

Friends of Farnham Park



New Ranger Robin Crowther

AGM REPORT - MEMBERSHIP FEES

The November AGM discussed the Chairman's proposal for another 'subscription holiday' this year, but in line with the Park's history of civil rebellion and Farnham's boundless generosity, the motion was defeated. The meeting instead felt that Members are generally keen to contribute to the Park's conservation and more events (**please see schedule overleaf**). It was suggested that greater efforts should be made to increase expenditure, especially on publicity and promotion, as well as on events and speakers. Apologies for the confusion.

Hence the subscription reminder enclosed with this newsletter can if you wish be used for the current year. Renewals and contributions will as ever be gratefully accepted at the FoFP events.

In the circumstances we won't relinquish any memberships and will continue to send your newsletters. New Members are always welcome.

FARNHAM PARK MINIPLAN NEWS

At their April Council meeting Waverley admitted the need for councils to re-assess two years of unlawful planning consents around the Thames Basin Heaths. This affects hundreds of homes unlawfully permitted using the Farnham Park Miniplan as 'mitigation'. The announcement of this huge and unprecedented task finally confirms that the longstanding concerns and representations of the FoFP Committee have been justified.

Because the Miniplan and the new 'regional strategy' are unevincenced experiments, the law that seeks to prevent species extinction dictates we apply some limitation on housebuilding. Unless the re-assessments are also to be unlawful, some consents must be revoked. Councillors are yet to consider their position and we await further news.

On June 3rd the Farnham Park Group of Waverley officers, councillors and FoFP representatives will meet to discuss the Miniplan Review. We will consider whether there is any established need to expand the Park's 'mitigation capacity' (to allow the building of a further 550 homes in Farnham); the additional car parking that would require; and the implications for the park's nature. Anyone wanting further information is welcome to contact Jerry Hyman (FoFP Chair) or Martin Clegg (Secretary).

MEET OUR NEW RANGER

Robin began his career in Countryside Management 10 years ago, as a long-term volunteer with the National Trust near Midhurst. Living in a tiny old caravan in a farmer's field was challenging during long winter nights, but he says he gained valuable experience like learning how to dig a proper hole (among other things!). It was quite a change from the more salubrious surroundings of Canary Wharf where he had been working for the Independent Newspaper (he had tea in Delia Smith's garden once during a gastronomic tour of Suffolk!).

After the NT, he served an apprenticeship with the City of London at Ashted Common in Surrey, gaining a permanent Ranger position on Coulsdon Commons - a mixture of chalk grassland and woodland on the North Downs near Caterham. They are popular multi-use sites with ancient trees, a range of different visitors and a variety of wildlife, perhaps the perfect training for Farnham Park.

After joining Waverley, Robin's priority was to set up the new office at Park Lodge, and he's now looking to recruit an assistant Ranger. He is keeping the Wednesday volunteer group busy with hedgelaying, scrub clearance, woodland thinning and path surfacing, and has reinstated the monthly Sunday volunteer group projects.

Robin recently moved to his new family home in Alresford with his wife Claire and his son Finn, 2. He is settling into the job fast, and with contagious enthusiasm told us,

"It's a wonderful opportunity and I feel very lucky to be managing this fantastic historic landscape. It was great to see so many people enjoy the winter snow here and I'm looking forward to experiencing the delights of spring and summer in the Park. There's lots going on over the next few months – keep an eye out for the new information panels at the Lodge as well as the Park entrances. Do stop me and introduce yourself when you see me about the Park – I'm very tall and tend to dress in green – you can't miss me! Better still, come along to our weekly Wednesday volunteer groups or the monthly Sunday projects and help us look after this wonderful place"

Robin likes to spend his spare time 'in the great outdoors' with his son, and he enjoys playing the piano. He also loves using scrap wood to make "useful and attractive objects", though he says his wife Claire might not entirely agree.

Members can socialise with our new Ranger and poke around the new Park Lodge facilities at our **barbecue** on July 29th, when we'll find out whether Robin can cook a decent burger.

'NEW' HISTORY OF THE PARK

The park has not always been so open to public access, having been created and maintained as the property of the Bishops of Winchester for centuries. The story of the two parks has been vividly told by Pat Heather in a new book, telling of the bishops and their lives at Farnham Castle. Pat has meticulously researched their stories and stewardship of the parks, including many illustrations, portraits, maps and diagrams.

The book is part of an occasional series published by the Farnham and District Museum Society, produced in cooperation with Waverley Council, the present-day stewards of the surviving park. It will be available in the summer at a price of £10 from Farnham Museum, Waverley sources, Pullinger's and from Peter Minett (01252 721576). A fascinating read for all those interested in Farnham life and the park itself.

– Pam Taylor, FDMS

NB: Pat Heather has kindly agreed to introduce and discuss her book with us at the Rowhills Centre on August 26th.

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Little grebe, summer & winter plumage

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2009

May 10th, Sun. 3-5pm, Spring Discovery Walk at Rowhills

Combining a FoFP social wander with Roy Champion's fascinating woodland expertise at Rowhills Nature Reserve, Cranmore Lane.

July 29th, Wed. 6– 8pm, FoFP Members' Social and Barbecue

An opportunity for Friends to get together over some food and drink at Park Lodge, and check out the excellent refurbishments and the new Ranger.

August 7th, Friday 2– 4pm, Children's event – Go Wild in the Park

Holiday fun exploring the Park and its wildlife with the Robin the Ranger. Booking essential – call 01252 717047 to find out meeting point (children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult).

August 26th, Wed. 7.15pm, Rowhills – A New History of Farnham Park

Pat Heather introduces FoFP to her new book and discusses the Park's varied history, over a cuppa at Rowhills Centre, Cranmore Lane.

September 6th, Sunday 10.30am, 'Forget-Me-Not' Walk

Sponsored 3 mile Walk for Leukemia Research, with attractions for the kids including face-painting and a bouncy castle; meet at the main car park. Contact Vanessa Battour on 01252 647563 or visit www.forgetmenotwalks.com/farnham

September 12th, Sat. 10 – noon, Natural Heritage 'Walk-in-the-Park'

Part of the Heritage Open Weekend 10th-13th September. A 4km walk led by the Ranger exploring the natural history, heritage and past usage of Farnham Park.

November 4th, Wed. 7 – 9.30pm Harry Pepper's Illustrated Deer Talk followed by FoFP AGM at Rowhills Centre, Cranmore Lane.

Starting with local expert Harry Pepper's Deer Talk, 7 to 8pm ish, with a questions session and refreshments, followed at 8.30pm by our Annual General Meeting and the Rangers' Report.

November 12th, Thurs. 'Old Farming Tools' Talk by Chris Shephard

A Rowhills Talk by popular Farnham expert Chris (of Rural Life Centre and Herald 'Peeps from the Past' fame). Starts 7.30pm, Cranmore Lane

Wednesday and Sunday Volunteers

Starting 10 a.m. – if you can't make Wednesdays, why not join in the monthly Sunday tasks? New helpers please contact Robin in advance.

May 31st Create cross drainage to improve terrain – Oast House La entrance

June 28th Pull Himalayan Balsam from Nadder stream – Oast Hse La entrance

July 26th Ragwort pulling in the meadows – Ranger's House car park, Folly Hill

August 30th Oak thinning scrub clearance – Bell's Piece/end of the Avenue

September 27th Planting daffodil bulbs along the avenue – Park Office, Folly Hill

OPPORTUNISTIC COMMENSALISM? Or just DUCKING AND DIVING ?

Having been entertained by the unusual behaviour of a little grebe, and lacking the words to describe it, FoFP Treasurer David Havenhand emailed the RSPB explaining,

"The grebe was on the pond surface about a foot to one side of an immature mallard. It dived and resurfaced about a foot the other side of the mallard, which immediately began to paddle down the pond. The grebe followed for a few yards, then dived again, coming up beside the mallard. This happened four times, before eventually the grebe miscalculated and came up under the duck, which squawked and skittered off into the reed mace.

Was the grebe having a game; was it a territorial battle; or was the mallard stirring up insects which the grebe was taking advantage of? The pond is quite deep, so that seems a little unlikely!"

The response from Darren Oakley-Martin, RSPB Wildlife Advisor was,

"I think this may be an example of commensalism, whereby two species interact, with one receiving a benefit and the other being indifferent to the actions of the other. Little grebes will eat a variety of larvae - as you suggest, the mallard may have been disturbing this larvae to the benefit of the grebe. This type of relationship in birds is rarely observed, but strangely, the journal British Birds recently carried a note on commensalism between little grebe and moorhen. It would seem that little grebes are one of the most opportunistic of our water birds!" Or are Farnham mallards just too polite (or meek) to say "stop ducking around"?

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE DRUNKEN CEDAR ?

Sorry, but sadly, a cedar adjacent to the cricket nets is slowly toppling over, and an investigation using a sonic tomography unit conducted as part of the ongoing Park tree safety inspections has shown the base and roots to be (in technical terms) pretty rotten. Given its location it will need to be felled before it falls on top of someone of its own choosing. The softwood timber will be retained if possible and could be used for a sculpture or Park furniture – ideas are invited. Contact the office or the FoFP committee with ideas, or else we'll ask Robin to sculpt it into a copy of Mike Hawthorn's 1958 F1 Ferrari. Or a bird table. – *Chairman*