

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Autumn 2015

Registered Charity No. 285383

<http://www.friendsoffarnhampark.com>



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Friends of Farnham Park
Annual General Meeting
will be held on

Tuesday 10th November 2015 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 illustrated Ranger's Report and informal discussion. Please e-mail Robin in advance if you've any interesting photos of the Park or of your garden wildlife which you'd like displayed.

Martin Clegg, Secretary, 01252 821977

FRIENDS IN FASHION!

Some of you have asked again about the 'Friends' Fashions', with the Friends of Farnham Park logo, as sported by some of our volunteers in the picture below.



These are available for Friends to buy through Committee member, Sally Hall. Choose from rugby shirts, polo shirts, sweat-shirts or fleeces with short or full length zip. Colours: Navy, Bottle-green (currently fleeces and rugby shirts only) and Burgundy. Sizes: S.M.L.XL.XXL. Prices range from £12 for a polo shirt to £19.50 for a rugby shirt. To order please contact Sally on 01252-726510.

EVENTS OF 2015

We have had a really good turnout for the events we held this year, and we hope that those of you who came along really enjoyed yourselves.

In April, Ken Crick gave us a fascinatingly in-depth talk about dragonflies, illustrated with his own amazing photographs – we came away feeling we had had first-hand experience of their private lives! Martin Woolner gave us another very entertaining tree walk in the Park, focusing on what lives in and underneath the trees, and had us all examining bark, picking about in the undergrowth, as well as waving umbrellas under an oak tree!



Martin Woolner on what lives in trees

Our July Members' BBQ had good weather for the third year running – can we keep this up?! It was attended by record numbers, around 60 of you joining us for a very pleasant evening of sausages and socializing. In August, Michael Haxeline and other members of Waverley dowsers showed how we can all use this ancient technique, including enhancing our aura with help from a tree!

Two talks have completed our autumn line-up. Dave Williams gave a delightful talk on badgers, and Philip Stephens gave us a fascinating account of his expedition to Katmandu and trek to Annapurna base camp. As advertised above, left, our last event of the year will be the AGM on Tuesday, 11th November. We hope to see many of you there, and look forward to a new programme of talks and events that will start again in the spring.

WILDFLOWER LOOKALIKES

There are several wildflowers in the Park that can be confused, one with the other. Here are a few examples.

RAGWORT and **FLEABANE** – both are members of the daisy family.



Common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) is a handsome herb with ragged leaves (hence the name). It has much-branched heads of yellow, daisy-like flowers and can grow to four feet tall. It is poisonous to cattle, hence Park volunteers pull it up from the hay meadows – cattle and horses will avoid it themselves if it is growing, but it can get mixed with feed if left to dry in the hay. It is safe to leave in other areas – contrary to some beliefs, its seeds do not spread very far. Strangely, sheep eat it and do not appear to be affected. It is an important wildlife plant and is a favourite food plant for the cinnabar moth, whose black-and-yellow striped caterpillars will strip it back to the stalk.

Ragwort



Fleabane

Fleabane (*Pulicaria dicenterica*) also has bright yellow blooms, but they consist of up to 600 separate flowers. It has lanceolate (long and tapered) leaves. It does not grow as tall as ragwort – two feet usually – but the occasional one may exceed that. In the past, it was burnt to drive away fleas! (*Pulicaria* comes from the Latin *pulex*, a flea).

BUTTERCUPS, SPEARWORT AND CELANDINE – everyone knows what a **buttercup** looks like, but there are



Bulbous buttercup

nine different species in the UK, of which we have at least four in the Park – bulbous, celery-leaved, creeping, and meadow buttercups. Buttercups are mildly poisonous – far from giving butter its colour as was once believed, cattle often leave them.

Spearwort is a lover of damp places, hence we see it near springs or ditches in the Park. There is a **Lesser** (*Ranunculus flammula*) and a **Greater** (*R. lingua*), which can grow three feet tall. Their leaves are lanceolate. One way to tell them apart is that buttercup petals form a closed cup, whereas spearwort petals are separated.



Lesser spearwort

Celandine – this also comes as lesser and greater, but they are not related. Lesser Celandine (*R. ficaria*) is another



member of the buttercup family, while Greater celandine (*Cheladonium majus*) is related to poppies. Lesser appears in early spring – before the buttercups – whereas Greater flowers in May/June and is not so common. Both have heart-shaped leaves, but those on Greater have several lobes.

Lesser

Greater



Lesser celandine flowers have 8-12 petals, usually spread out. Greater celandine has only four petals but there may be as many as four flowers closely grouped around the stem, giving the appearance of a larger flower. Greater celandine is poisonous, although it was once used as a cure for warts!

David Havenhand

FRIENDS WEBSITE GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH!

In our last newsletter, we told you that we had moved the website, to a temporary link on the free SurreyCommunity Info link. Now, thanks so much to the help and hard work of two Friends, Tony Lucas and Keith Miller, we have a brand-new website which incorporates all our information and the valuable photos put together by the late Sharon Watson. Take a look, we hope you like it, and we will continue to add to this website as time goes forward:

www.friendsoffarnhampark.co.uk

Also, we now have group Facebook page, Friends of Farnham Park, which we hope people will use to share photos and experiences of the Park.

MOTH REPORT 2015

This year recordings, using a Robinson Mercury Vapour Moth trap beside Farnham Park, were mixed, with a reasonable start and a slow but steady increase throughout the summer. The spring and summer species emerged as normal, however the autumnal species started emerging earlier than normal and have yet to peak as I write this report. Overall there was an 8% decline in species recorded from last year. There were 242 species recorded by August 24th as opposed to 260 species recorded by the same date last year. It is thought that the main factor responsible is climatic, but numbers may catch up by the end of the year.

Of the larger moths, there was a notable increase in the recordings of the **Privet Hawk Moth** and the **Eyed Hawk Moth**, possibly due to the mild winter and the easier survival of over wintering pupae.

The larvae of the **Privet Hawk Moth** will survive up to two years underground at a depth of 30cms. It is also probably enjoying the resurgence of wild privet and sapling ash trees on which they feed. The Privet Hawk Moth is the second largest resident Hawk Moth with a wingspan of 41-55mm and at one point in the summer they were coming to the trap every night, which proved quite spectacular.



The **Eyed Hawk Moth** exposes its unmistakable eye spots while rocking to and fro when disturbed. This has proved to deter insectivorous birds. The larvae feed mainly on willow which is plentiful in the Park.

Six species were recorded in the Park for the first time as follows:

- 1) **Least Black arches** – nationally scarce B
- 2) **Cypress Carpet** – discovered on alien host (Leyland Cypress)
- 3) **Tawny Shears** – nationally common
- 4) **Bordered Straw** – immigrant, but breeds in Britain in a good summer
- 5) **Mocha** – nationally scarce B
- 6) **Dark Spinach** – nationally common

It is worthy of note that 413 species of the larger moths have been recorded in the Park since I commenced 20 years ago.

David Helliwell

[Editor's note: Martin Angell, from Bourne Conservation Group, has also been moth-trapping in the park this year – we may get an update from him too in a future edition]

FROM THE ARCHIVES – FRIENDS POND



Further to our hedgelaying article in the Spring, we have been digging around in old photographs, including these from the construction of Friends Pond, which was done by the Friends of Farnham Park over two summers – 1994 and 1995. The Ranger at the time was David Tapp who agreed to the proposal as put forward by Murray Nurse. Murray was effectively construction manager, and he begged and borrowed materials and equipment from many sources, all at little or no cost to Waverley. Aubrey Long was a major contributor to the job as it would not have been done without his machinery, including a digger.



Compare the top view with Friends Pond as it is today (left!)

Roger Griffiths

BUTTERFLY TRANSECT 2015

As I was writing the first draft of this report in late August and listening to the rain beating on the window a word came to mind to describe this year from a butterfly counting point of view and that was ...frustrating. The weather obviously affects the number of butterflies in flight and it should preferably be warm, dry and still. This year we have had cold and windy, warmer but still windy, finally degenerating into wet and windy making it less than ideal. The counts on the transect (the designated route taken across the Park)were reasonable in April and May although these months only account for about 9% of the total 26-week count, mostly of species that overwinter as adults such as Brimstone, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Early June was poor with a cold easterly wind but as we entered the main flight period of late June to early August (a 7 week period which usually accounts for about 80% of the 6 month total) the weather improved although the counts struggled to reach the heights seen in the previous 2 years.



Most of the 23 species recorded showed decreases notably the Meadow Brown down from 348 to just over 200, but still by far the commonest. Conversely 2 of the other 'browns' - Gatekeeper and Marbled White showed reasonable increases as did 'cabbage whites'. It was encouraging to see Silver Washed Fritillaries and Purple Emperors still present and I also recorded one Painted Lady - a migrant species which sometimes arrives in large numbers such as in 2009.

With the weather rapidly deteriorating in late August and low numbers the norm for September the estimated total for 2015 is around 575 -

somewhat down on the 717 last year but still 11% up on the previous 8 year average. The main problem this year was the wind which tended to keep the butterflies in more sheltered areas of the park rather than in the open hay meadows. This conclusion is borne out by the observation that the only transect section that did not show a decrease on 2014 was along the sheltered path behind the Ranger's House.

Overall while not the best year it was still 3rd out of the last 8, and I do not think there is any real cause for concern.



Richard Burgess.

RANGER'S REPORT AUTUMN 2015

Is there a finer site in Surrey than Farnham Park on a glorious autumn morning? A low mist drifts through the ancient oaks, stifling traffic noise, cloaking the pylons, and transporting you back to a medieval landscape unchanged for centuries. With the meadows shorn of their golden grasses, the faded pea greens of high summer have given way to richer hues of burnt chestnut, and deep amber. It is a time to pause and reflect on a busy summer and enjoy the firm turf and ever-changing colours, before the stark outlines and deep mud of winter.

The new adventure playground has proved a real hit and was completed just in time for the end of the summer holidays. The oak and chestnut blend in with the historic park character and will soften further in time. We will be upgrading the existing trim trail within the play area within the next few months.

The major work of the season is the thinning of the woodland next to Shady Nook. Without this pro-active management, the trees will grow tall and thin with little understory. We will be removing around 130 oak trees which will give space and light for others to grow into big, strong specimens and improve the amenity quality of the area too. The works will involve some large machinery and areas of the woodland will be closed for short periods. More details to follow on site prior to the works.

Scottish and Southern Energy contractors have cleared small trees growing underneath the pylons which were in danger of getting burned off as the wires sag in summer. It has benefitted wildlife too, by increasing light levels to the Nadder stream and introducing some diversity of age structure into the scrub. Further scrub management as part of the Higher Level Stewardship funding, will take place within College Copse this winter too.

The park volunteers have shifted some ten tonnes of scalplings to dress some of the paths that are wearing out in the centre of the Park. It's hard work with only a shovel and wheelbarrow, trailing through the mud, though the volunteers have hardly complained at all - only another ten tonnes to go! An all-weather path link from the car park to the postern gate of the Castle will also be completed in the new year. The gate will be open every day and provide access from the park straight in to the Castle garden.

We have a new Apprentice Ranger, Philippa Manuel who'll be working with me at the park at least once a week for the next couple of years. She's getting stuck in - literally - she's already managed to fall over in Royal pond while pulling reed mace! Finally, our third Green Flag was awarded in the summer which is a tribute to all the hard work by staff, contractors and volunteers throughout the year. Thanks to all.

Robin Crowther