

Skylarks

A Message from the Committee

Welcome to the latest edition of the Skylarks newsletter reporting all that has happened in the Wick Country Park last year and the plans for this year. Firstly a belated Happy New Year from the Committee to you all and we send you our very best wishes for 2025.

The Events Calendar is included in this edition and the committee hopes again to see you at the Wick Country Park enjoying the events.

Our next event will be the Spring Birdsong Walk on Sunday 13th April followed by the Bring Your Own Picnic afternoon on Saturday 7th June.

On Friday 4th July it is the Moth Night and Stargazing which 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 will be held on Sunday 19th October.

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. There is a detailed list of all recorded sightings in 2024 written by Martin included in this issue showing how wildlife diverse and wonderful our local country park has become.

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 and AGM

The Winter Walk and AGM was held on Sunday 19th January. It was a cool and grey afternoon but we saw a few nice birds to brighten things up. There was plenty of action at the pavilion feeders before we set off and the highlight was a flock of Long Tailed Tit that just ignored us and gave everyone great views – some notably for the first time! The next highlight was at the boardwalk when two small brown birds were excellently spotted feeding right at the back on the ground in the gloom. These turned out to be a pair of Redpoll a new sighting for our park list and not a regular bird in Wickford at all. They are normally found feeding on Alder in winter, so they were in the right place, but I have never seen them feeding on the ground before. The final highlight of the day was at the lake where we saw 20 Mallard, the most I have ever seen here. Mainly males looking great with their new winter plumage, all ready for the breeding season.



Long Tailed Tit



Red Poll



Mallard

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

'The Birdsong Walk'

Our first event of last year was the Birdsong Walk which took place on Sunday 14th April. The weather was excellent, warm and sunny and we saw lots of birds and other wildlife. A scarcer warbler, the Lesser Whitethroat was also singing with at least 3 present in the park. Very good news to have this many here. As well as migrant birds, we also saw and heard many of our resident birds such as Goldfinch, Robin and Blue Tit. We also saw 3 bird of prey species, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and a very distant Kestrel as we had our coffee at the pavilion. In addition to birds, we also saw 4 species of butterfly, including a good number of Orange Tip, the first seen this year. Finally, we also managed to see one adder basking in the sun. Overall, an excellent day with lots to see.



Scarcer Warbler



Lesser Whitethroat



Orange Tip Butterfly

'Bring Your Own Picnic By The Lake'

The Picnic in the Park event took place on Saturday 1st June. The weather was dry but we had a cool breeze, and it was cloudy most of the time. Not really June weather but at least it was not raining. It was nice to see quite a few chicks at the lake, and the Canada Geese have had 10 chicks for several weeks now. A few Swallows and House Martins were good to see, and we also heard a couple of Reed Warblers. There are still plenty of migrant birds singing in the park and we also heard, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Common Whitethroat.





Kingfisher



House Martin



Reed Warbler

'Annual Moth Night'

Our annual moth and stargazing night at the Wick Country Park was due to take place on Friday 5th July but due to adverse weather it had to be cancelled. The event was rearranged for Friday 23rd August and this time took place in St Mary's Churchyard.

Wick-ed Gardeners



The Wick-ed Gardeners were very busy throughout 2024 and the dedicated team have started already in 2025 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.



'Other News'

A teacher from the Abacus School contacted the 'Friends' to say the school would like to become more involved with the Wick Country Park as they are so nearby. At the school's Summer Fete held at the end of June we had a table there and a presentation detailing the features of the country park.



The school also requested some help with their visit to the Wick Country Park on Armistice Day 11th November. On the morning a group of 57 pupils and their teachers came to hear about the 3 pillboxes in the country park, then all wanting to see inside went into the pillbox near the pavilion two at a time! At 11am we then observed the 2-minute silence.

There is also good news on the financial side for the benefit of the Wick Country Park. The 'Friends' were successful when applying for an Area Committee Grant - this amounted to £3000 and will be used to create a Wildflower Meadow to be completed in March/April. Additionally 13 fruit trees have been received from Basildon Council which will be planted soon and also £150 for bulbs which have now been planted.

Wick Country Park - Wildlife Sightings in 2024

Starting in 2020, it was decided to carry out a monthly wildlife walk in the Wick County 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.

Below are the detailed lists of all the wildlife seen/heard during 2024.

Birds 2024 – 63 Species

As in 2022 and 2023, we recorded birds on 13 visits during 2024 (12 monthly visits plus the wildlife picnic,) and identified 63 bird species, which is a new record for the park: (2022 – 56; 2023 – 54; 2022 – 56; 2021 – 53; 2020 - 53.) Two factors to consider that may have contributed to this record count; as the park matures it will attract more bird species, plus we are perhaps also getting a bit better at identifying them and where the common ones are in the park!

Three new species were added to our bird list in 2024: **Common Linnet**, **Eurasian Hobby** and **Willow Warbler**. It's surprising that it has taken so long to add the first two to our list, but **Willow Warbler** is a bonus, having declined by approximately 50% in England over the past 25 years, and is now largely restricted to the North and West of the UK. This was almost certainly a bird on spring passage North, one of a few heard around Wickford at this time.

An unusual bird seen at the lake in 2024 has been recorded but is not a separate species. This was a **Canada Goose x Greylag Goose hybrid** sometimes called a "Canlag" Goose. Quite an usual sighting but has never been seen again in the park.

In respect of population changes, most of our resident bird populations appear to be stable, with no noticeable increases or reductions apparent. However, a few changes are worth mentioning:

Common Chaffinch shows a slight increase this year and perhaps at long last they are recovering from the effects of trichomonosis disease.

This may also be true for **Greenfinch** where we had one of the best years for recording this bird, also badly affected by the same disease.

Sadly, records of **Common Swift** continue to reduce, and this is matched in the rest of the UK. One of my favourite birds and it will be a very sad day indeed if we no longer hear their screeching around the skies in summer.

A small increase in **Skylark** sightings is good news, although sadly some of these sightings were on land marked for housing development! Perhaps the new flower meadow might help here?

Nice to see **Goldcrest** once again. We last saw one on our very first visit in 2020. They are probably in the park most of the winter but are so small and agile we probably miss them most years.

At one stage there were as many as five **Lesser Whitethroat** in the park, a very good number for Wickford and a record for our list. This is a bird increasing its range due to climate change and is now well established as a summer visitor to the park.

Finally, a favourite of all of us, **Common Kingfisher**, was seen/heard on 3 occasions in 2024. It seems a pair were present at the lake in the latter months of the year. However, the icy weather which froze the lake, looks to have moved them on to running water or the coast.

Butterflies 2024 – 18 Species

In 2024, we saw 18 butterfly species which was the same 18 number as in 2023 (2023 – 18; 2022 – 19; 2021 – 22; 2020 – 21.) We added one new species this year – the **Wall** or **Wall Brown** as my software calls it.

This is a butterfly normally found in coastal areas of Essex, resting in the sun on sea walls as its name suggests. There were at least two records in the park this year, one being seen during a Wicked Gardeners

session in the spring. Perhaps we have a colony nearer than we think, although it is documented that they are found in open grasslands, so there could indeed be a small breeding population in the park or nearby. It was a poor year in the park for **Gatekeeper** compared to 2023 but there were plenty of these elsewhere in Essex so hopefully this is just a one-off.

Marbled White were present in record numbers this year, the most I have ever seen in the park, but sadly an early cut of much of the grass seemed to put an end to sightings. Hopefully, the grass is not cut until later in the year during 2025.

Sadly, for two years in a row now, we have not seen **Brown Argus**, **Common Blue** or **Small Heath**. These are all small butterflies that can easily be missed but **Common Blue** is a real worry as these were regularly seen in past years. They do not seem to have recovered from the hot weather of summer 2022.

It was pleasing to see both **Essex** and **Small Skipper** this year in good numbers, having also been badly affected by the heat in 2022. Perhaps we can see a real recovery of these two species in 2025.

Speckled Wood and **Small White** are the butterflies you are most likely to see in the park, both being seen on 6 visits, so you can see these for half of the year!

Meadow Brown was the most numerous butterfly seen, with 78 recorded during our July walk. I suspect at least 3 times this number were present in the park at this time.

Finally, our visit to the **White-letter Hairstreak** colony drew a blank yet again. We will try again in 2025, but this is a tricky butterfly to see at the best of times.

Dragonflies & Damselflies – 6 Species

6 species were recorded in 2024, the same number as in the past 2 years (2023 – 6; 2022 – 6; 2021 – 8; 2020 – 3.) One new species was added to the list – **Southern Migrant Hawker**, with a male and female seen “hawking” around the field near the “willow tunnel”. This is a European species expanding its range due to climate change and is now a common species in many parts of Essex. The male is a vivid blue dragonfly with noticeable bright blue eyes and this species is a very good sighting for the park.

What is apparent from our sightings, is that dragonfly and damselfly numbers vary greatly each year, and we are never guaranteed to see any species. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from the figures above and perhaps we need to re-think on how we look for dragonflies and damselflies with a more targeted approach.

Mammals – 2 Species

We only saw mammals on four visits to the park and these mainly consisted of **Grey Squirrel**. The only other mammal seen was a single sighting of **Red Fox**. I am surprised we have not yet seen a Muntjac Deer, but they are becoming more common in the area and I predict that we will see them one day.

Moths – 4 Species

As our moth night was cancelled due to bad weather, we only added 3 new moths to the list in 2024. It was interesting to find at least 6 **Emperor Moth** caterpillars this spring. The adult is a very impressive moth and are on the wing in April and May. We know they are in the park and are worth looking for during these months. Hopefully, our annual moth night will go ahead in 2025, but the mere mention of this event seems to guarantee poor weather! One year I am hopeful that we will be lucky.

Amphibians & Reptiles

Two **Adder** were seen in 2024, and this species is the most common reptile sighting in the park. Overall, we have now seen 4 amphibian and reptile species in the park. We know of plans to “re-house” some of these creatures in the park, from a nearby development and perhaps our sightings may increase in future years due to this.

Others – 27 Species

In 2024 we decided to record “other species” i.e. insects and other invertebrates. In addition to species recorded during 2024, I have also populated this list with a few earlier sightings, identified from photographs taken on past visits. We now have a total of 27 species identified and there will be many more to add over future years.

Written by Martin Singleton)

WICK COUNTRY PARK EVENTS 2025

The following events for 2025 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 Wildlife Walks	Dates for 2025 are all on the following Wednesdays: February 19th March 19th April 16th May 21st June 18th July 16th August 20th September 17th October 15th November 19th December 17th	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
Spring Birdsong Walk	Sunday 13 th April	Start time: 09.00. Martin Singleton will lead the walk and refreshments will be provided.
Bring Your Own Picnic by the Lake	Saturday 7th June	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 4th 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	Sunday 19th October	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

 Wickford Wildlife Society

Wickford Wombles

 Wickford Wombles

Neighbourhood Policing Team: Telephone 0300 333 4444 or 07875 003503

