

# Skylarks

Read on to find out the latest news from the park.

## Spring Bird Walk

On a damp and overcast Sunday morning, 11 intrepid souls led by ranger Mark, set out for a tour around the park to see and hear what bird life could be found. Going in an anti-clockwise route from the pavilion it was not long before we heard the first of many wood pigeons, some in trees, others a bit further away on the adjacent farmland. As our path took us around the hill, we stopped to hear two robins calling to each other, marking out their respective territories. Skylarks could be heard but remained well hidden in the rough areas of the hill and two cormorants were seen flying over in clear silhouette against the greyish sky. As we moved on we could hear the alarm calls of both great tits and blue tits, alerting their feathered friends of the "two legged danger" that was moving into their territory. Stopping on the far side of the lake, chaffinches in the nearby trees were somewhat elusive when trying to get a clear sighting!

Happily paddling away on the lake were mallards, coots and moorhens. The resident Canada geese were not so brave as to venture into the freezing water but were busily grazing away on the grass banks. The most exciting "spot" of the day was the great crested grebe, with its distinctive shape and plume around the head. Whilst there was only one bird on the water it is hopeful that a partner was not too far away and they will successfully nest in the park.

Our next leg took us around the lake and through the hedge into the backfield. Immediately we caught sight of a long-tailed tit flitting along the hedgerow looking for insects. As we moved along the path and looked back towards the pavilion, we caught sight of a group of meadow pipits, foraging on the ground for insects. A number of skylarks then came into view and it was interesting to see that all the birds were feeding in groups. As well as the meadow pipits and skylarks there were starlings, magpies and Canada geese. Black headed gulls, some still in their winter plumage with their chocolate/brown head not being fully evident, were happy to take any food that the other birds could find.

With the weather starting to turn, we reached the warmth of the pavilion for hot tea and coffee to discuss the morning's findings. As spring slowly creeps upon us, with longer hours of daylight and the trees and hedgerows breaking into blossom, many more birds return from Europe and Africa. Try to find time to listen to the birds singing, for at this time of the year you may be lucky to hear various warblers, chiffchaffs and finches, along with the more common thrushes, blackbirds and robins producing the most melodic of songs.

**Paul Clarke**  
Friend of the Wick Country Park



## Paws in the Park

Make a date for you and your dog at The Wick  
Country Park

on

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June**

**11am to 4pm**

**Fun Dog Show**  
**Dog Obedience and Agility Display**  
**Pets As Therapy Dog Parade**  
**Plus children's quiz, stalls, exhibits**  
**and more**

Admission free

Refreshments available

## Bee Houses

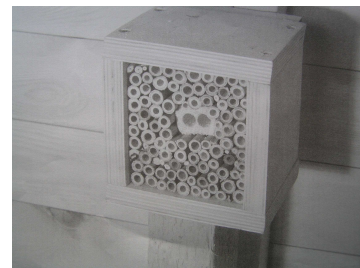
Having become involved in the above subject for the Park, I was persuaded to have a go at producing a few, of varying designs. Mark produced some very informative literature from the internet, gave me a crash course, and away I went to procure some materials.

Mason bees seem to prefer hollow stems with an inside diameter of 3-5mm. Bamboo is ideal, but other hollow stems such as reeds can be used. Our local DIY shop had a plentiful supply of off-cuts of wood suitable for making an open-fronted box. The stems are cut to size and jammed into the box. Larger diameter stems are ok – they create interest and provide shelter for insects such as lacewings during winter. A mirror fixing on the back of the box makes it easy to hang (preferably south facing, and sheltered from the rain). I found that the most time consuming job was drilling out the pith from inside the cut bamboo stems.

The female mason bee lays an egg inside the stem with a store of pollen for the grub to eat when it hatches, then seals the cell with a plug of mud, then starts again. (A supply of loose soil, such as a molehill, near the box helps the bee to achieve this). A stem can hold several cells. In spring, the bee at the rear end hatches, can't get out, breaks down the mud wall and bites the rear end of the bee in front. Eventually the bee at the front gets the message. The males mate and die within a few weeks, while the females start a new season's nesting.

Keep an eye open for these boxes around the park. More designs in the next Skylarks.

**Maurice Sweetland, Friend of the Wick Country Park**



## Tales from a new Friend

After having lived in Wickford for 15 years and walked around the Wick Country Park many times since it opened, I joined the 'The Friends' at the end of last year. Since then I have joined in the varied arranged events and enjoyed them all. When I walked around the park before it was really just for the exercise, but now, after the Yuletide Ramble in December and the Bird Walk in March, and listening to Mark the Ranger's informative knowledge on the birds and plants, walking there has become a new experience. Additionally helping out at the monthly work parties gives a feeling of involvement in the life of the park. Looking forward to the next event in June, Paws in the Park, helping out in the activities by making the refreshments. So as a new recruit I can say it has certainly been worthwhile in joining the Friends of the Wick Country Park.

**Christine Lee**  
Friend of the Wick Country Park

## Nature Quest

A FREE, fun, family day at  
The Wick Country Park

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July**

**11am to 4pm**

Test your knowledge with a quiz  
around the park followed by pond  
dipping and children's craft activities.

Rescuers Wildlife Sanctuary  
attending



Refreshments available

Parental supervision required



**Come and join the fun!**

## Can you help?

### Donate a prize

We will be running a tombola  
at the Paws in the Park event  
in June. Do you have any  
small prizes that you could  
contribute?

(No alcohol thank you)

### Lavender needed

Do you have any small  
lavender plants that you  
could donate to the park?



Perhaps you have taken lots  
of cuttings. There are a few  
gaps in the pavilion garden  
that it would be nice to fill.

If you can help with either of  
these requests please  
contact Nikki on 01268  
734293.

## 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.

### 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.



### Nature Quest

*Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July*  
11am – 4pm

A fun day for all the family. Be a nature detective, explore the park and investigate the underwater world of the dipping pond. Parental supervision required.



### 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:

Marcus Hotten  
Countryside Officer  
Telephone: 01268 550088

Mark Williams  
Countryside Ranger  
Telephone: 01268 562921