

Skylarks

The Friends have been busy since the last edition of Skylarks. Here is news of just a few of the things we've been up to.



The Canaries meet the Skylarks

The Canary Wharf Walkers were treated to the unbroken sound of the skylark as we were given a very informative and interesting guided tour of the country park by Mark. In what had been a fairly typical April as far as weather is concerned we happily chose a sunny and warm afternoon for our visit. To my shame, although I live only about a mile from the park this was my first visit and I was very pleasantly surprised by what it offers in the variety of its habitats in a relatively small area. In spite of its comparative youth, the park is already taking on a maturity and with the plantings of trees and shrubs, and the development of the lake, it isn't difficult to see that within a few years there will be an even greater variety of wildlife attracted to the shelter and food the park will provide. We were all particularly interested in the plans for the kingfisher bank - a bird so beautiful and yet so rarely seen. It was a surprise to many of us that it has already been a visitor to this area.

At the end of our walk we were treated to teas and biscuits kindly served to us by Nikki and Mike. I think quite a few of us have now joined the 'Friends' and I know that most of us will be making much more use of our local country park.

(In case you're wondering, the Canary Wharf Walkers are a small walking group from the local Anglican churches. On many of our walks around flat Essex we find ourselves on hills high enough to see Canary Wharf and when we were looking for a name that seemed as good a name as any).

Margaret Maguire



Join the party!

The first work party of 2005 took place on Easter Monday morning - 28th March. One volunteer worked in the Pavilion sorting, tidying and making hanging space for a variety of carpentry tools. After we had all studied the plans a new workbench was also built.

Outside by the dipping ponds two of us donned the waders provided and after a short safety talk from the park ranger climbed gingerly into the ponds. What fun! The purpose was to remove water fern, *Azolla filiculoides*, a very invasive water plant which, if not removed, would soon take over the pond. Handfuls of blanket weed were also removed which was very satisfying. It was great to see some frogspawn and care was taken not to disturb it.

Mark kindly provided us all with welcome mugs of tea which we drank in the early spring sunshine. Then it was back to work, no need for waders this time as with rakes and hoes we cleared the path round the pond of weeds.

There are plans for further work parties. All help is welcome so why not volunteer? It's great fun, guidance is given and all equipment is provided.

Nikki Gibson



Nikki dons the waders and braves the depths

We spotted the birdies!

What better way to spend a lazy Sunday morning than to take a walk round our country park in late spring. On 8th May we had a wonderful time in the company of our enthusiastic ranger, Mark, identifying the birds. There was a good variety in the hedgerows and trees: whitethroat, robin, sparrow, blackcap and goldfinch. We stopped to use our binoculars while Mark described the bird, its habitat and type of call. For a novice like myself this was so illuminating for I could never have identified so many species alone.

We continued chatting and enjoying the crisp breezy day until we reached the lake. Here we saw mallards, grebes, dabchicks, moorhens and a pair of swans. We also spotted a Canada goose on its nest on the island.

Blackbirds, a wren, blue tits, great tits and a long tailed tit were added to our list of finds. The skylarks put on a great performance overhead with their pretty bird song, a welcome sign of approaching summer. Swallows were also seen together with starlings and a collared dove.

Beside the lake, Mark showed us a St Mark's fly: a black long-bodied insect. At the end of the walk we had a really exciting experience. Mark ran off towards an emerging dragonfly that was drying its wings. We managed to get some close-ups of the broad-bodied chaser, which has appeared early this year.

We had an enjoyable morning. Why don't you join us for the insect event at the end of June. I am sure you won't regret it. Hope to see you there.

Maureen Bradford

What lies beneath?

In September 2004 the Environment Agency undertook an ecological assessment to evaluate the macroinvertebrate (minibeast) community present within the park's lake, to gauge the level of success of their colonisation since the lake was established near on two years ago.

The method undertaken relied upon two samples being gathered from the water's edge from within the reedbed and the submerged plant bed of Canadian Pondweed.

Samples were taken using the standard Environment Agency method of sweeping the vegetation with a pond net for a period of three minutes with the samples then being returned to the laboratory for sorting and analysis.

The results were very favourable, concluding that *'the water quality of Five Acre*

Lake appears to be better than that of the close by River Crouch and that colonisation since the lake's construction has successfully occurred, mainly through animals that have an aerial adult life stage. Numbers of damselfly and dragonfly larvae are notably good. The submerged beds of small water plants appear to provide such animals with an optimal habitat, with well over 100 individuals caught in just three minutes'.

'It is highly likely that further colonisation by a greater number of animals will occur with time, resulting in a community of high ecological value'.

This information was then used to help Basildon District Council Countryside Services to assess the lake's ability to continue housing this flourishing minibeast population while also providing a continuing supply of food for our intended fish introductions (now completed) and their future generations, thereby both providing a varied wildlife community within the lake and an opportunity for a spot of fishing for amateur anglers.

In the above table I have included a list of the number of minibeasts collected in the three minute survey, and where possible I have provided the common name beside the scientific name.

Mark Williams

Events

The Friends' committee has arranged the following events with the Wick Country Park ranger. *For all events please meet at the Wick Pavilion.*

Investigating Insects

Sunday 26th June, 11am start
Join us on a hunt for insects and other creepy crawlies.

Dragons and Damselflies

Sunday 14th August, 10am start
We'll be on the lookout for these aerial beauties.



Autumn Ramble

Sunday 9th October, 2pm start
Enjoy a gentle stroll with the ranger to see how the park is progressing.



If none of our events takes your fancy let us know what events you'd like to see arranged.



Birdwatching over the lake in May

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
Dave Mullender

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

Basildon District Council Countryside Services:

Steve Prewer
Countryside Services Manager
Telephone: 01268 550088

Mark Williams
Countryside Ranger
Telephone: 01268 562921

Table 1 – Results of the biological samples taken from the two plant habitats in the Wick Country Park lake (values given are actual or estimated abundances)

Common Name	Scientific Name	PLANT HABITAT	
		Reedbed	Canadian Pond Weed
SNAILS	MOLLUSCS		
Jenkin's spire snail	<i>Potamopyrgus antipodarum</i>	1	
Common (or wandering) pond snail	<i>Lymnaea peregra</i>	20	200
No name - Introduced snail from N. America	<i>Physa acuta</i>	20	40
White ram's horn	<i>Gyraulus albus</i>	10	10
LEECHES	ANNELIDS		
Duck leech	<i>Theromyzon tessulatum</i>		1
CRUSTACEANS	CRUSTACEA		
No name - Introduced shrimp from Canada	<i>Crangonyx pseudogracilis</i>	1	
MAYFLY LARVAE	EPHEMEROPTERA		
Pond olive mayfly	<i>Cloeon dipterum</i>	2	2
No name	<i>Caenis luctuosa</i> gp.	2	
DRAGONFLY LARVAE	ODONATA - ANISOPTERA		
Hawker dragonfly	Aeshnidae	1	30
DAMSELFLY LARVAE	ODONATA - ZYGOPTERA		
Blue-tailed damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	10	100
WATER BUGS	HEMIPTERA - HETEROPTERA		
Minute backswimmer	<i>Plea leachi</i>	10	50
Water boatman	<i>Sigara</i> sp.		2
Saucer bug	<i>Ilyocoris cimicoides</i>		1
WATER BEETLES	COLEOPTERA - HALIPLIDAE		
Crawling water beetle	<i>Halplus lineatocollis</i>	2	3
Diving beetle larvae	<i>Dytiscidae</i> larvae		2
CADDIS FLY LARVAE	TRICHOPTERA		
No name	<i>Mystacides longicornis</i>	10	
TRUE FLY LARVAE	DIPTERA		
Non biting midge	<i>Chironomidae</i>	2	8
Non biting relative of the mosquito	<i>Dixidae</i>	2	2