

Skylarks

Welcome to a bumper summer edition of Skylarks. There's been so much going on over the past few months we couldn't fit it all into the usual size newsletter so we've made it bigger. We hope you find something to interest you.

'Friends' website launched

The Friends of the Wick Country Park website went live in July and has already attracted a number of visitors and positive comments. It contains lots of information about the park including its history, forthcoming events and how to get a fishing permit. We hope to add more to the site soon including photos to the 'gallery' and 'flora and fauna' sections.

A great big 'thank you' goes to Nick Clarke who very kindly took the time to design the website for us and did such a fantastic job. Thanks also go to Paul and Gill Clarke who have volunteered to keep it updated.

Take a look for yourself at
www.friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk



A 'Garden Party' with a difference

Monday 14th July was a beautiful summer's day. It was pleasantly warm with a bright, cloudless sky when five volunteers, led by Nikki, assembled for an attack on the weeds in the shrubbery outside the Pavilion.

I met Christine in the car park and together we went to the Pavilion where we found Nikki and Dave already at work. We were later joined by Barbara and together with Mark (the Ranger) and amid much chatting and laughter, set about our task, which was not inconsiderable.

A caterpillar of the cinnabar moth was rescued by Nikki and rehomed by Mark. Later, led by Barbara, we were to find several of them gorging on ragwort. By mid-afternoon the sun was at its highest and things were getting really warm. Christine then decided that tea and biscuits were a good idea. By the time 4.30pm arrived most of us felt we'd had enough which wasn't a bad afternoon's work. There were six of us working and I personally had collected three sacks of weeds and I reckon we all did the same so about 18 sacks full of weeds were removed that day.

There is still much to be done. A few more work parties and several more volunteers should do the trick. So if you have the time and the inclination we would love you to join us for the next weeding bonanza on Monday 11th August from 9am.

Eric Dolby, Friend of the Wick Country Park



Crickets and Dragonflies

at

The Wick Country Park

Sunday 10th August

10am to 12noon

Join the Ranger and Friends of the Wick Country Park to identify and learn more about these fascinating creatures.

FREE event - no booking required

Refreshments available

Meet at the Pavilion

Parental supervision required for children



Paws in the Park

Our annual dog show, Paws in the Park, was a great success again this year with over 700 people attending. There were 191 entries in the fun dog show with classes from 'Cutest Puppy' to 'Best Veteran'. The Billericay Dog Training School impressed the crowd with their obedience and agility display and 45 dogs were tested for good behaviour in 'Temptation Alley'.

Over 50 children took part in the quiz and many enjoyed the craft activities in the Pavilion. Fifty prizes were won in the tombola. Twenty stallholders, many representing animal charities, used the event to promote their work and raise much-needed funds.

Fish and chips and ice cream were on the menu while gallons of tea, coffee and squash were provided free by the Friends of the Wick Country Park.

The feedback has been very positive so we hope to be able to hold a similar event next year.

If you came we hope you enjoyed yourself. If you were one of the many volunteers, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.



Billericay Dog Training School demonstrate obedience



Best in Show finalists with their owners, from left: Cutest pup, Lucy; Best condition, Sukie; Scruffiest dog, Tillie; Best rescue, Lucy; Prettiest bitch, Lacey; Dog judge would most like to take home, Cassie and; Dog with best child handler, Murphy. (Not shown are Talus, Handsomest dog and Lucy, Best veteran)



Best Condition and Best in Show winner - Sukie



Part of the agility display from the Billericay Dog Training School

From a volunteer's perspective

How lucky we were once again to have good weather for the Paws in the Park event. I had again 'been volunteered' into manning the 'Temptation Alley' game and also offered to lead a Dog Walk around the Park to start off the day.

Unfortunately, there were only two people and three dogs (two of which were my own) who came on the walk. However on return from that short gentle walk around the Park, with my friend and her dog, I finished setting up the Temptation Alley. This consisted of two lines of toys, balls, treats and food bowls set out in two lines with space in between them for the dogs to run. The idea was that the dogs would be placed at one end of the small arena and the owner would go to the other end and call the dog to them, hopefully without them pausing or touching the treats, toys and temptations!

Over 40 dogs took part in the challenge as well as one little boy who felt it was him that had to run through the toys! Most of the dogs completed the course without touching anything, though we did lose a few biscuits, and had to chase a couple of dogs around to retrieve the balls (I thought the dogs were supposed to do the retrieving!). It was not a serious game so myself and my helpers Sheena and Ellen did our best to get as many winners as possible, FUN being the order of the day. All successful competitors received a certificate with their dog's name on and a bag of treats courtesy of Burns food suppliers.

We were extremely grateful for the gazebo supplied by the Friends of the Wick Country Park to protect the dogs and owners from the sun, and it was shared with anyone who needed a break from the sun.

Throughout the day we watched lots of people and their dogs and families taking a walk around the Park. Many came in to see what was going on with the dog show and the Billericay Dog Training School Display team as well as the stalls.

I think that everyone who came to the event enjoyed themselves. Congratulations to everyone who competed in the Dog Show and Temptation Alley, as well as all the other volunteers who worked hard to make the day such a success.

Well done to the Committee and Friends of the Wick Country Park for another successful event.

Gill Beck, Friend of the Wick Country Park

Nature Quest



Our second biggest event of the year had families turn into nature detectives during Nature Quest. Lots of families enjoyed the activities on offer, starting with a quiz that got them exploring the park. There was also the chance for some pond dipping. This popular activity had the adults just as intrigued as the children to find out what kind of underwater creatures are living in the Park. A variety of animals were found including pond snails, dragonfly nymphs and, the children's favourite, newt tadpoles.

If they could be persuaded away from the pond, youngsters could also get creative in the Pavilion, making bug catchers, masks, snakes, plate gardens and other assorted crafts. They could also collect their certificates of achievement for completing the quiz.

The star attractions were the owls brought along by the Rescuers Wildlife Sanctuary who were raising money for their important work.

Feedback from parents and children was very positive. The weather was dry but quite windy so apart from a series of disasters involving gazebos it was a very successful day!



Children and adults fascinated by the pond creatures (above) and a closer inspection (top) with newt tadpole (inset)

From a volunteer's perspective

Sunday 20th July started off full of promise. The weather, which had been changeable, tending towards rainy, had changed to bright and dry. Mark (the Ranger) arrived to open the gates and after a short time to sort ourselves out we got started on erecting the gazebos. This proved more difficult than expected as there were no instructions and a pile of various poles. After a short while, Nikki produced the required instructions and the task suddenly became quite simple. On to the second gazebo and all seemed to be going well until a sudden gust of wind blew the half assembled structure over and damaged it beyond use. Fortunately Nikki came to the rescue again with a gazebo of her own.

By 11am all was ready and the first visitors arrived. No sooner had they been sent on the quiz than a second family arrived. Things seemed to be promising. Things then slowed down for a while until the first of the families arrived back from the quiz. They had obviously enjoyed the experience and told us all about the pond and its mysteries. The owls proved to be a popular attraction and were well worth a visit. Pond dipping and craft work attracted a great deal of interest. Several more families followed and the children were full of enthusiasm. At least one family enrolled as Friends of the Park.

Altogether it was not a disappointing day. The volunteers enjoyed it and I believe the visitors did too.

Eric Dolby, Friend of the Wick Country Park

Wildlife news

Sadly although the resident swans raised six cygnets this year only two of them have survived. One cygnet is known to have drowned while the exact cause of death of the others is unknown but could be down to deterioration in the weather.



On a happier note one of the large nest boxes placed in the park, to try to attract barn owls, has this year been host to a family of kestrels. Mark Williams (Wick Park Ranger) took these great shots, above and left.



I spotted these funny looking alder cones (below) whilst walking across the boardwalk one Sunday morning. I've since discovered that the strange red growths are galls caused by the alder tongue fungus, *Taphrina alni*. A gall is an abnormal growth produced by a plant and caused by



another organism usually a fungus or invertebrate.

Finally, teasels (above) were recently in flower. The seed heads should attract goldfinches.



**Deborah Belverstone
Chairperson**

Providing homes for wildlife

Bee houses

You may have read in the last edition of Skylarks about the open-fronted bee box design, filled with the hollow bamboo cuttings for mason bees. Another simple design consists of an empty tin can (e.g. soup or baked bean tin), packed with drinking straws.

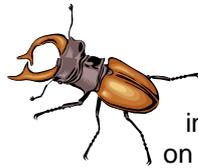
First the tin is thoroughly cleaned, then some candle wax melted into the bottom (about 8mm). The wax is allowed to set. The drinking straws are cut to size and packed into the tin. The wax is then re-melted and the straws gently pressed into the molten wax. With the tin kept upright the wax is allowed to reset.

These can be buried in the ground; ideally a south facing bank of a ditch or pond, with the front of the tin exposed, but pointing slightly down so that the water does not flood in.



Maurice Sweetland, Friend of the Wick Country Park

Stag beetle pyramid



The task during a recent work party was to create a home for saproxylic invertebrates (creatures who are dependent, during some part of their life cycle, on dead or dying wood). The best known of these creatures is Britain's largest land beetle, the stag beetle, *Lucanus cervus*. These beetles are now rare in Britain, mainly due to loss of suitable habitat. Many woodlands have been cleared of fallen trees, depriving stag beetles of the dead wood needed to complete their life cycle.

The pyramid of wood was built to encourage all saproxylic invertebrates to set up home within the Park. The hope is that they will eventually expand their range into the Park's recently planted woodland as it steadily begins to age.

The life cycle of many saproxylic beetles is very similar to that of the stag beetle. After mating, female stag beetles lay their eggs underground by logs, or stumps of dead trees. The larvae feed on the rotting wood and remain there for between three and five years while they grow. When fully developed, the larvae migrate to the surrounding soil where they pupate. After a short period the adult beetle metamorphoses and spends the winter in the soil, emerging the following summer to mate and lay eggs. Adults are very short-lived and generally die after mating.

The pyramid of wood that we built (right) is a suitable artificial nursery for the stag beetle and other saproxylic invertebrates. It was made by partially burying a number of vertical logs, which were tied together in bundles working from the centre out. Wood chip was scattered around the base of the logs and the soil was then replaced. Now we just have to wait to see who finds it. Who knows we may even have our very own stag beetle population setting up residence at the Wick Country Park!



Deborah Belverstone, Chairperson

Events

The Friends' committee has arranged the following events with the Ranger. All events start at the Wick Pavilion.

Work Parties

Third Sunday of each month
10am – 12noon and/or 1pm – 3pm
Come and have fun and help the Ranger with improvements to the park.

Crickets and Dragonflies

Sunday 10 August
10am to 12noon
Join the Ranger to identify and learn more about these fascinating creatures.

Garden Work Party

Monday 11 August
From 9am
Help weed the Pavilion garden.



Basildon District Council has organised the following event:

Annual Kite Festival
Sunday 28 September
11am to 4pm

A popular event whichever way the wind blows! Watch the experts or make your own. Have fun in the kite flyers' competition. Why not bring a picnic, as drinks will be provided. A lovely family day out.



Membership

If you are not a member but would like to join the Friends of the Wick Country Park please contact Nikki on 01268 734293 or email mikenikki@supanet.com

The Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

Deborah Belverstone - Chairperson
Nikki Gibson – Treasurer
Tricia Marshall - Secretary
Allison Tanner
Maureen Bradford

Contact Deborah on 01268 572732 or email dbelverstone@yahoo.co.uk

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