

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Spring 2021

Registered Charity No. 285383

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

 Friends of Farnham Park



Snowdrops – Fiona Allison

A NEW SPRING

As I write this it is the anniversary of lockdown, and it has been a long, hard and for some people traumatic period, but there does seem to be light at the end of the tunnel, with many people vaccinated, infection and hospitalization rates greatly reduced. Once again, the Park has shown what a wonderful resource it is for the people of Farnham. It has been heavily used, some people discovering this oasis for the first time. Others are using it with increasing regularity, finding new routes and observing new things, and, particularly now watching the progress of spring day by day – birds pairing up, blossoms emerging, first on the blackthorn, followed by wild cherry and soon hawthorn. Inevitably, increased use has put pressures on the Park, with paths muddy through increased footfall, a number of issues with loose dogs, another deer attack, and an increase in the amount of litter found. Let us hope spring will see a little sanity restored.

Libby Ralph

ONLINE EVENT

With many thanks to our speaker, Keith Betton, the Chair of Hampshire Ornithological Society, we were able to hold a very successful online talk in March, ‘the Return of the Peregrine’, which was attended by over fifty people. Keith gave a very knowledgeable and fascinating talk about how peregrines are recovering in the UK. During the Second World War, peregrines were culled along the south coast to prevent them from taking homing pigeons carrying vital messages. Then in the fifties, they were hit again by the widespread use of chemicals such as DDT, which accumulate in their bodies, affecting fertility and egg production. Keith mapped for us how populations have recovered since these chemicals were banned, with peregrines expanding from their traditional clifftop homes on the coast, to use cathedrals and churches, other tall buildings, cranes and pylons. Recently, a lone male fledged from Winchester has been perching on St. Andrew’s Church, hoping for a mate. Keith told of us of one nesting female who even had a few days’ holiday in the Isle of Wight - due the movement of the floating crane that she had made her home! Overall an excellent talk.

Keith also gave us a snapshot of the incredibly detailed bird observations he made across the Park during lockdown, and we will aim to get him back, probably later this year, to talk more about his findings.

At present, we are investigating whether other speakers would be happy to give their talks via Zoom in next couple of months. Members will be notified by e-mail or in person of any new events. We will also be watching and waiting as the Government’s roadmap unfolds - all being well, we hope to hold some walks in the Park over the summer.

FARNHAM'S LOCATION PROBLEM—MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

We now have the Optimised Infrastructure Plan (OIP) being prepared, yet another plan for Farnham. Problems arising from transportation issues have occurred since the railway arrived in Farnham in the 1890s which divided the town into north and south areas. Proposals in 1896 and 1909 by the railway company for a road diversion and overbridge were rejected. The situation has deteriorated ever since.

Starting in 1925 suggestions to divert road traffic were made and in 1930 Town planners produced a report on the merits of a bypass. Following County and Government involvements a bypass –southern route was decided and was completed in 1938. However, it was not really a bypass but divided the area into North and South with Hickley's Corner and the railway crossing remaining the two major problems. Today solutions for Hickley's Corner and the railway crossings are still being debated.

The park is now faced with new challenges including a suggestion to provide access facilities for E-scooters to join the walkers, cyclists, prams, joggers and dog owners. Meanwhile we have the urban expansion in Bordon and Whitehill to the south, and Aldershot to the north, not to mention the substantial housing developments at the perimeter of the town.

A solution to reducing traffic volumes from Bordon was included in the overall development proposal which involved constructing a branch line to Bentley on the Main Alton-Waterloo line. However as often happens a bold suggestion has not proceeded because of a negative cost-benefit review after the development had already started. This conclusion was made on the premise that passengers would not be agreeable to changing trains at Bentley. We wait and see what happens next.

Neil Taylor

FARNHAM BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS

Some twenty Farnham groups and societies, including the Friends of Farnham Park, are affiliated to the Farnham Biodiversity Partnership (FBP), that is working with Farnham Town Council and Waverley to create a biodiversity action plan for Farnham, and to help protect and enhance biodiversity across the town. This year, there are a number of threads in focus, and FBP would love your help in recording any sightings of some iconic species, as well as encouraging wildlife in your garden.



Male stag beetle

Swifts – swifts screaming overhead is an iconic sound of early summer over the town. We know there are nesting sites in a number of areas, including the town centre, West Street, Crondall Lane and Hoghatch. This year we are keen to get clear picture of the number and locations of nests, so that we can monitor them in future years. Swifts should arrive at the end of April and be around for the next couple of months.

Hedgehogs – do you get hedgehogs in your garden? Hedgehogs in the UK have declined rapidly over the past century – maybe as much as 30% in urban areas since the millenium. We are very keen to understand where they are still surviving in Farnham, and hope that people will help to support them.

Stag beetles – Britain's largest beetle, and a fascinating creature, these emerge around the end of May, having spent up to seven years as grubs underground in rotting wood. There a few scattered reports each year, particularly close to the Park. Will you spot one this year? More reports will help us to understand where they are living, and how they can be protected in future.

Wildlife gardens – Up to one third of the total area of Farnham consists of private gardens, and these are vitally important for our wildlife. I am sure many of you support wildlife in your garden, can you do one more thing this year? There are lots of ideas online of features to help wildlife, that don't necessarily involve 'rewilding' or making your garden look unkempt. Check out <http://www.wlgf.org/> for ideas.

If you can report sightings of any of the above species, or would like to help with any of these projects, please e-mail contact@FarnhamBAP.org.uk, or contact FBP on Facebook, **Farnham Biodiversity Partnership**.

Libby Ralph

FOREIGN VISITORS

Spring is always an exciting time on the ponds of the Park, to see what waterfowl are taking up residence, hopefully nesting and successfully bringing up young. Last year the mallards on Carron Pond were particularly successful.

This year, some of the eagle-eyed will have seen some exotic visitors on Aubrey's pond during March. The first of these was a Cayuga duck, which is a domestic meat breed named after Lake Cayuga in New York State. It's origins are disputed, it was long-claimed to be descended from the American Black Duck, but unlike this species, it has the curled tail of a mallard, and also exhibits true black colouring, which is a genetic mutation again common in breeds descended from mallard. It is believed to have been brought to the UK for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and is a popular 'fancy' breed for showing, so this individual is probably an escapee. It hung around for about a week, then disappeared.



Cayuga duck – Tony Lucas

Also on Aubrey's pond, we have seen up to five Mandarin ducks (*Aix galericulata*) – four males and a female, that have been busy between the pond and the woods. Mandarins are a perching, wood duck species native to the Far East. They were introduced to the UK via collections, and have naturalised in the UK, particularly in south-east England.

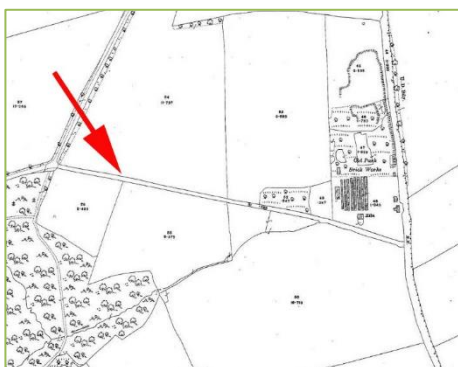
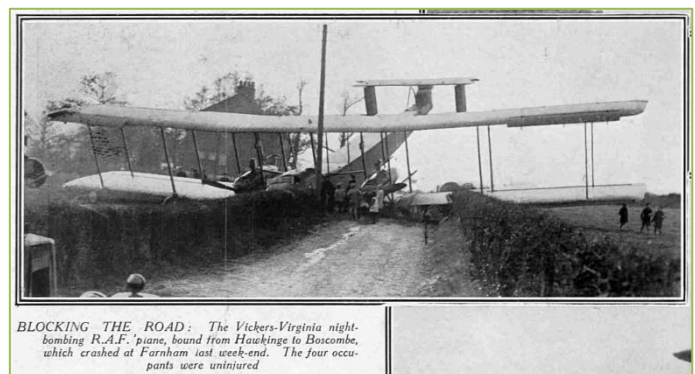


Mandarin ducks – Tony Lucas

Mandarins nest in holes in trees, sometimes high up and a long way from the water. Shortly after the ducklings hatch, the female flies down and tries to coax the young to jump from the nest. Once they have left the tree and made their way back to water, the father will return to the family and help to protect the ducklings. There are some Mandarins that have lived for a number of years on the river Wey near Tilford, we are waiting to see if these ducks will breed in the Park.

DETECTIVE WORK IN THE OLD PARK!

During the winter, Guy Singer circulated a picture in 'Peeps of the Past' of a Vickers-Virginia bomber (right) that crashed in the Old Park in 1931 (non-fatally), and asked if anyone could work out the location. A bit of map work, lining up to the cottages in the background pinpointed an area of Middle Old Park Lane, with a probable approach as shown on the map below. The road across the centre is Middle Old Park and on the right is the old brickworks, now



the Castle View housing development. At the track junction on the left now stand Woodside Cottages and we believe it is the roof of these that are visible in the background of Guy's cutting. This spring some detectives with a drone went out to pinpoint the exact spot!

Mick Bradford, Nick Hughes and Frank Phillipson all came up with roughly the same location, and Mick and Nick decided to work out what happened. Allan Arthurs of Media Techniche kindly supplied a drone. With information from pilot Ted Honey's logbook, thanks to his son Glenn, weather information for the day the probable line of flight was established.

Today the approach from the north west is hampered by power lines and trees, not there in 1931, but the Virginia must have approached much as in Mick's superb reconstruction image using one of Allan Arthur's drone photos. The big difference, however, is visibility - the two sergeant pilots on the day were hampered by very poor weather as the massive bomber got lower, and the port engine began to fail as it approached Farnham. Mick is busy preparing a synopsis of what we think transpired, and once allowed, the detective team hope to be able to present their findings to Glenn Honey and his family at a reunion on site.

(Story, pictures reproduced courtesy Chris Shephard)



RANGER ROUND-UP

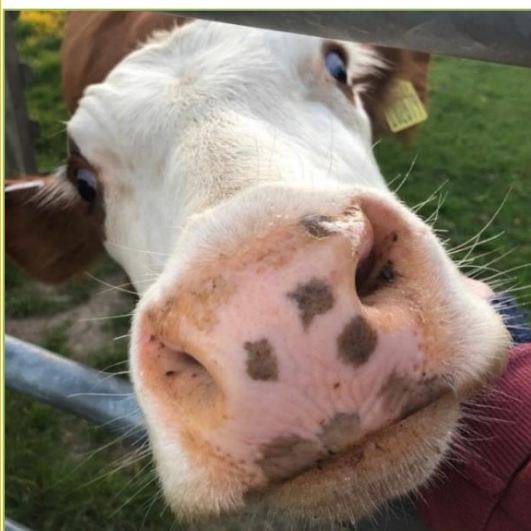
The Park has probably witnessed its busiest period in its history (only going back 600 years). Lockdown has seen unprecedented numbers of visitors with little reprieve from between April 2020 and now. As we prepare to welcome the further lifting of restrictions the park is probably yet to see its busiest time – the summer. If it was not obvious before, more and more people are realising the benefit of green spaces and their vital contribution to fitness and mental wellbeing.

Wood anemone (Fiona Allison)



For this Ranger, the biggest relief will come from the announcement that volunteering commenced again on Wednesday 31st March, with a full-on schedule of works I'm calling 'Covid catch-up'. The Parks & Countryside Team have continued to work through the pandemic with a large proportion of the work behind the scenes including policy writing; tree and biodiversity policies, project planning and polishing up on general office work.

Whilst the summer is going to be challenging for everyone there is much to look forward to in the Park. The dull, chilly weather is lifting and soon the spring meadows will be out in flower, the trees are returning to leaf and the birds will be nesting down. Over the next few weeks 2 of our coppice sites will be extended with hazel and hornbeam trees. This is being funded and planted by a new community tree planting group and Farnham Park is their trial site.



A number of the worst affected areas of muddy paths will be improved to allow unimpeded access even during the wettest winters. Several ponds and small wooded areas will be enclosed to offer protection to the wildlife inhabiting them, namely waterfowl, deer and badgers. The volunteers will be continuing their great work keeping paths clear and the invasive non-native species - like Himalayan balsam - at bay.

The Golf course and café is now linked to the mains sewer down at Upper South View and now that the diggers and dumpers have left the grass can begin to recover. The works were essential to reflect changing environmental legislation and to ensure that there are no pollution incidents in the future.

And lastly, the cows are now coming back!

Nick Macfarlane