

Skylarks

With the summer drawing to a close, find out what the Friends have been up to over the last few months and how you can get involved in future activities.

Nature Quest

After torrential rain the night before, the Friends' Committee was very relieved when Sunday 2nd August remained warm and sunny all day for Nature Quest. Sixty-three children took part in the quiz and were proud to receive certificates for their efforts. This was followed with pond dipping, where children were helped to identify the fascinating creatures they caught in their nets. With their imaginations inspired and an abundance of glue and pipe cleaners they went on to make their own intriguing creatures at the craft table. This was an ideal time for the adults to have a welcome cup of tea or coffee and of course there were drinks and biscuits for the children (and the dogs).

The owls, provided by the Rescuers Wildlife Sanctuary were popular with adults and children alike. Many people took the time to find out more about the absorbing world of bee keeping and to purchase a pot of honey.

Plants and carved toadstools were also on sale. A warm welcome is extended to the ten new households who enrolled as 'Friends of the Wick Country Park' during the day. We look forward to seeing you at future events.

If you have any comments on the day or have ideas for future events we would welcome your suggestions - drop a line to:

mikenikki@supanet.com

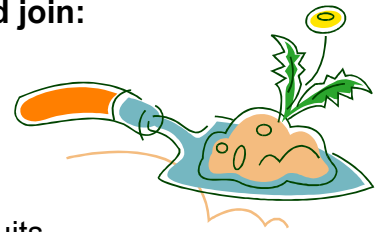
Nikki
Membership secretary

The Wick Weeders

Heard of the Wick Weeders? No, we are not a psychedelic band of the sixties! But a small group of 'Friends' who spend time fighting back the weeds in the Pavilion garden. At the moment the weeds are probably winning, but with your help that could all change.

Why you should join:

- Fresh air
- Exercise
- Good fun
- New friends
- Tea and biscuits



We meet on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month from 1.30pm. Just turn up on the day or ring me for more propaganda...oops I mean information!

Nikki
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Some of our Nature Quest pond creatures



Above; greater water boatman (backswimmer) and right; dragonfly nymph



Paws in the Park 2009



As we arrived at the gates of the park to unlock, we were greeted with a torrential downpour, reducing the visibility to not many yards. In addition to the current cloudburst, overnight rain had filled the potholes along the road, with many overflowing.

Having unlocked the pavilion, the hardy gang of 'Friends' had to make a decision - do we proceed or do we call the day off. After a cuppa, and Tricia convincing us to have faith, we decided to go ahead. Not long after, as the rain abated, we began setting up the rings along with the newly purchased gazebo to create a shady resting place for the dogs (very ironic given the weather!).

Soon the exhibitors began to arrive and set up around the outside of the ring, some old friends and some attending for the first time. By 11am it was clear and people began to arrive, to enter the dog classes, have a stroll or buy goods from the stalls, while children ventured around the park in an attempt to locate the clues to the quiz questions.

At midday the dog classes commenced with all being well supported. The overriding theme in each class was fun (this is not a serious dog show), and although everyone would like their dog to win, everyone still enjoyed themselves and often although not picked by the judge as a winner there was still a smile on their faces.

Having completed all the classes the Billericay Dog Training School then put on a fine display of agility - over small jumps, through tunnels and searching and retrieving various undergarments hanging on a line.

Upon completion, with the sun now shining, the day was set for the "Best in Show" class, with the winners of the individual classes now doing battle. After a tense wait, this year's winner was Brindle a Lurcher/Jack Russell cross.

Whilst we did not have the very large numbers that attended last year, due no doubt to the early bad weather, there were still over 300 people attending, coming from as far a field as north Essex and east London.

A special thank you to all the exhibitors, for without their contribution the day would not have been so enjoyable. We look forward to seeing you all again in 2010 and hopefully the weather will be kinder.

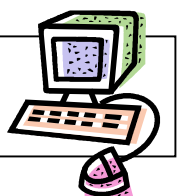
Paul Clarke
'Friend'

Right; Billericay Dog Training School

Below; Best in Show winner – Brindle, a Lurcher/Jack Russell cross, with owner James Bryant



To see more photos of our events visit our website
www.friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk and take a look in the Gallery.



An Alien Lands in the Park !!!

Don't worry, it's not a flying saucer that has landed in the park, but a worrying alien insect has landed - and more are likely to arrive. Scientists blame the new arrivals on climate change, as those European species that previously could not survive our cold winters are now able to withstand the milder climate. And once they are able to breed here they inevitably begin to spread. Here are a few of the new species to look out for in the country park.

2008 saw a major increase in the numbers of wasp spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) in the park. This Mediterranean species has been known along the south coast since the 1920s. But in 2007 it began to extend its range and was found in Surrey and Hertfordshire. By 2008 it was prolific in the long grass at the Wick Country Park.

This summer has seen the arrival in the park of the dreaded harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*). This species poses a real threat to the country's many indigenous species of ladybirds. The harlequin does not fight or eat the local species, but it occupies a wide variety of habitats (from deciduous trees to reedbeds). It therefore lives on a much wider range of food and is out-competing our indigenous species.

And waiting in the "wings", so to speak, are three other alien insects that have been seen in Wickford, although I am not sure if they have been found in the park - yet.

The rosemary beetle (*Chrysolina americana*) is another species from southern Europe that has been spreading across the UK over the past decade. The adults have a characteristic metallic sheen and live on rosemary, lavender and related plants. There are several lavender plants near the pavilion; I wonder if any of the "Wick Weeders" have seen any of these beetles on those plants? I have found many adults of this species on lavender plants in my garden in Wickford.

At least one horse chestnut tree in Memorial Park, Wickford has been infected with another new arrival. The horse chestnut leaf mining moth (*Cameraria ohridella*), or to be specific its larva, feeds on the inside of horse chestnut leaves leaving broad brown lines of dead tissue in their wake. This species arrived in the UK from Europe in 2002. As the species can produce several generations in a single year, most of the country's horse chestnut trees are under threat from this moth as it spreads north. I think that there is only one horse chestnut tree in the Wick Country Park, and to date it has escaped infection.

A more recent arrival is the green vegetable bug (*Nezara viridula*), also known as the southern green shield bug. This species is native to Africa, but is widespread in southern Europe and has been recorded in the UK since 2003. It attacks a broad range of crops from soft fruits to potatoes and beans. So maybe there is nothing in the park to attract it, but it has been found in Wickford.

**Cliff Thornton
'Friend'**



Harlequin ladybird found in the Wick Country Park on 8 August 2009



Green vegetable bug feeding on potato plants in Wickford, August 2009. This is an immature 3rd instar stage.



Wasp spider at the Wick Country Park, August 2008

Translocation of Reptiles to the Wick Country Park

Over the past few months a number of reptiles have been translocated to the Wick Country Park. The purpose of translocation (a process of moving an animal or animals from one location to another) is to move these precious animals away from areas that are due for development. This prevents them from being harmed, either directly by accidental injury during construction, or indirectly through loss of their preferred habitat. It is estimated that over 600 slow worms (a type of legless lizard) and more than 25 common lizards have already been introduced to the park between the end of May and the middle of July and introductions are likely to continue well into October.

The Wick Country Park offers an ideal location for reptiles to flourish with its swathes of open grassland providing suitable hunting due to the good supply of insects and other small animals. Hunting through long grasses also provides suitable concealment from their prey and the would-be predators who feed upon them.

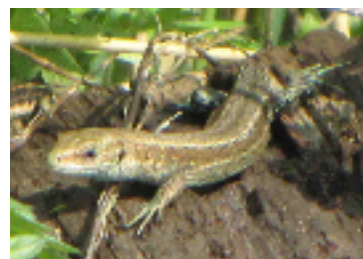
The open areas also provide vital locations for these cold-blooded animals to bask and heat themselves up so they can remain active. When the weather is poor or extremely hot the pockets of scrub and other wooded areas provide valuable shelter.

Molly Nicholson an Assistant Ecologist involved in translocation projects within the Essex area has described the capturing process in great detail:

"...we are using roofing felt to localise the animals; this is cut to approximately half a metre/metre size, and then left at approximate 15m intervals in various locations. Being ectothermic, the reptiles need to bask in the sun to increase their body temperature, and utilise the felts as a heat source at different points during the day. The exact numbers of reptiles we are catching depends upon various factors: temperature (if it's too hot, they don't require the felts to warm up; they can bask in the open sunlight), humidity and rainfall, local competition/predation, etc.

We check under the felts and capture any reptiles underneath or sitting on top. The species we are getting the most of include slow worms and common lizards. The lizards are the hardest to catch (being very fast), although this is primarily dependent upon temperature; they are sluggish if it's cold.

As these animals are territorial (to varying degrees), we are spreading them out in different areas around the Wick; the specific locations are being recorded so that we can keep track of numbers..."



Common lizard



Slow worm

Mark Williams
Countryside Ranger

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 to 12noon*

Come and have fun and help the Ranger with improvements to the Park.

Wick Weeders

*2nd & 4th Monday of each month
Starting at 1.30pm*

Basildon District Council has organised the following event:

Kite Festival

*Sunday 20th September
1pm to 4pm*

Join in the kite making competition and pick up some top flying tips.

Children must be accompanied by an adult. Dogs must be on a lead.

Membership

If you are not a member but would like to join the Friends please contact Nikki on 01268 734293 or email mikenikki@supanet.com



The Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

Allison Tanner – Chairperson
Christine Lee – Vice Chairperson
Nikki Gibson – Treasurer
Tricia Marshall - Secretary
Eileen Cattell
Deborah Key

Basildon District Council Countryside Services:

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