

# Skylarks

There are lots of ways to get involved with the park – volunteer to help at one of this year's events, join a work party or send us some photos for our website. Find out more about the park by coming to the Ranger's talk at the Wickford Wildlife Society meeting. Read on for more details.

## Chairperson's report

The past year has been our most successful yet with more members than ever before and some very well attended events. Nature Quest in May proved popular with young and old alike especially the pond dipping. Paws in the Park was the highlight of the year's events with approximately 700 people attending and the *Friends* also provided refreshments at the Kite Day in September which attracted a good number of visitors.



The work parties have been somewhat less well attended but continue to take place on the third Sunday of each month. Hopefully more volunteers may join in future.

At the end of 2006 the committee put together an application for funding from the Breathing Places Lottery fund. We were hoping to be able to use the funding for signage and interpretation materials but despite our best efforts we found out in May that, due to a high number of applications, on this occasion we had not been successful.

We have more events planned for the coming year including Nature Quest and Paws in the Park. We would very much welcome help at these events so please get in touch if you are happy to volunteer.

The Friends of the Wick Country Park website is being put together and once it is up and running we will let you know.

Thanks to all members especially those who have attended and helped at events and work parties and contributed to Skylarks over the past year. My thanks also to Mark and fellow committee members. Please continue to support the park by renewing your membership.

**Deborah Belverstone, Chairperson**

*Friends of the Wick Country Park* are invited to attend the next indoor meeting of the Wickford Wildlife Society on

**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2008 at 8pm**

Ranger Mark Williams will be giving a talk on 'The Wick Country Park' giving an insight into its wildlife and aims for the future.

**See below for details of venue**



## Wickford Wildlife Society

The Wickford Wildlife Society was formed in 1983 and offers local people the chance to see wildlife presentations on a wide variety of topics and to visit some of the excellent nature reserves for which Essex is famous.

During the autumn and winter months, indoor meetings are held in the Roman Catholic Church, 61 London Road, Wickford, on the second Wednesday of every month. These usually consist of a slideshow presentation by a wildlife expert or enthusiast, on a variety of topics, from plants to insects, geology to ornithology, and covering Essex and many "wild" places throughout the world. The indoor meetings start at 8pm and end at around 10pm. Car parking is available in the Church car park, and refreshments are available. There is a small charge for each meeting of £2 for non-members and £1 for members.

For many members the highlights of the schedule are the outdoor meetings that largely take place during the spring and summer months, although there is normally a winter bird watching trip too. Outdoor trips are mainly on Sunday mornings and normally meet in the Wickford central car park (next to Somerfields) usually returning around 1pm.

If you would like a copy of the Society's programme of events for 2008, please contact Jeanne Hutchings on 01268 734254 or Marie Singleton on 01268 560663.

**Website [www.wickfordwildlife.co.uk](http://www.wickfordwildlife.co.uk)**

## Soil, land use and associated grassland plants at the Wick Country Park

The site's soil is typical of Essex being made up of a mixture of poorly draining heavy clay soils made up of tightly packed small soil particles and the free draining lighter calcareous soils consisting of larger wider spaced soil particles.

The soil types range from (with the lightest first) chalk, sandy clay gravels and boulder clay providing the Wick Country Park with a wide-ranging combination of soil structure that can yield various degrees of drainage. Where the grit and chalk is dominant within the soil it promotes drier areas that benefit plants such as Lesser Burdock *Arctium minus*, Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, Great Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola f.integrifolia*.

Where the clay is heavily consolidated water will run off the higher ground thereby giving rise to lower damp conditions benefiting plants such as Goat's-rue *Galega officinalis*, Hairy St. John's-wort *Hypericum hirsutum*, Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, Common Fleabane *Pulicaria* areas.

Both arable and dairy farming influence the sites flora. Historically the site was used for dairy farming with some of the surrounding farmland being cultivated. Currently all but two of the surrounding fields are now used for arable crops with the field to the east being used for exercising horses and to the south consisting of rough grassland with intermittent horse grazing.

Therefore we have a good mixture of plants that flourish on disturbed ruderal soils such as Wild Oat *Avena fatua*, Cut-leaved Crane's bill *Geranium dissectum* Hoary Cress *Cardaria draba* as well as those associated with animal grazed pasture such as Cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Lesser Trefoil *Trifolium dubium* with Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and Red clover *Trifolium pratense* and White clover *Trifolium repens* in good numbers.

The recent earth works undertaken while creating the park have also aided plant life associated with disturbed soil. The site's location in Essex also positions it close to the sea enabling a selection of inland tolerant coastal plants to occur on the site.

### Mark Williams, Countryside Ranger

#### Add to our Gallery

Have you taken any photos in the park? Perhaps at one of the events or of plants and animals you've seen in the park. Our website is currently being developed and will be up and running soon. If you have any photos that you'd like us to consider for inclusion in the 'Gallery' please email them to [dbelverstone@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:dbelverstone@yahoo.co.uk)



#### Help with work in the park

January's work party was a wet affair. Mark needed help removing the encroaching reeds from one of the ponds. Otherwise they would take over and dry out the pond. Mark provided waders and tools and fortunately the weather was unseasonably mild. After a couple of hours it was quite satisfying to see the difference we'd made.

The next work party will be held on Sunday 17 February. Bring your wellies if it's wet and meet at the pavilion at 10am or 1pm.



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

### Bird walk

*Sunday 16 March  
10am to 12noon*

Join the ranger in a spring stroll and try to spot and identify birds in the park. Tea and coffee will be available in the Pavilion after the walk.



### Paws in the Park

*Sunday 8 June  
11am to 4pm*

Following on from last year's huge success, all dogs and responsible owners are invited to this popular event. Fun dog show, display of dog obedience and agility, stalls, refreshments, games and children's quiz.



### 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](mailto:mikenikki@supanet.com)

## The Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

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

Contact Deborah on 01268 572732 or email [dbelverstone@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:dbelverstone@yahoo.co.uk)

## Basildon District Council Countryside Services:

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