

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter April 2010

Registered Charity No. 285383



MIND YOUR HEAD

A special form of entertainment comes to the Park every autumn, much to the amusement of local golfers.

Players at Farnham Park Golf Club have seen literally hundreds of decent drives to the green rewarded with the sight of a crow waddling and hopping over to the ball, and then flying off with it.

The manager of the course Johann van der Merwe explains how one breeding pair of crows, residents of a tree by the ninth hole, have added an unusual element of lottery to the round.

"Once fledged, their annual spring brood of 2 or 3 chicks are taught to pinch golf balls. Lessons begin with the adults pushing balls around with their beaks. By September they've progressed to teaching the chicks to pick up the balls and fly off with them – dropping them across the Park, the cricket pitch and nearby fields, with the garden of the Rangers House a favourite target".

The crows aren't fussy whether the ball is white, coloured or even luminous, but they do seem careful not to mess on their own doorstep. Tuition tends to be concentrated on the sixth green, with the first, fifth and seventh also popular haunts – though as Johann believes, "It seems they're just having a laugh, it's a game. Part of the fun is that it is unpredictable".

A falconer who was asked if he could help had to decline when he saw the size of the culprits, concerned that "they'll kill my birds". Serious golfers are now pinning their hopes on a pair of red kites that frequent the Park.

So whether you're a Tiger or just fancy some unpredictable gentle exercise in a beautiful setting, why not turn up and have some fun? If you slice your tee shot wildly off-course, you can always blame the crows, everyone else does. Prices for 9 holes are just £5.50 for Seniors, £6.50 for those less mature, and £3 if you need to hire a set of clubs. And every Wednesday at noon there's a Seniors Competition (60+) to enjoy. If you find the birds rolling around laughing at your attempts to reach the green, you could always offer your services as a scarecrow.



FARNHAM PARK EVENTS 2010

16th April. Fri. 10 am – noon, **Spring Nature Ramble**, meet at Park Lodge. A family walk aimed at children. (Sorry, no dogs).

17th April, Sat..a.m, "**Come and Try Orienteering**", for individuals, teams and families. Turn up anytime between 9.30 and 11 a.m. dressed to run or walk and give it a go. For details see www.southern navigators.com.

19th April, Mon. evening, "**Early Saxon Landscapes**", an illustrated talk by eminent local ethno-botanist **Chris Howkins**. Learn about the early history of our area and how this has helped to create what we see today. Venue is '40degreez' behind the Farnham Sports Centre, Dogflud Way at 7pm. for 7.30 start. Non-members £1.

11th May, Tues. 7pm, "**Clever and Curious**", an illustrated talk by the excellent and amusing speaker **Jill Carey**, looking at how wild plants adapt to their environment. Venue is the **Rowhills Centre**, Cranmore Lane, 7p.m for 7.30 start. Non-members £1.

15th July, Thurs, **Friends' Social/Barbecue** in Park Lodge garden, 7.30p.m to dusk, a chance to feast, relax and natter with friends.

12th August, Thurs. a.m., a holiday **Mini-Beast Safari** in the Park with the Ranger. Meet at Park Lodge 10 a.m [2 hours approx.]. Sorry not suitable for pushchairs or dogs.

11th September, Sat. a.m., "**Meet the Remarkable Trees**", a **guided walk** with the Ranger. Discover the ancient trees of Farnham Park and delve a little deeper into its hidden history. Part of the Heritage Weekend. 10am – noon, meeting at Park Lodge.

October – "Ancient Trees – Britain's Living Heritage" (details TBA): Don't miss this entertaining **illustrated talk** by renowned veteran tree champion, **Ted Green MBE**. Venue will be **40degreez**, behind the Farnham Sports centre. Non-members £1

17th Nov 17th - A.G.M. at **Rowhills Centre**, Cranmore Lane, 7pm. for 7.30, followed by an illustrated round-up of the year by our Ranger Robin Crowther.

Wednesday and Sunday Conservation Volunteer Groups
Starting 10 a.m. – if you can't make it to the weekly Wednesday groups, why not join in the monthly Sunday tasks?
New helpers please contact Robin in advance: 717047.

CONGRATULATIONS TO WAVERLEY

The Farnham Society has bestowed a Design Award upon Waverley's Countryside Department and their architects for the popular eco-modernist transformation of Park Lodge, Folly Hill.

RANGER'S REPORT by Robin Crowther

The cedar of Lebanon tree by the cricket pitch which was felled last year is taking shape. Three local schools came together in a workshop recently to brainstorm for ideas for the main entrance sculpture. Newts and deer were a common suggestion, as was some sort of link, both structurally and visually, to the castle. The kids were also keen to get stuck in with a hammer and chisel to remove the bark and rot from the centre. Work will continue with schools, the Park volunteers and a local artist over the next few months, with installation planned for late summer.

Keep an eye out for two new ponds being created in the Park also in late summer. Ponds are extremely rich in wildlife and they will add to the existing habitat for great crested newts, dragonflies and other aquatic vegetation. A low fence will prevent disturbance from dogs while allowing access for people to enjoy them. The ponds will be fed from groundwater and surface water only and will be allowed to colonise naturally, so might take a while to establish.

We have a new volunteer assistant Ranger to help out in the Park for the summer. **Lucy Proctor** is currently finishing her countryside studies at Merrist Wood College and will be working a couple of days a week at Farnham Park and every weekend at Frensham Common from Easter.

CONSERVATION ROUND-UP

The Volunteers braved the cold snap to lay another section of the Queen Mother's Hedge along the Avenue, using the hazel gathered during the autumn coppicing work.

The veteran horse chestnut overlooking the car park has been thinned for longevity, and 50 hawthorn and blackthorn saplings have been planted in the gaps in the hedgerow bordering the car park. Some dead/dying elms and sycamores have been removed from the southern boundary fence line.

Willow rods of many lovely hues, cut from the withy beds behind the Lodge, were used to supply the Easter willow-weaving workshop.

MINIPLAN UPDATE

You'd be amazed what unaccountable people will get up to, or maybe you wouldn't. 'Nuff said. (Expletives deleted). - *Chairman*



MY GARDEN BIRDS

In 2006 I began recording the birds I saw in my back garden each month. I did it on a random basis noting what I saw whilst going about my daily life e.g. watching whilst on the phone or washing up, but they had to actually land in the garden.

I made a chart and stuck it on the kitchen door so I could tick off what was seen. That first January I recorded 9 species and by the end of the year had 22 on the list. I noted that I had 6 that visited on a regular basis: robins, blackbirds, great tits, blue tits, wood pigeons and magpies. Other species I didn't see for a few months and some like the goldfinch, only rarely.

I was now becoming really interested and the next year decided I needed more than just a bird-bath and table, so invested in a food station and supplied seed and fat balls. I had to grease the pole well with Vaseline to prevent the squirrels climbing up and eating everything but after a number of attempts, and very greasy paws, they got the message. I now had visits from the great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch and long-tailed tits fairly often. My bird count was going up and so was my observation. I still had my six regular visitors but I could now add wren and dunnock to them. These two were more secretive and never visited the food station but were often in the garden under the bushes or turning over the leaves on the ground.

In 2008 a pheasant arrived and then a collared dove, and the following year a grey wagtail, greenfinch and ring-necked parakeet. It is always exciting adding a new bird species to the chart, but what surprised me was I had few sightings of starlings or house sparrows. This winter I am delighted to say that I have had regular visits from the sparrows and have had a regular song thrush too.

My total now stands at 31 species and in four years I have gone from 9 species in January 2006 to 17 species this January. By buying Niger seeds and a container I hope this year to encourage more finches and I am hanging containers from the trees, so it will be interesting to see if I get any more new arrivals. - *Helen Wilson*

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GOING NATIVE, DISCRETELY

Having planted a thousand native daffodil bulbs between the trees along the avenue and waited with bated breath for spring to finally arrive, it's clear we've successfully avoided creating an excessively garish and inappropriate display. The first blooms look nice and tasteful, if a little sparse, but Robin assures us they'll spread in future years, even if we have lost a few to the badgers. We do hope they appreciated the winter feast...

