

Skylarks

A new year, a new Chairperson and another bumper edition of Skylarks to keep you up-to-date with all the latest news.

Former Chairperson's report

Well, it's been another busy year. We've had the spring bird walk in March, Paws in the Park in June (which attracted around 700 people), Nature Quest in July, Crickets and Dragonflies in August, we helped with the Kite Festival in September and finished with our Yuletide Ramble. We've had work parties, which included making bee houses and a stag beetle pyramid. The Wick Weeders, led by Nikki, have been hard at work in the garden outside the Pavilion. Our website was launched in July – for which we owe a huge thanks to Nick Clarke, who designed it, and Paul Clarke, who is keeping it updated for us. We now also have a notice board, which we bought with some of the money we've raised over the past few years. Skylarks has continued to be published quarterly and for the first time we had an extended summer edition.

I'd like to thank the committee, Mark and all the volunteers for another successful year. We are only a small committee so we are really grateful for everyone's support, especially at the larger events, which wouldn't be possible without that extra help. There are lots of ways you can and have been involved, whether it's keeping up to date through Skylarks or the website, coming to events, volunteering at events, donating mugs for the kitchen and items for the tombola at Paws in the Park, joining in with work parties and the Wick Weeders and contributing to Skylarks. However you've taken part - thank you - and please continue to support the Park by renewing your membership.

I've been Chairperson for the past four years now and have really enjoyed it. I've seen lots of developments and the membership grow but it is now time for me to stand down and give someone else the chance to be Chair. I will remain on the Committee and offer my support to Allison and wish her luck in her new role.

Deborah Belverstone

Message from the new Chair

Hello, I would like to introduce myself as the new Chairperson for the FOWCP committee. My name is Allison Tanner, mum of Jessica and Isabel, wife to Lee and part-time Civil Servant and belly dancer.



I have been a committee member for 3 years, (ever since I made eye contact with our membership secretary Nikki at the AGM!). Being on the committee has given me a unique insight into just what it takes to make a success of an open public space, (silly me, I always thought these things just happened!).

At the end of last year, our previous Chair, Deborah announced that, due to her forth-coming nuptials, she wished to step down. Despite my offering to plan her wedding for her so that she could remain in the position, she declined my generous offer and so it fell upon me to volunteer for the role. Attempting to fill Deborah's boots was a most daunting prospect, so I am delighted to announce that Christine Lee has agreed to be my Vice-Chair. Both Chris and myself are looking forward to interesting times ahead and are pleased to announce that the committee has some good news to share. FOWCP have recently been awarded a Grassroots Grant to enable us to purchase six picnic tables, all with wheelchair access. Grassroots Grants is funded by the Office of the Third Sector and all the committee members were instrumental in gaining the funds. (see page 3)

And so 2009 has started on a very positive note which I am sure will continue. Finally, for now, it remains for me to say a big 'THANK YOU' to Deborah for all the hard work she has done as Chair for the FOWCP. Thankfully Deborah has decided to stay on as a committee member – but in case she ever changes her mind, I really am very good at planning weddings!

Allison Tanner

Winter bird life at the Wick Country Park

Winter at first glance is a quiet time for watching wildlife. Many birds we associate with spring and summer spend the winter months in southern Europe and Africa, while those that remain seem to keep a low profile until spring, when the need arises again to defend a territory and raise a family.

Walking through the park in winter, however, proves there is still plenty to see. This season is actually advantageous for seeing wintering flocks of birds that otherwise, during the spring and summer, would remain hidden within the greenery. Flocks of blue, great and long-tailed tits fly in short bursts from twig to twig through the park's hedgerows looking for hidden insects amongst the blackthorn and hawthorn branches to feed upon. The long-tailed tits typically announce the arrival of the flock with their distinctive trilling calls.

On the open fields small numbers of loosely-flocked meadow pipits and skylarks fly through in stops and starts looking for small insects to feed upon, while other small birds such as linnets and finches frequently search through the rough areas of grassland looking for edible seeds. The goldfinch, frequently the most obvious with its liquid call, bright yellow wings and red facial marking, inadvertently calls attention to itself by often landing to feed upon a prominent teasel seed head standing several feet above the ground.

As we approach spring the onset of warmer weather will usher in a wealth of emerging wildlife; insects, which provide food for many of Wick Country Park bird life, and for the resident kestrels, emerging reptiles and amphibians supplement their principle diet of field voles and other small mammals, which has sustained them throughout the winter period.

Mark Williams
Ranger

Other birds to lookout for in winter at the Wick Country Park:

Black-headed Gull	Little Egret
Canada Goose	Moorhen
Chaffinch	Redwing
Coot	Siskin
Collard Dove	Snipe
Fieldfare	Sparrowhawk
Great Crested Grebe	Stonechat
Greenfinch	Woodpigeon
Green Woodpecker	

Join the Ranger

on a

Bird Walk

at the Wick Country Park

on

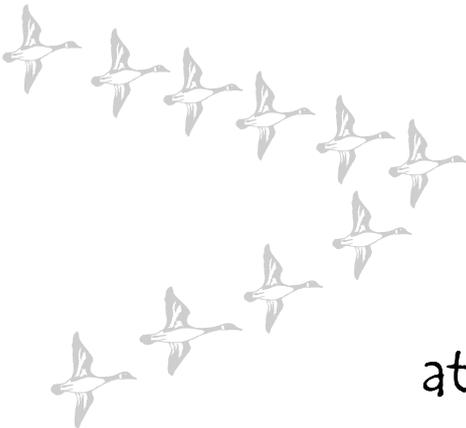
Sunday 19 April

Starting at 10.30am

Admission free

Meet outside the Pavilion

Tea and coffee will be available in the Pavilion after the walk.



GRASSROOTS GRANTS APPLICATION SUCCESS!

The Friends of the Wick Country Park are very pleased to announce that we have recently been awarded a Grassroots Grant to enable us to purchase six picnic tables, all of which are fully accessible by wheelchairs. We have been working very hard behind the scenes, in partnership with Basildon District Council's Countryside Services, to make The Wick Country Park much more attractive, and welcoming to visitors. We have already bought and had installed a notice board, which we use to display notices of forthcoming events and information about the park. This next phase of our project has been funded by Grassroots Grants, which is funded by the Office of the Third Sector (OTS). As part of the Cabinet office, the OTS leads work across Government to support the environment for, amongst others, voluntary and community groups – and that's where we come in. The picnic tables will be situated in the park to enable visitors to take full advantage of the views and all that the park has to offer. It is hoped that the tables will be installed in the spring and will be fully utilised in the summer of 2009. So, make a note in your diary, pack your picnic bag and come along to The Wick Country Park for a pleasant break in the Essex countryside. We look forward to welcoming you.

How the Wick Country Park helped with my home work

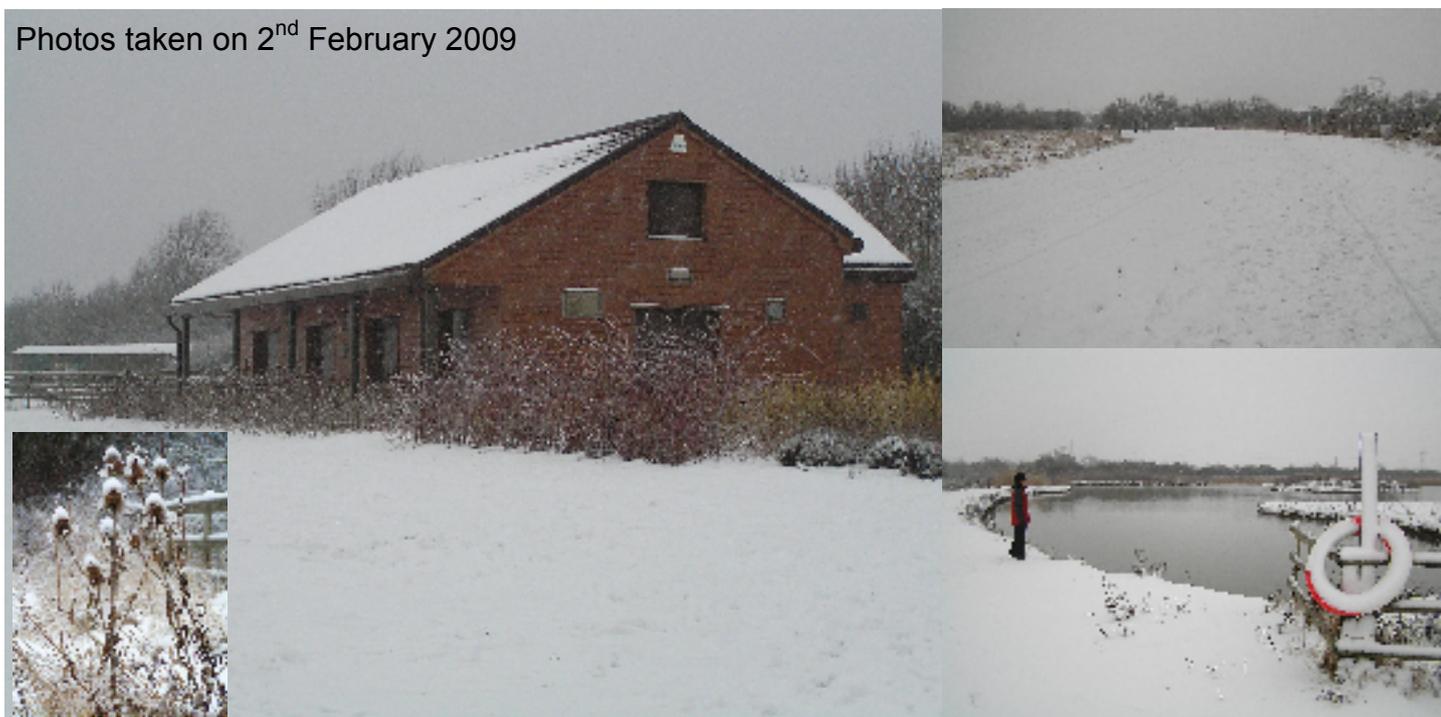
During the Christmas holidays, I went to see the pill boxes at the Wick Country Park because I had some homework to do about World War II. I thought they were very interesting and I found out that they were built to protect the country during the war if Germany had invaded us. I decided that it must've been really scary and I would not have liked to have been in one. I am really glad that they were never used. My teacher has put my homework on display in our classroom!

by Isabel Tanner



Winter wonderland at the Wick

Photos taken on 2nd February 2009



Roman artefacts from the Wick Country Park



During 2001 several arable fields were landscaped to create the contours of the Park we see today. One of the many diggers on site was assigned to dig out a section of the bank of the stream that runs through the Park. The driver of the digger was asked to create the small pond that now lies in the middle of North Benfleet Brook which runs through the Park. Fortunately the digger driver was keeping his eye on the soil that he dug out of the bank. At one stage he stopped digging and went to have a closer look at something that he had spotted in soil. He had seen what looked like broken pieces of red pottery. He recalled that on a previous job elsewhere he had found similar pieces of pottery and been told that they were from the Roman period. He decided to put the pieces to one side for further investigation.

I collected the pieces of pottery and took them to show to Sam Weller of the Billericay and District Archaeology Society. He confirmed that they were pieces from the late Roman period. Whilst most were shards of broken pottery, he pointed out one that was part of a roof tile, which suggested that there may have been a dwelling in the area some 1,700 years before.

I was telling fellow Friend Rose Johnson about the above finds and she told me that she was not surprised. She told me that about 20 years ago her sons used to play in the cornfields that are now occupied by the Park. They often came home with bits of broken red pottery that they had found in the fields. Rose knows her pottery and had identified the pieces as being Roman.

Roman material is often found in Essex, but material from The Wick Country Park was a pleasant surprise. But why there? Well, here is one possibility. If you look at a map of south Essex and draw a line from Canvey Island (where there was a Roman port) to Chelmsford (the local Roman garrison), you will find that the line passes close by the site of the Wick Country Park, and Beauchamps School where Roman material was found in a 1960s excavation. So it may just be that some of the pieces were dropped by people travelling between the port and the garrison. Alternatively, there is the fascinating prospect that Romans were once living in the area that we now know as The Wick Country Park!

So if you are walking in the park and see a bit of red pottery in the soil, pick it up – it might be another piece of Roman pottery.

Cliff Thornton



Events

The Friends' committee has arranged the following events with the Wick Country Park Ranger. *For all events please meet at the Wick Pavilion.*

Work Parties

*Third Sunday of each month
10am – 12noon*

Come and have fun and help the Ranger with improvements to the park.

Bird Walk

*Sunday 19th April
Starting at 10.30am*

Join the Ranger and Friends of the Wick Country Park in a spring stroll and try to spot and identify birds in a wide variety of habitats.



Paws in the Park

*Sunday 7th June
11am to 4pm*

All dogs and responsible owners are invited to this very popular annual event.

Nature Quest

*Sunday 2nd August
11am to 4pm*

Be a nature detective and discover some of the wild wonders of the Wick.

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@sunanet.com



The Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

Allison Tanner – Chairperson
Christine Lee – Vice Chairperson
Nikki Gibson – Treasurer
Tricia Marshall - Secretary
Deborah Belverstone
Eileen Cattell

Basildon District Council Countryside Services:

Marcus Hotten
Countryside Officer
Telephone: 01268 550088

Mark Williams
Countryside Ranger
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