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■ Editorial

The five year development programme for the Wick Country Park is at an end. The project started in 1999, with a public consultation about the sort of facility that local people wanted. The overwhelming response was for a country park with some facilities for children and family enjoyment.

It has been a long haul since the first site work started in 2000. We were not timid in our task to transform a sterile, ex-cattle grazed meadow into a series of rich habitats for wildlife, with access and amenity for the local community. If not done carefully these two aims could be mutually exclusive, but the results after five years of development seem to indicate that we have got the balance about right.

Early work created a four acre lake, with islands and headlands planted with shrubs. The spoil from the operation has helped re-profile the landscape with two large mounds covering some eight acres. These have been planted with thousands of native trees and shrubs and will eventually become a charming woodland.

The construction of the pavilion building in 2003 has provided a much needed educational facility for local schools and will eventually house display material that can be enjoyed by all visitors. A recently dug pond next to the pavilion is now proving popular with visiting school groups for their science studies.

The last piece of major construction at the park was to install an adventure play area, with

challenging equipment for the six to ten year olds. We have created parking and picnic benches next door so that all the family can enjoy the visit. It's clear from the use it gets that it is a much appreciated addition to the park facilities.

The new lake has settled down and is now a very rich habitat indeed. Dragon and damselflies abound, not to mention the ducks, geese, moorhen and grebes that use the open water and the shallows. Kingfishers and wading birds, like redshank and dunlin, are frequently seen and swallows and house martins criss-cross the lake and meadow catching insects on the wing. Of course, we cannot end without a mention of the skylarks. Their song is the anthem for the country park and charms visitors for most of the year. Even more importantly, the careful management of the site has

One of the Park's many newly planted oak trees.



demonstrated how public access and biodiversity can co-exist, with the skylark population in the park actually increasing over the last five years.

Now that the development phase is at an end we can look forward to many years of the successful evolution of the habitats that have been created. New species will move in and, inevitably, some may be lost. The reed bed that was planted three years ago has just provided the latest of these new additions to the species list, the reed warbler. We anticipate many more of these migrants breeding in the park in years to come as the reeds extend their range across the shallow areas of the lake.

In September, the lake will open to families wanting to fish for the rudd, roach, tench, perch and bream that we have introduced. This amenity will extend the interest of the park to yet another range of visitors. The more people that enjoy the park, the more it will become a respected and special place in the hearts of the local community.

It already has the makings of a truly lasting and sustainable feature for Wickford and much credit for this goes to the local people that have been involved with its early development. This particularly applies to the members and committee of the *Friends of the Wick Country Park*, who continue to support the Council with the management work and events that bring the park alive for visitors. Also, the many volunteers who love to get stuck in with practical help to assist Mark, the Countryside Ranger based on site. Thanks to you all, and we can look forward to the future of the park with optimism because of all your hard work on this, Basildon's newest country park.



An expansive canopy of mature oak spreading over and above one of the pathways of the Wick Country Park.

■ Establishing Park Woodland

This winter planting has continued on the park's two north westerly hills, being part of the ongoing process of establishing an oak and ash woodland upon the spoil which was previously excavated and then relocated to create the park's lake feature and the hills themselves.

The Oak Woodland

The Oak can reach to 45 metres with a ragged crown but more normally its leading shoot is eaten, forcing out side branches to form a large spreading dome up to 20 metres in height. The twisted furrowed bark is greyish in colour. The leaves grow on very short stalks and have deep lobes. Oak trees can support an incredible number of plant and animal species including well over 300 lichens and over 400 spiders and insects. This includes nearly 200 species of butterflies and moths. In the spring the rich bounty of caterpillars feasting on the season's new leaves attracts many feeding and breeding woodland birds in search of food for their young. A single great tit may eat up to 300

caterpillars a day! Mature oak trees have a labyrinth of branches providing suitable surface areas for colonising plants such as algae, mosses, ferns, as well as a foothold for climbing plants such as ivy. These plants offer a wealth of microhabitats in their own right.

The Ash Woodland

This species often reaches 20-25 metres in height and is the only native member of the olive family. It has smooth silver grey bark which breaks into fissures on older trees. During winter the large unopened buds are jet black. Ash leaves are one of the latest to open and often drop while still green. Each seed is set in a long green wing or samara and drops from the tree during October. While ash is not particularly favoured by insects, supporting only 41 different species (roughly one tenth of the number supported by oak), it supports over 250 species of lichens.

Ash trees have finely divided compound leaves and a fairly loosely branched overall structure. As a result, they cast a relatively light shade which allows a variety

of other plants to grow beneath them, therefore providing a rich shrub and field layer.

As the woodland begins to mature the enclosing canopy will cast alternate and shifting areas of light and shade. This will encourage the growth of a varied understory made up chiefly of the planted hazel and hawthorn, with the smaller amounts of planted holy, spindle and field maple providing a potential home for over 220 invertebrates and 350 lichens. This will benefit small woodland birds and mammals by providing feeding and nesting materials.

Though we are looking at several generations of people before these trees reach their maturity and optimum wildlife potential, even the youngest of up and coming woodlands will still provide a home and food for a variety of wildlife very much in the sense of the here and now for all of us to enjoy.

■ Faeces & the Toxicara Parasite

As well as being unpleasant and unsightly, dog faeces is a serious public health risk due to the parasite toxicara which can cause blindness if swallowed. A recent survey by Encams (Environmental Campaigns) said up to 16,000 people are affected by toxicariasis every year. The parasites and its eggs can be picked up on shoes, children's hands, the wheels of pushchairs, wheelchairs etc. It may take months after swallowing these eggs for symptoms to develop. The symptoms can last for a year or more and include the following: poor appetite, headache, fever, sore throat, aching limbs, abdominal pain, sleep disturbance, listlessness, pneumonia, asthma.

Eye symptoms are not always present although blindness resulting from toxicariasis affects

nearly 100 people a year and may develop up to ten years after the initial infection. The main group of people at risk are children who play where irresponsible dog owners have allowed their dogs to foul without clearing it up afterwards.

Fortunately the disease can be controlled if the faeces are disposed of immediately in a responsible manner. Any suitable plastic bag can be used, or special poop-scoop bags can be purchased from pet shops, veterinary surgeries or stores. Dispose of faeces in any one of the three poop-scoop bins located within the park. Additional information regarding the conduct of all patrons including dog owners can be found in the soon to be issued Bylaws, more details of which will be published in the next newsletter.

■ Egrets Visit The Wick Country Park

The Little Egret is a small, entirely white heron, with a long slender bill, black legs and conspicuous yellow feet. The bird rarely uses its voice which is a short hoarse croak. Egrets prefer open areas of shallow fresh water, being found in and around the margins of coastal and inland waters, but occasionally they will frequent secluded waterways during particularly cold weather conditions, though never straying far from their source of food, which consists of fish, crustaceans and molluscs.



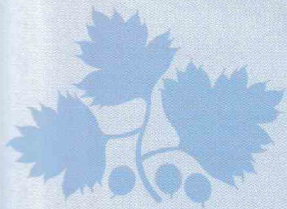
They feed by walking through the water snapping at prey with their bills, occasionally running in a bid to dislodge prey from the bottom.

Throughout the autumn and winter months the egret has been a regular park visitor with a maximum count of three birds in August which congregated briefly around the verges of our five acre lake. This coincides with the species departure in late summer and autumn from breeding colonies in continental Europe resulting in several thousand egrets frequently turning up in and around the U.K.

During the colder months of winter a single individual has been spotted lurking in and along the park's winding brook. This bird is one of about 2,000 which in recent years have started over-wintering in Britain, while the majority of their brethren have migrated to the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan African region. The egret is a fairly new colonist in Britain, being observed initially towards the end of the 1980s as a rare spring visitor in scattered locations in and around our southern estuaries. Within a decade a breeding population was established and within the last half dozen years the bird has become an all year round resident.

There are now well over a hundred pairs nesting in Britain, utilising more than 20 nest sites. Two of these sites are within a ten mile radius of Southend-on-Sea and around 200 birds remain at roosting sites throughout the Winter in our county, the two closest significant roosting locations being Tewkes Creek and Canvey Point, though roosting sites throughout Essex are still very much a mystery. ■

Egrets flying over The Wick Country Park lake.



The Wick Country Park News

■ The new Wick Country Park Pavilion Garden

A superb new garden has just been created as a new feature for the Wick Country Park Pavilion.

The blue print for it's creation came from several quarters including the local support group The Friends of The Wick Country Park and Basildon District Council's very own Countryside Services team who own and manage the site.

Planting includes drifts of Mahonia, Spindle, Ceonothus, Potentilla, Eleagnus, together with Euonymus Fortunai, and Berberis Thumbergia all being planted with a view to provide a colourful display of distinctive foliage and attractive flowers.

Other plants of particular note include the beautiful Rosa Rugosa that come the Autumn will yield striking and sizable reddish orange hips combined with an under planting of sweet smelling purple Lavender.

To add to the spectacle Paper Bark Birch and a Judas Tree will be added later in the year when the weather is a little cooler along with a variety of spring bulbs. ■

Contact:

Ranger - Telephone: 01268 562921
Countryside Services Main Office
at Wat Tyler Country Park -
Telephone: 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.



**Basildon
District Council
Countryside
Services**



■ Become a Friend

If you've enjoyed reading this newsletter and would like to find out more, or become more involved, then why not join the *Friends of the Wick Country Park*. The *Friends* are a group of interested people working with Basildon Council to make the country park a community resource developed by local people for local people and, of course, wildlife.

Members receive the quarterly newsletter *Skylarks* and events are arranged throughout the year. These are very informal and friendly and are an opportunity to meet up with people with a shared interest in the park.

This year's events have included a wildflower wander, bird watch, nature quest and insect hunt and more are planned for the coming months. There is also the chance to participate in work parties and if you're really keen you might even like to join the committee!

For further information please contact Deborah on 01268 572732 or email dbelverstone@yahoo.co.uk

The Friends

If you haven't yet joined *The Friends of The Wick Country Park*, but would like to do so, please contact:-

Nikki Gibson
126 Church End Lane
Wickford, SS11 7DP
mikenikki@supanet.com
Telephone: 01268 734293

THE SPOTTERS' GUIDE TO BIRDS AT THE WICK

Yellowhammer	Robin
Dunnock	Wren
Greenfinch	Blue tit
Chaffinch	Great tit
House sparrow	Heron
Starling	Blackbird
Kestrel	Carrion crow
Reed bunting	Skylark
Black headed gull	Mallard
Collared dove	Herring gull
Song thrush	Wood pigeon
Redwing	Lapwing
Canada goose	Magpie
Lesser black backed gull	Green woodpecker
Pied wagtail	Tufted duck
Little gull	Little egret
Snipe	Cuckoo
Reed warbler	Pheasant

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

KITE FESTIVAL AT THE WICK

Sunday 18th September
1pm - 4pm

Come along to the Wick Country Park and fly a kite. Make a kite using one of our proven designs or create your own. Parental supervision required.

YULETIDE RAMBLE AT THE WICK

Sunday 4th December
2pm - 4pm

Come and join with the Countryside Ranger and friends of The Wick Country Park for a leisurely stroll that includes a pleasing hilltop parkland view. Then end the afternoon at the Park's Pavilion by partaking in festive cheer, fuelled by warming mulled wine and mince pies. Parental supervision required.