



The Friends of Horton Country Park

NEWSLETTER No. 15

January 2006

Newsletter

Firstly, may I apologise for the lack of newsletters this year. We have been trying to find a format which is workable for the future rather than relying on the good nature of people who have compiled them in the past but no longer wish to continue to do so on a regular basis. The newsletter is for every member's information and we always welcome any input from you all! Peter Tomlin has now taken up the task of compiling the newsletters for the future as well as our website www.friendsofhorton.co.uk.

Could anyone who would be happy to receive the future newsletters by e-mail please register to do so on the website at <http://www.friendsofhorton.co.uk/addme> or e-mail peter@friendsofhorton.co.uk. This obviously cuts down costs to us which can be used in further conservation work.

Thank you for your patience in this matter. BPK.

Chairman's Update

Whilst newsletters may have been scarce this year there has been quite a lot of other work in progress throughout the park and by the friends.

The largest event was the Autumn Country Fair held in the park in September. The fair was a great success and we raised over £300 pounds for the friends as well as recruiting a number of new members which we heartily welcome. We received many congratulations from dignitaries of the council and many people who came along and enjoyed the day. I must thank the Rangers, Countryside and Community Development Team and members who helped on the day for all their hard work. We also thank the Mayor Jean Smith for opening the event. This will not be an annual event as we will possibly alternate with the Epsom Common Day, but in order to run an event of this size in the future we will need more volunteers from the friends to help on the day and in its organisation as there is an awful lot of work involved in preparing an event of this size. We hardly advertised yet found we could just about cope with the car parking!

Fishing problems. Throughout the year we have had problems with unauthorised fishing on the various ponds around the park. This came to a head with Rangers being threatened with violence and signs being burnt. An operation was mounted with the help of the community police force in which 30 people were apprehended and 12 of them had their names and addresses taken by the police. CALPAC (Central Association of London and Provincial Angling Clubs) took out the larger fish from the ponds to discourage further activity which has significantly been cut.

The conservation volunteers group have been growing in numbers and we now meet every other month (on the month that we do not

have a meeting). In the last six months three projects have taken place.

Firstly, in September half the boundary of the park between pond wood and the new cottage hospital was cleared in preparation of completing a footpath between the two. The remaining task is to divert the fence line of the other half. This will then mean that we have a footpath running all around the perimeter of the park.

In November a hedgerow management task was completed in which a large length of hedgerow was intermittently cut to produce new growth and this will be balanced with future working parties in order to maintain a constant habitat.



Most recently in January we planted in the ancient apple orchard 8 old varieties of apple tree which were grafted specially for us at Brogdale Horticultural Trust a year ago, and litter picked the area from the Ruxley Lane entrance into butchers wood which had become extremely untidy.

Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped on the various tasks and we look forward to seeing you and any new faces in the near future to continue this valuable work.

Finally, thank you to Peter Tomlin for his work on the newsletter and website. Laurence Coley who has volunteered to take up the position as membership secretary. Pat Lowe for her help compiling the minutes of the meetings. Brendan Kilby.

Ranger's Log

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council arranged for the old hospital fencing to come down this November, allowing a great deal of land to come back within the management of Horton Country Park. Any damage to footpaths will be repaired as soon as possible.

Nescot students have been working with the Countryside and Community Development Team again, clearing dead elms from some of the hedgerows and maintaining the stream within Lambert's Orchard. Next term the hedge will be planted up and the water in the stream is running very well now. Their volunteer work is invaluable in progressing the countryside management for Horton Country Park.

The Ranger Service has got new bikes to patrol on so make sure you say hello. We will also be recruiting more Rangers next year so look out for new friendly faces.

The volunteer tasks have been very successful and we have more organised for the future. We really appreciate all our volunteers' hard work and would like to encourage more of you to come and join us. The tasks are fun, you help to conserve the wildlife and it's also good exercise!

If you want any information about the park, please pop in to the information centre or pop in to the office and we will be glad to help. Sarah Hallums

Bird Spot

The first significant sighting of the early spring was some **Waxwings**. This is what is known as an invasion species, originating in Scandinavia and further east. 'Invasion species' means that the birds do not arrive every year, only in years when a shortage of food or other circumstances force them away from their normal geographical region.



Waxwing - *Bombycilla garrulus*

Photo by Tony Quinn

The 2004/5 winter brought the largest numbers I can remember in over 50 years. The first I heard of this group was at the April committee meeting when, long standing committee member Bill Facer, (not a birdwatcher) announced that he had seen some pink birds with crests while walking his dogs. It soon emerged what they were and that an unknown birdwatcher and Ranger Sandy Fleming had seen as many as 50 around the car park on March 20th. Bill had seen 4 further into the Park on 25th. I think us dedicated birdwatchers missed them all!!

Our second **Red Kite** was seen on 27th March by Paul Brayshaw. Like the first, it was not actually seen from the Park but was watched from close by, drifting over the Park's airspace. April 1st was quite a good day for me with a late **Common Snipe** at Meadow Pond, a number of singing **Chiffchaffs**, 2 **Yellowhammers** and 2 pairs of **Reed Bunting**, one at Meadow Pond and one at the Orchard balancing pond. Bob Smith saw a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in Butchers Grove on April 10th and also some **Blackcaps** and the first **Willow Warbler**. Additionally the following day the first **Swallow** was seen. The Surbiton and District Birdwatching Society had an open day in the Park on April 17th which I had not been able to publicise in the last newsletter. It was with great delight that we heard a **Nightingale** on our first walk and it was also heard on subsequent walks. This follows on from 2 heard in 2003 which were not thought to have bred - but it makes you wonder!! It transpired that Bob Smith had heard it briefly the day before. On 20th April I walked back through the Park at night after an Epsom Common Association meeting. It was singing and the power in the silence of the night was quite remarkable. I was able to hear it from a distance of nearly half a mile!! The species migrates at night and no doubt singing during the hours of darkness helps to find an over flying mate. It seems to have worked as it was heard until at least May 27th making it very probable that breeding was at least attempted, the first time in Epsom and Ewell for over ten years!! Going back to the SDBWS open day, we met Terry Summerfield who had been counting the **Heron** nests in Great Wood. He came up with the amazing total of 15 occupied nests!! Among other species seen that day were **House Martin**, **Common Whitethroat**, 2 pairs of **Reed Buntings**, a few **Willow Warblers**, **Little Owl** and an un-identified bird of prey which I missed. By the 23rd there were 10 **House Martins** and 2 **Lesser Whitethroats** were new. Alison Fure had a good day on the 27th with **Cuckoo**, **Hobby**, the **Nightingale** and 4 **Lesser Whitethroats**. Three **Willow Warblers** were still singing on May 5th giving hope that that the massive decline the species has suffered in recent years is coming to an end and 2-3 were heard throughout the breeding season. There were 7 pairs only a few years ago! A pair of **Linnets** were also around on and off and no doubt bred. On my Breeding Birds Survey on 9th a **Garden Warbler** was seen in the South of the Park and Bob Smith heard one elsewhere on 30th. Two **Hobbys** were also seen that day. Not in the Country Park but of great interest was a **Quail** reported to ranger Lindsey Mason, again by an unknown birdwatcher, on May 23rd. It was apparently calling from Park Farm and I have heard that they raise Quail on the farm. The time of year and the fact that quite a few were being reported nationwide makes it more probable that it was a genuine migrant than an escapee and if anyone knows the identity of the birdwatcher I would very much like his contact details. Two **Kestrels** in the South of the Park on June 10th may have been breeding and a **Yellowhammer** was seen on 11th. On June 19th Bob Smith saw a **Reed Bunting** still singing at the Orchard Balancing Pond, a **Hobby** and 20 **Lapwings** on Polo Field. Ten **Lapwings** flew NW on 26th and 3 **Lesser Whitethroats** were still singing.

A visit on July 2nd produced **Willow Warbler**, **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Garden Warbler**.

My thanks go to Alison Fure, Terry Summerfield, Paul Brayshaw, Bob Smith and Tony Gibbs for their notes. Tony Quinn

Insect Corner

Following the discovery of the rare **Horseshoe Ladybird** (last newsletter), I was delighted to accompany Dr Ian Menzies (entomologist) and the Countryside and Community Development Team (Stewart Cocker, Sarah Hallums and Annette Murray) on two trips to see if any other interesting species could be found. Dr Menzies has designed and built some special nets which can be held under shrubbery while gently (gently I said Sarah!) tapping above to dislodge insects. As a birdwatcher this was a real eye-opener for me. The amount of food available for insectivorous birds is just incredible, small beetles, bugs, ladybirds of various types, small spiders, some with bright green bodies and yellow legs etc etc. Some of those found are shown here, courtesy of Stewart Cocker who took the photographs. Another rare ladybird was discovered but not quite as rare as the Horseshoe and also as we were walking at the back of Pond Wood both Ian and I saw a butterfly which we thought might have been a **Green Hairstreak**! This would be new for the Country Park but unfortunately we were not totally sure. One to look out for next year when they re-emerge perhaps?

Stewart Cocker had another fortuitous day on June 9th while pond dipping with a school outing. He was taking a rest and noticed two **Grizzled Skipper** butterflies in the meadow adjacent to Field Pond. This is a new butterfly for the Country Park and more importantly would represent a re-colonization of the borough if their presence continues. This had been quite a day for Stewart as shortly before he had netted a **Great-crested Newt** from the pond! This is regarded as a very important and highly protected species in Britain and was one we had talked of introducing to the Country Park.

Back to insects. All the usual species continue to be reported including **Silver-washed Fritillary**, five of which I saw recently in Butchers Grove. Dragonflies included **Black-tailed Skimmer**, **Broad-bodied Chaser** and **Emperor**, the one species that has not been reported was **Red-eyed Damselfly**. It may just be that no one went at the right time of year but they were in a part of Meadow Pond where dog owners encourage their pets to bathe and also where illicit fishing takes place so this may have been detrimental to their wellbeing. Another one to look for next year!

Many thanks to Bob Smith for his reports.

Tony Quinn

Farmstead School and 'Farmstead Belfry'



Fig 1. Farmstead Belfry

Fig 2. Farmstead School

Due to repeated vandalism Farmstead School has been demolished under a DEFRA License which incorporated provision for a purpose built bat roost, coined 'Farmstead Belfry' for ease of identification.

Vandalism has continued to hamper efforts and a new steel door has replaced the existing one to prevent harm coming to this European Protected Species. During the works period, investigation of the Lodge found two bats roosting within its luxurious 'batty' interior with internal bat boxes showing signs of exploration and the Hessian pleats proving popular with its residents (see below). A notice has been put on the wall announcing that interference with the roost is an offence and if anyone sees any activity at this site which causes concern please call the police.



Fig 3. Hessian Pleats



Fig 4. Wood mice building their winter nest.

As the vegetation dies back it is time to check the mammal boxes and empty the remains of the summer blue tit nests. Wood mice are beginning to colonise the newly emptied boxes some of them even using the existing tightly woven moss bird nests rather than constructing their own less elaborate bedding of dried leaves. This is a family of mice with a winter nest in the making. At present only the ground storey has been completed and as the weather worsens efforts will be made to fill the box with bedding.

One of our problems has been that curious squirrels keep knocking the lids off the boxes which then fill with water. You may see some of these left upside down to dry out. Please do not be tempted to touch them. The boxes should not be opened at any time as there is a potential that interference may fall foul of wildlife law given their continuous occupancy by creatures. Although wood mice are not protected, birds at their nests, and some other mammals are. There will be plenty of opportunity to investigate over the winter with me if you are interested.

Lastly, we found a grass snake *slough* or skin which measured 130cms in the country park which is very large. Grass snake can grow much bigger than this and two metres has been recorded in the south east this year. However this was a very good record. It is possible to sex a snake by counting the sub-caudal scales underneath the tail which number less than 62 in a female indicating the slough was that of a male.

Alison Fure

What's going on? / Diary Dates

Friends Meetings:

Tuesday 7th February 2006
 Tuesday 4th April 2006

At 19:30 in the hall behind the Ranger's Hut.

Friends Volunteer Tasks:

Sunday 19th March 2006

Meeting at 10 a.m. at the Ranger's Hut.

For further information on events phone 01372 741191 or visit
www.friendsofhorton.co.uk



Best Park Photo Competition

We are looking for the best photo taken in the park past and present. Please e-mail your photos to peter@friendsofhorton.co.uk and the winning photo will feature in our next newsletter.

The Friends of Horton Country Park



Lower Mole Countryside Management

Volunteer Tasks

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust has many opportunities to get involved in countryside volunteer work giving you the opportunity to learn some new skills at the same time as a healthy workout in the great outdoors.

Lower Mole Countryside Management Projects' tasks: For more information please Tel: 01372 743783 or email: mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk

February 2006

Dates:	Site:	Task:
7th - 9th	Epsom/Walton Downs	Downland Restoration
Sun 12th	Ashtead Common	Woodland Management
14th - 16th	Ashtead Common	Scrub Clearance
Sun 19th	No Task	
21st - 23rd	To Be Arranged	
Sun 26th	Elmbridge Commons	Scrub Clearance

March 2006

Dates:	Site:	Task:
28th Feb - 2nd	Elmbridge Commons	Scrub Clearance
Sun 5th	No Task	
7th - 9th	Norbury Park	Woodland Management
Sun 12th	Norbury Park	Woodland Management
14th - 16th	Headley Heath	Downland Restoration
Sun 19th	No Task	
21st - 23rd	Malden Meadow	Hedge Management
Sun 26th	To Be Arranged	
28th - 30th	To Be Arranged	

Full details of all the tasks and where to meet can be found on our website www.friendsofhorton.co.uk/lowermole.html

Bean Poles



The Lower Mole Countryside Trust has a limited quantity of traditional hazel bean poles to sell specifically bundles of 10, at 8' or 6' long at £3 per bundle which can be collected from Horton by appointment.

The Next Newsletter

Please send you contributions to peter@friendsofhorton.co.uk or give them to Brendan.