

# WORSLEY WOODS AND ENVIRONS

by Joey Eccles



Worsley woods and environs isn't the easiest place to bird and to see a variety of species often a bit of legwork is needed. It is generally underwatched but the rewards can be great (all three British woodpeckers have been recorded in the area over the last 2 years) and just about anything can turn up at any time.

Worsley woods itself is a mature wood spanning 30 hectares. The wooded valley is split by the M60 motorway so 'the woods' isn't exactly the quietest place but as the motorway morphs into background noise, it can become a peaceful and relaxing environment. The woodland itself is mostly deciduous, containing common woodland birds. Many paths dissect the woods but the best birds are usually found on the less explored tracks. The woods are usually most productive early morning, before the army of dog walkers and joggers descend onto the habitat, however the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker sightings of 2009 were mostly around 3.00pm. Other birds of note in the woods seen in the last couple of years include Kingfisher, Water Rail, Dipper and Brambling.



Above: Worsley Wood

From the north-west Kempnough brook runs through the woods to the dam. The brook itself is home to Water Rail (present all year round), Kingfisher and Woodcock plus Dipper has also been recorded along it. In winter, up to 15 Common Snipe and up to 50 Teal feed along it, though these can be difficult to see because of the marshy habitat and the vegetation (even in winter) that surrounds it. Old Warke Dam was built in the middle of the 19th century as a private boating and fishing lake for the first Earl of Ellesmere. Although fishing (along with boating and swimming) is now banned on the lake, the fish still remain. The lake is owned by Fred Done (of 'BET-FRED' fame) and his house 'The Aviary' overlooks the lake. The dam itself is deceptively shallow because of an increasing silt problem, and may in the future become a mudflat. The presence of the fish increases the potential of seeing a variety of waterfowl on the dam and in summer Little Grebe is often present, although it can be hard to see and Kingfisher regularly fish on the dam. Tufted Duck is annual. There is also a small mudflat on the dam extending from the marshy area and this has attracted Redshank, Common sandpiper, Snipe and Jack Snipe in the last couple of years. Rarities recorded on the dam include Black-necked Grebe and Garganey.



Above: Warke Dam



Above: The Packet House

The Bridgewater canal that runs through Worsley is famously orange, due to iron from the now defunct coal mines. Around the 'ABC bridge' (next to the road bridge) many Mallard are resident plus Moorhen and Mute Swan also breed in the immediate area. Grey Wagtail is also present and along with Kingfisher, the birds spread their time between the canal and the dam. Canada Goose is an irregular visitor and Black-headed Gull is often with the Mallard (especially when there's some bread being offered!). Swallows nest (up to 20 pairs) under the motorway bridges that cross the canal and other uncommon birds recorded over the canal include Green woodpecker and Hobby.

Worsley golf course is a relatively small and compact course. It lies at the northern end of Worsley and provides a link between Worsley and Monton. Around the course lie copses of trees and a stream runs from the south to the north. Water hazards allow habitat for commoner water birds such as Moorhen, Mallard and Grey Heron. The copses of trees provide a home for woodland birds which include two pairs of Sparrowhawks and Tawny Owls which are sighted regularly. The stream can hold Common Snipe, Woodcock and scarcer birds such as Green Sandpiper and Kingfisher have been seen in recent years. Other scarce birds seen over the golf course include Osprey and Peregrine.

The woods and its environs offer some of the best habitat in the area and they can hold a great variety of flora and fauna. As with any area though, persistence can often be key (it took 6 visits in a month to locate the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker of 2009!) but unfortunately the site appears to be rather under watched by birdwatchers and many fantastic birds probably go by unnoticed. Worsley Woods are therefore really worth a visit at any time of year and if more birders could make the trip perhaps a few more of its secrets would be revealed!

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**Joey Eccles, March 2011**

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