake during feeding and migration times.

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4. Priorslee Lake Wildlife

- 4.1 The Lake has been watched for many years by a number of local birders and careful records kept of bird sightings. These records form part of the county records for Shropshire maintained by the Shropshire Ornithological Society and ongoing records are published in quarterly and annual reports and are available for research and for access at local and national level.
- 4.2 Attached is a comprehensive list of bird recordings from 2000 to 2007. This shows that 155 different species of birds have been recorded on or around the Lake, including 41 breeding species, 99 over-wintering species and 24 scarcities, over the given time.
- 4.3 Twenty-four of the bird sightings are considered scarce or rare and the list includes birds which are “red listed” as in special need of conservation measures. Perhaps the most enigmatic of these is the Bittern recorded in 2002. The Lake has been visited by a number of scarce gulls, a Black Tern, Osprey, Red-rumped Swallow, Pectoral Sandpiper, Grey Phalarope and a Purple Heron to pick out just a few.
- 4.4 The lake has appeared in national reports of rare birds seen which means that both it and Telford are known nationally in the world of keen birders.
- 4.5 Shropshire is not a county known for high bird counts or mega-bird rarities but the Lake is within the top five of the best birding sites in the county and on that ground alone deserves conserving. (Often within the top three – depending on recent reports.)
- 4.6 In the wintertime the Lake holds an important gull pre-roost, being large enough to accommodate four figure numbers of these birds. It is in these roosts that the rarer gulls are usually to be found.
- 4.7 Whilst the non-bird wildlife has not been studied and recorded in nearly as great a depth as birds, and therefore comprehensive records are not so readily available, it would be strange indeed if the Lake supported a good range of birds but a poor range of other wildlife. This point is being addressed but it may take several years study to produce quality records – particularly for those creatures only found at certain times of the year or which are scarce and take time to locate.
- 4.8 However, it is known that the Common Spotted Orchid, the Southern Marsh Orchid and the Bee Orchid are found at the site.
- 4.9 The Friends of Priorslee Lake recognises the unique contribution that Priorslee Lake makes to the wildlife of Telford. In addition to a good number of resident birds, the Lake attracts a wide range of summer and winter visitors as well as birds on spring or autumn migration. Add to that a large and varied gull pre-roost and the regular rarities and the wildlife value of the Lake becomes all too apparent.
- 4.10 The link via Wesley Brook to Priorslee Flash simply makes the area even more valuable as neither would be as good as they are without the other.
- 4.11 It is important to stress that the Lake is the biggest stretch of open water in Telford and its size allows other activities such as sailing and fishing to go on mostly without undue disturbance to the wildlife.

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5. Priorslee Lake Designations

- 5.1 The Lake is, of course, part of the “Green Network” of Telford. This gives it no statutory protection and is not based on any wildlife value. It could be taken out of the Green Network at the stroke of a pen. However, it is hoped that the Borough Council and its members and officials will not tinker too much with the existing green areas as once these are lost to development it is almost impossible to get them back.
- 5.2 The Council is currently re-assessing the “Green Network” – which has been a tremendous asset to the lifestyle of Telford people as well as to local wildlife. There is pressure from the Government on councils to build more houses and this inevitably puts pressure on open spaces. It would be a great loss to Telford if any of the open spaces were removed from the “Green Network” and therefore left more vulnerable.
- 5.3 In particular, the greatest loss to Telford would be for Priorslee Lake to lose its designation as part of the “Green Network”. It is to be hoped that it will be on the new list when it is eventually published.
- 5.4 In 2007 Priorslee Lake was designated a “County Wildlife Site” by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. The Trust’s full time staff, who made the designation, consists of professional and qualified staff well experienced in wildlife and environmental issues. The designation was not lightly made and reflects the value of the site to the local birdlife in particular.
- 5.5 This designation does not have any legal standing in itself and does not ensure the Lake is preserved as a wildlife site for the future. However, it does state its value as a wildlife area and it does impose a moral duty on the owners and users of the site to protect it and not to damage the wildlife credentials of the Lake and surrounding area.
- 5.6 It is hoped that the designation will be the catalyst for those involved in developments in the area to appreciate the value of the Lake for wildlife. Only time will tell!

6. Ownership of the Lake and Current Use

- 6.1 Priorslee Lake is owned by Severn Trent and it is difficult to see how anything can be done to or with the Lake without their co-operation. This particularly applies to the protection and enhancement of the wildlife as well as to any development that might encroach on the Lake or its surrounding area.
- 6.2 However, it is hoped that Severn Trent, as a responsible organisation, will be sensitive to environmental issues and will be keen to display its green credentials. Surely Severn Trent will not want to become known and criticised for allowing the destruction of such an important wildlife site in Telford?
- 6.3 The recorded wildlife has lived side by side with the existing users of the Lake (see paragraph 2.2) and there is no reason why this should not continue. The only cause for concern would be the use of large power boats, which might swamp water birds, and the use of any boats close to breeding areas in the spring and early summer. Fishing does not seem to be a problem as fishermen are generally quiet.

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- 6.4 It is hoped that the existing water sports users will accept the wildlife value of the site and be sensitive to the needs of the wildlife while following their chosen sport. With some consideration there is no reason why the two should not co-exist.
- 6.5 Most birds are protected by law, particularly during the breeding season, and presumably other lake users would not want to break the law.
- 6.6 The Friends of Priorslee Lake have no desire to prevent others from enjoying the Lake as long as the wildlife is not adversely affected.

7. Commercial and Housing Development

- 7.1 Plans are in hand for commercial and housing development in the Priorslee area and in particular adjacent to Priorslee Lake. Naturally this is of concern to the Friends of Priorslee Lake and to others who value the wildlife and country aspect of the Lake and would not like to see it destroyed in the process.
- 7.2 It is not the purpose of the Friends of Priorslee Lake to comment too much on the proposed housing development since this is not adjacent to the Lake. However, we are aware of concerns by local residents that open and green spaces within the estate might be squeezed and this would be detrimental to the overall wildlife situation.
- 7.3 Care needs to be taken in the design of housing areas to ensure that people and damaging pets (such as cats and dogs) are not placed too close to wildlife sensitive areas.
- 7.4 In particular, the wildlife corridor of Wesley Brook needs to be maintained and protected and this means it should not be piped and trees and hedging adjacent to the brook should be retained. Care will need to be taken over the positioning and design of bridges and roads.
- 7.5 It would be good to encourage people to visit the wildlife areas and we see the Lake in particular as an asset to both the area of Priorslee and to the whole of Telford.
- 7.6 Of greater concern is the commercial development which is adjacent to the northern boundary of the Lake site. Care will need to be taken to ensure that the buildings do not cause damage to the trees/bushes on that side of the Lake.
- 7.7 A hotel is proposed at the Castle Farm Way end of the northern boundary and this may involve the removal of some trees on the development land but planners may require others to be planted. There should be no direct access from the hotel to the Lake, as this would mean further tree loss, but hotel visitors could walk around the end to the Lake and so an enhanced Lake would be an asset to the hotel.
- 7.8 The Friends of Priorslee Lake are not against commercial development near the Lake and accept that some such development will take place.
- 7.9 Such development, carried out in the right way, could in fact protect the Lake by providing a buffer of commercial buildings between the new housing and the Lake and thus reduce the number of cats which might roam to the edge of the Lake and kill much of the bird and creature wildlife.

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- 7.10 It is particularly important that good fencing is put between the commercial development and the Lake site to prevent people from braking through the trees to gain access to the Lake edge. We suggest a six foot metal paling type fence.
- 7.11 Commercial development could also provide the incentive and finance to enhance the wildlife aspects of the Lake and show the green credentials of those involved, so improving the wildlife value of the site for the whole of Telford.

Recommendations

8. The Friends of Priorslee Lake make the following recommendations.
- a) That the study of the fauna and flora at the Lake should continue.
 - b) That talks take place with Severn Trent to ascertain their attitude to the wildlife value of the Lake.
 - c) That Telford Borough Planning and Project Officers agree and confirm a commitment to retaining and enhancing the wildlife value of the Lake.
 - d) That all commercial developers be required to ensure their plans show a commitment to retaining and enhancing the wildlife value of the Lake.
 - e) That some form of liaise and co-operation is developed between all Lake users.
 - f) That it is agreed by all involved which parts of the area surrounding the Lake and on the Priorslee estate should be ear-marked for wildlife protection. This should basically be as follows:
 - i) The trees, shrubs and vegetation along the northern edge of the Lake, including the reeds and water vegetation.
 - ii) The north-western corner of the Lake as far as the reed beds extend.
 - iii) As much as possible of the trees between the Lake and Ricoh.
 - iv) The open area in the south-west corner – a possible flower meadow.
 - iv) The trees between the Lake and the M54.
 - v) Wesley Brook along its whole length from Flash to Lake.
 - vi) Some wildlife enhancement around Priorslee Flash.

In due course further reports will be issued by the Friends of Priorslee Lake as further information comes to light, more detailed plans for the area are revealed and as developments progress.

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