

Skylarks

Already the Yuletide Ramble and AGM are a distant memory but in the first newsletter of 2006 we take a look back and to the future.

Chairperson's Report

Our third AGM in December saw the end of probably the most successful year for the *Friends* so far. We have increased our membership and have had a good number of well-attended events.

Our first task back in February 2005 was to attend the Wick Fun day with Mark at the Wick Community Centre helping to promote the park. This gave us the opportunity to talk to local people about the park and try to recruit a few new members.

We also held seven events in the park last year. These were well attended and have all attracted some of our youngest members. Our first event was the Wildflower Wander in April and we were lucky to have the expertise of Barbara Chapman of the Wickford Wildlife Society (and also a friend of the park) and Steve Prewer, the council's Countryside Manager to help us identify the various plant species.

Mark provided the expertise for Spot the Birdies, Investigating Insects and Dragons and Damselflies. I think we actually saw more dragonflies on the Autumn Ramble in October than on the Dragons and Damselflies day, which was rather windy despite being in the middle of August, but we saw a wide range of other invertebrates including grasshoppers, bush crickets and a wasp spider.

Particularly successful was the Nature Quest in May. There was quite a lot of effort put in to that event by both Mark and the committee and it really paid off. The committee worked with Mark to help produce a quiz taking participants around the park and also to man the two challenges that were part of the quest. We had a lovely sunny day, a very good turn out and Nikki did a good job of encouraging visitors to the park to take part, whilst recruiting new members at the same time.

It was also the first year that our newsletter 'Skylarks' has been produced quarterly and we hope that members find it interesting and informative. I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to the newsletter in the past year. If any members would like to contribute to future issues, perhaps reporting on one of the events, please let us know.

Regular work parties have recently started - helping Mark with some of the practical aspects of the park. The first in October involved removing bulrushes from the alder pond and some weeding of the newly planted garden outside the pavilion. The weeding continued in November and work parties will continue on the third Sunday of every month until further notice. I hope that more members will be able to attend.



I would like to thank all our members, whether you have been along to some of the events, taken part in the work parties or just enjoyed keeping up to date with the latest park news by reading 'Skylarks'. Your support is really important if we are to continue to help with the development of our local park.

My thanks also to Mark who has been very helpful and supportive, particularly when it comes to arranging the events and work parties.

Last but not least I would like to thank the other members of the committee for their enthusiasm and for the important contribution they have made in various ways this year. This includes providing articles for the newsletter and helping to get it distributed, helping with events, coming up with new ideas and recruiting new members.

Deborah Belverstone

A young 'Friend' describes the Yuletide Ramble

Ranger Mark took us on a walk around the park, it was a lovely day. We saw and heard lots of birds and some bugs. On the lake we saw eight swans swimming. After the walk we went to the Pavilion and we all ate mince pies. The grown-ups had mulled wine as well! Afterwards, the grown-ups talked a lot about the park - and mummy didn't keep her head down*. We all had a lovely time and are looking forward to more walks next year. I like the park, and Ranger Mark because he tells us lots of things about birds and bugs.

Isabel Tanner, aged 6 an 'arf



(*Mummy, Allison, is now the latest member of the FOWCP committee after failing not to be noticed!)

.... In the belfry (or the pill box)

The park was recently visited by consultants from the Bat Conservation Trust. A few of the committee tagged along with the Ranger and we were treated to an inspiring tour and lecture by these very knowledgeable people.



In my younger days I used to work for a company installing and maintaining echo sounders mainly on the fishing fleets around the Scottish coast. These sounders produced an exact profile of the seabed – also detected shoals of fish – even a single fish. Bats use a similar principle for navigation, emitting rapid pulses of sound and picking up the echoes from their surrounding environment. (I would point out that the bats 'invented' it first!)

It was explained to us that this system of navigation used by the bats was not suited to wide open spaces, i.e. they rely on 'structured' terrain like trees and buildings to build up a profile of their route; a hedgerow leading to their roosting place is desirable. Many bats crossing motorways are killed as they are flying too low; in these areas, authorities can sometimes be persuaded to install extra high street lights which the bats 'pick up' on their sonar, and fly over the top.

Bats will roost anywhere where the conditions are favourable – a pipistrelle bat can crawl into a hole only 12mm (less than half an inch) wide.

Funding from outside sources is currently being sought for a number of conservation projects that includes the further improvement of the site's pillboxes for bats, which have already undergone modest and inexpensive alterations. For progress updates watch this space!

Maurice Sweetland

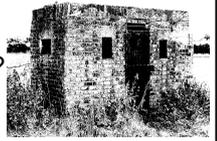
Are you an 'eco-friend' of the park?

Here are a few things you can do to help the environment and make your visit more enjoyable:

- Leave the car at home if possible and walk or cycle to the park. You will cause less pollution and get some exercise.
- Make sure you take your rubbish home with you.
- Clear up after your dog making use of the dog bins in the park.
- Try to resist feeding the ducks and geese. It may be fun but it's actually not very good for them. Too much bread pollutes the water and birds can die due to overfeeding.
- Finally why not join a work party and help with the ongoing improvements to the park. (Details below)

Phil's fascinating facts

Hi! How was your Christmas? Did you have visitors come and stay over? I did and they are still with me now! Still I don't mind 'cos I enjoy the company and they have really done little more than sleep since they got here.



They are small tortoiseshell butterflies or their posh name is *Aglais urticae*. They are quite colourful characters when awake, having wings that are orange with a thin border of brown with small blue dots along the sides. At the front edge of the upper wings there is a pattern of black and yellow or orange marks. They really cheer the place up! Let me share some more interesting facts with you about my visitors:

- They have a wingspan of about 50mm.
- They rest with their wings closed but will open and close them rapidly, flashing their bright colours to confuse and alarm predators.
- They drink nectar from flowers such as thistles – lots of those in the park, eh?
- Their caterpillars are yellow with dense black speckling and two yellow lines down their back and one along each side. They also have black spines along their sides and back.

Maybe you will be able to spot some in the park later in the year. See you in the park soon I hope.

Phil the pill box



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

Sunday 19th March
10am – 12noon and/or 1pm – 3pm
Sunday 16th April
1pm – 3pm

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

Open House

Sunday 26th March, 11am – 2pm
Pop in to the pavilion for tea/coffee and find out more about the park.

Easter Bird walk

Sunday 16th April, 10am – 12noon
Join the Ranger as we look and listen for the park's bird life.



Stopping by the lake on the Yuletide Ramble

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

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

Basildon District Council Countryside Services:

Steve Prewer
Countryside Services Manager
Telephone: 01268 550088

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