

Friends of Farnham Park

Newsletter Spring 2015

Registered Charity No. 285383

<http://www.surreycommunity.info/friends-of-farnham-park/>



SPRING IS SPRUNG!

At last we have some spring sunshine – although some north-westerly gales as I write this! Welcome to our Spring newsletter, which includes our programme of events for 2015 – we hope to see you at some of these. Also, we are in the processing of moving our website – see next page for details. We hope you enjoy the articles about activities over the last few months – and enjoy the Park as the weather warms up!

Libby Ralph

BUTTERFLY TRANSECT 2014

The only predictable thing about the British weather is its unpredictability. After a very wet and windy winter we were blessed with a mild spring which gave the butterflies a flying start (pun intended) after the previous cold spring and then, surprise, surprise a second hot dry summer in a row! As a result of this the butterfly transect counts for April 2014 vs. 2013 were up from 4 to 33 and June from 27 to 100 (May being poor in both years). With the warm weather continuing, by the end of July the count for the year was up on the same time in 2013 by 20% although it did drop off in August due to the deteriorating weather and by the end of the month was just 3% up with one month to go but already just above 2013's total.

The most productive transect sections were the meadows, in the centre and northwest corner of the park and the Southern Slopes, which offer an ideal habitat for the predominantly grass loving species that live on the park. As usual the lowest counts were on White Bottom and there were fewer butterflies in the wooded area behind the Ranger's House.

Two highlights of the year were the resurgence of the Small Tortoiseshell which went up from a count of just 1 in 2013 to 22 in 2014, and the arrival of

the Silver Washed Fritillary (below), which had made brief appearances in previous years but was seen on several occasions in 2014 - around Yoyo and Aubrey's ponds (an area not covered by the



transect) and once on the transect up near Hampton Road. Hopefully they will form a breeding

colony and be a regular in years to come.

Another winner was the Small Skipper (right) up from 38 to 77 and a number of species had similar counts to



2013 with the highest as usual being the Meadow Brown which at 350 by the end of August represented 50% of the total count. In contrast the biggest fallers were Large and Small Whites (the notorious cabbage whites) so gardeners should have a better brassica crop this year!

So another successful butterfly year drew to a close - can they make it three in a row? Watch this space.

Richard Burgess.

FRIENDS OF FARNHAM PARK EVENTS PROGRAMME 2015

Tuesday 14th April: Dragonflies. An illustrated talk by Ken Crick.

Ken is a retired Chartered Mechanical Engineer with an interest in dragonflies that he developed while playing, as a boy, around Fleet Pond and other lakes/canals. He is co-author of the 'Blackwater Valley Dragonflies' book. Ken acts as the British Dragonfly Society focal point for the Bramshill & Warren Heath sites and is entering year 14 of a planned 15 year dragonfly population survey.

Wednesday 17th June: A tree walk in The Park with Martin Woolner

Martin is a retired biologist and worked at ICI Jealotts Hill for 40 years. Now a Tree Warden and Ancient Tree hunter, he is really interested in what lives in, on and under all sorts of trees. I wonder what he will find to show us in the Park? Meeting at the Rangers House car park at 17.00

Thursday 2nd July: Friends of Farnham Park members BBQ

Once again we are grateful to Farnham Cricket Club for allowing us to hold this at the Cricket Pavilion where we hope to repeat the perfect weather we've had in the last couple of years. Start time 19:00 at the Cricket Pavilion.



Tuesday 11th August: Dowsing. A walk and talk by Michael Haxeline.

Michael is a member of Waverley Dowsers and he hopes to cover the use of a dowsing rod, tree hugging, energies of a pyramid and their application in conservation and how to search for a lost tool. Meeting at Park Lodge/ main car park 17.00

Tuesday 15th Sept: Badgers. An illustrated talk by Dave Williams.

Dave is about to retire from Surrey Wildlife Trust, where he has been the County Mammal Officer for many years. He is the leading light in the West Surrey Badger Group, as well as Chairman of the Surrey Mammal Group. He is a popular and well-known local expert, and we expect an entertaining talk.

October (tbd) – we hope to have a talk from John Gahan on the geology of the Park. Details in our next newsletter.

Note: all indoor talks take place at the Rowhill Centre (Cranmore Lane), 7pm refreshments for 7:30pm start. The Centre now has a hearing loop should anyone need it.

Events are free to FoFP members, £3 to non- members. Walks meet at Park Lodge/main car park, or Ranger's House car park – see above.

NEW WEBSITE FOR THE FRIENDS

In order to ensure the future of our website, we are transferring our content to SurreyCommunity.Info, which is a free community portal provided by the county council and the 11 district and borough councils in Surrey, for community, voluntary and not-for-profit groups in Surrey and the bordering areas. It will take us a bit of time to get it set up as we'd like it, but please go back and visit from time to time, to see what's new.

<http://www.surreycommunity.info/friends-of-farnham-park/>

RIVERFLY MONITORING

The Riverfly Partnership was formed in 2004 to bring together a number of organisations such as anglers, conservationists and various government agencies with a common interest in freshwater ecosystems with special reference to riverflies. These invertebrates include mayflies, stone flies and caddis all of which live most of their lives as larvae or nymphs in streams until they emerge as short lived adults. Together with other invertebrates they are a vital link in the food chain and good indicators of the health of rivers and streams. Subsequently in 2007 an initiative was set up to monitor the populations of certain significant groups of riverflies as well as the freshwater shrimp which admittedly does not fly and is not actually a shrimp but it is a good indicator of healthy waterways as it requires oxygen-rich water.



After suitable training Alan and I began monitoring the abundance of the selected invertebrates in the Nadder in Farnham Park on a monthly basis as an extension of our Riversearch activities which were described in a previous newsletter. The technique involves 'kick sampling' in which a 25cm net is held against the stream bed and the gravel is disturbed using a foot to dislodge the invertebrates and cause them to be washed into the net. After three one minute sweeps to cover various parts of the selected stretch the sample is emptied into a bucket of water and decanted into plastic trays to be sorted and counted.

In the 4 months we have been monitoring so far we have found 3 of the selected 8 groups of which by far the most common is the freshwater shrimp (above) whose numbers in February topped 1000. The other two were 'olives' - the nymphs of a type of upwing fly - and uncased caddis - the naked version of the more familiar cased type.

Freshwater shrimps grow to about 20mm, are grey brown in colour and can live up to 2 years. They reproduce rapidly producing 2 generations of up to 50 offspring per year which hatch fully formed from eggs carried in a brood pouch by the female. They are detritivores, feeding on decomposing leaf litter and are reared commercially for use as fish food. Olives spend up to a year in the nymph stage feeding on algae scraped from submerged stones and fine organic debris before emerging as adult flies. Caddis larvae feed on plant material and can tolerate lower oxygen levels. They generally have one generation per year overwintering as larvae and emerging as adults in the spring after going through a pupal stage.

The other designated types we have not yet found in the Nadder (although they are all present in the Wey in Farnham) are cased caddis, 3 other kinds of up-wing flies including mayflies and stoneflies.

Richard Burgess and Alan Walter

HEDGELAYING REVISITED

Our volunteers were out laying another section of the Queen Mothers hedge along the Avenue this January, braving some cold easterly winds. We probably only have one more year before we reach the top by the football pitches.



Planted to commemorate the 80th birthday of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 1980, the hedge runs the length of the Avenue, framing the view over White Bottom. We found some Farnham Herald articles and photos about the first laying of the hedge in 1996-97. The current round has been completed in 50-60m stretches over the past six years, and has attracted some very positive comments from passers-by.

Getting to grips with the hedge:

in 1997...

...and in 2015!



RANGER'S REPORT SPRING 2015

A walk without a coat, a 'chiff chaff chiff' from the bushes, a butter-yellow brimstone sauntering by and the welcome hardening of the ground beneath our feet - the winter is finally behind us and through a combination of volunteers, contractors and rangers, we've achieved a lot in the past six months.

We've continued our thinning of the oak scrub near to Nutshell Lane creating the next generation of mature oaks. We've cleared a lot of bramble (don't worry there is plenty left for nesting birds and blackberrying!) to reclaim lost bits of the Park and enhance landscape trees. We've undertaken tree surgery to some of our veteran oaks, reducing the weight and leverage on some of the old limbs to ensure they stay intact as long as possible. We've checked, prodded and assessed numerous trees along well used paths to ensure they are safe, felled a number of large sycamores along the residential boundary, culled poorly Avenue trees and replanted with lime and elm. We've pruned young trees to ensure a good structure and healthy crown, coppiced hazel to breathe light into woodlands, cleared paths encroached with thick scrub, installed new benches and of course laid another section of The Avenue hedge. That's a lot of cutting, stacking, chipping, burning and planting.



Felling sycamore on southern boundary



Volunteers hard at work repairing a path

Looking ahead, the arrival of the cattle is always a nice moment in the year as they leap off the trailer and frolic in the lush new grass, relieved after a long winter in a barn. Continuing the centuries old tradition of grazing in the Park, they do a great job maintaining the open aspect in this area. Please ensure your dog is under close control when walking through the grazing area as cattle can be spooked by running dogs.

The wild flower meadow area on the southern slopes is a real treat in summer with colourful harebells, scabious, knapweeds and the delicate quaking grass. These are all specialist chalk grassland species which are under threat and it's great to see them in an 'amenity' area. We'll be extending the meadow again this summer but still be cutting wide paths to walk through to enjoy the sights and sounds of insects and flowers.

The public have decided upon a new design for the adventure playground which is being completely refurbished this spring. Built of sweet chestnut and sawn oak mainframes, renowned for their longevity, this will be a rustic play area in sympathy with its surroundings. Featuring tangle climbs, rope bridges, rope traverses, and balance beams all within a castle theme, it will allow children to play endlessly and let their imaginations run wild. It will be ready for action in late May hopefully.

So a big thank you to everyone involved in some way, big or small, in looking after the Park this winter. Whether you're stuck in a bramble thicket with a pair of loppers or just popping a discarded can in a bin while walking the dog. After slogging through the mud for months, we can reap the rewards, as we sit on a new bench for a few minutes to enjoy spring in the Park in full swing.



Volunteers not so hard at work!

Robin Crowther