



Skylarks



A Message from the Committee

Welcome to the latest edition of the Skylarks newsletter. Firstly a belated Happy New Year from the Committee to you all and we send you our very best wishes for 2024.

The Events Calendar is included in this edition although there are still dates to be confirmed for many of them. The committee hopes again to see you at the Wick Country Park enjoying the events. Our first event of the year will be the Winter Walk on Sunday 18th February, this will be followed by refreshments in the pavilion and then the AGM.

A brief summary of the future events will be that the Birdsong Walk is planned for a Sunday in April or May, followed by the Bring Your Own Picnic by the Lake, last year this was in June and was a pleasant afternoon sitting in the sun, relaxing and watching the wildlife around the park. The date for the Moth Night and Stargazing can be confirmed, this will be on Friday 5th July, this is an enjoyable evening identifying the moths and stargazing through the telescope. This year hopefully it will be a fine sky to enable seeing some planets! The Autumn Walk with apple themed refreshments is also on the timetable and will be confirmed as soon as possible.

In addition to these nature events there are the Monthly Wildlife Walks led by Martin Singleton and other experts from the Wickford Wildlife Society. This is a leisurely walk looking out for the birds and other wildlife that are in the park.

The committee are looking for any opportunities to hold further events, however these will be announced nearer the date. To keep the success going we are appealing for more volunteers, also to join the committee to help us arrange and give new ideas for this year's events.



Winter Walk



Sunday 18th February 2024 2pm

Please join us for a Winter Walk (1 - 1½ hours) - followed by Mince Pies and Mulled Wine

Then the AGM of the Friends of the Wick Country Park

Everyone welcome to all or part of this free event

Meet at the Pavilion, Wick Country Park

If using sat nav., please use post code SS12 9GP

For more details go to the website:

www.friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk

The Autumn Walk



Last year's Autumn Walk was held on Sunday 1st October 2023 and again was expertly led by Martin Singleton. On the walk **15 species of Birds were spotted** - Barn Swallow, Carrion Crow, Cetti's Warbler, Common Blackbird, Common Moorhen, Common Starling, Common Wood Pigeon, Eurasian Blue Tit, Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Magpie, European Greenfinch, European Robin, Great Tit, House Sparrow and Mallard. Additionally **2 species of Butterflies** - Large White and Small White and also **2 species of Dragonflies** - Common Darter and Migrant Hawker. **One species of Reptile** - Common Lizard.

As commented by Martin "the Common Lizard in particular was good to see - I think it is the first one I have seen in the park. The Common Darter dragonfly was also interesting - I guessed this was a Common Darter, despite being an unusual colour, and checking back home, I found out that this was an "over-mature" female. It seems that post-breeding, some dragonfly species colouring darkens as they age and that is what we have seen here with this specimen".



Common Lizard



Common Darter

If you wish to read the full record of the wildlife spotted on this walk and any of Martin's wildlife reports they can be found on the Friends of the Wick Country Park website www.friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk

Wick Country Park - Wildlife Sightings in 2023

Starting in 2020, it was decided to carry out a monthly wildlife walk in the Wick Country Park, generally on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, depending on weather, holidays etc. The aims of the walk are:

1. To enjoy the park, it's wildlife and get some fresh air.
2. To record and count the wildlife we see/hear, namely: birds, butterflies, dragonflies, mammals, and anything else of note, e.g. moths and reptiles.
3. To gain a greater understanding of what wildlife lives in and/or uses the park and monitor any changes in their populations.
4. To promote the wildlife of the park to the Friends group and general public via the Website and Facebook etc.
5. To share our wildlife recordings with all relevant groups and organisations e.g. Basildon Council, all County Recorders, Essex Amphibian and Reptile Group, etc.

Each month, an email report is issued, recording the wildlife identified that month. Then at the end of the year, an annual report is issued. This report compares year to year, highlighting any noticeable differences between the years.

Birds 2023 - 54 Species

As in 2022, we recorded birds on 13 visits during 2023 (12 monthly visits plus the wildlife picnic,) and identified 54 bird species, which is in line with previous years: (2020 – 53; 2021 – 53; 2022 – 56.) After a record 10 new species in 2022, it was always going to be difficult to add new bird species to our list and only 2 new species were added to the park list in 2023 - Great Crested Grebe and Red Kite. A pair of Great Crested Grebes were present at the lake for several months and we did have hopes that they might breed but no evidence of breeding was seen, and we certainly did not see any grebe chicks. Red Kites are becoming more common in Essex and with possibly as many as 30 pairs breeding in the county, numbers are likely to increase further. Two birds were seen in 2023, both giving great views, even without binoculars, and hopefully we will see more of these fabulous birds in future years.

The Canada Goose, appear to be continuing their decline at the lake and as in 2022, some months they are not there at all. Numbers are down, despite chicks being fledged and reaching adulthood each year. Perhaps there is too much disturbance at the lake – we can only speculate on why their numbers have reduced. Where they go is also unknown. Short distance summer migrants Common Chiffchaff and Eurasian Blackcap continue to do well in the park, with up to 10 Chiffchaff and 11 Blackcap present in the park last year, although Chiffchaff were present for fewer months compared to 2022. Common House Martin and Common Swift also show a slight increase on 2022 sightings, which is welcome news for these much declined species. Common Starling and Common Wood Pigeon were both seen in large numbers last year, but I feel these were one-off instances, rather than increases in abundance of these species. However, by recording each month we may see some long term changes in populations over time. Fieldfare and Redwing, both winter visitors, were present in good numbers in 2023. Numbers vary each year for these “thrush” species and depend on weather, food supply on breeding grounds, and breeding success during the spring.

Otherwise, most of our resident bird populations appear to be stable, with no noticeable increases or reductions apparent.

Finally, it was good to record Kingfisher again in the park, showing that this species uses the lake for feeding, probably more regularly than we realise. Sadly, we did not record Bullfinch, or Common Tern, this year and only 1 Lesser Whitethroat. Fingers crossed for sightings of these species in 2024!



Kingfisher



Bullfinch



Common Tern



Lesser Whitethroat

Butterflies 2023 - 18 Species

In 2023, we saw butterflies on 7 of our walks and identified 18 species of butterfly compared to 19 in 2022, (2021 – 22; 2020 – 21.) No new species were added to our list last year. As has been reported nationally, several butterfly species did very well in 2023, and this was reflected in the park. Gatekeeper, Holly Blue, Large White, Peacock, Red Admiral, and Small White, were all seen in record numbers during the year. Let's hope we see many of their offspring in 2024. Sadly, there were also some losers too, we did not see any Common Blue or Small Skipper and only identified 1 Essex Skipper. It will be interesting to see if this improves in 2024. We also failed to see Brown Argus and White Letter Hairstreak but both are small butterflies and could very easily be missed. The park has proven to be an excellent place to see butterflies in the summer months and long may this continue.

Dragonflies - 6 Species

6 species were recorded in 2023, the same number as 2022 (2021; 8, 2020; 3,) with no new species added to the park list. Brown Hawker was good to see and there were reasonable numbers of Migrant Hawker at times. Sadly, we did not see the Willow Emerald in the park last year, but it is certainly breeding in the area. A surprise was not seeing Black Tailed Skimmer which is normally quite common around the lake. Perhaps all the recent work on the ponds near the pavilion may prove fruitful for dragonflies in 2024?

Mammals - 2 Species

We saw mammals on 7 of our walks and these mainly consisted of Grey Squirrels. The only other mammal seen in the park was Red Fox. We did not have a “bat night” in 2023, so no bats were recorded. Our overall list remains at 4. There must be plenty of small mammals in the park that we never see, and I am surprised that we have not seen a Hedgehog yet. I do think there is so much disturbance during the day and well into the night that many mammals do not emerge till very late!

Moths - 16 Species

We identified 14 moth species during our moth night, despite the rain and cold weather on the night. We also saw a Box Tree Moth in September and Barbara & Richard found an impressive Emperor Moth caterpillar in June. Our overall list now stands at 41, with 8 new species added during 2023. One year we will get decent weather for our moth night, and we could get some spectacular results. In addition, we may get the help of the Essex Moth Group in 2024 and it will be interesting to see what they can find. Thanks again to Colin for providing all of the moth attracting equipment.

Amphibians & Reptiles - 3 Species - all years.

Having seen two reptiles in 2023, I decided to record these via an online recording database, "The Record Pool". The records are then reported to the Essex Amphibian & Reptile Group (EARG). I also have in my notes that I saw an Adder on the 21st September 2022. In 2024, the EARG have agreed to visit the park and show us the areas where we may find Amphibians and Reptiles and how to look for them. Hopefully, this will lead to a few more species being added to our list.

Recap 2023

Yet another successful year of wildlife walks and we now have 4 years of data and our understanding of the park, and its wildlife is increasing with every visit. We are now starting to include more specialist countywide groups in our walks and events e.g. Essex Wildlife Trust, Essex Bat Group etc., which can only be good for the park.

My highlights of the year were:

1. Seeing great views of Red Kites – what fabulous birds they are.
2. The large numbers of butterflies in the park during the summer.
3. The impressive Emperor Moth caterpillar found by Barbara & Richard.
4. The Fox sunning itself near the pavilion pond.

Looking forward to another year of great wildlife and seeing you all on the walks.

(Written by Martin Singleton)

Wick-ed Gardeners



The Wick-ed Gardeners were very busy throughout 2023 and the dedicated team have started already in 2024 working to maintain the pavilion garden. If you would like to join the valued team of volunteer gardeners please come along, all are welcome, tools are available but bring your own if you prefer along with your pair of gardening gloves. Please keep an eye on the Friends of the Wick Country Park website under Latest Headlines for the date of the next session and meeting arrangements.



Improvements to the Park

Over the past year and with many thanks to councillor George Jeffery the 'Friends' and visitors have seen many welcome improvements to the Wick Country Park. These include repairs to the playground, the paths round the park being upgraded and with better drainage, also the repair of the damaged wooden walkways. Additionally the fencing round the pond next to the pavilion has been repaired and the wooden boardwalks across the pond too. Hopefully a pond dipping nature event can now be organised to enjoy the benefits of bringing the pond area back to life.

Please go the Facebook page for the Friends of the Wick Country Park and see the link posted on 17th January and view the video of the improvements to the pond area next to the pavilion – very impressive!



WICK COUNTRY PARK EVENTS 2024



The following events for 2024 have been organised by the Friends of the Wick Country Park.

*All these events start at or near to the **Wick Country Park Pavilion** and for most events booking is not required, please see the particular event for details. Toilets, car-parking, cycle racks, and refreshments are available at most events.*

EVENT Please click on the link for full details	DATE	DETAILS
Wick-ed Gardeners	Next date: please see the News Headlines page	The Wick Country Park Gardening Group - the Wick-ed Gardeners meet regularly and always welcome new volunteers. For the next date, please see the News Headlines page. Meet outside the Pavilion. Please bring your own gardening gloves. Tools will be provided, but if you have your own favourite gardening tool/s please feel free to bring your own.
Monthly Nature Walks	Dates for 2024 are all on the following Wednesdays: February 21st March 20th April 17th May 22nd June 12th July 17th August 21st September 18th October 16th November 20th December 11 th	Starting at 10.30a.m. Enjoy a sociable and leisurely walk of approx 1 - 1.5 hours around the Park, led by Martin Singleton, and assisted by other experts from the Wickford Wildlife Society to watch and listen to the varied wildlife in the Park. If you come throughout the year you may be amazed at the changing patterns of sightings throughout the seasons. For further details and to confirm the next date, please contact Martin Singleton
Winter Walk & AGM	Sunday 18 th February	<i>Starting at 2 pm</i> this is a sociable and leisurely walk of approx 1 – 1.5 hours around the park and afterwards enjoy some mulled wine and mince pies. Everyone is then invited to the AGM.
Birdsong Walk	Sunday in April/May to be confirmed	Start time: 09.00 - note the earlier start compared with previous years. Martin Singleton will be the lead. Refreshments will be provided.
Bring Your Own Picnic by the Lake	To be confirmed	Time 2pm to approx 5pm. Sit by the lake and see what birds and wildlife there is about whilst enjoying a picnic.
Moth Night and Stargazing	Friday 5 th July	Time 9pm till late - Moth Night and Stargazing. This is a joint event with the Wickford Wildlife Society. There will be a booking system to be opened nearer the time as numbers will be limited.
Autumn Walk with Apple Theme Refreshments	To be confirmed	Time 10am - Autumn Walk round the park then back to the pavilion for apple theme refreshments.



Come along to the Wick Country Park and enjoy a walk and see the wildlife.

If you do make any good wildlife sightings, please share them by sending an email to contact_us@friendsofthewickcountrypark.co.uk and we will add them to the 'Nature Notes' on the website. If you could manage a picture or two that would be even better!

Friends of the Wick Country Park Committee:

Christine Lee - Acting Chairperson, Hazel Broomfield - Treasurer, Marie Singleton - Secretary,
Eileen Cattell - Membership Secretary, Alaric Cundy - Webmaster
Peter Bates - Committee Member
Les Finn – Committee Member

 Friends of the Wick Country Park

**Wickford Wildlife Society website: www.wickfordwildlife.co.uk
(40th anniversary this year 1984 – 2024)**

 Wickford Wildlife Society

Wickford Wombles

 Wickford Wombles

Neighbourhood Policing Team: Telephone 0300 333 4444 or 07875 003503



Our 'meet and greet' robin often seen at the entrance to the park to welcome visitors!