
Newsletter

January 2018



Registered Charity No: 1051042

We have experienced some early snowfall and flooding in the Country Park which while making it difficult to access certain paths has made for some contrasting views.



COMMITTEE

Chairman

David Thorogood
01480 456380

Vice Chairman

Graham Taylor

Membership Sec/Treasurer

Malcolm Robinson
01733 810708

Events co-ordinator

Margaret King

Newsletter

Ray Bowers

Ranger Representatives

Judith Arnold (HDC)
Kirsty Drew (HDC)

Contact us

e-mail friendshcp@yahoo.com

or write

c/o the Visitor Centre,
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park
Brampton Road,
Huntingdon, PE29 6DB.

Has there been an explosion in the Park squirrel population to cause them to explore further afield or are they simply looking for easy food from my bird feeders? Anyway there have been more squirrels in my garden this winter than ever before. They are a general nuisance and cause some damage.

The charity dog walk in the Park on 7 January was well attended and was, I believe, a success. Might it become an annual event?

We were all saddened by the death of Judi Figgures last month. Judi was a life member of the Friends and for over 20 years visited the Park almost every day. It was with Judi's vision and determination to enable less able visitors to explore fully the Country Park that we acquired the Trampers. We also need to thank her for persuading the rangers to create the harder surface path around the lake linking the brick bridge and Chestnut Avenue.

I am pleased to welcome back Chris Jordan to the Committee. Chris left a few years ago to look after his mother during her long illness.

David

Chairman

Looking Back and Ahead with the Beekeepers in the Park

The Huntingdonshire Beekeepers Association's (HBKA) aim was, when it was set up in 1882 and still is, to promote honey bees and assist beekeepers in Huntingdonshire. Its membership has always hovered around 100-120. However, in the early 21st century membership dropped to below 80 so a small band put forward a plan to move the few hives that were dotted around the Country Park into a central apiary, build a public viewing facility and start offering courses for beginners.

In 2001 HBKA received Lottery funding to convert a garden shed into a public viewing gallery to easily and safely see the bees at work. There were only 2 hives in the early days but every Sunday afternoon two HBKA members turned up to open them and show the public the inside of a hive. This tradition is still maintained.

The Friends donated a new hive to the apiary in 2010 bringing the number up to three which helped us to show bees to the public. At the time the plight of bee populations was becoming better known and appreciated so the little gallery was becoming full to bursting on weekends.

We decided in 2012 that the apiary needed to expand both in hive numbers and visitor accommodation. The Big Lottery Fund helped us with cash to build the new Gallery and our members, Park staff and Park volunteers contributed lots of hard labour. We had 16 hives bequeathed to us in 2012 so now we have more bees, a viewing gallery to allow large numbers of visitors to see them and the capability to produce honey for sale.



We are particularly proud that the Gallery has increased the number of school children that we can talk to as part of their early education - we had over 1200 last year - let alone the hundreds of casual visitors that visit during the summer.

The one major weakness in our facilities has been the access for wheelchairs into the Gallery. In late 2017 The Friends and the Town Council combined their resources to help us buy a heavy duty metal ramp that we hope will provide a really good access in the future (see left).

So what of the future? In 2018 we have combined with the Park Cafe to offer 'Beekeeping Taster Sessions' for the public to join beekeepers in meeting bees 'face to face' with the Park providing a lunch for the delegates. As part of our annual spring clean we will replace the rather dowdy entrance tunnel netting and later in the year we will install a novel type of 'green' hive called a Sun Hive (see photo below).



Our Apiary will then have 8 different types of hive to show the public and allow our members to see and use before they decide to buy one for themselves. Our Sunday summer viewing sessions will continue as before so we look forward to a good season - beekeepers are eternal optimists!!

Our Apiary now allows us to more easily achieve our Association's aims to educate our community about honey bees. It is second to none so a big 'Thank you' to our friends The Friends for your wholehearted support.

Roger Wood

Christmas Craft Fair



Over the weekend of 25/26 November committee members and other Friends took part in the Christmas craft fair in the Countryside Centre. The event was organised and managed by Alex from the Council. Our stall was in three parts and extended along the entrance hall. Margaret, our tireless events co-ordinator, gathered together an eclectic and enticing mix of tombola and raffle prizes plus hand made craft items. We raised £250 over the two days.

We also raised a further £48 by running a tombola at the 'Big Breakfast' on New Year's Day.

Park Projects

The Committee has agreed to fund new fencing around the 'newt' pond close to the cafe to make the area safer.

We have also requested a free native hedging pack from the Woodland Trust for planting nearby, including hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple, dogwood and spindle.

Membership

Membership continues to grow. It now stands at c180. Please continue to encourage others to join so that we can fund more items that add to our enjoyment of the Country Park.

Wildlife Watch

The following sessions are to be held during the next three months:

- 10 February: Crafty Paints- wildlife themed art
- 3 March: World Wildlife Day- free taster session
- 10 March: Spring Clean- including checking bug hotels and trees planted last year.

Sessions start at 10.30 and end at 12.30. £3 per child including a drink & biscuit
For more information contact David on 01480 388666

Events in the Park

For events marked * please book at www.ticketsource.co.uk/hcp

**'All you can eat' Buffet
Breakfast Club*
Last Saturday in the month**

Adults £7.50, under 10s £5

**10 & 13 February
Rock decorating***

Choose and decorate your own rock
Drop in session. All welcome
£1 per rock, 50p for additional rocks.
(includes competition entry)

**14 February + 4 & 10 April
Multi Sports Camp for 5-11 year olds**

Try a variety of sports and play activities in a safe and supervised environment.
10.00-12.30 & 13.00-15.30
£10 per session.

Book at www.ticketsource.co.uk/u-sports

**15 & 16 February, 4 April
Creative Teacher Led Crafts***

Design and make your own;
3D Fairy Garden - 15 Feb
Dragon - 16 February
Medieval Castle - 4 April
10.30-13.30
£10 per child (including lunch) + free tea/
coffee for parents/carers

**11 March
Mother's Day Roast***

Seats in cafe at 12.00, dinner served at 13.00
£9.00, under 10s £5

**5 - 8 April
Art Fair**

Local artists. Live demonstrations. Free.
5 April: 13.00-16.00; 6-8 April 10.00-15.00

**9 & 11 April
Open Zorb Sessions**

Have fun in the bubbles. All welcome
£5 per person.
www.ticketsource.co.uk/u-sports

**10 & 11 April
Creative Countryside***

Craft session with lots of designing/sticking
1030-12.00 £5 per child incl materials.
Children must be accompanied by
responsible adult.

**21 April & 28 April
Beginners' Beekeeping Course**

Two day course £60 per person
Call Paul on 01733 840725 or e-mail him at
paul.howe@birchtree.com.uk

See Facebook or website
www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/countryside_events
for more information

Senior Ranger's Report

2017 seems to have flown by in a flash so my new year's resolution is to slow down and take time to enjoy the achievements and note the changes that the volunteers and staff made last year and will continue to make to the Country Park over the coming 12 months!



Hedge Laying

This is the time of year when we survey our trees to ensure they are healthy. You may spot some with tags on. This means we are monitoring their condition not that we will be felling them all! However occasionally this is necessary and any work identified from these, together with the planned cyclical thinning of the new plantation (still called that even though it was planted in 1990!!) will happen over the next couple of months. The resulting timber is used to heat the countryside centre.

Over the last few months Matt, David and Sam have galvanised the volunteers into a huge amount of practical work. I am sure you have already seen on facebook some updates or noticed the changes:-

- around the ornamental lake – coppicing, cutting back and clearing logs out of the water
- around the main lake. The Green Team (a team of adults with additional needs from the college) have been working hard to maintain the open aspect by felling the willow regrowth. Whilst this is currently in piles it will be burnt over the coming weeks
- around the orchard. Paul (an extremely long standing volunteer at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve) shared his skills and knowledge in the art of hedge-laying. Over time this will bush upwards and outwards to create a healthy thick hedge which will benefit wildlife and look visually more attractive. The next area to benefit from these newfound skills will be the balancing pond near Christie Drive.

The weather has played havoc with some of our recent planned events. The Frostbite cross country race was cancelled due to the snow on 10th December but has been rescheduled for February 18th. Recent visitors will have noticed the flooded lakes . It tends to happen each year but this has been a little earlier than normal and the water levels rose phenomenally quickly. One of the weekly Park Runs was cancelled and one re-routed but stalwarts still turned out on both Christmas day and New Years Day.

The Countryside Centre saw a flurry of activity towards the end of the year too!

The craft fair in November made a successful return - with more stalls than ever before, and additional children's activities. Again I would put out a plea that if anyone could help on odd occasions like this just for a couple of hours, it would lessen the load on your hardworking committee.

We hosted our first ever week long pantomime - Beauty and the Beast - starring members of Hunts Youth Theatre. It was a delight to have so many enthusiastic and talented young people using the building and bringing their friends and family to the Country Park. We hope to work closely with them again.

A significantly Christmassy appearance took over for December. Willow reindeer were made during a two day workshop and some of you may have noticed Father Christmas lurking one Saturday morning in the hope of having breakfast with some of our younger visitors!

Over New Year we tried a pop-up café in the Countryside Centre serving an all day breakfast. Wow! What a spread of hot and cold food including croissants, cereal, fruit and of course egg and bacon!! Nearly 200 people gave it a go and we have had VERY positive comments. Keep an eye open as there will be more of these events

Once again, on behalf of all the staff, thank you for your continued support and Happy New Year to you all.

Judi