



Skylarks

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The *Friends* have held a number of well attended events so far this year. If you haven't joined us you can read about some of the events here and find out what's coming up in the next few months.

How does the garden grow?

Many of you will have noticed that the garden has been developed. Despite the heatwave the planting began in stages. It was labour intensive due to the weed removal and soil improving that took the form of rotovating prior to planting and, once the plants were in the ground, the adding of a top layer of mulch. The contractor, a very knowledgeable man, together with his team has done us proud.

Stage one was the planting of *Rosa rugosa* underplanted with rows of lavender. Scorching proved a problem so the roses were pruned back, but unfortunately out of the numerous clumps of lavender planted a few did perish. Though it has to be said when establishing a new garden a few losses are not uncommon.

Stage two saw the planting of drifts of various species including *Ceanothus*, *Mahonia*, Spindle, white *Potentilla*, and *Berberis thunbergia*. At the far end *Eleagnus* and *Yucca gloriosa* have been added. Stage three involved planting drifts of *Euonymus fortunei* (a yellow and green variegated variety) and a showy silver leafed shrub with yellow daisy-like flowers. At the far end some beautiful feathery shrubs, which have wonderful bright yellow foliage in spring, were added.

Most of the area is in full sun and when the standpipe thread broke the watering had to continue by watering can. Soil improvement by mulching continued as each lot of plants was added. This meant many weeds! So digging over and weeding has been quite a lot of work.

Later on a paper bark birch and a Judas tree will be planted with spring bulbs being put under the birch. Seating was mentioned but will be confirmed later if funds allow. The plants have been selected for their hardiness and many are tough with evergreen leaves. The garden is now well established and if volunteers continue to assist the project should be something we can be proud of. The council is to be commended for the opportunity this has given to the people of Wickford to enjoy this pleasant area.

Let's hope we can look forward to the continued improvement of our wonderful country park.

Maureen Bradford



Nature quest

We have had some lovely days for our events and none more so than for our Nature Quest in May. The sun shone and armed with clipboard and quiz sheet participants set off to discover more about the park and take part in the 'Caterpillar' and 'Sheep and Shepherd' challenges.

Those that took part received a certificate and a Wick Country Park badge. Well done to Jessica Tanner who won first prize. We hope you enjoyed using your cinema vouchers.

A few words from the winner

"The Nature Quest was a lovely day and gets your brain going. There were two fantastic challenges and me and mummy managed them both! It was on May 15th and it was brilliant! I liked the 'Sheep Dog Trial' - (one of the challenges) - this was where I was blindfolded and mummy had to direct me around some cones. It was a great day, I think everyone should be there. There were a lot of questions to answer as we explored the park, but it got me thinking and learning about the park. I really enjoyed the day and winning cinema tickets! "

Jessica Tanner, aged 7½



The garden in August



Dragons, damsels and other beasties

During the summer the *Friends* enjoyed two bug hunts. The first, at the end of June, had us sweeping nets through the meadow – great fun for the children (and the adults enjoyed it too!). In fact we didn't need to do much at all; Mark laid down a white sheet and we had grasshoppers, crickets and other creepy crawlies hopping all over it. We saw a great variety of invertebrate life on our way around the park including lacewing and ladybird larvae, butterflies, lots of grasshoppers and bush crickets, as well as a parasitic wasp, thick legged flower beetle, white plume moth and meadow plant bug. At the end of the morning we were also lucky to see a large hoverfly, which you can read more about below.

In August it was time to look for damselflies and dragonflies, though it was a cool and windy morning and we were not too optimistic about seeing many. However by the lake we did see male and female common blue damselflies, with Mark explaining how to identify them by looking for a teardrop shape on the abdomen. We also spotted a wasp spider and more grasshoppers and bush crickets. Dragonflies did appear too in the form of a Southern hawkler and Black-tailed skimmer. A dragonfly skin, shed as a nymph emerged as an adult, was even found in the educational pond. Fascinating stuff!

Deborah Belverstone

One of Britain's largest hoverflies visits the Wick Country Park

The hoverfly species *Volucella zonaria* is large in size and dark brown in colour with yellow and orange stripes. At nearly 3cms long and 1cm wide this is the largest of a group of five closely related species and one of the largest of all the 250 or so species of hoverfly that are known to occur in the British Isles.

At the turn of the last century this animal was an extremely rare vagrant from the continent, yet to breed in Britain, with no more than several individuals being found throughout England's southernmost coastal counties.

Volucella zonaria only became established as a breeding species during the 1940s. It is now regularly recorded around outer London and the surrounding countryside. Adults occur in mid-summer and are typically attracted to well flowered woodland margins, though the individual visiting the Wick Country Park clearly appreciated our expanse of flowering hawthorn and blackthorn hedgerows.

The life cycle of any hoverfly begins as an egg. The larvae of this species, when hatched, specialize in scavenging their food from wasp colonies. This uninvited but harmless guest loiters beneath the nests of wasps waiting for scraps of food to fall from their oblivious hosts above.

Before reaching adulthood the larvae form a pupa prior to transforming (metamorphosing) into the flying adult.

The great thing about this hoverfly is that if you cannot find it, at least for a fortunate few, it may well find you. Due to its inquisitive nature (for want of a better description) it has a reputation for occasionally flying through the open windows of houses for a brief flying sortie before making a quick exit.

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.*

Autumn Ramble

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

Work Party

Sunday 16th October,
10am – 12noon and/or 1pm – 3pm
Come and have fun and help the ranger with improvements to the park. Join us for a couple of hours or the whole day.

Yuletide Ramble

Sunday 4th December, 2pm start
A winter wander in the park followed by warming mulled wine and mince pies and the *Friends* AGM.

Let us know if there are any other events you would like to see arranged in the future.



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

Party in the park

During the autumn and winter the *Friends* will be joining the ranger for work parties to help out with park improvements. This is a chance to get your hands dirty, have fun and help make a difference to the park. Jobs include weeding and reed removal.

Work parties will take place on every third Sunday of the month starting on 16th October. If you would like to join us we will be working from 10am to 12noon and 1pm to 3pm. Bring your wellies if it's wet and meet us at the Pavilion at the start of either session or bring a packed lunch and stay all day. Tea and coffee will be provided. Parental supervision is required for children.

We look forward to seeing you.



The Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

Deborah Belverstone - Chairperson
Maureen Bradford - Vice Chairperson
Nikki Gibson – Treasurer
Tricia Marshall - Secretary
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