

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Autumn 2019

Registered Charity No. 285383

<http://www.friendsoffarnhampark.co.uk>

 Friends of Farnham Park



SUMMER REVIEW

Not quite such a scorching summer as last year, but we've had some pretty good spells. With a bit more rain early on the wildflower meadows in the Park did much better than last year, and yellow rattle in particular produced a stunning display.

Once again, the Friends have had some very interesting and enjoyable events and talks.

In April, Chris Shephard led us on a walk pointing out some of the WWII defences that still remain in the Park, up Folly Hill and in the Old Park. Even those of us who know the area well saw things we'd never noticed before – and we even pointed out some anti-tank bollards that he'd never noticed!

Still in April, previous Ranger Ron Hills, now a lecturer at Merrist Wood College, came back to talk about the history of our Park trees, and how we can look after them in the 21st century.

In May, Isobel Girvan of Surrey Wildlife Trust led another very successful wildflower walk, this time at the top of the Park. The clearance done for the sewer repairs last year has allowed a number of interesting species to emerge.

We continued our good run of weather for the BBQ – indeed, we had the opposite problem, of one of the hottest nights of the year, a bit of a challenge for our 'chefs' on the BBQ. This popular event was attended by around 60 people.

Finally, in September the talk 'Flights of Fancy', by Brian Nobbs of the RSPB was an absolutely fascinating combination of nature and engineering, as he gave a detailed explanation of the role of birds' feathers in flight and other functions.

Libby Ralph

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY!

Our last talk for this year:

Tuesday 15th October – Dormice

Given by Kathryn Killner and Julie Russ of the Surrey Dormouse Group.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Friends of Farnham Park
Annual General Meeting
will be held on
Tuesday 12th November 2019 at 7.30 pm
at Rowhill Field Centre,
Cranmore Lane, GU11 3BD

Copies of Agenda papers will be available at the meeting and, on request, from the Secretary two weeks in advance.

All members are welcome to the AGM which will be followed by the annual Ranger's Report and informal discussion. Nick would welcome your help with any photos of the Park over the past year
Nick.Macfarlane@waverley.gov.uk

That's it for this year, but looking further ahead to next Spring:

Tuesday 17th March 2020 – Return of the Peregrine, by Keith Betton

Note: all indoor talks take place at the Rowhill Centre (Cranmore Lane), 7pm refreshments for 7:30pm start. The Centre now has a hearing loop should anyone need it.

BUTTERFLIES IN 2019

This was my seventh year of counting butterflies in the park and I am very happy to report that it was the best ever. Apart from a rather poor result in May every month showed an increase over last year with June after a rather poor start ending on an all-time high. Not to be outdone July went over the top with a count that was higher than the previous 12 full year totals with the exception of 2017 and also produced the all-time highest number of 254 in a single transect walk on the 3rd of the month. By the end of August the total for the year thus far stood at 1168 - a massive increase on 2017's 868 which was the previous high and there were still 4 weeks of counting left!

I think that this increase was partly due to another warm summer but unlike the very dry one last year there was some rain which meant the flowers in the meadows lasted longer for the butterflies to feed on. Also there was a big increase in the quantity of Yellow Rattle which is a semi-parasitic plant on grasses which stunts their growth somewhat and allows the insects better access to the flowers. The stars of the show were topped by the Marbled White which showed an increase from its previous high of 65 to a stunning 149.



Marbled White

Other good performers were the Meadow Brown (as usual the commonest) from 509 to 645 and Gatekeeper from 81 to 129 with encouraging results from Small Heath and Common Blue.



An additional bonus this year was an influx of migrant Painted Ladies although only 2 were seen on the park transect but I had a lot on my Buddleia in the garden. I hope you managed to see some as they are very beautiful.

Painted Lady

(Richard Burgess)

MOTH REPORT

The year was interesting because of the fluctuating temperature spikes. These varied from cooler night time temperatures in early summer, producing only 50 to 60 moths each night, to very high night time temperatures along with high humidity in high summer which produced in excess of 200 moths each night at the moth trap. Obviously climate change is a major factor in these observations.

The year's records were mixed but by September 19th, 270 separate species were recorded, which is slightly higher than normal. Some species recorded have re-occurred after a break of some years, for example the Blackneck Moth, whose caterpillars feed on tufted vetch.



Blackneck Moth



Spring moths produced high numbers of other species including Oak Beauties. Then there were species, which are normally on the wing in summer, appearing in late Spring, which again indicates shifting weather patterns and climate change

Oak Beauty

New species recorded at the moth trap were Chamomile Shark, Dotted Footmen, Toadflax Brocade, Brownline Brighteye and Oblique Striped. Dotted Footmen and Toadflax Brocade appear to be extending their range and the Oblique Striped is a rare record.



Toadflax Brocade

A moth which is worthy of note and which is an alien species is the Box Moth and this has appeared for the fourth year in a row. Its caterpillars are very destructive to box as shown in the photograph and if observed should be notified to the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley. This destructive moth has been present in the country since 2008 and there have been more definite increases in population since 2011.



Box Moth Caterpillar, Moth and Devastation to leaves



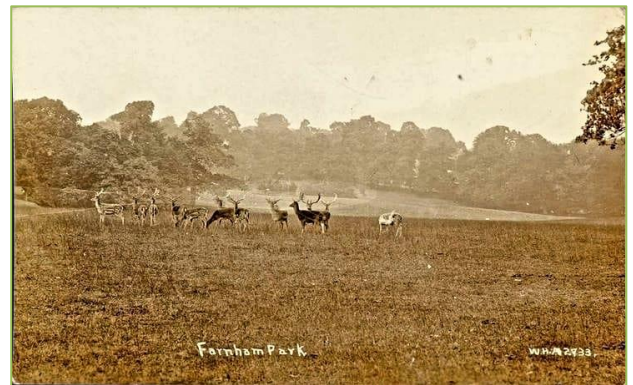
In conclusion there has been a definite increase in moth species moving north from Europe and becoming more established in southern Britain for example the Clifden Nonpareil, which has been recorded at the moth trap three times this year, which is a record for the species for me. This trend will obviously continue as weather patterns change.

Clifden Nonpareil

(David Helliwell)

DEER IN FARNHAM PARK

Our lovely park - originally called the New Park or Little Park was first established around 1376 and stocked with deer to offer sport for guests and to supply venison for feasts or given as gifts to cement relationships. Originally the park was stocked with Fallow deer which had been previously brought over by the Normans and which are larger than the current population of Roe deer which are one of only two species native to Britain the other being Red deer. Old photographs show Fallow deer in the Park up until at least the 1920s.



Fallow deer in the Park (1916) – courtesy Tim Walters



Early morning roe deer at the top of the Park (Neil Taylor)

Fallow come in various colour variations with the commonest being a reddish brown with white spots and the males have large palmate antlers. They feed mainly on grasses as well as herbs and young trees etc. and form small herds of 10 - 50 living in woodland and parkland reaching up to 16 years of age with the females longer than the males. As deer parks declined in the 15th century many escaped and are now widely established in the wild and are the commonest deer species in England and some have been seen on Farnham Old Park.

The deer which now live in our park are Roe deer which can be found in many woodlands and parklands but they are rather shy and largely unseen mostly coming out around dawn or dusk although the volunteers did get a nice view of one in White Bottom whilst hedge laying last year, so keep your eyes open! They are easy enough to identify with a reddish-brown coat in summer fading to a dull brown/grey in winter with a white patch on the rump which is easy to see when they are running away from you. The males do have antlers, but they are quite small with up to 3 points. They have a varied diet of buds, leaves, bark, grasses and assorted herbaceous plants so they have plenty of choice on the Park.

They are usually solitary or in small groups although they can form larger groups in winter. The mating rut is between mid-July and the end of August but although the egg is fertilised at mating it is not implanted until

January so the young are not born during the winter and arrive around mid-May to mid-June - often as twins and with a dappled coat to help camouflage them in their first couple of months when they are left alone amongst the vegetation between feeding times.

One other species of deer which has been seen on the Old Park is the Muntjac which was first brought over from its native China in the 19th century as ornamental animals for parkland estates. They are smallish but thickset with reddish fur and relatively short legs and a white underside. The males have short antlers and 5 cm long upper canine teeth. The population has increased due to a number of escapees and they are now considered a pest as they eat young trees, cultivated crops and garden plants. On the plus side they apparently taste good!

Richard Burgess

OPPORTUNIST!

“We regularly see Red Kites circling above Farnham Park – but this morning [20th August] was a bit special! The annual hay cut started yesterday. This morning I was walking my dog about 100 metres away from the harvester. I had seen a kite above a copse close to the site of the cut, when I realized that it was following the machine. It was about 20 metres above the ground and 5 behind the machine. Suddenly it plummeted to the ground and rose with something in its talons. I was too far away to see what it had caught. It flew into the copse and although I waited, I didn't see it again. Is this a common occurrence, or did I happen to be in the right place at the right time?” *David Havenhand*

David got a reply from Roger Bardell of RSPB Nature's Home magazine:

“I think that your second suggestion is close to the mark: it was in the right place at the right time. It seems most likely that the harvester was causing some damage to wildlife, such as ground-nesting birds or mammals living in the crop. Red kites which eat carrion would take advantage of this and seize anything killed. So, let us hope that they can continue to find food in this way, though, of course, it would be better that there were no carrion left by the harvesters. This was well observed by you. For years, we have become accustomed to gulls following ploughs, so, perhaps, with the spread of red kites, there is another seasonal feature for us to watch.”

RANGER ROUND UP

The Ranger and the volunteers have had a busy summer, populated as always with a lot of Himalayan Balsam clearance. Taking a systematic approach from the top of the Nadder at Hampton Road, significant progress has been made in the last two summers to reduce the stands of this non-native.

Fifteen new wooden signs have been erected, about half of these are replacements, mainly along the drive to the Rangers House and half at new sites, including name signs by the Ponds. They are all made of oak from the Surrey Wildlife Trust sawmill.

On 19 September, in the context of Waverley Health and Well-Being Week, a mixed band of volunteers included Waverley staff, volunteers, representatives of Farnham Castle and the Cricket club joined together in starting to clear the Castle dry ditch. Special thanks to Farnham Castle Further clearance work will be done on a future task. It is hoped to eventually re-open a path along the ditch to allow an off-road route from the main Castle entrance to the Postern Gate.

Park users will also have seen some new benches have been installed, most notably a very smart memorial bench at the crossroads of the main path and the drive to the Ranger's House.

A full work programme is planned for the autumn and winter months. Sleepers have been ordered for bridges near Shady Nook and YoYo Pond. materials have been ordered for 50 metres of path repairs. Scrub clearance will continue, particularly for glade creation. The Queen Mother's hedge laying will be continued along the football pitches, with help from a contractor to manage some of the very large vegetation, while the volunteers will work on restoration, re-weaving and in-filling from the Bells Piece end. It is also planned to lay a section of hedge on the north east corner of White Bottom, which will de-mark a rectangular hazel copse which is being re-coppiced.

Nick Macfarlane

