

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Autumn 2020

Registered Charity No. 285383

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

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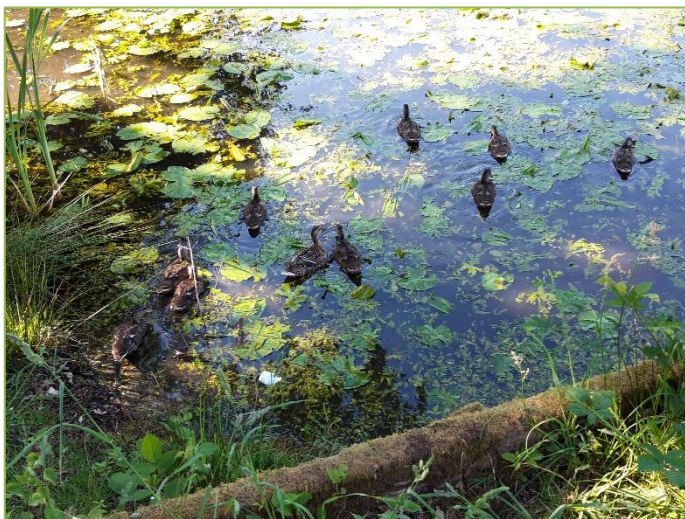
...AND SO TO AUTUMN

When we issued the last newsletter in early March, none of us foresaw what was to come a few weeks later. It has been a very strange year, and extremely stressful and sad for anyone who has friends or family that have been affected by COVID-19.

One thing that we can be grateful for is that the weather has mainly been kind to us, and I hope that many of you have at least had the opportunity to get out in the sunshine over the summer. Later in this newsletter Fiona Allison reflects on the benefits of the Park in these times - I'm sure this will resonate with many of you.

In September, Nick was at last able to get the volunteers out again, working in a COVID-safe manner, and I know he has been very relieved to get going on the long list of tasks that were building up. Let us hope we can get Friends' walks and talks going again in the Spring.

Libby Ralph



Mallard chicks did well on Carron Pond this year – usually most succumb to predators – Neil Taylor

An unusual view of the haycut in the Park!



*(Photo
Nick Macfarlane)*

MEMBERSHIP AND AGM

We would normally be reporting on our events of the year, and inviting you to attend an Annual General Meeting in November. This year, we have decided to delay the AGM until after Christmas. Depending on the restrictions at that time, this may still have to be a virtual meeting, in which case we will put a process in place for proxy voting for the Committee and other necessary items.

Our annual membership fees of £4 per individual, or £6 per household will become due at the beginning of November. Neil, our Secretary, will be sending out reminders in the usual way. Because we have been unable to hold any Members' events this year, if you wish, you may suspend payment for one year, and we will still keep you on our Membership list.

If you do wish to continue to contribute that will be very welcome and enable us to support additional Park projects. Friends Committee has already agreed to put additional money towards repairing the small bridges, and hedge-laying at the end of White Bottom.

MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLEHILLS?

I am sure you have all seen plenty of molehills in the Park but how many of you have actually seen a mole? I have only seen one and unfortunately that was dead, but it did get me thinking about what they get up to underground.

Our native mole (*Talpa europaea*) is one of 42 species in its family which includes moles and also s. This species which range throughout most of Britain and much of continental Europe and also Russia. They prefer to live in meadows, gardens and parks where deep soil allows them to dig their tunnels - they avoid flooded areas, coniferous forests and sandy or stony soils



Physically they are about 6 inches long with a cylindrical body and the females are generally smaller than the males and they both have short very dense fur with no specific nap so they can move backwards and forwards in their narrow tunnels and their eyes and ears are concealed by fur to shield them when tunnelling.

They dig a system of tunnels and chambers using their powerful forelimbs with large paws incorporating an extra unjointed thumb to help them shift the soil. They can also tolerate higher levels of carbon dioxide than other mammals due to a special form of haemoglobin that utilises oxygen more effectively.

They are very territorial and are active all year round with males and females only coming together to mate in late winter and the spring when the female (sow) gives birth to 3-4 pups in an underground chamber lined with dried leaf material. When the pups leave their mother's burrow in summer, they have to find new territories, and this is the time of year you might be lucky enough to see one above ground.

The molehills which are excavated soil pushed out of the tunnels are often in lines as the underground tunnel may be the work of a single male and may be as long as 20 metres - the result of a single day's work ! These tunnels are not just a way of moving around without having to come to the surface and risk being predated but to act as worm traps as these are the moles favourite food. When it catches a worm the mole will paralyse it with toxin in its saliva and then store it in a chamber until required (up to 470 worms have been found in one chamber) when the mole will squeeze out the soil in the worm before eating it. It is estimated that an adult 80g mole will need 50g per day especially in winter and supplements them with insect larvae in summer.

Despite apparently tasting vile [*who has tried one?! – Ed*], they do have some predators such as Tawny Owls, Buzzards and Stoats. They are also disliked by some people because of the damage they do to cultivated areas although they do not eat plant material, and in fact they can be quite useful preying on harmful insect larvae plus their tunnels help to drain and aerate heavy soils - so garden pests or cute and useful ? Your choice.

Richard Burgess



WEASELY SPOTTED!

A couple of years ago Richard's wildlife article covered stoats and weasels, both occasionally seen in the Park. In August, Neil Taylor was lucky enough to get this shot of a weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) in his garden just off the northern border of the Park. A great spot – weasels need to catch enough food equivalent to about one third of their body weight every day, so they don't normally hang about!

(Photo Neil Taylor)

AN OASIS OF CALM

Ten months after the COVID-19, pandemic began, the world continues to adjust to the new and ever changing 'normal'. There has been disruption to just about every aspect of ordinary life and Farnham Park has proved to be an Oasis of Calm to local residents during this difficult time.

When the UK went into lock down in March the Park was flooded with people taking their hourly exercise in the fresh air; the peace and quiet helping to lift spirits amongst an overwhelm of fear and uncertainty.

(Photo Fiona Allison)



I'm a huge advocate of walking in nature and have spent countless hours exploring the hidden dells, ponds and streams of the 320-acre Park. I've experienced the myriad of health benefits and so could you, including; a boosted immune system, reduced stress and anxiety, improved sleep and of course helping those of us that piled on the pounds during lock down to get leaner and fitter.

Many of us now have a greater appreciation of the park as a place of solace and rejuvenation, a lifeline to help us find grounding and peace. With all the changes this year, it has remained a constant and reliable presence. It's estimated that parks and green spaces have provided the NHS £370 million savings towards mental health care, during the pandemic they have proved invaluable to many.

As Autumn sets in, the changeable weather and dark evenings may tempt you back indoors but with restrictions tightening, now is the perfect time to stave off the seasonal blues and boost your energy the natural way.

If you'd like to spend more time in nature and want to be part of a friendly and growing community in the Park, why not consider joining the volunteers on a Wednesday morning, 9:30am -12:30pm? For more details website www.waverley.gov.uk or contact our Ranger, Nick Macfarlane. See you there!

Fiona Allison

PARK BUTTERFLY SURVEY 2020

Judging by the counts the year of lockdown for us seems to have also affected the butterflies as well! After last year's record breaking count of 1200, this year struggled to top 2012's lowest total of 355 with just over 400.

The year started off well after the winter rain with lush spring growth and warm sunshine encouraging overwintering and early emerging adults such as Brimstones, Orange-tips, Peacocks, Holly Blues and Commas all showing average counts for the time of year (April/May). *Mating Orange-tips*



The following few months with lots of sunshine and little or no rain saw many of the smaller meadow flowers shrivel up rather quickly depriving the butterflies of their nectar. By June most of the Park was very dry and although a good selection of species were on the wing, their numbers were significantly lower than last year - notably in July, with an impressive total of 758 in 2019, down to a disappointing 191 this year. Overall the only section of the specified route of the transect which suffered less was the path from White Bottom to the edge of the grazing area, skirting the Rangers House, where shade from the trees reduced the drying and gave a count only slightly down on last year.

In terms of individual species the usual top performer (Meadow Brown)was down from 646 to only 143 and the Marbled White which had risen over the last few years to a high last year of 149 only managed 33. Many other species were also disappointing with the most notable increase being the Large White up from 10 to 31 (so some people may have had to sacrifice a few brassicas!) There were also slight rises from Orange Tips, Holly Blues, Red Admirals, Peacocks, Commas and Silver-washed Fritillaries but noticeably none of the meadow varieties. Fingers crossed for 2021.

Richard Burgess

RANGER ROUND UP

The last 6 months has been a challenging time for everyone, with perhaps the exception of the wildlife which have in fact enjoyed a bit of respite. The ranger team worked throughout lockdown to ensure vital services were covered as well as keeping their sites ticking over.

As we wave goodbye to summer, rather thankfully for me, and welcome the next season we are already starting to see the leaves turn and the temperatures reduce. Perfect time for winter works to commence! I was very pleased to announce a return to volunteering at the beginning of September and whilst things are a little different and somewhat cautious, it was good to have a taste of normality.



(Photo Fiona Allison)

Working on my own had made me become rather introverted and whilst I rather enjoyed the title of ‘The Lone Ranger’, I am relieved to have the extra help. I have just finished the Sept-March volunteer programme which really was no struggle as we have rather a lot of catching up to do! There is a lot of variation in the tasks; bridge building, pond restoration, glade creation/extension but most importantly, a lot of cutting things down and throwing them on a large fire.



September and October are due to be very busy times at the park. The golf course and café are due to be plumbed into the mains sewer, conforming to new environmental legislation. This will mean the loss of the fir trees and some poorly structured oak by the Mike Hawthorne Pavilion which, once the works have finished, will be replaced with 500 hedgerow trees as an extension of the existing Queen Mother’s Hedge.

Clearing the glade (Nick Macfarlane)

Other smaller projects include scrub management – stopping encroachment and loss of meadow land, new bridge installation and the clearance of scrub from an ancient double ditch and bank historical feature, the creation of 2 woodland glades to encourage the establishment/recolonisation of ground flora and the laying of the hazel hedge in the south east corner of White Bottom, paid for by Friends of Farnham Park.

A huge thank you is owed to our contractors, Continental for working throughout this period to ensure that bins are emptied, and litter picked. Last but not least a huge thank you to the Park users and the volunteers who themselves have litter picked and reported issues to me as they have occurred.

A huge demand has been put on the Park as an accessible greenspace. Visitor numbers continue to be a great deal higher than this time last year as people have discovered and come to appreciate the Park, the majority of whom have a great deal of respect for it. I think we can all agree that this pandemic has highlighted just how vital our greenspaces are for physical health and mental wellbeing.

Nick Macfarlane

COMMITTEE - VACANCY

We would still like to hear from anyone interested in joining the Friends Committee. Talk to Libby Ralph or Neil Taylor at a volunteer workparty, or you can e-mail us at friendsoffarnhampark@btinternet.com .