

Friends News

Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park (FORCP)

Issue 19 Winter 2003



Tree Sparrow Recovery Programme

Over the last 25 years the number of Tree Sparrows nationally has fallen by over 80%. All of the factors involved in this dramatic decline have not yet been identified but the most obvious so far are changing agricultural practices, removal of hedgerows, the use of pesticides, herbicides and the destruction of habitat.

The decline in numbers was identified by the Common Bird Census, organised by the British Trust for Ornithology and from a steady decline in the capture rate as reported by Britain's 2000 bird ringers.

To try to remedy this problem the Royal Society For The Protection Of Birds appointed a Tree Sparrow Recovery Officer whose remit was to identify measures to reverse this decline. Two problems which were immediately obvious were lack of winter feed and very limited breeding sites so Rushcliffe Country Park has signed up with the recovery programme to hopefully provide both.

We are currently manufacturing feeding hoppers - a sort of glorified bird table, to position in the buffer zone between the business Park and the plantation, to try to attract these birds from an established breeding area at Bunny, to a winter feeding area at the Park. We have 100 kilos of grain and 15 nestboxes kindly donated by the recovery programme to be going on with, so hopefully, we can help to re-establish a healthy population of Tree Sparrows around the Country Park.



On The Wing

We have recently received four recovery forms from the British Trust For Ornithology regarding swans ringed at the Country Park. These are:-

X0250 Ringed 16th September 1998. Caught at Priory Water, Asfordby, Leicestershire on 11th January 2000 and sponsored by Ivy and Eddy Barber.

X1587 Ringed 15th September 1999. This bird was caught at Holme Pierrepont in a poor condition and hospitalised. When recovered it was released back at Holme Pierrepont on 23rd December 1999. This bird was sponsored by Joy Murray.

X4231 Ringed 19th September 2000 and sponsored by Paddy Nott. Caught at Lea Marston, nr Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire on 21st June 2002.

X3260 also ringed on 19th September 2000. Caught at Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire on 28th July 2001. Unfortunately we have no record of who sponsored this bird, so, if you recognise a friend under the number, please let the Rangers know.



Missing Identity

At present a woodland path is being created in a plantation near the community garden. The plantation is known as **Community Wood**, however this is not a very inspiring name. If anyone can think of a better name please let the Rangers' know! Also the woodland area that has been designated as a memorial wood is called **Memorial Wood**. Any more imaginative titles would be gratefully received.

Magical Moments Birdwatching in Hungary

A 3 hour drive east of Budapest lies the Hortobagy National Park. In October the *puszta*, a dry grassland broken by only acacias trees, farmsteads, reed-fringed fish ponds and gagging flocks of white geese, holds a variety of birdlife. At this time of year thousands of Common Cranes pass through this area on their way from breeding grounds further north to their winter quarters in Africa. Well over 50,000 spend the autumn in Eastern Hungary and this was one reason why I was in Hungary, to see the spectacular roost of these cranes. We took up our positions behind a line of trees as dusk approached in readiness for the fly past. Soon the air was filled with the whistling and trumpeting of thousands of cranes as they appeared over the



trees, rapidly dropping to ground level as they battled against very strong winds and then crossing in front of a beautiful sunset. There must have been at least 5,000 birds flying over in about half an hour. A truly magical moment.

Next day another wonderful sight awaited us in a village street as people were making their way to work. In a couple of trees either side of the road were 10 Long-eared Owls roosting. We couldn't believe our eyes. Binoculars weren't really necessary. It was fantastic to see them so close with their large glowing amber eyes looking down at us.



Travelling to an area on the Danube gave a completely different kind of habitat, broad-leaved woodlands, and a variety of birds. Here we were able to identify and compare 6 different species of Woodpeckers and throughout our time there we were surrounded by the calls of numerous Marsh Tits.

A great country for birdwatching.

Jean Gray



Here Be Dragons

Far back in the mists of time, long before dinosaurs roamed the earth, a species of animal took flight and is still with today; that species is that of the order odonata, or commonly known as the dragonfly.

These creatures have survived because they have been able to make the best possible use of their environment; the dinosaurs did not manage to do this but the odonates did.

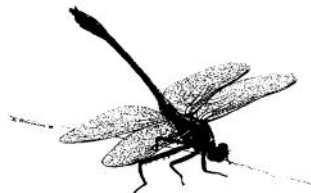
They have managed to survive because of two fundamental factors:-

1. *As eggs and nymphs, dragonflies live in water; but as adults they live in the air. The newly emerged dragonflies instinctively fly away from the water and disperse. This dispersal has been vital, for if one water source has dried out, the dragonflies have been able to find another.*

2. *As Darwin maintained, each species must find itself a niche - or die out. Dragonflies are brilliant aerial hunters and have occupied a niche that no other creature has been able to challenge.*

However, having survived millions of years, these fascinating and beautiful insects are now on the decline. The principal threat to our dragonfly population is the loss or destruction of suitable habitat.

Here at the Park we are extending our dragonfly habitat by creating a pond in one of the glades within a plantation. The pond will be lined so that it does not dry out in summer, and it will be sheltered from strong winds, so that all being well, there will be dragonflies here in the not too distant future.



Recent Records

Cormorant Seen every day from 30th October with a max of 7 on 23rd November.

Golden Plover 18 were seen flying east over the Park on 20th November and 3 flying South-east on 29th November.

Common Darter This very late dragonfly was seen on 15th November. The day was fine, dry and warm and this animal was either extremely long-lived or had just emerged.

Getting Back into the Swing of Things

When your waistline's increased



Due to Christmassy feasts



And you know that you really should walk

Rams



Come and hedgelay with us
It'll give you a buzz



And get rid of those inches and pounds



Wildlife Highlight

During autumn grass-cutting, five Harvest Mouse nests were found near the Seasonal Pond. The exact location has been recorded and this information will be passed to the Biological Records Centre at Wollaton Hall in due course. This is more than we found during the Harvest Mouse survey of 2000/2001.



Surprisingly, a further nest was found by a visitor on the other side of the Park on the 30th November so an expedition will have to be raised to hopefully find more.

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This took the form of a walk from the Country Park to Plumtree, for lunch, and, for some of our number, the walk back as well. The day was grey, mostly threatening to rain but fortunately never quite achieving that. Just like most of December seems to have been so far, come to that, except when it has managed very well to rain very hard.

Anyway, we had a very pleasant time as usually seems to result from a countryside outing in good company, and even on such local ground the day was not, as they say, without its incidents. I have never before had to interrupt a walk to await the departure of a helicopter, when its engine was warmed up enough, but what did it matter. Time was not pressing, away from the usual routine.

Lunch at the Griffin too had its moments we shall probably remember.

It would be stretching a point to say the terrain was difficult, but conditions under the railway bridge were boggy, to the extent that in taking avoiding action on the way back one of our number did get a bit lost, temporarily. Beyond that I am sworn to secrecy.

Many thanks to Griffin for her arrangements and to the other Rangers involved.

I have checked, and double checked, my OS map and the distance comes out, one-way, at some four and a half miles. Well done, everyone.

Morris

Any articles for the next edition of the Friends News can be sent to 11 Peacock Close, Ruddington, NG11 6JF, left at the Rangers' Office or email LMculjim@aol.com







Rushcliffe Country Park





ACTIVITY DAYS

Unless otherwise stated, all volunteer events are **free** and open to members of FORCP and non-members.



January

- Sat 4th  Hedgelaying
Help create a traditional hedgerow boundary around the Country Park, by coppicing and laying the existing trees, to form a long lasting and valuable feature.
- Wed 8th  Hedgelaying
This traditional hedgerow management at the Park, is supported by DEFRA and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.
- Thurs 9th FORCP Meeting
St Peter's Rooms, Ruddington. New members welcome
Followed by an illustrated talk about Badgers by Bill Roberts of Notts Badger Group
- Sat 18th  Hedgelaying
Wed 22nd  Pond construction
Get digging to construct another wetland site in one of the glades, to attract dragon flies and damselflies.

February

- Sat 1st  Pond Construction
Complete shape, add lining and water!
- Wed 5th  Hedgelaying
Sat 15th  Hedgelaying
Wed 19th  Coppicing
Continuing the programme of woodland management within the Park's plantations.

March

- Sat 1st  Tree planting
Planting saplings that have been growing in the nursery, and are now ready to plant out in the woodland, and in the gaps in the hedgerow boundary.
- Wed 5th Willow Weaving
Thurs 6th FORCP Meeting AGM
Sat 15th  Tree Nursery
Wed 19th Community Garden
Sat 29th Woodland Path Project
Help spruce up the existing structures and add another to the design.
St Peter's Rooms, Ruddington. New members welcome
Sorting out the germinating seeds and planting them into raised beds.
Early spring pruning.
Continuing the good work to help the project towards completion.

 *This symbol denotes the activity is working towards the Notts Biodiversity Action Plan.*

Meet at the Rangers Office at 10.15 am.

Unless stated all events run from 10.30 am - 3.30 pm.

Don't forget some lunch, sturdy boots and waterproofs.

For more information contact the Ranger's Office **0115 921 5865.**

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