

Skylarks

With this edition of the newsletter we welcome the new Ranger, Mark Williams, with whom the Committee will soon be arranging an informal open day so that you can meet him and members of the Friends group. Now that the Park's development is almost complete we look forward to seeing you at this and one of the many events that are due to be held there.

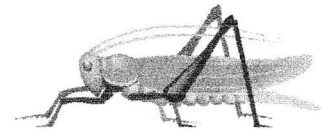
The Chairperson describes a recent visit to the park

On a wonderful summer's afternoon, in late July, three of the Friends met for a gentle stroll around the park. The heat of the sun was made more bearable by a very welcome breeze, which blew quantities of thistle seed fluff about. In the garden this would not be welcome, but here in the Country Park the thistles provide an excellent food source for seed-eating birds, particularly the lovely goldfinch.



Two of the more noticeable plants were spear thistle and prickly ox-tongue, both with flowers much loved by insects. Vast numbers of hover flies have been around this summer, as you can't fail to have noticed. Perfectly harmless, they are of great benefit to us as their larvae eat huge numbers of aphids (greenfly).

A lovely afternoon with much to see and hear.
Barbara Chapman



We turned right from the Pavilion along the easy-access path, stopping first at the new dipping pond, where we saw a black-tailed skimmer dragonfly laying eggs in the water. Every step of the way along the path we found delicate common blue damselflies sunning themselves on the hard surface. As it was so hot, the birds were very quiet and not very visible but instead we heard plenty of grasshopper and cricket song and saw aerial displays of supreme agility by many species of dragonfly.

A message from the new Countryside Ranger

Dear Friends

Firstly I must start by thanking Barbara for giving me this opportunity to write to you within the Society's quarterly Skylarks. I also would like to express my gratitude to her and the other members of the Society who upon our meeting have all given me such a warm and hospitable welcome to the Wick community.

Though as individuals our aspirations for the Wick are probably somewhat similar it is the Friends' constitution that is to be accredited for providing a tangible written form for the Society to steer by. Nevertheless I have no doubt there are many individually held ideas on how we ought to set about things and I look forward to hearing from each and all in the course of my appointment.

I'm also hoping to have the opportunity of meeting many of you at the soon to be held Friends informal 'Meet Your Ranger Day' or later in the year at the December AGM, which provides the ideal forum for honing ideas into practicable proposals via the Society's constitutional procedures.

Mark Williams

Birds were to be seen on the lake; Canada geese and coot. Yet more damsel, skimmer and dragonflies were seen by the lake, including a female Brown Aeshna or hawkler egg laying – a very impressive dragonfly with brown tinted wings – unmistakable. Looking into the water we saw small shoals of young fish, probably stickleback. The lake was filled by pumping from the brook nearby and fish would have come with the water. Near the lake the common and beautiful scarlet pimpernel was growing – maybe you wouldn't want a garden full, but it's no problem in the park.



A good day for butterflies too. We saw many gatekeepers, meadow browns, common blues and a single small copper near the alder pond. Skimming across the surface tension of the pond were pond skaters on the open water- not much open water because of an extensive growth of blanket weed. Dragonflies again – the blue tailed damsel and ruddy darter.

Committee members recall the development of the park

The Wick Country Park is in an ideal place to serve the community. From the top of the meadow you can see the Abacus School, a housing estate, an industrial estate, the railway line, a farm and the A127.

Going back, say, five years, the area on which the park was developed was quite different. Part of the area was wild scrubland, vast fields were used for rotational crops and cattle grazed on a number of fields. When the idea of the park was first put forward it was difficult to envisage how a nature park covering such a large area could successfully be developed.

During a very wet winter the lake was excavated and some of the other landscaping features put in hand. The Ranger organised tours of the site from time to time, the first being on a cold winter's day with the heaviest of clay underfoot. Experiencing the condition of the clay one could easily understand the problems experienced by the men operating the heavy-duty earthmoving equipment. The most interesting feature of that tour was walking across what was to be the bottom of the lake. The man made islands seemed to tower above one's head but it certainly put things in perspective.



The enthusiasm of the Ranger was such that we could all look forward to the coming months and see how the park would develop. It was all fascinating information – from the technicalities of filling the lake to the erection of owl boxes and bat houses. Another interesting thought was the fact that thousands of young trees would be planted over a period of time.

Now in 2004, it is nearly all in place. The Pavilion is used by local schools for educational purposes, the large lake is attracting a range of waterfowl, the new pond dipping area will mature over a period of time and the Adventure Playground is well used by local families and their young children. It is a paradise for dog walkers, while joggers fully utilize the perimeter paths. The park is becoming increasingly popular and as the wildlife develops there will be so much more to see and enjoy.



As this is a community park, in the true sense of the word, we now need the help of the local people as well as all their ideas as to how the park can become more user-friendly.

Maurice and Alison Sweetland

Ever thought of becoming a Wick Country Park Volunteer?

Already in my brief duration as Park Ranger for the Wick there has been more than one occasion where I thought that it would be useful if I had an extra pair of hands - for example:

- Tasks that for health and safety reasons require a second person e.g. the removal of litter from water bodies
- Assisting in routine site patrols
- Litter picks
- Opening of the park gates during the absence of staff
- Bite sized articles for Skylarks
- Minor construction and DIY



In addition to regular tasks, there will be the occasional project as well. At the moment I'm thinking about a display of pressed and dried wildflowers identified and labelled within the pavilion - anyone got the time, knowledge or even a spare flower press to hand?

So if you have or are likely to have some time to spare, suitable practical or writing skills or are just brimming with enthusiasm, let me know and soon you too can enjoy contributing to the Wick Country Park.

Mark Williams

Membership

If you would like to join the Friends of the Wick Country Park please fill in the application form and return to the address at the bottom.

The Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

Barbara Chapman – Chairperson
Deborah Belverstone – Vice Chairperson
Dave Mullender – Treasurer
Alison Sweetland
Maurice Sweetland
Glyn Martin
Contact email:
chapmans@alrosa.fsnet.co.uk

Basildon Council Countryside Services:

Steve Prewer
Countryside Services Manager
Telephone: 01268 550088

Mark Williams
Countryside Ranger
Telephone: 01268 562921

Membership Application

FRIENDS OF THE WICK COUNTRY PARK

(PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS THROUGHOUT)

If taking a household membership please list all those to which it applies.

Full name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Full name: _____

Age, if under 18: _____

Full name: _____

Age, if under 18: _____

Full name: _____

Age, if under 18: _____

Full name: _____

Age, if under 18: _____

Type of membership requested (please tick):

New

Renewal

Membership fees
£3 per household
£1.50 individual

I hereby apply for membership to the Friends of the Wick Country Park, and agree to be bound by its constitution.
(Copy available on request).

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please make cheques payable to 'Friends of the Wick Country Park' and return to:
D. Mullender
31 Tresco Way
Wickford
SS12 9GP

OFFICE USE ONLY

Membership no:

Renewal Date: