



Horton Country Park

The Friends Of

NEWSLETTER No 14

APRIL 05

BIRD SPOT

The Country Park seems to be ever more popular as a birdwatching site and two walks were organized during the winter. The first on Dec 12th by the Surbiton and District Birdwatching Society was attended by 12 of their members in spite of inauspicious weather. A good range of species was seen, including some **Lesser Redpolls** but the icing was at the end of the walk, when a flock of at least 20 **Yellowhammers** were watched in the car park! This is the highest number ever and follows the 8 seen flying over the same area, during the opening ceremony as a Nature Reserve three days earlier.

Due to sickness, I had to postpone my walk from Jan 8th to 22nd. Those that turned up on 8th were also blessed with about 13 **Yellowhammers** but I failed to find any on 22nd. Winter thrushes were also scarce that day but good views of **Fieldfare** were obtained and also a **Treecreeper** and a few **Goldcrest** were seen near the Orchard. Meadow Pond produced the prizes of the walk though, when singles of both **Common** and **Jack Snipe** were flushed from the reeds. It is a few years now since the last Jack Snipe was seen! This one stayed until at least Feb 8th and the Common Snipe, on and off till Mar 20th with, perhaps a second, at the Orchard Balancing Pond on that date. On a negative note to my mind, about 10 **Ring-necked Parakeets** were seen in Butchers Grove. A beautiful bird? Yes. But a pest in their native India and I fear will become so here soon, as the



Lesser Redpoll



Jack Snipe



Kingfisher



Water Rail

increasing numbers may affect some of our native hole nesting species.

Aside from the walks, on Jan 14th 96 **Lapwing** was a good number but were presumably flying over.

Numbers of winter thrushes remained low though until Jan 16th when 150 **Redwings** were in Butchers Grove with rather fewer **Fieldfare**. A **Kingfisher** was seen at the Chessington Rd balancing pond and a record number of 100 **Linnets** were making good use of the weeds on the nearby golf course, these remaining (unseen by most observers) until at least Mar 20th. Up to 4 **Reed Buntings** were seen near Meadow Pond throughout the period.

To demonstrate how mobile the winter thrush flocks are the day after my walk, Jan 23rd, 250 **Fieldfare** and 50 **Redwings** were seen! Also around were 5 **Lesser Redpolls**, which may have been present most of the winter.

After doing some installation of the Dormouse boxes on Feb 2nd, two of us went looking for nocturnal species and were fortunate to find a pair of **Tawny Owls** in Longrove Wood. By early February the **Hérons** were starting to establish themselves again. There appear to be at least 5 nests at present, 3 on the edge and two inside Great Wood. I did meet some people who said they went onto the adjacent mound to get a good look. This is not a good idea as

BIRD SPOT cont.

it could cause the birds to desert the site! Also in early Feb 2 drake **Teal** were seen in the Orchard Pond and Balancing Pond area on the 5th. This species is not rare but is the first I have heard of for the Country Park. On Feb 8th a probable **Water Rail** was seen, followed by a certain one on 13th, which was still there on 27th. Two were heard back in November you may recall, so they must have wintered but are terribly difficult to see.

Feb 9th was a good day! The 250 **Fieldfare** and 500 **Redwing** must have been a nice sight and single **Blackcap** and **Chiffchaff** were, I believe, our first possible over wintering warblers. To cap it all 2 **Marsh Tits** were also seen. The high thrush numbers continued throughout February with about 350 of each on 27th. No doubt many were returning migrants, on their way to Scandinavia most likely. Numbers had dropped to less than 200 of each by March 13th and none at all could be found on 27th. These high numbers were mostly associated with fields where livestock were, or had been recently, grazing in the Children's Farm/Polo Field area.

On Feb 20th, as well as the thrushes 6 **Yellowhammers** were seen. Throughout, I had no indication that the feeding area for this species was being used by other than crows, tits and squirrels. The idea was to try to establish if the project was working this year, as in previous years they had been associating with cattle in the adjacent field and we were not sure if they were going to our feed. We need to discuss whether to continue.

Finally, the first breath of spring (or the wintering bird), a Chiffchaff was heard on

March 18th.
Tony Quinn

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Volunteer Group Work to help the Water Voles

On Sunday February 20th a group of volunteers braved a biting cold wind to spend three hours clearing and laying a stream bank to encourage Water Vole habitation. An impressive length of bank was cleared of brambles and, despite a few cuts, everyone was pleased to see the result of their hard work. It's amazing what can be achieved with just a few hours' hard work and it is envisaged that we will build up a regular group of volunteers so that more tasks may be undertaken. The exercise is good too, though I know there were a few aches and pains the following day!!

Our thanks go to all those that helped and any other prospective volunteers just get in contact with myself or the Ranger's Office.

Annual General Meeting 26th April

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 26th April at 7.30pm in the hall behind the Ranger's Office. See accompanying notes. Refreshments will be provided. There are still a number of officer positions to be filled including Honorary Secretary. If you are interested please come along. Everyone is welcome. Stewart Cocker will give a talk on the proposals for the 10 Year Management Plan for Horton Country Park.

WHAT'S GOING ON? cont.

Dates for the next Friends meetings are:-

Tuesday June 7th

Tuesday August 2nd

Tuesday October 4th

All at 7.30pm in the hall behind the Ranger's Hut.

Information Centre

As mentioned in the last newsletter it is planned to man the information centre when possible in the summer months and even sell light refreshments on certain 'event days'. As yet I have not had a single response – Please can anyone help me with this even if only for a few hours? If so contact me direct on 020 8391 5925. Thanks. Brendan.

Subscriptions now due.

Please note that subscriptions ((£2 per person) are now due for the year March 2005-2006. Those who have joined since October are paid-up until March 2006. Subscriptions should be sent to Terry Summerfield, 148 Rollesby Road, Chessington.

New Members

Just one new member since the last news letter, we would like to welcome Mrs S Bullen.

Brendan Kilby

Website

The Friends of Horton Country Park now have a Website. For those with internet access the address is:

www.mediashock.co.uk/horton.

The site is still under development by Pete Tomlin but is already well worth a look.

DORMOUSE PROJECT

The key people involved in this project have been Alison Fure, Nesot Students, some working for their Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Countryside and Community Development Department. Many thanks to them all. Alison has a government license to handle small mammals and bats and did a very good design job on the boxes. The students soon got the knack of assembling the boxes and some also helped with the installation. About 50 boxes are now around the park and Alison reports that two had already been used as winter roosts, probably by Wrens. Even if no Dormice are found, apparently they become used by bats, Wood mice, moths and other creatures so the exercise will not be in vain.

Tony Quinn

DIARY DATES

For further information on events phone 01372 741191.

<http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/epsom/tourism.nsf/pages/calendar.htm>

June 12th – REALLY WILD DAY.

Have a go at pond dipping, hunt for mini-beasts then end up in pond wood for a quiz trail. A perfect family outing! Meet at 10am at the Information Centre, Horton Country Park. **Advanced booking only**, please call for information.

July 3rd – HORTON COUNTRY PARK

DIARY DATES cont.

QUIZ TRAIL.

Answer questions correctly and follow the trail through Horton Country Park. Discover exciting facts about nature and maybe win some prizes! Meet at 2pm in the New Room. **Advanced booking only**, please call for information.

Tony Quinn

INSECT SPOT

Likely to be another sign of global warming, Dr Ian Menzies, an experienced and enthusiastic local entomologist has discovered a previously very rare Ladybird in the Country Park and also on Epsom Common and in Nonsuch Park. It does not really have an English name yet but Horseshoe Ladybird is being considered due to the markings on its wings which actually remind me more of a lower case Greek omega. The scientific name is



Clitostethus arcuatus - photo Stewart Cocker

Clitostethus arcuatus and it primarily a Mediterranean species. Unless you are an expert don't go looking for it as it is among Britain's smallest ladybirds, being only about 1.5 mm long and so almost unfindable without a magnifying glass. The Ladybirds of Surrey, published in 2000 by the Surrey Wildlife Trust lists only two sites in the county and just over a dozen records. It is given Red Data Book 1 status (endangered) in Britain but Dr Menzies thinks it may be undergoing a status change.

Tony Quinn

YOUR NEWSLETTER

If you wish to send any letters or articles for inclusion in the next newsletter please send them to Christine Cross: 23 Hemsby Road, Chessington, Surrey KT9 2DY or e-mail to cross_christokes@hotmail.com or phone 020 8397 5670. Thanks.

Whilst I am perfectly happy to continue creating the newsletter for the Friends, if anyone else enjoys doing this sort of thing and would like to inject some new ideas and flair into the newsletter please volunteer, either at the AGM or contact Brendan or myself. I won't fight you for the job!

Chris Cross