# ‘RESTORATION’ AND RADLEY LAKES

***Pochard sheltering behind an island on Thrupp Lake, Radley  Copyright John Newbegin***

The Radley lakes complex consisted originally of twelve gravel pits, ten of which have already been filled with ash. Now only two are left, Thrupp Lake (area 10.2 ha ) and its much smaller neighbour Bullfield Lake (1.4 ha). Over the past 50 years these have become naturalised into a rich and beautiful wildlife site that supports over 1,400 species - at last count!

In the late 1980s, Oxfordshire Ornithological Society undertook bird surveys for the whole of Oxfordshire. The results, published in ‘The Atlas of Birds of Oxfordshire’, showed that the Radley lakes area had the greatest diversity of breeding birds in the county.

This was attributed to the wide range of habitat types in the area. Subsequent ash filling has replaced much of this diversity with 10 ash pits; creating yet another one will only further reduce it!

RWE npower wish to turn a beautiful lake into a massive ash tip, so their use of the word ‘restoration’ is inappropriate and completely misleading. And yet they continually and unashamedly point to the first ash filled lakes, A to D, as an example of the sort of ‘restoration’ we can expect for Thrupp Lake!

**‘Restoration’ of Thrupp Lake will be different from that of Lakes A to D.**

Lakes A to D, the previously ‘restored’ areas, are not comparable with Thrupp Lake. They were filled by a process that caused far less damage to the marginal vegetation. Much of this was left undisturbed during the filling and, therefore, was available to colonise the ash. Even so, as many species can’t grow in ash, parts of the surface are still grey and sparsely vegetated!

Nowadays, when lakes are filled they are required to have a thick clay lining and huge clay banks built around them to contain the ash. In the case of Thrupp Lake these will be nearly 5m high! The massive engineering works needed will cause complete destruction of the marginal vegetation, it will not be there to colonise the ash! During the digging out of the lake about 1,500 trees will be destroyed.

In the case of Thrupp lake, there will not even be any top soil to cover the ash as it will all have been used to restore other lakes.

Also, ash may not stabilize when it is stored wet in a clay pit, so the area could remain fenced off for decades!

## Why is Thrupp Lake irreplaceable?

Thrupp Lake supports hundreds of over-wintering wildfowl. Evidence suggests that Bullfield Lake has reached capacity at 120 water birds and could not possibly accommodate the hundreds of birds displaced from Thrupp Lake. The Planning Officer's report to Oxfordshire County Council carelessly suggests that this doesn't matter as they can easily fly off somewhere else! Surely the more sites that these birds can use, the less is the risk to their populations and, anyway, why shouldn't local people have the right to enjoy them too!

The large area of the lake provides a home for many species and a rich feeding ground for many others. Birds like kingfishers and herons rely on the fish, hobbies and the large population of bats rely on the millions of insects that breed in and around the lake! When the last lake, H/I, was filled, heron numbers at the local heronry dropped to almost half their previous numbers!

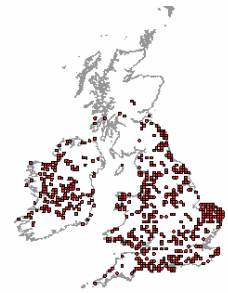
Thrupp Lake has banks which provide nest sites for kingfishers. Bullfield Lake does not. The loss of Thrupp Lake will mean that kingfishers, a protected species, will lose both a major food source and their nesting sites.

The lake has more than 20 islands where birds can breed unmolested by humans and other predators. Bullfield Lake has no islands! RWE npower plan to put a small pond with an island in the middle of the ash tip they will create out of Thrupp Lake. Will this really be an adequate replacement? Apart from its small size, how can a pond dug out of ash possibly support the huge numbers of fish needed by the birds using the area, especially since many toxins are known to be present in ash?

The large area of the lake disguises wide variations in depth of water that occur beneath its surface. Different depths suit the foraging needs of a variety of water birds feeding on aquatic vegetation, invertebrates or fish! Thus they help to create the conditions that support the huge number of species found in and around these two lakes.

## What about RWE npower's 'rare orchids'?

Recently, RWE npower have made much fuss in the press about its 'rare orchids' - marsh helleborines - growing in the 'restored area' of Lakes A to D.



***The distribution of marsh helleborines in the UK***

These grow on a small part of one of the 'restored' areas and are one of the few plants that thrive on ash. They are actually widely distributed over the UK as the above diagram illustrates.

For really rare orchids, look at the White Helleborines growing by the edge of Thrupp lake. They are at genuine risk from the proposals!

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