



# Skylarks



## A Message from the Committee

Welcome to the latest edition of the Skylarks newsletter. Firstly a belated Happy New Year from the Committee to you all and we send you our very best wishes for 2022. The past year has been another one of uncertain times but the latest news is positive so hopefully life will soon be back to normality.

After suffering two years of upset to our normal annual events programme in both 2020 and 2021, discussions are underway by the Committee to form a list of events for this year. To maintain these events we desperately need supporters to help plan and run them. If you have enjoyed our past events or have ideas for future events, your support will be very much appreciated. Please visit the Volunteering page on the Friends of the Wick Country Park website to read about ways in which you can become involved with the Friends' group, or contact us for more insight into what would be involved. The events list as it stands is at the end of the newsletter, you will see that the first event of the year will be the



## **BIRD SONG WALK**



on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April at 9am

Throughout 2021 Martin Singleton has been continuing his excellent monthly Wildlife Walks around the country park observing and recording to create a comprehensive and detailed report. Every month the report is added to the website, it's amazing the array of wildlife that live in the park so please take a look and see if you too can spot any of them on your visits and walks. A much appreciated annual report has been compiled by Martin, an abridged version is included, to see the full report please go to the Nature Notes section on the website.

The gardening team are back in action with the new name 'Wick-ed Gardeners'! All are welcome, any help you can give will certainly be very much appreciated.

A further bit of news is that new fishing arrangements are now in place for the lake, meaning a Bailiff will be monitoring use by the anglers. A summary is included in the newsletter, further details are planned to be put on the website.

Finally a new feature to enjoying life in the Wick Country Park is the Annual Photographic Competition, this will run throughout 2022 and will conclude with choosing the winning photo and prize giving. The details of the competition will appear on the website, until then please do not forget your cameras and take those inspiring views and wildlife in the park.



# Wick Country Park – Wildlife Sightings 2021

## Bird Species

A total of 53 bird species were identified in 2021 which is exactly the same number as 2020! However, 5 species were added to the overall “park list” and these were: Common Reed Bunting, Little Egret, Little Grebe, Sedge Warbler and Pied Wagtail. This of course means that 5 species seen in 2020, were missing in 2021. One in particular is the Lesser Whitethroat. Prior to 2021, these were recorded for several years in the park, and it is disappointing that none were seen or heard at all this year in the park but hopefully they will return in 2022.



Common Reed Bunting



Little Egret



Little Grebe



Sedge Warbler



Pied Wagtail



Lesser Whitethroat

In December 2021, 3 birds were added to the UK red list due to severe declines in their populations since 1996. These were: Common House Martin (-57%), Common Swift (-58%), and European Greenfinch (-67%) and our own records perhaps reflect some of this. In 2020 we saw Common Swift on 3 occasions with a maximum count of 11. In 2021 we only saw them once with a maximum count of 5. European Greenfinch sightings are even worse, we saw Greenfinch 6 times in 2020 with a maximum count of 7. We only saw one single Greenfinch in the whole of 2021! There is no doubt this species is in real trouble and numbers have massively reduced in our area. Its cousin, the Chaffinch, has also massively declined recently but our sightings remain stable, although just a few years ago it would have been one of the most common birds in the park. Despite UK wide declines, our records of Common House Martin increased in 2021, with a maximum count of 30 birds seen on one visit. Another declining bird is the Song Thrush, and our sightings were reduced from 5 in 2020 to only 3 in 2021. Sadly, there does not appear to be any real significant increases in any bird numbers except for the Black Headed Gull, where we did see a particularly large flock of around 300 birds one visit. However, you cannot really read anything into a single year's changes and only after several years will we see the effects of any changes in bird populations in the park.

In respect of birds breeding in the park, the most obvious group are the water birds around the lake where we can see the chicks being cared for by the adults. Here we saw breeding success for Canada Goose, Moorhen, Coot and Mallard, all with chicks at various times of the spring and summer. In addition, we can reasonably assume that some of the summer migrant birds are breeding here, and we can add Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, and Reed Warbler to the list. In respect of resident birds, we can also assume that many of these are breeding in the park, and without listing them all here I would estimate another 14 or 15 species are breeders. This would give us a reasonable estimate of 22 / 23 breeding species in the park itself. There are also many other species which breed in the surrounding areas and use the park for feeding e.g. Starling, House Sparrow, Swallows and House Martins, so there is no doubt that the park is an important area for breeding birds in Wickford.

## Butterflies

A good year for butterflies with 22 species identified, some in very good numbers. Two new species were added in 2021, Small Heath and White-letter Hairstreak. In respect of the latter, during our walks, these were actually seen just outside of the park but were seen and identified at other times in the park during 2021.



Small Heath



White-letter Hairstreak



Meadow Brown



Marbled White



Brown Argus

In respect of numbers, Gatekeepers were not present in the same numbers as 2020 but there were huge numbers of Meadow Browns and it was a good year for them. Marbled Whites were also present in very good numbers and this species has now become a common sight in the park. The butterfly most seen is the Speckled Wood, seen on 50% of our walks, normally in the shaded areas behind the lake. It is also worth mentioning the Brown Argus, which is an excellent sighting for the park, and we saw 3 individuals this year, including one that looked like it was laying eggs. Let's hope we get a decent population of this lovely little butterfly in future years.

### **Dragonflies**

2021 saw a welcome increase in both the number of species and general number of dragonflies/damselflies seen. 5 new species were added to the park list: Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Common Darter, Emperor (Blue) Dragonfly, and Large Red-eyed Damselfly.



Blue-tailed Damselfly



Common Blue Damselfly



Common Darter



Emperor (Blue) Dragonfly



Large Red-eyed Damselfly

### **Moths**

Our first year recording moths, mainly due to the moth night held in August. We identified 21 moth species in 2021 but there are surely many more to be found. Interestingly, we saw 2 hairy caterpillars during our walks last year, which were identified as Oak Egger moth and Fox moth, which coincidentally are both in the same family of moths!

### **Mammals**

One new species was added to the mammal list, Red Fox, which was seen and heard during the moth night, additionally a Common Pipistrelle bat was also identified that night using a bat detector. Other than that, the only other mammal seen in the park was the Grey Squirrel.

(Written by Martin Singleton)

For even more information please go to the website where you will be able to see the full annual report in detail and also the monthly reports.

### **'Wick-ed Gardeners'**



A new name but still the valued work of the team of volunteer gardeners working to maintain the Pavilion garden. All are welcome, tools are available but bring your own if you prefer along with your pair of gardening gloves. Refreshments are provided to sustain you in the very much appreciated work. There are no set times now so please keep an eye on the Friends of the Wick Country Park website under Latest News for the date of the next session and meeting arrangements.

### **New Lake Bailiff at the Park**



S & A Watercraft have announced that working with Basildon Council they are now the company patrolling the lake to improve and maintain the area. They will be patrolling the lake at regular intervals interacting with the anglers, also any upcoming events will be announced on their social media pages. Fishing is strictly for permit holders only, fees and season tickets will apply.



## WICK COUNTRY PARK EVENTS 2022



The following events for 2022 have been organised by the Friends of the Wick Country Park.

*All these events start at or near to the **Wick Country Park Pavilion** and for most events booking is not required, please see the particular event for details. Toilets, car-parking, cycle racks, and refreshments are available at all events.*

EVENT Please click on the link for full details	DATE	DETAILS
<a href="#">Wick-ed Gardeners</a>	Next date: please see the <a href="#">Latest News page</a> .	<b>Great news!</b> The new Wick Gardening Group - the Wick-ed Gardeners - is now meeting regularly in its new guise. For the next date, please see the <a href="#">Latest News page</a> . Meet outside the Pavilion. Please bring your own gardening gloves. Tools will be provided, but if you have your own favourite gardening tool/s please feel free to bring your own. Refreshments will be provided.
<a href="#">Annual Photographic Competition</a>	Throughout 2022	Please check out the <i>Latest News</i> page via the link to the left for confirmation of the details. But meanwhile, start taking, and saving, your photos in and around the Park!
<a href="#">Monthly Nature Walks</a>	Dates for 2022: February 16th March 16th April 20th May 18th June 15th July 20th, August 17 <sup>th</sup> September 21st October 19th November 16th December 14 <sup>th</sup>	Starting at <b>10.30a.m.</b> Enjoy a sociable and leisurely walk of approx <b>1 - 1.5 hours</b> around the Park, led by Martin Singleton, and assisted by other experts from the Wickford Wildlife Society to watch and listen to the varied wildlife in the Park. If you come throughout the year you may be amazed at the changing patterns of sightings throughout the seasons. For further details and to confirm the next date, <a href="#">please contact Martin Singleton</a>
<a href="#">Birdsong Walk</a>	10/04/2022	Start time: 09.00 - note the earlier start compared with previous years. Martin Singleton will be the lead. Refreshments will be provided.
<a href="#">Bring Your Own Picnic by the Lake</a>	11/06/2022	Time 2pm to approx 5pm. Sit by the lake and see what birds and wildlife there is about whilst enjoying a picnic.
<a href="#">Moth Night and Stargazing</a>	01/07/2022	Time 9pm till late - Moth Night and Stargazing. This is a joint event with the Wickford Wildlife Society. There will be a booking system to be opened nearer the time as numbers will be limited.
<a href="#">Bat Watch and Night Walk (to be confirmed)</a>	06/08/2022	Time to be confirmed. This depends on if we can get someone from the Essex Bat Group to attend.
<a href="#">Autumn Walk with Apple Theme Refreshments</a>	30/10/2022	Time 10am - Autumn Walk with apple theme refreshments

## Evolving Plans

At the committee meeting held in January 2022, plans for events for the year were discussed, and, in addition to those listed above, others are under consideration, as below.

1. [Skylarks 3k Races](#) - In the past we have facilitated two such races per year in conjunction with the *Pitsea Running Club*. Unfortunately, that arrangement has, pardon the pun, run its course, but the committee is exploring alternative arrangements.
2. The AGM would revert to a January 2023 date, and would follow a guided [January Jaunt](#), as in pre-pandemic years.



Come along to the Wick Country Park and enjoy a walk and see the wildlife. If you do make any good wildlife sightings, please share them by sending an email to [contact\\_us@friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk](mailto:contact_us@friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk) and we will add them to the 'Nature Notes' on the website. If you could manage a picture or two that would be even better!

### **Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:**

Christine Lee - Acting Chairperson, Hazel Broomfield - Treasurer, Marie Singleton - Secretary,  
Hannah Cooper - Membership Secretary, Alaric Cundy - Webmaster  
Peter Bates – Skylarks 3K Race Events

-  Friends of the Wick Country Park
-  Wickford Wombles

Neighbourhood Policing Team: Telephone 0300 333 4444 or 07875 003503

