



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service
The MBE for volunteer groups

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to
Dec 2020



Rangers Office
0115 921 5865

Our website
www.friends-of-rcp.co.uk

Issue 89

Friends Newsletter

Pop Up Shop 16 September



Photo Janet C

The pop-up shop in September was very successful. We raised a total of £397.20 This was £138.00 for calendars, £140.00 for honey and £66 for jam sales. The remaining money was for various items, and that was without advertising! The weather was kind to us and it was good to see a lot of familiar faces. It was ideal to sell items that hadn't been seen for months as they were locked in a cupboard in the classroom. It was a win, win situation.

Friends of
Rushcliffe Country Park
2021 Calendar

AVAILABLE NOW



Photos depicting the natural beauty of the park.
By, and with thanks to
Staff, Volunteers and Visitors.
Price only
£6.00

Through popular demand the pop-up shop is popping up again!! We have picked the first Wednesday in each month. Dates are 7th October. 4th November and 2nd December 10am to 12noon. Numerous items are for sale including the 2021 Country Park calendar, honey, jam, cards, books, apples, cakes and crafts. Please come along and have a chat and there may be something you want to buy.

Dorothy.

Message from Alastair

Hopefully everybody is still coping well with the current situation and aren't missing us too much! It's nice to see that a good number of you are able to come to the park and are finding work that can be done safely, I know Chris and Steve have been very grateful to the hay/reed rakers in the last couple of weeks Hedge laying is currently being organised, and although we won't have the usual large group this year, it can at least be done easily with social distancing. I will send out a message when we are starting so anybody can get involved if they want to. As usual, if you are out on the park we prefer you to work with somebody where possible in case there's an accident, and as long as social distancing is kept and tool sharing is kept to a minimum then we don't have to stick to just 6 people

We are currently in talks with Notts County Council's education department about them using RCP as a base to run education sessions. This could mean that a lot more children get an outdoor education at the park and eases the pressure on the Rangers to do it all.

We also have some exciting new plans in the pipeline around completely revamping the visitor centre, class room, outside toilets and the potential for a small outdoor café. These are all very early stages at the moment and when we have a better understanding of what's possible we would love to get the Friends' input into this. Watch this space.

The skatepark is on its last legs now and you may notice that some has been taken down and some areas fenced off. The plans for a brand new skatepark have been delayed due to Covid-19 but the current time line has work starting by the end of the year and a finish date (leaving time for bad weather) for the end of Spring 2021.

Another lockdown and a second wave of coronavirus seem inevitable, so plans may come crashing down and there may be a time when we have to restrict volunteering again, but we can keep our fingers crossed.

Stay safe and thank you for the continued hard work.

Alastair

John's Jottings

Late summer can be a quiet time for birds. The lake has continued to be home to



Little Grebe Photo John E



Stock Dove Photo John E



Male kestrel Photo John E

the usual suspects, but small birds around the Park seem to have all but disappeared. There are several reasons for the apparent absence of even common birds like Blackbird. The breeding season has long finished for many species, so singing to establish and hold a territory is no longer necessary, although a few species such as Robin, or even the occasional Chiffchaff, are singing to establish winter territories. The frantic feeding of young has also finished. Although populations are at their highest, with fledged young as well as adults, birds can easily hide while trees and shrubs are still fully in leaf. Moreover, many birds are undergoing moult and may stay hidden because of increased vulnerability. The abundance of food in the wider countryside means there is less need to come to our feeders. Also many of our summer visitors, including hirundines and most warblers, have already departed and are yet to be replaced by winter visitors such as Redwing, Fieldfare, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll.

Monitoring of the Barn Owl nest boxes by the Rushcliffe Barn Owl project has discovered an adult using one of the boxes for resting.

Our Swans have had a successful breeding season, with 8 of the original 10 cygnets still surviving as I write this. They are a feisty lot, so far evading efforts to catch and ring them.



Barn owl
Photo Rushcliffe Barn Owl
Project



The summer has been good for dragonflies and damselflies, with Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselflies, Banded Demoiselle, Black-tailed Skimmer, Southern and Migrant Hawkers, Emperor Dragonfly and Common Darter all recorded. Also Grass Snake has been sighted a number of times. Finally, during his grass survey work John R recorded Common Wild Oat (*Avena fatua*)

for the first time.

John E

Preparing the Bees for the Winter Months

The members of the bee group continued to meet weekly in the Apiary over the summer months and are now busy preparing the hives for winter.

Extracting and jarring this year's honey was completed in July and this is now selling well through various means.

As beekeepers, with the summer months over, it is now our job to make sure the colonies are as healthy as possible, disease free, weaker or smaller hives combined together and all hives have enough food stores to see them through the winter.

In Autumn the foraging bees bring back any final supplies of pollen and nectar to store in the frames and when no longer needed these bees begin to die off.

Inside the hive the queen bee lays fewer eggs and the amount of brood diminishes. As the drones in a hive are not needed for nursing the young winter bees they are superfluous to the colony and are dragged out of the hive by the workers.

During September we have been steadily feeding the bees with sugar solution made from granulated sugar dissolved in hot water. Each colony needs around 18 to 22 kg of food to survive the winter. The feeders have been topped up every few days and David has been scouring all the supermarkets for the cheapest supplier of sugar. We have all been astounded how quickly the solution in the feeders has disappeared and have been fascinated watching them feeding.

In the Apiary we have cut back any overhanging branches and foliage around and beneath the hives to allow for ventilation. New paths have been cleared for easier access and the future positioning of the hives explored. The colonies are nearly ready to be bedded down in the hope that they successfully survive the winter months

The Beekeeper Group

Roger's Report



The bicycle sculpture has received a makeover. Helen and I worked on replacing the rotten post that was supporting the rear cyclist. I also repaired the wooden handle bars. Later I filled in some of the holes and painted it.



The Labyrinth game using a steel ball, has received a much needed upgrade. The acrylic had been damaged. The structure was cleaned, sealed with epoxy resin and then painted. A new piece of acrylic was purchased and edged with a used bicycle tyre. It is already getting

plenty of attention. Come and try your hand!

Roger

Clearing Fence Lines



We (Lib, Ethan, Rosemary and I) have been clearing the fence line along Memorial Walk (with social distancing, of course).



Heather

Labyrinth Steps Refresh



Jill and Helen made a thorough job of clearing, cleaning, fungal washing and finally coating with decking oil the labyrinth steps.

Lakeside Work and Hay Rake

A lot of work has been done round the lake and also some of the meadow land has been raked after the annual cut but folks have been shy of reporting their activities. Gary has sent me a picture of Lib, Heather and Rosemary after hay



raking and I managed to get pictures of Paul helping Chris remove the barley straw sausages and weights from the lake, and of Jill clearing around the lake.

Plant Galls found at the Park

As you are walking around the Park you may have noticed some unusual swellings, 'galls' on some of the plants and trees.

Plant galls come in many different shapes, sizes and colours. All the Galls I describe are caused by insects but they can be caused by mites, fungi, bacteria and viruses.

Insect induced galls grow where an insect lays its eggs in a specific plant. When the eggs hatch the larvae inject chemicals which create an area of abnormal growth in the plant providing shelter and food for the growing larvae. Most gall causers stick to one host species or a group of closely related species.

Here is a selection of a few of the more unusual ones that have been found at various locations in the Park. Three of these insect inducers were new recordings for the Park; the Germander speedwell gall midge, Bistort Gall midge and Hawkweed gall stem wasp.



1 Robins pin cushion



2 *Diplolepis rosae*



3 Galls on Germander Speedwell

The Robin's Pin Cushion (photo 1) which is found on dog roses is known to most people. It is caused by the bedeguar gall wasp, *Diplolepis rosae*, (photo 2) laying its eggs in a bud in the spring. It grows mainly on the stem and can be as large as 7cm in diameter. Each gall has a woody case surrounded by tough branched green or red hairs. The larvae develop and pupate inside the gall chambers, emerging as adult wasps in the spring in time to lay their eggs on the newly emerging rose

buds.

The galls seen at the shoot tips of Germander Speedwell (photo 3) are caused by a gall midge, *Jaapiella veronicae*.(photo 4) It attacks the shoot tips causing the two terminal pairs of leaves to cling tightly together and form a pouch.(photo 5) Each pouch contains many orange larvae



4 *Jaapiella veronicae*



5 *Germanda speedwell*



6 Creeping thistle



7 *Urophora cardui*

Creeping thistle seen in many places in the Park has its own gall (Photo 6) caused by a picture-winged fly, *Urophora cardui*. (photo 7) This gall can grow to 10cm long, becoming brown and woody during the summer, the larvae develop in the gall chambers where they pupate in the spring , emerging as the adult fly when the gall rots and disintegrates.



8 Bistort gall

Colourful galls can be seen on Common Bistort growing at the margins of some of the paths and fields (photo 8) they are caused by a gall midge, *Wachtliella persicariae*. The leaves to become rolled and thickened, and cannot be unrolled without breaking them. Each gall contain several light red or orange larvae which pupate in the galls when mature.

The Hawkweed gall (photo 9) is caused by a gall stem wasp *Aulacidea hieracii*, they are initially green turning brown later in the autumn. The larvae remain in the gall over the winter and pupate in the spring. A different species of *Aulacidea* gall wasp is used to control hawkweeds in America and New Zealand where the plants have become a pest.

This is only a small selection of galls. Hundreds of different galls can be found in the UK. For example oak trees species harbour at least 50 different galls and we have a few of them in the Park.

How many varieties of Gall do we have in the Park? A project for next year's BioBlitz with the help of the local Gall experts.

Plant Photos 1,3,5,6,8 taken by R. Dove, and no.9 by S. Brown

Insect Photos 2,4,7 copyright British Plant Gall Society reproduced with their permission.

Reference Britain's Plant Galls author Michael Chinery.



9 Hawkweed gall

Rosemary.

Sunday Teas - September 2020.

As many of you will remember we started Sunday Teas at Easter 2009 opening on the first Sunday of the month. Later we added a second week – the third Sunday. These had to stop abruptly with lockdown, of course, and I cannot see when and if it will be restarted.

We have asked, over the years, for kitchen improvements – even offering to pay for some, but there have been none and there is NO WAY we can socially distance in the present one.

Dorothy has been able to clear our cupboards of all the food stuffs and the freezers were cleared early on with most of the cakes going to nurses at QMC. I am very grateful to all of those bakers, shoppers, servers, washers-up and setters-out who have helped over the years – many throughout the 11 year span – that allowed us to make so much money for the RCP and to have had fun most of the time!

When the lockdown ends it will be up to the members to decide whether to reopen or to sell off our equipment, but I am retiring from the organizer's position.

Best wishes to you all!

Sue.

Editor's Note. I am sure that all friends will want to thank Sue for running the sunday teas for so long. Thank you Sue.

Lake And Pond Survey

Rosemary and I were able to survey the Lake in early July and the Education Ponds in early August. There was an abundance of Mayfly in the lake, which is a good sign as Mayfly larvae do not survive in polluted aquatic habitats and, as such, have been chosen as markers of water quality in ecological assessments. (Notice how clear the water is on the following photographs).

In contrast to their short lives as an adult (a day), a Mayfly nymph may live for several years in the water. Its body passes through a number of instars (stages), moulting and increasing in size each time. I captured an image in the sample tray of a Mayfly alongside a moulted skin, although it is unclear whether they belong to each other. Image right is a *Mayfly alongside an exuvia (moulted skin)*



It has been a while since we recorded finding a Water Stick Insect, so we were delighted to find a small one (10mm long). Image right is a *Water Stick Insect looking at its reflection*.



We also found several different types of Caddis fly larvae (these are also markers of good water quality). Each one had a different case which was built by the larva from either reeds, stones, or leaves, to protect itself. Some types of larva move around looking for food, whilst others use the case as a fixed retreat, waiting for food to come to them.

Image to right and two at the top of the next page are Caddis fly larvae





Owing to the cancellation of the children's pond dipping activities, the Education ponds were undisturbed through spring. The hot weather meant the water levels were low, and in contrast to the Lake survey, it was hard identifying anything in the muddied water. However, we did find an abundance of pond snails and Dragonfly nymphs.



Image above Dragonfly *Southern Hawker*. Nymph identified by Rosemary by counting the number of spikes on its tail, and other features using a Key to Dragonfly larva.

Three other interesting sightings occurred during Rosemary's regular visits to the ponds to check water levels, etc. On one occasion she was fortunate to watch a Dragonfly emerging from its exuvia*. On another visit to the Newt ponds during August, she watched a female southern Hawker laying its eggs on the mossy surround of the pond. And, in early September, she spotted tell-tale signs of a larger animal using the pond to drink from and rooting for worms nearby. There was a water trail, footprints and Ranger Chris confirmed the evidence suggested it was a badger.

*To see a You Tube video of a Dragonfly emerging, visit

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzS5MHx_PoQ

So far this year 14 species of Damselflies and Dragonflies have been observed in the Park, including Common Darter, Ruddy Darter and Broad Bodied Chaser.

Natural history studies in the park

Of course the park offers a splendid facility for leisure. But do its visitors know how much biodiversity it contains? Up to the end of August 2020 observers had identified an astonishing 1864 species in 18 botanical and zoological groups. But that is not all. There is another significant, but little known, fact about nature in Rushcliffe. The Borough was the home of Francis Willoughby, one of the two founding fathers of the systematic study of natural history in England in the 17th century.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF RUSHCLIFFE COUNTRY PARK

and its historical background



David Charles,
John Randall, Mick Thompson,
Rosemary Dove and Chris Davis

Keyworth & District Local History Society
& Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park
2020

Building on this august heritage there are two ecological experiments in progress, inspired by some classical work elsewhere going back to 1882. It is usually suggested that improving soil fertility reduces wild flower biodiversity. Yet on a field in the park with very poor soil we found that applications of compost had the opposite effect. In the other experiment a corner of a field has been closed off since 2011 while we monitor its return to nature. It already shows signs of eventually becoming a wood dominated by sycamore, cherry, and hawthorn trees.

A booklet has been prepared jointly with Keyworth and District Local History Society (KDLHS) entitled *The natural history of Rushcliffe Country Park and its historical background*.

Copies may be purchased from FoRCP or from KDLHS.

David Charles, John Randall, Mick Thompson, Rosemary Dove and Chris Davis
September 2020

Regular Workdays are suspended

Until the Covid-19 emergency ends there will be no regular volunteer workdays. Our rangers have a list of work to be done and are also open to suggestions. Work must respect covid-19 separation rules but completely lone working for some tasks is not allowed because of the risk of accidents.

Volunteers must contact the rangers in advance of doing work and get approval.

Please contact countrypark@rushcliffe.gov.uk