

Skylarks

Spring has finally arrived and it's time to get out and enjoy your local park. The committee has been busy arranging new events for this year. Check out the details in this issue and we hope to see you soon.

A Little History

As with many other Essex villages within the Buchanan Triangle, Wickford was a farming village. Wickford is of Saxon origin, Wick meaning a winding river and Ford being a shallow river crossing. There are other meanings given to the village name, but this seems to fit the area.

The agricultural depression and the industrial revolution led to a decline in farming and related trades. The loss of this traditional livelihood in the area meant that workers had to look elsewhere for a living.

In the 1880s the arrival of the railway played a big part in changing Wickford from a farming village with a livestock market, to an urban town with commuters travelling daily to London and other industrial areas. To facilitate the construction of the railway adjacent farmland was compulsorily purchased. In later years much of Wickford's farmland, due to the sharp decline in agriculture within the area, was sold to private real estate companies.

This new real estate was then divided into small plots (plotlands) thereby enabling a profit to be obtained by selling to local people, who otherwise lacked the finances to purchase. This included the Cranfield Park Estate that the Wick Housing Estate now occupies, providing a home for approximately 2000 people.

By the latter half of the 20th Century the plotlands fell largely into disuse. After several changes of ownership and with the ever-increasing need for housing, The Wick Housing Estate was built. The land that now constitutes the Wick Country Park was purchased and set aside for public recreation by Basildon District Council, the choice being whittled down to several sports fields or a Country Park. The final decision was left to the vote of the Wick Community and by the turn of the 21st Century the Wick Country Park (at least as a concept) was born.

Historically the land, which is now The Wick Country Park, belonged to Phantom Hall Manor. (The Hall still remains and is visible to the east of the park). The land was used primarily for the grazing of cattle up until the late 1950s, with additional usage given over to wartime defence.

From the late 50s the estate came under its current ownership and production then went over to mixed farming with cattle and arable (wheat, barley and a small

proportion of maize). It is worth noting that the hedgerow surrounding the park has been in existence for at least two generations, while the hedgerow flanking the brook is likely to be a remnant of the time when the area was wooded and has therefore never been cleared entirely, if at all.

After some initial 'fringe' work, work specific to the creation of a country park began in 2001 and by December 2002 the park was officially open, though work continues to this very day.

Mark Williams

A Date for the Dog Owner's Diary

The Wick Country Park is a great place to walk the dog and with that in mind we have organised a Dog Awareness Day for Sunday 4 June. From 11am to 4pm there will be a variety of information available for dog lovers, a fun family quiz (all about dogs of course) taking you around the park and refreshments available from the Pavilion. At 3pm the Billericay Dog Training School will entertain us with a Dog Obedience and Agility Display.



Wildlife Photography Display

On Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 July the Pavilion will be open for you to admire the work of local photographer Darren Chaplin. There will be items for sale and refreshments will also be available. Drop in any time between 10am and 5pm on either day.



Squirrel Proof? - NO! Jays are shy birds? - NO!



While our dog Pippa was alive and running round the garden, birds and wildlife lived in fear as anything that moved was fair game for a good chase (although latterly the end result was very much in her mind). Sadly she is no longer with us and now we have been putting out more bird feeders to see what we can attract back to the garden. The usual abundance of common birds eventually reappeared, like great tits, blue tits, greenfinches, chaffinches, the occasional woodpecker, etc. On one occasion a bird appeared which we hadn't seen before – had to dash for the bird book which indicated it could be a black cap, (no it wasn't a great tit). We have an old pear tree that over the years has been taken over and strangled by ivy that produces large clusters of berries. The black cap was pecking at these berries although the book indicates they go mainly for insects. The bird was soon joined by a further small group of the same – they never reappeared.

At the same time as Mark was reporting fieldfares in the park we were lucky to have quite a large group feeding in our garden on some hawthorn berries.

We have a pair of 'tame' squirrels who hang upside down on the 'squirrel proof' feeder and somehow manage to pull nuts through the mesh. A pair of jays also feed from the same feeder, starlings as well, with the result that the feeder soon becomes 'pecked and wrecked'. We have so far had no success in getting a decent photograph of the jays at work as we can only view through the window. The jays are very obliging in that they also spend quite long spells at the birdbaths and we have been able to enjoy their colours and detail at our leisure. What a result.

Our attempts at enticing the wild birds back to our garden have been a great success and we will keep vigilant for any more exciting visitors.

Maurice & Alison Sweetland

Garden Update

It's about a year since the garden was started. We got off to a good beginning with a fairly mild winter and recently some much-needed rain (though more is still needed). So on the whole I am pleased to report that the garden is now well established.

Recent funding has allowed a sizable increase of plant stock. Three trees have been added: Judas tree, *Amelanchier lamarckii*, and paper bark birch. A good selection of spring bulbs has been ordered for planting later in the year. These will include snowdrops, wood anemones, wild daffodil and blue bells. *Viburnum bodnantse* will also be added at a later date.



A hawthorn hedge has been planted in front of the picnic benches that run beside the play area and in front of the Pavilion car park. In the latter location in due course clumps of lavender will also be added.

In addition to the above four, *Cotoneaster horizontalis* have been planted around the manhole at the end of the Pavilion car park.

Between the educational pond and the Pavilion twenty *Pyracantha* bushes with their cheerful red berries have been planted. This area also benefits from the addition of twenty-five *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, which have pretty pink bud-like flowers that appear in early summer maturing eventually into beautiful red berries by the winter.

An additional layer of mulch has been applied to much of the planting around the Pavilion. This protection aids the soils water retention; it also helps to stem the growth of weeds.

Pruning has taken place ensuring the plants keep a good shape this year. By early summer the garden should be looking splendid thanks to the efforts of the hard working volunteers and the guidance of Steve Prewer of Basildon District Council's Countryside Services who gave much of his valuable time sharing his extensive knowledge of ornamental garden plants.



Maureen Bradford

Events

Basildon District Health Walks

Tuesdays 10.15am for 30 to 40 minutes. Meet in the car park. For info. call **01268 568528**

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 and/or 1pm – 3pm
Come and have fun and help the ranger with improvements to the park.

Dog Awareness Day

Sunday 4 June, 11am – 4pm
Can you talk dog? Come and find out with fun family activities as well as information and refreshments in the pavilion.

Grasshoppers and Damselies

Sunday 25 June, 2pm – 4pm
Get a closer look at these fascinating and beautiful creatures.

Photographic Display

Saturday 15 – Sunday 16 July
10am – 5pm
A display of wildlife photographs by Darren Chaplin in the Pavilion including items for sale. Refreshments also available.

Crickets and Dragonflies

Sunday 13 August, 2pm – 4pm
A search in the undergrowth for bush crickets and in the sky for dragonflies.

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 Bolverstone - Chairperson
Maureen Bradford - Vice Chairperson
Nikki Gibson – Treasurer
Tricia Marshall - Secretary
Alison Sweetland
Maurice Sweetland
Allison Tanner

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