

3.2.3. Fauna

EWR is a rare green jewel offering sanctuary to wildlife amongst many acres of urban built-up land. This 1.5 acre parcel of land is special because for over 50 years it has been left virtually shut off from human disturbance and interference and as a result nature has very successfully reclaimed it for herself.

Managed Parks or Human Recreational Areas like Alexandra Park and Edgeley Park, whilst beautiful and immensely helpful for human mental health and well-being, cannot be categorised as sanctuaries for wildlife in the same way as EWR. In percentage terms, less than 4% of the entire surface area of Edgeley is capable of supporting wildlife habitat to any consistent, self-sustainable or meaningful degree and here it is.

Now covered in years' worth of soil build-up, brambles, woodland and grassland, EWR provides fantastic habitat. The whole site is teeming with invertebrates (worms, slugs, beetles, insects, spiders, butterflies, moths, centipedes and millipedes) it has them all in unprecedented numbers. The security afforded by being fenced off, and the brambles and shrubs, along with all the invertebrates and trees, has made EWR special to Edgeley.

The fenced off nature of EWR has provided a constant safe refuge to foxes who have their den there and raise fox cubs to the delight of Edgeley residents when the cubs stumble through the fence and totter off down Moscow Road East or play in neighbourhood gardens.

Foxes, toads, hedgehogs, rats, birds, an occasional badger, moths, butterflies and a myriad of insects including dragonflies have and still can be experienced in EWR. Bats, both Pipistrelle and Noctule can be seen feeding above EWR late in the evening. Local people remember newts and a badger which used the railway premises as a corridor. Foxes are a regular sight, having a number of dens against the northern bank within EWR and help to control the local rat population.

One of our foxes



Imagine if the area were developed, where would the rats go? What if there were no foxes there to hunt them? We all remember the swarms of rats (in broad daylight) disturbed during the construction of the Cheadle End. One local lady on Finland Road recalls seeing swarms of them running through local streets. They got into the walls of her house and ate the electric wires, causing thousands of pounds of damage.

Birds

The area is home to many birds and attracts others - some that nest there and others that fly in-and-out looking for invertebrates to macerate to feed their young or for materials from among the many grasses and wildflowers to line their nests.

A Bird Survey conducted looking over EWR perimeter fence over 10 days (45 mins every morning) in March 2023, revealed by sight or assisted with binoculars that at that time 14 different species either lived there or were foraging for food or nest materials.

Regularly spotted, were: Blackbirds, Blue tits, Collared Doves, Crows, Great tits, House Sparrows, Long-tailed tits, Magpies, Robins, Woodpigeons and Wren.

House sparrows are of particular interest as they are listed on the Red List in the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (2021). *i.e.* of most concern. Worryingly, the Red List now accounts for more than one-quarter (29%) of UK species, more than ever before. Amongst the new additions to the Red List is the Swift. A swift was seen flying directly over EWR in July 2024.

The robins, blackbirds, great tits, long tailed tits, woodpigeons and wrens are always most visible, appearing to have generations nesting there every year. Of wonder in spring was the daily sighting of the long-tailed tits gathering spiders' cobwebs off the car wing mirrors along Moscow Road East and flying back up high into the trees in EWR to make their cobweb pouch nests suspended against the tree bark.

Two other birds spotted are of particular interest in as much as they are listed as Section 41 in the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (2021). Namely: Dunnock and Bullfinches.

Bullfinches are thinly distributed across the UK and are rarely spotted as there are only 265,000 breeding pairs in the country. They enjoy scrubby areas of bramble undergrowth near woodland edge, orchards, hedgerows and even parks and gardens. They feed on buds, berries, seeds, and particularly enjoy macerated insects to feed their young. There is a strong possibility that bullfinches might nest in the brambles in EWR as they have been spotted numerous times by residents of Moscow Road East since March 2023. The dunnock may also nest here as its preferred habit is vegetated areas with scrub and likes to nest close to the ground in hawthorn or brambles. The wren likes to feed in the brambles on the plentiful insects and spiders. The house sparrows were incredibly busy in March 2023 flying in and out of EWR with beaks full of grasses, returning to the rafters of our terrace houses to build their nests. They similarly need to feed their young on macerated invertebrates.

Unusually, in 2010/11 a tribe of magpies numbering over thirty gathered in two of the maturer trees along the edge of EWR before dispersing suddenly in the winter of 2012. A family of pied wagtails used the area for years but have not been seen for the last three or four. In 2023 a Nuthatch was spotted walking upside down clinging to a thick stem of a large tree and since the introduction of the Merlin App (on mobile phones) that recognises bird song Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs have been recorded in EWR. In fact, it is obvious (by their calls) that chiffchaffs have moved into nest there this year (2024).

It is clear that many birds live in EWR whilst others just pop in and out to use it as a larder to supplement their dietary intake also finding it a useful wild place to source nesting material in the

spring. How wonderful it is for residents of Edgeley to live in such close proximity to this beautiful oasis in an urban sprawl. The unique combination of having the parks alongside three bodies of water and a rewilded fenced-off parcel of land (EWR) bursting with insect life and berries and other resources combines to directly enhance and support all the wildlife activity we see.

The reservoirs also support a lot of other bird life as well as Mallards, Coots, Moorhens and Canada Geese. We often have Cormorants and Herons too. In the summertime Kingfishers visit and every November approximately 20 Goosanders fly in from Scandinavia making their home on the reservoir for five months before flying back in the springtime.

Whilst these aquatic birds do not generally frequent EWR, neither to forage nor nest (with the exception of the herons who have nested high up in EWR trees and the occasional lone Canada Goose looking for lost chicks) we fully understand to what extent the impact of losing EWR's part in the local ecosystem will have on the biodiversity of all the reservoirs.

Pipistrelle Bats are commonly seen at dusk flying up and down Moscow Road and Moscow Road East, as well as flying low across the reservoirs and around EWR. This is the ideal habitat for them as they consume up to 3,000 insects per night consisting of: aquatic-flies, mosquitos, midges and other invertebrates such as moths. The reservoirs provide the aquatic-flies and EWR the invertebrates in plentiful amounts. Pipistrelle Bats enjoy urban areas and like to roost in trees, and also in between old roof tiles of the 120 year old terrace houses in the conservation area around the reservoirs.

Noctule Bats are the UK's largest bats. They can be seen flying higher than the Pipistrelles over the Edgeley Reservoirs and EWR. The Noctule Bats can be seen earlier than dusk in the summer months. They enjoy a diet of moths, beetles, mayflies and flying ants. Sadly, populations of Noctule Bats have declined greatly in the last few decades, due to a loss of habitat. This is a consequence of urban development which has resulted in the loss of mature trees used for nesting and hibernation. The Noctule bat is a priority species in the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan. It is also protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Foxes

Not only is it a joy to see the fox cubs in the summer and hear the vixens calling for a mate, telling you it's nearing the end of the winter, but they also provide a great service in the ecology of the reservoirs helping to keep a natural balance. With so little natural wild habitat urban foxes primarily scavenge for food but given the chance they will hunt for small mammals such as rats and mice, helping to keep rodent numbers under control. At times there are many rats around the reservoirs and given that expert ecologists are undecided for sure whether we in urban areas

One of our foxes in a garden at the east end of Moscow Road East



live 6ft, 10ft or 15ft away from a rat, it can only be a good thing to have resident foxes in EWR that patrol up and down the streets and around the reservoirs most nights. Not only do they assist in keeping rat populations down but foxes will take the opportunity to seize Canada Goose eggs and young, keeping in check their rapidly breeding numbers.

This 1.5 acres parcel of land is acting as a vital lifeline to many urban wildlife creatures. To needlessly take it away to create yet another carpark in such a large urban area will deny foxes a home. They have lived amongst us for so long and played their part around the reservoirs in keeping rat populations down and given such delight. To partially take some land and leave a bit will still render the whole site almost useless as foxes will not want to live so close to human disturbance. EWR provides security to raise cubs and gaining access to the Rail Line embankment opens-up miles of green corridors for the foxes to forage in and keep their population healthy.

Edgeley Reservoirs were placed here because there are natural fine white sand springs with rivulets under EWR making it an ideal home for city wildlife. This rare green jewel with rivulets of water, mature trees, grasses, scrub and beautiful flora, acts as a haven and place of shelter to wildlife. The plentiful invertebrates and blackberry brambles make it like a fantastic larder for nature and a secure home for many birds, mammals and amphibians. It is a **RARITY** in the grey dull urban sprawl! It is a green jewel, a true treasure of Edgeley.

Birds known to have utilized EWR directly (including outside of survey period March 2023):

Black Headed Gull, Blackbird, Blackcap, Blue tit, Bullfinch, Canada Goose, Chiffchaff, Coal tit, Collared Dove, Crow, Dunnock, Gold Crest, Goldfinch, Great tit, Grey Wagtail, House sparrow, Little Owl, Long tailed tit, Magpie, Meadow Pipit, Nuthatch, Pied wagtail, Robin, Rock Dove, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Swifts, Woodpigeon, Wren

Kingfisher (not in EWR but within 20m)

It is also beleieved Starlings use the grassland area in winter to feed.

Most Threatened

In England many of our rarest and most threatened species are listed under Section 41 (S41) of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. Outcome 3 of the Government's Biodiversity 2020 strategy contains an ambition to ensure that 'By 2020, we will see an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife and will have prevented further human-induced extinctions of known threatened species.' Protecting and enhancing England's S41 species is key to delivering this outcome.

Bullfinch, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Herring Gull, Song Thrush