



Our website:
www.friends-of-rcp.co.uk
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April to June
2017

Issue 75

Friends Newsletter



As the Spring brings colour and vibrant growth to the Park it's a good time to celebrate the end of the hedge laying season and in this issue we can see some of the extensive work that has taken place over the cold seasons to both bring traditional countryside techniques to the park and manage the many and various boundaries.

Thanks to Janet, John R, John Y, Lib, Karen and the Rangers for the photographs.

Spawning Creatures in the Park

Prompted by finding some toads near the Education Centre at the park recently, and having seen frogs in the area a number of times, I decided to look into the lives of these interesting amphibians. The organisation Froglife had some helpful information.

Frogs have smooth, moist skin and long, stripy legs and are likely to be found in damp habitats. Toads have warty skin, golden eyes and prefer to crawl rather than hop; if threatened a toad can puff itself up to appear bigger. Toads can tolerate drier habitats than frogs and spend less time in water.

There are two species of frog and two species of toad in UK but you are only likely to see Common Frogs and Common Toads.

The Common Frog is the amphibian most likely to be found in gardens; they are widespread and found in a variety of habitats, including urban gardens. Common frogs are noticeable for their long jumps after being disturbed, their smooth skin and patch behind the eye. They tend to be green or brown (although can be cream, orange, red or black) and often have random black blotches.



Toad moving from Education Centre towards the lake.

The Common Toad is also widespread. They tend to crawl rather than making frog-like leaps and have rough, warty skin, golden eyes and two distinctive lumps behind the eyes (called parotoid glands). When disturbed, toads tend to remain still.

Frogs

- Spawn is laid in clumps in shallower water (usually the earliest to be laid).
- Tadpoles are black and will stick together in a writhing mass (shoal) when they first hatch.
- As tadpoles develop, they become mottled/brown and do not shoal.
- Tadpoles grow back legs first.

Toads

- Spawn is laid in long strings, usually wrapped around vegetation in slightly deeper water.
- Tadpoles are jet black (and remain so) and they often form shoals.
- Tadpoles grow back legs first.

Spring is breeding time so expect to see large number of frogs and toads returning to ponds. Amphibians will emerge from hibernation when the weather starts to warm up (night time temperatures over 5°C) - this can be any time from January onwards. It is very much dependent on local weather conditions so there is no set time. Both need to be around 3 years to breed.

They head straight towards a water body to breed and it's common to see large numbers of animals congregating in and around ponds. Males often start moving before females and will either wait at the pond for a potential mate to arrive or wait near by and 'piggy back' on passing females. Once spawning is over, most animals will leave the water and may not spend much more time actually in a pond at all.

Frog in
Gibbies
Pond.



Amphibians form a crucial part of the diet of many wildlife species so you can expect to see a number of predators, particularly if there are frogs present. Animals that will feed on amphibians include birds, foxes, rats, stoats, otters and hedgehogs.

Predation is likely to leave no trace of the amphibian, but sometimes bodies are left behind. If you come across a dead frog, in some cases it is possible to tell what predator may have been involved. For example, herons and other birds may leave a pointed entry wound where they've stabbed with their beak and rats may leave bite marks around the belly where they try to pull out the internal organs; rats, stoats and foxes will all kill more than they will eat, especially when there are large numbers of prey congregating and are also known to stockpile bodies. Otters are one of the only creatures to predate on toads - most animals don't as they find toad skin distasteful but otters will peel the skin from toads' legs and eat the muscle underneath. Some amphibian predators, like grass snakes, have disappeared from many parts of the UK where they once thrived; having these animals around is a privilege.

Adding a variety of places to the habitat for amphibians to hide when disturbed is the best long-term advice. Log piles, rockeries, dense low-growing foliage and water bodies can all provide places where amphibians can flee from natural predators. At the country park there are numbers of toads living around the park buildings who make their way across the path to the lake in Spring. The frogs live in various areas and can be seen by the eagle-eyed near the Gibbies Pond and on the edges of the main lake in Spring. The photos are of our own Country Park amphibians.

Anne D.

Douglas, Dog Volunteer.

Hello Friends, Dogs, Countrypersons,

I am very much looking forward to the Spring and Summer at the park despite my fondness for a bit of mud and a few puddles.

Since Anne started working again we have not been as able to join in the regular Friends Wednesday work parties as often but we spend a lot of time at the park which of course, I very much enjoy, often bringing dog friends with us. It is quite nice to do this in dry sunny weather, and especially nice to benefit from the 'High Season' opening hours with the facilities open until 6pm.

Our litter picking means that we venture into various corners of the park searching out hidden debris. As a side effect of this we get to see an overview of the Park and some interesting little spots we hadn't really taken note of before.



We still forget there is a pond in Gibbies Wood and struggle to find it! No need for a maze—a sense of direction would help! We also didn't really go down Weggie Walk until the hedge there started being laid.

We also forget the larger grassy areas behind the business park, which never get very busy even in the height of the school holidays. The orchard area is an excellent spot for a quiet picnic (or for a nervous dog to walk - not me of course!) at most times of year.

It's been nice that the Dog Activity area has survived the downpours this year without having to be closed for recovery and we are looking forward to the next fundraising event in the summer. We have acquired Westie biscuit cutters in various sizes for my parmesan shortbread dog treats, which unfortunately I have to donate to the cause. I shall cope by clearing up the cake crumbs when we go to set up the cafe on Saturdays in the meantime.

Douglas



People Profile -

This time: **Treasurer and unbelievably active octogenarian, Jean Gray**

What other jobs or roles have you had?

I have lived in Ruddington for 50 years, but still a “Yorkshire Lass” at heart. As a school teacher I took my class down Asher Lane one winter’s day in 1994 where we all enjoyed planting whips.

What else do you enjoy doing?

I enjoy gardening, reading, playing the piano, love walking in the countryside, birdwatching, worldwide travel, playing badminton, and lawn green bowls.

What do you most enjoy about being at the Park?

Gibbies Wood was a favourite area of mine but in 2012 the orchard was created and that became 1st choice, enough to make me decide to plant my own Avenue of 31 trees alongside the orchard.

What was your first involvement with the Park?

I have always had a love of Wildlife and when the Ranger at the park asked for people interested in forming a Friends Group to attend a meeting in the village I went along.



And from the Friends, what do we respect Jean for?

- A stalwart supporter of the Park and hard working volunteer.
- Being Treasurer for so long!
- Her straight talking!



In 1998 the Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park was formed. The group consisted of 6 volunteers. A Treasurer was needed and I volunteered for the first year. I am still the Treasurer after 19 years, and Vice Chairperson now. I have learned new skills - hedge laying, coppicing, building willow structures, wildflower surveys, pond dipping, woodcarving, creating mosaics, planting trees correctly, mammal trapping. The park has been a big part of my life for 19 years and I hope it will be for many more years.

What’s your favourite natural thing at the park?

I have a passion for the whole park and it has been great to see it maturing and developing over the years, thanks mainly to approx £160,000 raised for a variety of projects, and hard work.

As the Friends specialise in tea and cake, what’s your favourite cake?

I don't do cake very often. Maybe one I would go for would be chocolate.

Membership of FORCP 2017

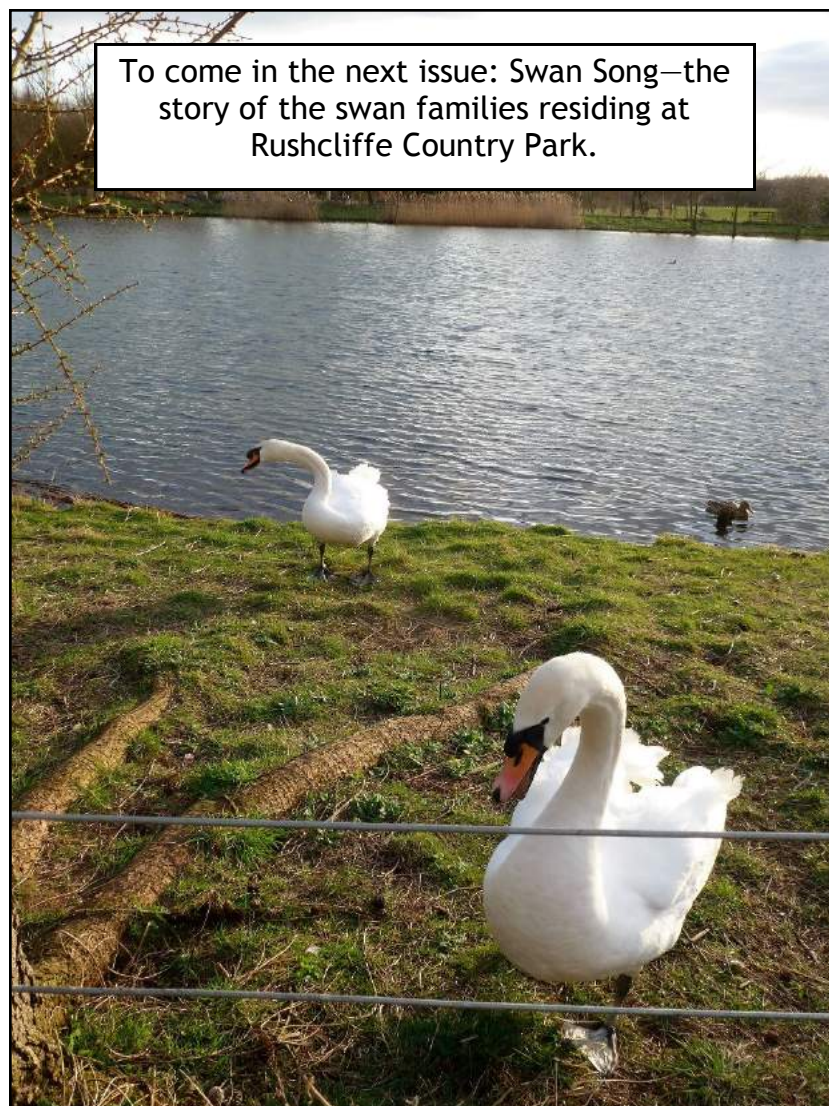
IMPORTANT!

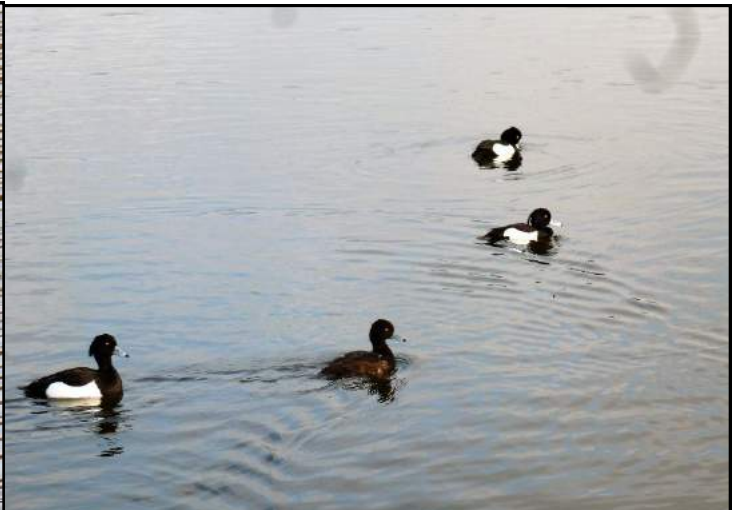
Enclosed with paper copies of this newsletter are Friends' Membership forms.

All Friends need to complete a form please.

We need full details and your signature and the date, and please tick the Gift Aid box if you pay any tax on your income or savings. This adds a considerable amount to the subscription income.

If you do not receive a paper copy of the newsletter and are, or wish to be, a Friend of Rushcliffe Country Park, please obtain a form from the Rangers Office.





The Friendship Garden forges ahead with help from the Environment Agency...



And a hefty load of hand picked wood arrives from Wytham...







Talking about Hedges...

At the end of this season's hedge laying we should congratulate our now experienced cutters. Just saunter down Weggie Walk and you will have difficulty in spotting where one person started and another finished, so consistent is the work. Considering that it was a challenging hedge to lay with the previously large, ingrown, horizontal trunks to remove and a vast amount of brash to cut out it is a credit to all involved.

It is also encouraging that some new members have started to develop their skills with the promise of more hands to the bill hooks next season. Praise is also due to the tremendous support we have from many Friends in helping with the less obvious tasks of sharpening tools, trimming and removal of brash, cutting firewood, cutting and preparing stakes and binders, etc..

As always, Chris has done a wonderful job with his chain saw - saving us the effort of hand sawing large pieces in awkward positions - and thanks to all the rangers in shredding our mountains of brash.

Many members of the public have said how good the hedge looks and one or two have asked us if we could do their hedge!

Now the park is maturing it is good to have a plentiful supply of our own stakes and the binders used on this hedge were the best yet.

We should be proud of our achievements this year - so to next season not too far away!

John R











'D' Day

Friends Paul, Karen and Lib joined Rangers Zoe and Chris for a day of Den area preparation on Monday 6 March 2017.



The Den area of land, set aside in the educational woods, needed attention prior to Chris's programme of Den Building for school parties and the public. The work involved making safe the area, eg to avoid trips and pokes to the eye. All of the old branches etc stored in the wood over the winter needed to be 'strength tested' and moved into place in readiness for den construction.

The sunshine breaking through the trees made it a pleasant day's work. The morning sun on the same day also made the Dogwood at the Park's entrance particularly beautiful.

Lib



2017 report on the Rushcliffe 10km Run and Teas!

The Rushcliffe 10km Run in March each year is usually the busiest and most lucrative Sunday Teas of the year!! Cakes of all sizes and shapes, some savouries, some gluten free and vegan, are ordered and baked by many of our talented bakers, and the room is prepared in great anticipation with extra tables squeezed into the foyer.

This year the early morning greeted the servers brightly as we collected to serve the stewards with warming drinks during their briefing session. By 9.30 the clouds had appeared. By the time of the start at 10.30 the rain was coming down in huge lumps and bouncing up from the puddles and in between! 850 runners kept running.

The many followers of course did not. Our room was full of chauffeurs and child minders. Some enjoyed the cakes and then some soaking runners treated themselves to a selection of eye-watering cakes.

But the large crowds did not materialise. The weather defeated us all. The fresh new crew of afternoon servers arrived and had five customers all afternoon!

Not a good day for Teas (£338) but some runners beat their targets and achieved new goals. Well done!!

Feb 19th however proved to be a bumper day without any special event with takings of £620! It is becoming more difficult to sustain this level with home make cake, so please look out for more home bakers or bake sales.

I am happy to pay expenses to regular bakers so if you would like become one, please let me know. We also really need volunteers who are able to set up before the cafés— usually on Saturdays (approx. 1-2 hours would be helpful)



Sue



Some of the 7000 or so hours voluntary work by the Friends and other volunteers have contributed to a wide range of projects....



Dawn Chorus Walk



Sunday 7th May 2017

Rise early and join many others all around the world in celebrating the dawn chorus, nature's daily miracle at



Rushcliffe Country Park

Meet 6am at the Visitor Centre

In celebration of International Dawn Chorus Day
join us for a gentle walk of around 1.5 miles

This is a FREE event - parking is a £1

Please be aware this is an informal event - not a lecture on birdsong
We will identify some species by song on the walk

Hot drinks and tea-cakes will be available to purchase afterwards

**Just turn up on the day or, for more information,
enquire at the Ranger's Office: 0115 921 5865
email: countrypark@rushcliffe.gov.uk**



International Dawn Chorus Day is promoted by
The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham & the Black Country.
See www.idcd.info for more information.



John's Jottings — Wildlife at the park update from John Elwell

Spring is coming, judging by today's sunshine and temperatures in the mid-teens while working on the hedge in Weggie Walk. For the last few weeks I have been enjoying more and more bird song while working, except when drowned out by Chris running the chipper or the dogs in the nearby kennels. Dunnocks seem to have been particularly vocal recently, but also the other resident song birds such as Wren, Great Tit, Robin and Greenfinch. Sadly I have not heard Skylark along there this year, although they have been heard. I have heard Chiffchaffs in a couple of places in Notts during the last few days, and Chris reported one in the Park on 13th March, but we will need to wait a little longer for our other visiting warblers.

There has also been some avian interest on and around the lake this quarter. A pair of Great Crested Grebes have been around since late February, and we hope they will stay to breed. Although the Teals reported in the autumn did not stay for the winter, we have had brief or longer visits from other ducks: Shoveler, Gadwall and Pochard.

Also there was a brief visit from an Egyptian Goose in January. Several people were lucky enough to see a Water Rail on occasions during the colder weather. These



secretive birds spend most of their time hidden in reeds, and go undetected except when uttering their squealing call.

A pair of Mute Swans are settling in and starting nest building - apparently the cob is ours but the pen is a new one. A few days ago an adult swan landed in my street. It was probably from the nearby canal, and when this happened before (a very long time ago), it was coaxed back to the canal through somebody's back garden. That way

through is no longer available, so the RSPCA came and took care of it.

The rangers have certainly had their eyes open recently. Among other things Zoe and some volunteers saw a stoat chasing a rat, Chris found a Wasp Beetle in the foyer, and today he found a pair of toads and had to move them out of harm's way. It seems Mr. Toad is foregoing his motor car for the time being and finding other pleasures.

Other signs of spring recently have been the Snowdrops and Daffodils in flower, and sightings of Small Tortoiseshell butterflies. Today John Y saw a Brimstone. There is clearly much more to look forward to during the next few weeks.



Comments from the Chair

We had a super Christmas celebration this year with good food and fantastic entertainment by Duncan and his team.

We are very grateful to Councillor Reg. Adair for grants totalling £1450 in this 12 month period which makes some of our projects more viable.

Two months ago I applied to the Co-op local Community Fund. To apply, you have to have a Project showing how the money will be spent. It happened to be the time when we were thinking about the Garden of Friendship. I put together the details of what we were planning to do and estimated cost of £2.500.

1% of all monies spent at the Co-op over a 6 month period will be divided between 3 chosen charities. If we are one of the 3 chosen and you shop at the Co-op please ask that it be donated to the Friends. A new committee member is needed to replace Marie Burley, and one to replace John Elwell who has resigned. Jean suggested that someone volunteer to shadow her for this year ready to take over as Treasurer in 2018.



Rosemary is interested in taking part in a National pond survey under the Freshwater Habitats Trust. She would like to survey either the Gibbies seasonal pond or the seasonal pond at the Bradmore end of the Park. She would like help from other specialists in the Friends to help identify flowers and grasses around the ponds and also Friends who would be interested generally in helping.

Dorothy





Work Days

The Friends' work days will be held every Wednesday and also Mondays. Meet at the Rangers' Office at 9.30 am.
New volunteers always welcome

Registered Charity No 1079665



Nice one,
Jean!

Car parking charges update

Voluntary payment will continue up to June 2017 when an obligatory £1 payment system will come into operation.

Improvements to the present car park will be done and extra parking spaces made for groups.

Places for volunteers will only be able to be used on the day of volunteering otherwise the £1 charge must be paid.

For regular park visitors the best option may be parking passes. These cost £5 for 3 months or £20 a year.

Dates for your Diary 2017

Linger Teas Wed 5 Apr; 19 Apr

Café Sun 2 Apr; 16 Apr (Easter)

Linger Teas Wed 3 May; 17 May

Café Sun 7 May; 21 May

Linger Teas Wed 7 June; 21 June

Café Sun 4 June; 18 June

FoRCP Meeting Wed 14 June 2017 1.30pm

Wytham visits 15–19 May; 4-8 Sept 2017