

Friends News

Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park (FORCP)

Issue 34 Winter 2006

Interesting Visitor to Rushcliffe Country Park

A Black Swan

On Monday the 16th October an interesting visitor landed on the lake - a Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*). This event was greeted with a great deal of interest from staff and members of the public, as this is the first time in the history of the Park that this species has been sighted here. As Black Swans are not ringed it is impossible to determine from where the bird originated. It is interesting to note that at the time of writing the resident swan pair (who are themselves relatively new to the Park) appear to be tolerating this visitor, when any attempt to land by any other Mute Swans results in a furious defence of their territory.



As many people have asked a number of questions the following information may be of interest:

Description

The Black Swan is closely related to the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) and the Black-necked Swan (*Cygnus melanocorypha*). The Black Swan has a body length of up to 142 cm with the females being smaller than the males. In adults, the body is mostly black, with the exception of broad white wing tips, which are visible in flight. The bill is a deep orange-red, paler at the tip, with a distinct narrow band towards the end. Younger birds are much greyer in colour, and have black wing tips. It is the only entirely black-coloured swan in the world.

Distribution and Habitat

Black swans are found throughout Australia, and are more common in the south. They prefer large salt, brackish or fresh waterways and permanent wetlands, requiring 40m or more of clear water to take off. Outside the breeding season, Black Swans travel quite large distances and fly at night, resting during the day with other swans. The Black Swan has been introduced into several countries, including New Zealand, where it is now common.

Food and Feeding

The Black Swan is a vegetarian. Food consists of algae and weeds, which the bird obtains by plunging its long neck into water up to 1m deep. Occasionally birds will graze on land, but they are clumsy walkers.

Breeding

In the North of Australia, the Black Swan breeds from February to May, with June to September preferred by birds in the South. Birds form isolated pairs or small colonies in shallow wetlands. Birds pair for life, with both adults raising one brood per season. Up to 10 eggs are laid in an untidy nest made of reeds and grasses. The nest is placed either on a small island or floated in deeper water. The chicks are covered in grey down, and are able to swim and feed themselves as soon as they hatch.

Black Swans in Britain

Although this bird is a native of Australia, due to a few escaping from captivity they are now known to be breeding in the UK. Recently it was reported in *The Times* that six black swan cygnets were born at the Abbotsbury Swannery and the parents were thought to have escaped from a zoo or park. It is illegal to let black swans breed in the wild, so the cygnets will be moved when they are older.

Heather



Many thanks to all those people who were suggesting where Black Swans could be seen.

Some were many miles away but we all made our way to Daybrook and Arnot Hill Park where you can see that Gedling Borough Council have claimed they are resident there.

So they were! An adult pair with a couple of grown-up cygnets, so we were able to see various stages of plumage. Looking at other pictures of these swans it would appear that the chicks are pure white in colour.

Norman Ecob

A Trip to Western Australia or “Down to Earth”

Taking a three night rail journey on the Indian Pacific, (2,650 miles from Sydney to Perth), visiting one of the richest wildflower areas in the world, seeing impressive granite rocks, magical ocean beaches, giant forest trees, limestone pillars resembling ruins of an ancient city, whales, dugongs, friendly dolphins, sharks swimming in shallow, crystal clear water, walking in the Bush and driving on long straight roads, for miles and miles with no sign of habitation, was a wonderful experience.

Something quite different to all these wonderful sights I had seen was coming across compost toilets! My travelling companions were quite amused at my excitement. Not many people would shout with glee. The reason why I mention this down to earth subject is that I know Heather, one of our Rangers, has been researching this topic as there is a possibility that some may be installed in the Park. We have been asking for conventional toilets near to the play area for quite a long time as it is quite a walk from the existing toilets, but the cost would be extortionate. When compost toilets were mentioned to people comments such as: smelly, dirty, what about flies, unpleasant to use, were made. With this in mind I did use the compost toilets in two different areas to find out for myself how good they were. I can assure you that in temperatures of 30 degree Celsius there were no smells, no flies and very clean. I would have no reservations in supporting Rushcliffe Borough Council if they go ahead with this idea. I know that they do have compost toilets in the UK but I haven't come across any on my travels.

Jean



Grasshopper

Wednesday 22nd November saw the completion of the giant grasshopper sculpture in Gibbies Wood.

The original design came from a similar sculpture in the Sherwood Pines Country Park near Edwinstowe. It was photographed and measured.

Zoe and Roger then got busy choosing suitable timber from our log pile, and with the chainsaw the pieces were cut.

Much of the construction took place in and around the workshop, members joined in with carving detail and shaping the components.

The completed sculpture was installed on Wednesday the 15th November beside the snake sculpture. Many thanks to all the Rangers and Friends who contributed. We now have an attractive construction for everyone to enjoy. Well done.

Roger



Wildlife Update

Since the last Newsletter our last Moth Trapping session of the season took place on the night of 23rd September. The catch of 91 moths of 25 species included some surprising individuals. 8 new species were caught, one of which was a small Mottled Willow, an immigrant which appears in numbers only infrequently.

Pride of place must go to the Black Swan which took up residence from 16th October until 31st. This was probably the most photographed bird in Notts during its stay. A display of our photos is mounted in the foyer of the Education Centre and a brief history of the bird appears on the front page, prepared by Heather.

On Monday 2nd of October, Peter and myself were walking towards the reed bed when a small Darter Dragonfly took off, flew past us and out of sight. I mentioned to Peter that it looked very dark. The following day my suspicions were confirmed when the animal was found perched on Sea Buckthorn and identified as a Black Darter. These dragonflies are uncommon in Notts, although they breed at Misson near Retford.

As previously mentioned, the Grasshopper was installed in Gibbies Wood on the 15th November, but, prior to this, a strange fungus was found growing on the sculpture. Photos were taken and passed on to Ray Purser for identification. It turned out to be Honey Fungus, but the cap had not matured properly making it look very odd indeed.



The last bit of excitement started on 19th November when a cow was reported to be on the Park. This was located on 21st in Gibbies Wood and photographed. After the import of more cows and gates (to try to corral them), endless hours of herding when one charged, came to an end on the 23rd when the last one got out of the wood on its own and joined another farmer's herd.



All in all a good couple of months with 8 plants, 5 fungi, 12 moths, 1 dragonfly, 1 bird and 1 cow (!) being added to the species lists.

Lastly, Kingfisher records are few and far between; in fact only two up until 2005. Since October this year, Kingfisher has been seen three times - all recorded near the reedbed.

Mike



Park Update

On Wednesday 15th November the Grasshopper was installed in Gibbies Wood. It had been completely built up from the component parts in the workshop, but had to be dismantled to get it out of the door. As the body was too large to go over the footbridge, its meandering route took it up Mere Way, in at the Barleylands entrance, across the Field of Hope and eventually into Gibbies Wood.

The annual cutting, baling and removal of the Wildflower Meadows has been completed, leaving the Park looking a little bare, but Millfield (G1) and the meadow directly behind the lake, (G4) have been left as part of the rotational cut. This provides habitat for small mammals which are food for birds of prey over the winter. Kestrels are often seen hovering over these areas.

The hedgelaying season is upon us again and 100 metres of H20 was completed on Armistice Day. At 11.00am Paddy ensured that all participants observed the two minute silence with a blast on her whistle.

We are now well into laying 150 metres of H12, (Weggie Walk), and should have it finished by the end of December.

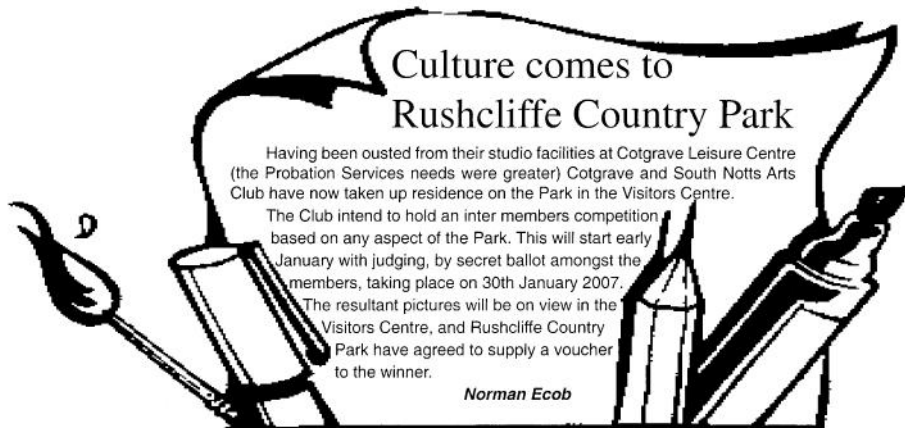
Culture comes to Rushcliffe Country Park

Having been ousted from their studio facilities at Cotgrave Leisure Centre (the Probation Services needs were greater) Cotgrave and South Notts Arts Club have now taken up residence on the Park in the Visitors Centre.

The Club intend to hold an inter members competition based on any aspect of the Park. This will start early January with judging, by secret ballot amongst the members, taking place on 30th January 2007.

The resultant pictures will be on view in the Visitors Centre, and Rushcliffe Country Park have agreed to supply a voucher to the winner.

Norman Ecob



Rushcliffe Country Park

ACTIVITY DAYS

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

January

Wed 3rd	FORCP Social - Meet 11am Rancliffe Arms for New Year walk followed by a meal. (FORCP Members Only)
Thurs 4th	FORCP Meeting at RCP 7pm. New Members Welcome
Sat 6th 	Transplant tree saplings from woodlands
Wed 10th	Revetment of Tree ID Trail
Wed 17th 	Willow planting & maintenance of sculptures in Gibbies Wood
Sat 20th	Revetment of Tree ID Trail
Wed 24th 	Transplant tree saplings from woodlands
Sat 27th	Revetment of Tree ID Trail
Wed 31st 	Transplant tree saplings from woodlands

February

Sat 3rd 	Coppice willow for workshop & maintenance of willow sculptures lakeside
Wed 7th 	Coppice willow for workshop
Sat 10th	Willow Weaving Workshop run by Carole Beavis 10am - 3-30pm
Wed 14th 	Joint Task FORCP & Wildlife Watch Group. Meet at Gibbies Wood by the Log Maze.
Thurs 15th	Willow weaving Gibbies Wood / Transplant tree saplings
Sat 17th 	FORCP AGM at RCP 7pm. New Members welcome
Wed 21st	Willow weaving Gibbies Wood / Transplant tree saplings
	Winter Walk Natural Heritage Project. Open to All

March

Sat 3rd	Revetment of Tree ID Trail
Wed 7th	Make & Paint Marker posts for new trail
Wed 14th	Install Marker posts for new trail
Sat 17th	Task to be arranged
Wed 21st	Task to be arranged
Sat 24th	Carry out required maintenance - Community Garden, Tree ID Trail, Sensory Trail, Activity Trail
Wed 28th	Carry out required maintenance - Log Maze, internal pathways, and Teak oil carvings.
Sat 31st 	Wildflower Identification Walk

Although the above are set tasks, they can be subject to change. There are also a number of ongoing jobs, which can be carried out alongside the above.



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

Meet at the Rangers' Office at 9.30 am.

Unless stated all events run from 10.00 am - 3.30 pm.

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

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

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