



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

Priorslee Lake – Telford’s Premier Birding Site

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 This report details the importance of Priorslee Lake as a birding site. It also gives information on the ownership, history, development and current use of the Lake, together with details of nearby sites and reasons for the wildlife value of the Lake site.

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 or other site 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 nearby is a small lake and also a good bird area, though not as good as Priorslee Lake. Wesley Brook runs from the Flash to the Lake and acts as a wildlife corridor between the two.
- 3.2 Wesley Brook passes through Priorslee Lake and goes on towards Shifnal to the east, maintaining the wildlife corridor beyond the Lake.

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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 A comprehensive list of bird recordings from 2000 to 2007 is available. 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 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.

5. Priorslee Lake Designations

- 5.1 The Lake is part of the “Green Network” of Telford. This gives it no statutory protection and is not based on any wildlife value. However, it shows the importance the local council places upon the Lake as an open space within the town boundary.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.

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 by continuing protection for the wildlife of the Lake.
- 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.
- 6.4 The Friends of Priorslee Lake have no desire to prevent others from enjoying the Lake as long as the wildlife is not adversely affected. Indeed, considerate use of the Lake brings others into contact with the wildlife and that should be for the good.

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 on the northern side.
- 7.2 It looks as though commercial development (offices) will be nearest to the Lake and this should form a barrier to protect the trees and bushes on the northern boundary.
- 7.3 The Friends of Priorslee Lake are not against commercial development near the Lake and accept that some such development will take place. This should enhance the value of the Lake as a natural area in a new town setting.

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- 7.4 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 if housing were adjacent to the Lake and kill much of the bird and creature wildlife.

Access

- 8.1 Although private property there has been access for many years and a well established path all the way around the Lake means all areas can be seen.
- 8.2 The sailing club has vehicular access and a club house at the western end and the fishing club has limited vehicular access at the eastern end.
- 8.3 Car Parking could easily be provided at the western end. A main road borders the Lake at the eastern end and a layby provides parking between the road and the Lake.
- 8.4 The Lake is just off J4 of the M54 and has good nearby roads from other areas and from within Telford so access from Telford, Shropshire and beyond is good.

The Future

- 9.1 There is no doubt as to the value of Priorslee Lake as a wildlife area and in particular as a good site for birds.
- 9.2 The Lake would be an ideal area for designation as a local nature reserve maintained by the council or by some other body.
- 9.3 The lake would improve birdwise with the provision of a management plan to enhance its potential for wildlife.
- 9.4 A development plan to improve access and facilities would also be an advantage.

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