

Summer 2008

Friends of  
Rushcliffe Country Park

Issue 40

## What's black and white and doesn't know you're there?



'Have you ever seen a badger?' Well no - except for laying by the side of the road or that ancient stuffed one in Wollaton Hall - so after convincing my significant other that she wanted to see badgers too (what with her being a car owner and all that) it was off to Oxford.

What a beautiful day, we set up camp in the sawmill yard and then met the rest of the green shirted badger hunters in the conservator's garden for rather good cake and a plan of attack.

It turns out that badgers don't come out until the dusk and staying in bed all day wasn't an option for us! Alas there was work to be done, but first a walk in the woods...

Now I don't know if you've ever been to Wytham (this computer certainly hasn't - blumming interfering spellchecker!) But it's absolutely gorgeous, carpeted in blue bells, crammed with old trees, teeming with birds, deer and researchers carrying out some of the strangest tasks (the researchers - not the birds or deer as far as I know). The weather was set to remain glorious for the rest of our stay and the recent rain made badger emergence that evening a distinct possibility.

It's amazing how much you can learn about badgers in a short space of time. Wytham 'Badger Heaven' Woods, with its limestone cap over calcareous sand on worm filled clay is bursting at the seams (edges? Wood banks?) with the popular striped mustilidae and this was the time of year that all the cute baby badgers would be frolicking around their sets in full view of any quietly seated observer. Roger, Teresa and I sat quietly - downwind - of a definitely 'active' sett and waited.....

The woods really are lovely.....even after an hour sat motionless in the same place it's still beautiful.....sun slowly setting.....birds singing.....squirrels scampering along branches as the light fades.....mosquitoes biting.....

OK it's completely dark now and I'm pretty sure I still haven't seen a badger - they probably didn't come out tonight at all. So a little disappointed we return to base to discover our fellow watchers have enjoyed a full two hour badger cabaret! I think some rabbits even bought them choc ices and sherry halfway through.

Next day the work begins, all piling eagerly into the back of the truck for a bumpy but fun ride to the old Swiss chalet deep in the woods. There was a gate to be installed and many yellow topped marker posts to be found, recorded and reported on. I joined a small team of intrepid post hunters and got to see the woods away from the well trodden paths. It didn't disappoint and was full of surprises - dells filled with flowers, strange looking experiments and a rather steep and slippery bank I discovered all by myself.

That deep in the woods it was hard to find each other let alone the posts but we made a good team and all survived the morning reporting the posts that needed replacing (after Dorothy's unexpected Kung-fu method of checking their condition).

The gate installation had also gone well, Roger's impressive tunnelling and a very imposing drill bit had won the day so I whiled away the afternoon flailing around with a large hammer and some temporary fence posts while more marker posts were found and new ones installed and then off to the pub in the back of the trucks!

Back in time for the badgers though - the full friends complement raced up to the 'cabaret' sett (after some minor, wine related embarking/disembarking issues) and waited.....

'Have you ever seen a badger?' Yes! Loads of them! Only a few meters away! Aren't they brilliant! Smaller than you think, a little skittish, faces full of baffled curiosity and they don't really have a clue you're even there.



The next day more post hunting and replacing win was had while I helped install the second gate (these were for moving sheep about by the way - did I mention that?). Digging in Wytham I discovered is the same as quarrying in other areas but we got there in the end. Others had been having more fun though - Roger had got his hands on the quad bike, I imagine there's one on his drive at home now (still looking for reverse though Roger?).

Fell in love with the badgers again that evening, every glimpse of a nose popping up out of a hole or a saggy bottom shuffling off into the undergrowth seemed as exciting as the first. Nigel even allowed us a campfire back at the sawmill - a few rounds of Ging Gang Gooly and then it was all over.

Check the website (<http://www.friends-of-rcp.co.uk/photos.htm>) for the badger watch photos and Nigel's well deserved praise for the work the Friends carried out. I'd personally like to thank the Friends for letting me tag along and the badgers for the thrill of finally seeing them just doing what they do.

Chris

## MOTH TRAPPING

On Saturday 7th June I arrived at the park at 8.00pm to meet Mick Thompson and Keith Cox, and take part in a moth trapping session. During the session, which lasted until 3.00am, twelve other people came and went. We caught 119 moths of 35 species. 3 new macro (large) moths plus 4 micro (small) moths were caught.

The new 3 species of macro moths are: Brown Rustic, Ingrailed Clay and Green Pug.



One further macro moth was photographed, and all 5 will be passed on to an expert for identification. Photos were taken of a moth which we could not identify on the night. The photos were shown to Dr Sheila Wright at Wollaton Hall and she identified it as a Dusky Brocade. A pug moth (of which there are over 50 species) was also taken to her for examination. This turned out to be a Common Pug.

I had a fascinating evening catching and trying to identify the moths, and am looking forward to the next one.

Sara Tolley



## THE POND AREA IMPRESSES ITS FIRST STUDY GROUP

On Thursday 12th June sixteen children from Plumtree School arrived to carry out a pond dipping morning.

The enthusiastic and well behaved children- oh what a relief!- sat together on our carved benches to be briefed on the morning's task. Then in twos they went to their own pond and began trawling. Their catch, amongst much excitement, was transferred to the collecting trays for closer examination using lenses. The large pond also proved to be a great attraction as damselflies darted about showing off their electric blue.

We were all very impressed with just how many species had colonised this brand new area. Here is the species list recorded by Mick.

- Blue-tailed Damselfly
- Pond Snail (Wandering Snail)\* new species to park
- Planarian (Flatworm)\* new species to park
- Common Frog
- Common Toad
- Lesser Water Boatman
- Mosquito Larva
- Water Beetle
- Dragonfly Nymph
- Midge Larva
- Hoglouse
- Leech
- Damselfly Nymph
- Rat-Tailed Maggot
- Greater Water-Boatman
- Smooth Newt
- Ramshorn Snail
- Mayfly Nymph
- Large Black Slug



Each new study will yield an update to this list so that we will build up a record of its colonisation over the years. This will be published on our web site.

We felt that this new purpose built area has really proved its worth as a first rate facility. The Friends can be suitably proud of their hard work. Well done!

Roger Byrne

## TREE FELLING ON THE PARK

The Park Rangers have received a lot of unfair criticism recently over plans to fell the trees close to Loughborough Road. The Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park fully support the Rangers and I feel it is important for everyone to know the reasons behind their decision.

The trees had been planted too close together and had to compete for light. As they had grown they had a lean of up to 30 degrees which caused stress loads, causing cracks.

Most of the trees were sycamore, an invasive species introduced in the 16th century. They spread rapidly, allowing hardly any other vegetation to grow and supporting very little wildlife. The only wildlife found was a family of great tits in a man-made bird box.

The poplar trees nearest to the road had become dangerous and needed to be felled. One horse chestnut was infected with bleeding canker, the disease that has killed many of these trees in the last few years, and was taken out.

All the wood from the felling will be recycled within the park. The brush has been chipped, [no excuse for not wood-chipping the paths,] and the logs will be used to make benches and for other projects.



The Rangers plan to replace the trees with a variety of native species. The hedge along the road will be laid in the autumn which will then fill up the gaps where it has been shaded out by the sycamores. The hedge will be widened to a triple line with the planting of 700 whips. When established they will provide a much more effective barrier for the road.

On the park side of the hedge around 130 new trees will be planted using native species to give a diversity of habitats. [It sounds like a lot of interesting work is in store for The Friends!]

No-one likes to see any trees being felled but it was done for the long term benefit of the wildlife and the environment of the park.

Jean Gray

## PARK UPDATE



Since the last newsletter 39 new species of plants and animals have been found on the park. The addition of a new reference book has enabled us to identify slugs, snails and a host of other terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates from centipedes to flatworms.

Some species have been found that have been here for a while and missed being added to the lists purely by oversight. These include Walnut and Bloody Cranesbill. This last was seen growing in the classroom flowerbed over a year ago and on checking was found not to have been added. (More has since been found in the new flowerbed at the end of the car park.)

Wild Celery was located by smell in the herb bed at the Education Centre after one of the leaves was crushed. This plant has the same latin name as Celeriac which has pungent foliage.

Moths caught at the Centre lights and on National Moth Night have taken the total to 201 species so far. Four more 'collected' samples and one photograph are awaiting forwarding to an expert in Micro-moths for identification.

Lastly, on June 7th, an Oxford University student came around the Park with me numbering nettle-beds for a study of a certain aphid and its predators. She will be starting this project during July, so I can see at least one or two more species being identified.

Mick

## 70! - WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

Unsuspecting Usman, our security guard, arrived at work on Wednesday the 28th of May to a surprise celebration of his 70th birthday.

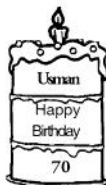
As well as a cake (with only one candle), he was presented with a practical gift from the Friends in the form of a mobile shelter to protect him from the elements. Usman has a particular soft spot for the swans and their cygnets, so was presented with some framed photos of the last pair, along with photos of the Park in an album. Also a book of obscure football facts, as football is another of his passions, having played for The Gambia (1958 - 62).

Our celebration was not up to the same scale as the large family party being held in his honour, and his absence, back in the Gambia.

He was touched and surprised by the gifts as well as the appreciation of his work on the park.

The shelter has been a huge success and is in use every day.

Usman is a much respected and valued member of our team and we hope he remains so for many a day to come.



## HELPING AT RUSHCLIFFE COUNTRY PARK

*'It was great fun! I loved the painting!' 'I liked all the colours!' 'I love the maze!' 'I liked moving the bark chippings!' So what had been going on? On Wednesday 11th June a group of excited girls from the 3rd Keyworth Brownies waited for all 19 to arrive at the Rangers office. Some counted the cygnets while others admired the displays.*

When most had arrived, Zoe welcomed them to the Country Park and to helping again. She led them round the lake, passed the end of the tree trail that they had worked on before, and over the bridge to Gibbies Wood. Jill, one of the regular 'Friends', was waiting by the lizard; she had anticipated their arrival and had a row of paint pots [cut-down milk containers] waiting so that each was able to have a paintbrush and pot of green paint. They then proceeded to paint on to the very worn looking lizard. Great fun was had and most managed to get the paint on the lizard rather than themselves.

With the green paint beginning to run out and the lizard wet but much smarter, some of the girls chose to go over to the maze with buckets, shovels and rakes to attack the pile of wood chippings next to the caterpillar. Using all the equipment and helped by one of their mums, they set about spreading the chippings on a small area of the maze, until all was gone. Then they were able to try to solve the maze without cheating!

Meanwhile some painters had turned their skills on to the snake! who soon looked much brighter and patterned. A few keen ones painted some poles then everyone enjoyed playing in the area away from the wet paint! Most managed some paint spots to prove they had been busy but all returned to the car park full of their activities to share with their families. They had spent their Brownie meeting having fun and helping the community!!

**Sue Jackson, Brownie Guider**



## SWAN UPDATE

**Tues 18th Dec 2007** - Wilhelmina and her cygnets flew off the lake.

**Wed 26th Dec** - A new pair of swans took up residence on the lake. The male had no identification ring, but the female did. At this point no-one was able to get close enough to read it.

**Thurs 27th** - Wilhelmina returned alone. The new pair drove her off and she was taken to Holme Pierrepoint to prevent her being killed by the new resident pair.

**Sun 30th Dec** - The male swan was caught and ringed but the female swan still eluded capture.

Wilhelmina returned with a male swan and a cygnet (not one of her own). The resident pair pursued them to drive them off.

**Mon 31st Dec** - The cygnet had flown away by itself, and after many hours of battle Wilhelmina and her new partner admitted defeat and flew off the lake.

The female was finally identified as a daughter of our original pair and Wilhelmina's sister.

Our new resident pair has since defended the lake against several other pairs of swans. They constructed their nest at the front of the reed bed so that for the first few weeks they could be seen clearly. Much to the disappointment of the viewing public the reeds grew up around the nest and obscured the view!

After intense anticipation, finally, on **Thursday 22nd May 2008** the new pair proudly displayed their new family of 7 cygnets to the public. Unfortunately overnight on **Saturday 7th June** one cygnet disappeared. **The Rangers**

## A GENTLE REMINDER THAT YOUR SUBS ARE NOW DUE

\*Delete as applicable

\*I/We wish to renew \*my/our Subscription to the Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park - Minimum £2. Please return form to the Rangers' Office.

Name.....

Address.....

Phone Number.....

E.mail address.....

# Rushcliffe Country Park

## WORK DAYS

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

The Friends Work Days will be held every **Wednesday and Saturday** from  
**Wednesday 2nd July - Saturday 27th Sept**  
New Volunteers and Members always welcome. See tasks below.

### Notable Dates

FORCP Meeting - Wed 9th July 2008 - 1.30pm RCP  
RCP Moth Trapping Night - Sat 12th July 2008 - Dusk to Dawn  
FORCP Meeting - Wed 10th Sept 2008 - 1-30pm RCP

### Tasks



Construct & carve a bench for the FORCP 10yr Seating area



Woodcarving - Mega Dragonfly



Flora & Fauna Identification Walks



Pond Dipping Surveys



Annual Hayrake



### A BIG THANK YOU

I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank the Friends again for all your hard work and enthusiasm.

We've been in a bit of a holding pattern over the last 3 months due to the delay in the tree felling and I have had to ask you to do the more mundane maintenance tasks week in week out. I have been impressed that you have undertaken them with your usual gusto and remained cheerful.

A special thank you to John Randall for all your skilled work in producing the new directional signs, which are an excellent addition to the fabric of the Park.

Our residential trip to Wytham was a big success all round and I was honoured to show you off to my oldest and trusted friend.

Now we can move forward with the more creative and interesting tasks and celebrate your 10 years in style!  
Cheers, **Zoe**



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.**

Produced by the Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park  
Registered Charity No 1079665



Supported by  
  
Rushcliffe  
Borough Council



An independent group associated with  
FORCP  
a registered charity