



# THE FRIENDS of PRIORSLEE LAKE

## Interim Report No.1 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 an interim report giving 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.

#### 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 2006. This shows that 153 different species of birds have been recorded on or around the Lake, including 41 breeding species, 98 over-wintering species and 22 scarcities, over the given time.
- 4.3 Twenty-two of these sightings are of birds considered scarce or rare and including 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 and Grey Phalarope, to pick out just a few.
- 4.4 The lake regularly appears 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 or so best birding sites in the county and on that ground alone deserves conserving.
- 4.6 In the wintertime the Lake holds an important gull pre-roost being large enough to accommodate large 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 without undue disturbance to the wildlife.

## 5. Area Designation

- 5.1 Priorslee lake has no designation in terms of its wildlife value and therefore relies solely on the goodwill and care of the owners and those who use it for any consideration or protection it may receive.
- 5.2 It 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.
- 5.3 It is hoped that the last thing anyone wants for Telford is to make it a concrete jungle of houses, factories and offices where people have to leave to visit the countryside. One of the big assets of Telford has been the amount of countryside actually within the Town boundary – due to its make up of several existing towns and areas inbetween.
- 5.4 The Friends of Priorslee Lake feels that some better designation other than Green Network is long overdue – and one that takes into account its wildlife status. This status is the de facto position with the Lake – it is simply the case that it has not been recognised.
- 5.5 Consequently, the Friends of Priorslee Lake asked the Shropshire Ornithological Society to consider some form of designation and the Society took this up with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. The main problem is that the only possible designation is that of a “Wildlife Site” and this depends as much on other wildlife as on birds – and as has been stated previously, the recording of other wildlife has been neglected over the years so that this is now a problem to the designation.
- 5.6 The matter is still under consideration and it is hoped that at sometime in the future such a designation will be made. In the unlikely event that it is not, it will have to be understood that it is still a valuable bird site which needs protecting for the future.

## 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.
- 6.2 However, it is hoped that Severn Trent is a responsible organisation which 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 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 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.

## 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 likely to be much more adjacent to the Lake. The commercial developers are likely to see the Lake as an asset they can exploit to build and sell offices, factories or other commercial concerns on the side of the Lake. In fact, the term "Lakeside" coined by the Borough Council for the proposed commercial developments has already caused some alarm!
- 7.7 The Friends of Priorslee Lake are not against commercial development near the Lake and accept that some such development will take place.
- 7.8 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.
- 7.9 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.
- 7.9 In this Interim Report, 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 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 trees between the Lake and the M54.
- v) Wesley Brook along its whole length from Priorslee Lake to Priorslee Flash.
- vi) Some wildlife enhancement around Priorslee Flash.

In due course further interim 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. Eventually, a final report will be issued.

8<sup>th</sup>. August, 2006.

Richard Camp,  
Co-ordinator.