

Urswick Tarn Association  
Wildlife and Management report  
May 07-October 07

The last report covering the period Oct 06-May-07 highlighted the concerns expressed regarding the lack of Coots on the tarn compared with some time ago and the need to monitor the population.

Counting Coots seen on the tarn and comparing numbers year on year would seem to be the obvious way to monitor the population but Coots (mostly flying at night) are more mobile than many people realize-from late summer onwards numbers on the tarn can increase-decrease due to failed or non breeders dispersing, disturbance or weather conditions.

Obviously the most important aspect is to monitor the breeding population-no of pairs-success or failure but as has been pointed out before this will be time consuming and less accurate as vegetation increases during the summer.

A total of 6 occupied Coot nests plus one where apparently no eggs were ever laid were found round the Tarn verges between early May-June 22<sup>nd</sup>.

By May 20<sup>th</sup> the three earliest nests (A) (B) (C) were all devoid of eggs-there was no sign of young at (A) or (B) but at least 2 young were skulking in the reeds near (C).

In addition two more nests (E) and (D) were occupied.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> (at least 11 days after the eggs in both nests had gone) a single chick was finally located at (B) and two at (A).

Of the newer nests (D) was now empty with no sign of young while (E) contained 7 eggs.

June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2 young Coots continued to frequent the area between (A-B) but which nest they belonged to was never clear-2 young were near (B) where only one had been located previously while a single young was at (D) where no young had been seen since the nest was found empty on May 31<sup>st</sup>!

In addition another nest (F) was found which may or may not have been a second brood for (Ds) pair.

In the first week of July (F) was empty with no sign of chicks and only 2 young Coots could be located on the entire Tarn.

The 6 `active` nests found contained a total of 31 eggs-the 4 nests where young were known to have hatched having contained 19 eggs, on the basis that any predator finding a clutch of eggs invariably takes them all it seems reasonable to assume that all 19 of the eggs hatched, but as far as could be ascertained only 7 young were ever seen.

Although this might seem a poor result it seems probable that some young managed to keep out of sight-certainly some adults did.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> with 5 occupied nests one would expect at least ten adult Coots to be present but only 5 were found most of these on the active nests.

May 31<sup>st</sup> 8 Coots were seen, on June 22<sup>nd</sup> when one would expect few if any Coots to be moving in from elsewhere a minimum of 25 adult and 5 young were seen.

In the first week of July only 4 adults and 2 young were to be found but by Sept 17<sup>th</sup> 39 Coots were on the tarn.

One would expect any problem affecting Coots to also affect Moorhens so it seemed logical to monitor them also, but the problems encountered with Coot counting are magnified when counting Moorhens which nest and habitually skulk in areas of thicker vegetation.

Between early May-August a total of 7 active nests were found containing 41 eggs, in addition to these chicks were seen in three other areas and reported from a fourth and there were undoubtedly more.

Although young were eventually seen throughout virtually all areas of the verges any meaningful count was impossible `many` being the only verdict.

Having produced 5 cygnets one naturally assumed that the Swans would be largely problem free-how wrong can you get.

During the autumn a pair of new Swans appeared-drove our male Swan down the Beck and constantly attacked the female and cygnets.

Concerned villagers mounted guard for some time but people have to sleep-the RSPCA were unable to help so to save the cygnets the `new` Swans were `relocated`.

Peace reigned-briefly-two weeks later one of the `relocated Swans` reappeared with a friend and the whole process began again.

Obviously once the cygnets leave nature will have to take its course but at the time of writing chaos reigns one of the `new` Swans has been removed and its mate continues its campaign of harassment

The last report noted the Swans constant attacks on the local geese causing one goose nest with 5 eggs to be abandoned.

It now appears that two almost certainly three goose nests with eggs were abandoned in similar fashion while the eggs in another nest in a garden were dealt with by the landowner.

Few goslings appeared and those which did were constantly attacked by our male swan some almost certainly drowned, a promising example of biological goose control-long may it continue.

A Kingfisher has once again been reported on several occasions during the period, one exceptionally close encounter occurred as I was standing in the reed edge of the croft when a kingfisher attempted to land on my hand.

Realising its mistake it hovered briefly like a red and blue humming bird right in front of my face then landed briefly on a reed stem near enough to touch.

After a few seconds it flew off but away from the tarn into the croft farm yard-north along the access track and back to the tarn through Mr Blacklock`s garden.

The Great Crested Grebes raised 2 young but latterly only one has been seen, the smaller Little Grebe or Dabchick appears to have done well again this year with at least one brood of young being produced, two young were still being fed by the adults during mid September when 7 perhaps more were on the tarn.

During the period some 70 hrs of work has been carried out.

Recent work to ascertain how much of the tarns fringing reeds have been lost and where conditions are or could easily be made suitable to allow reeds to recover highlighted an area on the west side of the tarn along side Mr Dent`s land.

Remnants of phragmites reeds line small parts of the tarn edge where the depth of water should allow large stands of reeds to grow 4-5 metres out.

The obvious problem was shading by over hanging willows these have now been cut back-the branches to be used to help deter the ever present geese from destroying any new shoots which appear.

In the croft in recent days work has begun to remove more of the willows-widen out the boat launching area and make the fishing peg more useable.