

## In this Issue:

7

- EDITORIAL
- ADVENTURE PLAY AREA
- BATS
- BOOK REVIEW
- THE LAKE
- WILDLIFE FEATURE - CRICKETS
- SPOTTERS BIRD LIST
- INTRODUCING THE NEW RANGER
- FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### ■ Editorial

*Welcome to another edition of the Wick Country Park newsletter. It's been almost a year since the last one and, as those of you that visit the park can testify, a lot has been happening.*

The highlight was last September, when media personality and ecologist, Professor Chris Baines, formally opened The Pavilion Building. The Pavilion has many energy-saving features, such as sensor controlled lighting, rainwater recycling for toilet flushing, a heat recycling system and excellent insulation. As well as being a very significant event in the development of the park, it heralded a new era for Basildon Council's Countryside Services Education Team. Schools and groups have been quick to book visits to the

*The Adventure Play Area before and after: the state of the art play equipment and safety surfacing was installed during February and March this year and has proved to be a resounding success.*



Basildon District Council  
Countryside Services

Pavilion and the park to study the emerging wildlife, build living sculptures out of willow poles and have fun and games with educational birthday parties. All of these activities can be booked through Countryside Services' main office at Wat Tyler Country Park (Tel: 01268 550088).

The previous Countryside Ranger, Paul Bown, left us in January and has recently been replaced by Mark Williams, who will be based at the office within The Pavilion. Mark is on duty from Monday to Thursday and on Sunday, so the main gates will be open on those days. See the note about opening/closing times and contact numbers at the end of the newsletter.

The development phase of the country park is due to finish in July 2005 and we are well within the schedule for completing all the work that is planned. In fact, all of the 'big jobs' have been



done and it's a case of adjusting certain things, replanting some areas and making sure we record the improvements in wildlife that is happening as a result of the new habitats that have been created. It's good to see so many local people enjoying a walk or jog around the trail, having a picnic, birdwatching or simply relaxing in the peaceful surroundings. There are not many places in the district where you can unwind to the beautiful song of the skylark!

### ■ Adventure Play Area

The state of the art play equipment and safety surfacing was installed in February and March this year and has proved a resounding success for the families with young children it was designed to attract.

Playdale, the manufacturer, have developed the area in consultation with Countryside staff who have experience of designing and running successful play areas at Wat Tyler Country Park. The facility at the Wick Country Park is ideal for children up to the age of about seven or eight. It will give them fun and challenges, and a soft landing if they tumble. It also looks attractive in its setting through the use of natural wooden uprights and brightly coloured panels. More recently, a picnic area backed by a parking



bay for about ten vehicles has been surfaced and fenced adjacent to the play area. We will be installing heavy duty picnic tables and benches soon, so that parents can rest and relax while keeping a watchful eye on their children as they play.

The Ranger and other Countryside staff do keep a close eye on the use of the play area and a daily inspection of the equipment and surfacing is carried out. However, we can't be around all the time, so if visitors experience any problems, either in the play area or elsewhere on the park, please use the contact numbers provided on the signage or contained at the end of this newsletter. We intend to make sure that the park as a whole retains its high standards for the benefit of local people.

### ■ Bats

Following an excellent illustrated talk by the Essex bat expert, John Dobson, work really got underway during March with the conversion of two out of the three wartime pillboxes into roosting and hibernation sites for bats.

The entrances have been fitted with locked steel doors, with bars at the bottom to allow bats to fly in while excluding humans. The gun slits have also been sealed with steel plates. This provides a secure, dark environment and creates the right conditions of airflow and humidity for some bat species. Inside, the walls have been lined with wooden boards, standing proud of the surface on battens to allow the bats to crawl up between the wall and the board. Special bricks containing holes have also been placed so that the bats can lodge inside, providing a similar environment to that which they might find in the crevices of a natural cave.

All we can do now is to wait for the bats to find and use the pillboxes. Periodic inspections will reveal if there are bats in residence and then we can call on the help of a licenced bat expert to help identify and monitor the species. We have bought

a nifty piece of electronic equipment that picks up the high-pitched squeaks and squeals of the bats as they fly around in the darkness in pursuit of air-borne insects. The bat detector can decode the different wave length calls that each species uses. If you're interested in knowing more about these fascinating creatures, seeing them and listening to their echo-location calls on the bat detector, see the EVENTS section of the newsletter for the date and time.

### ■ Book Review

There are two must have books for anyone wanting to identify the insects to be found within the British Isles. *The Collins Field Guide to Insects of Britain & Northern Europe* and *The Collins Pocket Guide of Britain & Western Europe*. These books make an excellent introduction to the group, but with 20,000 or so species in Britain alone no one book can cover each and every one.

The pocket guide has the most illustrations and with both books ready to hand is a good source to start with. Even if the insect you're trying to identify cannot be found it will enable you to find half a dozen or so similar individuals, each superbly illustrated with a brief description of the animal and its habitat. The illustrations within the Field Guide are fewer, though still plentiful, and are grouped together in the centre of the book with 60 plates in total. The invaluable

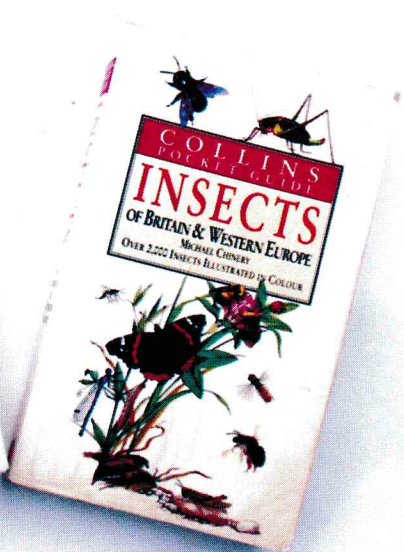
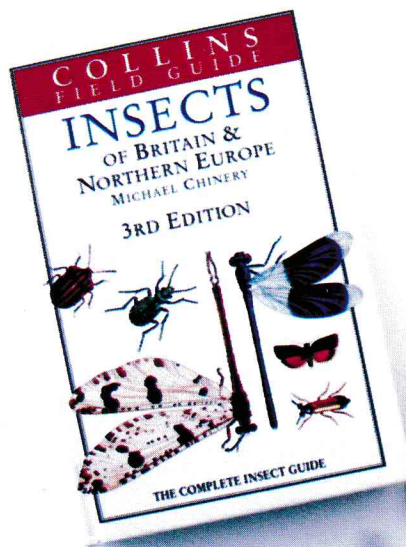
feature of this book is that beside each plate the illustrated insects are named and grouped into their respective families, with a brief description and page number. Turning to the numbered page, one is rewarded with a comprehensive description of that individual's family. The book makes excellent reading material and is much more than a means of identification. The information works systematically through the classification process, often enabling one to pinpoint the family of a found insect which, within a group of animals with so many species, is very good indeed.

Reviewed by Mark Williams  
Wick Country Park Ranger

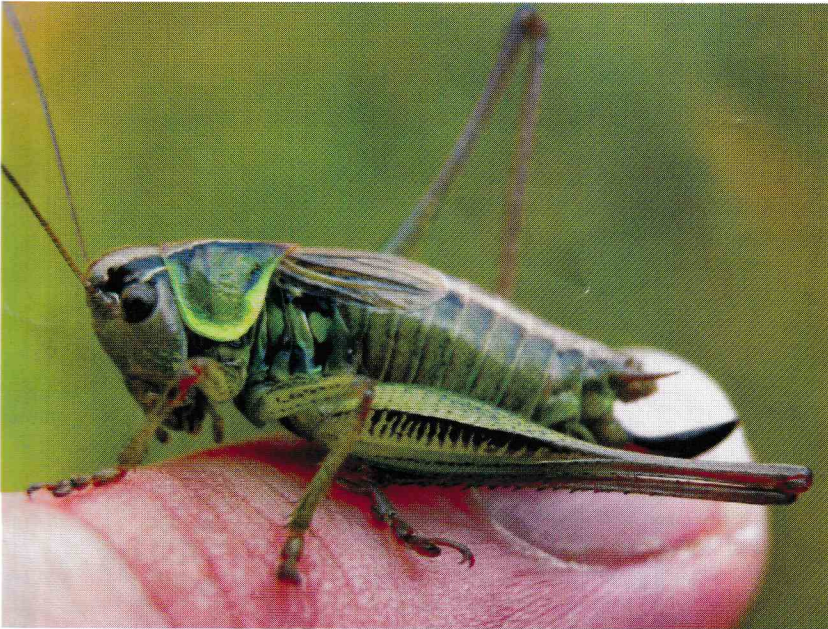
*Please note: This article represents the personal view of the reviewer and is not meant to represent the view of Basildon District Council.*

### ■ The Lake

In the natural world a lake or pond is alas, as with so many things of beauty, but a temporary thing. The remains of plants and animals (including animal droppings) create a build up of nutrient rich sediment. This combined with an ever increasing growth of vegetation leads to the water becoming progressively shallower until it finally gives way to dry land. My concern for the wildlife of the lake, especially while it is in this early and fragile stage, is that too great a number of any one species of



## WILDLIFE FEATURE The Roesel's Bush-cricket



Above: A newly formed adult female.  
Below: A mature female.

A hundred years ago Roesel's bush-cricket was confined to the coastal fluke of the river Thames and small coastal pockets stretching northwards to the Humber. It was not until the mid 1980s as part of The Greater London Survey that this infrequently seen species was noticed establishing itself in and around the Home Counties. Now, in the 21st century, this climate driven expansion has led to it being found just about anywhere with a suitable environment, top of the list as des-res being water meadows and ungrazed grassland. It is the latter that the Wick Country Park provides in such abundance.

This visually and vocally striking species (sounding somewhat similar to a camera delayed action mechanism) can as an adult be found in warm weather from July onwards, when the males can often be heard wooing the females well into the evening using high pitched stridulation, (crickets and grasshoppers actually sing by rubbing their legs together).

The female can quickly be distinguished from the male because, like all female crickets, she has a long upward curving ovipositor (egg laying tube).



Otherwise both sexes look very much alike with a black pronotum (a shield situated behind the head) flanked with a distinctive narrow yellow horseshoe band, while in front of the very long hind legs can be found three yellow ovular stripes.

• A grasshopper and cricket identification walk will be lead by expert Tim Gardiner at the Wick Country Park at 11am on Sunday 8th August. All are welcome. Suitable outdoor clothing recommended.

plant or animal could potentially dominate the establishing ecosystem, thereby excluding other potential wildlife beneficiaries as well as contributing to their own demise.

It is with the above in mind that I turn my immediate attention to the Canada Goose. Being a large animal a small number can have a significant impact in one of two ways - either by climbing in and out of the water, thereby destroying the still establishing water fringing vegetation, or by the production of Guano (droppings) which are frequent and extremely nutrient rich.

Since geese are flying creatures they need to keep their body weight to a minimum, therefore they have not evolved the complex and weighty digestive system of a grazing mammal (such as a cow). This means they can only digest and intake a fraction of the nutrients available within the grass they eat (because grass contains cellulose it is extremely hard to digest). What remains has to be excreted very quickly to enable the eating of yet more grass in a race to replace the modest nourishment they've already gained from any previous consumption.

Below is information obtained from the Canada Goose Preservation Society Web Site:-  
[www.cgcs.demon.co.uk](http://www.cgcs.demon.co.uk)

*In small, urban areas like parks it makes good sense to try and limit feeding - because bread is not a natural diet, and not good for the birds.*

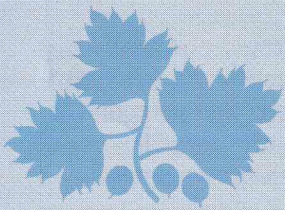
*Uncontrolled feeding is the main cause of over-population of Canada geese in areas too small to sustain them naturally.*

*The Canada Goose Preservation Society also recommend the following signage.*

*Polite but firm notices are essential - for the good of the birds as well as the public. Suggested wording:-*

***“Too much bread pollutes the water, and birds can suffer serious and sometimes fatal diseases as a direct result of overfeeding.”***

So Please try to resist the feeding of Canada Geese, not just for their benefit but for the benefit of all the wildlife that share the lake with them.



# The Wick Country Park News

## Spotters guide to birds

### Spotted in the park on 25th January 2004

Yellowhammer	Robin
Duncock	Wren
Greenfinch	Blue tit
Chaffinch	Great tit
House sparrow	Heron
Starling	Blackbird
Kestrel	Carrion crow
Reed Bunting	Skylark
Black headed gull	Mallard
Herring gull	Collared dove
Song thrush	Wood pigeon
Redwing	Lapwing
Canada goose	Maggpie
Lesser black backed gull	Green woodpecker

### Spotted in the park after 25th January 2004

Pied wagtail	Tufted duck
Little gull	Little egret
Snipe	



### ■ The New Ranger

As the new Park Ranger let me take this opportunity to introduce myself with a little vocational history. I began in conservation as so many do by volunteering during my youth in and around the local neighbourhood - in this case half a dozen groups or so affiliated to the Lee Valley Park and Epping Forest.

Immediately after school I digressed briefly into Forestry in Herefordshire and the Royal Tunbridge Wells district before returning to conservation proper by enrolling into the excellent Merrist Wood College situated in Surrey (sorry, Writtle!) where I spent three fruitful years more or less mastering the trade of Park Ranger.

College was interspersed with two student placements, the first being in Fenlands of Cambridgeshire with the National Trust. The second with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust bordering Strangford Sea Lough in Ulster. Both posts entailed practical and rudimentary educational work with a sort of Wetlands theme.

After College I returned to Ulster on a whim and after a few inquires and a measure of good fortune I took on the role of Urban Field Officer for Conservation Volunteers Belfast (please note the word conservation - no balaclavas). The project contributed towards providing the communities of Belfast with opportunities to work together transforming derelict urban wasteland into wildlife and amenity havens.

While part of the project, I secured for all those involved an award internationally recognised within the conservation fraternity and conceived by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature. I guess I found myself in the right place at the right time and just happened to do the right thing.

Lastly, before leaving Northern Ireland, I worked for about a year with the Ulster Wildlife Trust as an Education Officer, immersed in fun-filled educational projects and activities with people of all ages, yippee!

Finally, back in England I was once again employed by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust as one of three full time wardens working with a small army of contractors and part timers' putting together the London Wetland Centre.

After its completion I became the Centre's Aviculturist, once again keeping and breeding internationally endangered waterfowl. Other duties included guided feeds and talking shop with zoological boffins.

What I find so impressive about the Wick Country Park is its already establishing wildlife, and the people I meet, who so obviously appreciate it to.

Mark Williams

### The Friends

*If you haven't yet joined The Friends of The Wick Country Park, but would like to do so, please contact:-*  
D. Mullender,  
31 Tresco Way, Wickford,  
SS12 9GP.

**Contact:**  
**Ranger - Tel: 01268 562921.**  
**Countryside Services Main Office at Wat Tyler Country Park - Tel: 01268 550088.**

**The Wick Country Park - Opening & Closing Times**  
Summer 9.00am - 8.00pm Winter 9.00am - 5.00pm  
Pedestrian access open at all times.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### GRASSHOPPER & CRICKET SAFARI

Sunday 8th August  
11am

Identification by sight and sound of these remarkable mini beasts will be lead by national expert Tim Gardiner.

### BAT WATCH

Wednesday 25th August  
7.30pm

For anyone interested in knowing more about these fascinating creatures, seeing them and listening to their echo-location calls on the bat detector.

### DRAGONFLY & DAMSELFLY WALK

Sunday 5th September  
11am

These precision flyers are a marvel to behold, whether it is the comparatively delicate looking damselfly or its more robust & larger relative the dragonfly.

### KITE FESTIVAL

Sunday 19th September  
10am - 2pm

Come along and choose from one of our proven designs or design your own. Join in our kite flyer's competition & pick up some top flying tips. Parental supervision required.  
Booking Essential  
Tel: 01268 550088.

### AUTUMN BIRDWATCH

Sunday 10th October  
9.30am

With the imminent onset of winter many birds will be migrating south to their winter homes. Come search the sky's of Wick Country Park for these feathered nomads who may well frequent the park briefly for a well earned rest.

Please Note - All events will start from The Pavilion.



**Basildon District Council**  
**Countryside Services**