

The background of the cover is a photograph of a bush, likely a viburnum, with clusters of bright red berries. The leaves are a mix of vibrant green and deep red, suggesting an autumn setting. The text is overlaid on this image.

The Park

Edition 36 Autumn 2017

**The Quarterly Magazine of
The Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park**

Cover Photograph

Autumn colours in the Park



Volunteers raise the 10th Green Flag Award with the Park staff Janet Munro and Richard Dowsett in August.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the author(s) and do not reflect those of the Editor, the Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park or Bedford Borough Council.

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Newsletter No.36

Autumn 2017

Just four more editions of the Newsletter and we will celebrate its Tenth Anniversary. It started as an A4 sheet of news, but in Autumn 2012 the current format was adopted. Since then the emphasis has been on explaining things that can be found in the Park, drawing attention to new features and trying to help visitors interpret the environment of the Park.

We distribute just over 1000 paper copies a year and an electronic version can be found on our website at www.hocp.co.uk. An archive of past editions can also be found on the site.

Increasingly, ideas for publication, as well as articles and photos, are being provided by our volunteers. We are always looking for new ideas and material.

The Editor

Visitor likes and dislikes

Over the summer we conducted a simple poll of visitors, asking them about their likes and dislikes. What brings people to the Park and what keeps them away?

Let's start with what visitors like about the Park
(in no particular order):

- The peace and quiet - it really is a 'country' park.
- The fact that it is free entry. (Most respondents said that they left a donation because the money was going to improve the Park).
- The (almost) all weather surface on the path around Grebe Lake, making it usable all year round.
- There's something here for the whole family.
- The boards around the Park are informative and interesting.
- Dog walkers are welcome. (One visitor quoted a recently visited park with a notice reading "**No dogs or children**".)
- It feels safe.
- The friendly, knowledgeable and helpful staff.
- It's generally free of litter.

What visitors dislike (in no particular order):

- Arriving at the Park on a bright sunny day to find there is no parking because both car parks and the track between them are full. The car parking is too small!
- Having to leave the top car park before 5.00pm when the access gate is locked for the day.
- The absence (until recently) of anywhere for parents to sit inside the play enclosure near the café. More seating please, no matter how simple!
- The lack of a proper Visitors' Centre with a shop and displays and literature about the Park.
- Dogs off leads — can be scary even for adults.
- The path around the main lake is hard going with a push-chair, let alone wheelchairs. It's wrong to call it an all weather path.
- Not being allowed to cycle around the Park.
- Limited number of marked paths/trails through the Park.
- Not popular with older children — limited range of things to do.

Some of the Fungi found in the Park

by Adam Horne

Scarlet Elfcup (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*)



A cup-shaped fruiting body with tiny hairs on the outer surface. It has finely serrated edges on a pale margin with a bright scarlet inner surface of the cup. Cup size is between 1-8cm; each stands 0.5–3cm tall. Found on hardwood. Not edible.

Location: bridleway between top car park and Silt Lake.

Jews Ear (*Auricularia auricula-judea*)



A fruiting body generally in the shape of an ear; almost translucent like that of an ear lobe. Outer surface is generally tan brown in colour covered in small hairs. The outer body hardens as the fruiting body ages. Grows mainly on elder but can be found on hardwood particularly in damp woodland environments.

Location: Ash tree near duck feeding area.

Shaggy Polypore (*Inonotus hispidus*)



This bracket fungus is not always black but generally on ash trees they are. The large ash tree in Otter Holt Wood has a large bracket fungus on it. Shaggy Polypore can grow up to 25cm across; that's nearly 10".

Location: Ash near the Silt Lake.

Bracket fungus (*Daedelopsis confragosa*)



This fungus is a polypore bracket, which, as it ages, changes colour. Cause decay in the heartwood of a tree. If knocked or damaged it bruises red or dark pink. It causes white rot within the living tree.

Location: Willow tree in the Shelter Belt.

Chicken-of-the-Woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*)



This is fleshy pale yellow in colour; quick growing fruit body between early summer and late autumn. It can grow up to 50 cm across with many layers.

Location: fallen Willow in Otter Holt Wood.

Fairy Ring Champignon (*Phallus impudicus*)



These fairy rings are found in several places in the Park. When they are new and fresh they are white and bright. As they mature they become brownish and the cup becomes flat or upturned. Year upon year the fairy ring grows wider as it spreads.

Dog Stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*)



This is an immature specimen. They can grow up to 12-15 cm in height. It starts in a whitish ball full of jelly-like substance, from which the stem erupts before it disperses its spores.

Location: near Rabbit Warren.

WARNING

**Fungi can be
poisonous**

The Declining Pochard Population

by Richard Dowsett

Over the years I have noticed a distinct drop in the number of Pochard visiting the Park. I put this down to changes in the weather in their northern breeding grounds but it appears there is something more fundamental going on.

My interest was sparked by an article in the *Guardian* that indicated that Pochard would be extinct very shortly if the current trends continue.



It turns out that breeding British Pochard are too rare to count; but the best estimate currently is 880. Even for our winter visitors, this duck has moved from amber to red as a species of conservation concern. The reasons for this include the following:

- Former increases in the Pochard's breeding range in the early 20th century have been linked to the increase in artificial water bodies (as at HOCP). This trend is now in reverse;
- One of the major changes for our winter visitors is the change in wetland management in Central Europe. Fresh water fish farming has become more intensive or has been abandoned;
- Excessive richness of nutrients in lakes & rivers resulting from outfalls from sewage treatment, and run-off carrying nutrients resulting from fertilizer;
- Water extraction and drought have desiccated the bodies of water that breeding Pochard prefer;

- Non-native mink eat Pochard eggs and ducklings, as can wild boar. Likewise carp compete for the same food;
- Pochard are especially susceptible to avian influenza;
- Disturbances arising from the recreational use of lakes and other areas of water, disturbance by hunters, proximity of urban development and habitat deterioration ;
- Quite often Pochard nest close to black-headed gull colonies, whose members act both as a deterrent and watch-keepers for other species.

Rather alarmingly, given the ban on lead shot in the environment, 70% of examined birds have lead shot in their bodies. Also, as these birds ingest grit to aid digestion, they pick up lead shot and suffer lead poisoning. Although lead shot contamination may not be the main answer, in population terms it is catastrophic.

The data upon which this article is based was gathered by volunteers from bird counts from HOCP and elsewhere. The results are combined with scientific studies across the regional flyways to inform WeBS (The Wetland Bird Survey).

There is still more research needed to be able to understand fully and to explain why Pochard are becoming an increasingly rare sight. However, bird watchers at HOCP should not despair. Pochard can still be seen on the Grebe Lake, and the new bird hide should make it easier to spot them, especially in winter. The Park Guardians would greatly appreciate sightings being reported to them.

Richard Dowsett.

(With Janet Munro, Richard is a Park Guardian, managing the Park on a daily basis for Bedford Borough Council)

New Bird Hide

Those visitors who walk around Grebe Lake on a regular basis could hardly have missed the construction of a new structure at the northern end of the Lake. Built of local oak, the new bird hide is an important new facility for both serious and casual bird watchers.



But we already have a bird hide in the Park!

Why do we need another one?



This is certainly an opinion that has been stated in recent weeks and it deserves a response. Harrold-Odell Country Park is one of a number of areas of water in the Ouse Valley that are important to migratory birds, escaping severe winters in continental Europe.

The new hide was funded by the Friends of the Park at a spot that overlooks the northern end of Grebe Lake. This is where birds tend to congregate in the winter because it is more sheltered than other parts of the lake and should provide an excellent viewing point from which to watch them.



The construction of this hide is part of an ongoing project with the focus on birds, which the Friends started in the Spring. In addition to the new hide, twenty bird boxes have been put up around the Park and many were used by nesting birds almost at once. More are planned.

Over the years, the Friends have funded the design and production of interpretive boards around the Park. The latest was erected on the boardwalk at the start of the summer. It includes a section on bird recognition as well as reptiles and insects.

Harrold - Odell Country Park

Dragonfly Pond



Since the original pond was opened in 1981, it has been used by Harrold Odell Country Park as a habitat for a wide range of wildlife. The pond is a popular spot for visitors to see a variety of birds, including swans, ducks, and geese. The pond is also a popular spot for dragonflies and damselflies.

The pond is a natural 'Dragonfly Pond' which is a focus of Harrold Odell Country Park. It is a natural habitat for a wide range of wildlife, including dragonflies, damselflies, and other insects. The pond is also a popular spot for visitors to see a variety of birds, including swans, ducks, and geese.

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Creatures to look out for

Amphibians								
 Toad	 Turtle	 Newt	 Dragonfly	 Damselfly	 Dragonfly			
Birds								
 Swan	 Duck	 Goose	 Pheasant	 Robin	 Sparrow	 Cuckoo	 Magpie	 Heron
Insects								
 Dragonfly	 Damselfly	 Dragonfly	 Dragonfly	 Dragonfly				




Other bird recognition boards are planned for the outdoor classroom and the new hide. In addition, we plan to replace the boards in the main bird hide, as the colours have seriously degraded over time. All these initiatives are funded from visitor donations and a NextEnergy Capital donation.

Bats in the Park

Nicky Monsey, Bedford Bat Group

If you are really observant you will have noticed that in addition to new bird boxes, we have ten bat boxes in the Park.

The bat boxes are surveyed regularly by the Bedfordshire Bat Group and we have recently received their latest report. This shows that currently, the most frequently found bat is Soprano Pipistrelle.



Below is an extract from a report giving the results of the latest bat survey conducted by the Bedfordshire Bat Group.

The first survey, in August 2014, showed a very quick response to the bat boxes, with 2 of the boxes having droppings. By the end of the season 4 of the boxes had evidence of occupancy, with two boxes having bats in them.

In 2015, the spring surveys did not record either bats or droppings, but in late summer and autumn both bats and droppings were found, bringing the number of boxes used up to 5.

In 2016 many of the boxes had signs of bird nests or bird droppings, with 7 out of the 10 boxes containing birds' nests. These were left undisturbed, and were removed after the young had fledged.

The presence of the bird nests reduced the bat occupancy of the boxes in the spring, but in the autumn, bats were found in 3 of the boxes, with droppings found in 1 more box, bringing the total number of boxes used to 6 out of 10.

2017 started with 4 boxes occupied by bird nests, but one of the boxes was occupied by a bat. This bat was in a box that had not had a bat in in previous years, but had had bat droppings in.

Box No	Total No Bats	Total Soprano Pipistrelle	Total Unidentified Pipetrelle
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	4	4	0
4	0	0	0
5	1	1	0
6	0	0	0
7	7	7	0
8	9	7	2
9	1	0	1
10	3	3	0

So far, a larger number of bats have been found in the autumn, compared to in the spring. Also female bats have not been found in the spring, but have been found in the boxes, with male bats in the autumn. As British bats mate in the autumn, and give birth in June/July, it is most likely that mixed roosts of males and females are mating bats.

The lack of females found in the spring and summer, suggests that these bat boxes are not maternity roosts for soprano pipistrelles. The large number of birds' nests found in the spring/summer mean there is insufficient data for these seasons, and make drawing any firm conclusions impossible.

Activities in the Park

Health Walks



These take place on a Thursday every two weeks and are led by Janet Munro who is a trained leader and Park Guardian.

The walks are open to everyone looking for a healthy and sociable pastime. There is no need to book, just meet outside the Visitors' Centre Café at 10.30am.

**The next Health Walks will take place on
Oct 19th; Nov 2nd, 16th & 30th; Dec 14th & 28th.**

Friends' Task Days

These are held once a month and provide an excellent opportunity to sample what it's like to be a volunteer. They are also ideal for people who have limited time available in which to volunteer.

Task Days are led and supervised by Park Guardians, who will provide the necessary kit and training. If you enjoy the experience, you may feel inclined to join a weekday group of volunteers on a regular basis. Alternatively, you may wish to continue on a monthly basis.

**The next Task Days will take place on
Oct 30th; Nov 27th & Dec 18th.**

In An Emergency

Emergencies can arise anywhere, whether as a result of a health problem or an accident. If you witness or are involved in any emergency in the Park:

**Contact the emergency services without delay
Ring 999 from your mobile**

If this is not possible you should:

**Return to the café in the Visitors' Centre;
Tell the staff you need to ring 999;
Ask to use the café telephone.**

Seeking Help or Information in the Park

- Your first point of reference are Park Guardians.
- You will frequently see volunteers working around the Park. Depending on the weather, they wear blue jackets or shirts with **Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park** on them. They will be only too pleased to provide you with help if they can.

Contacting the Park Guardians

The Guardians (Park staff) have an office in the Visitors' Centre where they can be reached. However, as they can be deployed either in the Park or elsewhere in the Borough, the office may be closed, in which case a contact telephone number will be displayed on the door.

Contact Richard Dowsett and Janet Munro by **Telephone:** 01234 720016 **Email:** hocp@bedford.gov.uk

The Bell at Odell



**Walking in the Country Park this Autumn?
A warm welcome awaits you at The Bell in Odell**

Just walk through the park along the main bridleway on to Horsefair Lane and 150 yards along the road you will find us serving a fine selection of ales, wines, gins and excellent food.

Walkers, cyclists, dog walkers and children will find a warm welcome. As will visitors arriving by car, as there's parking to the front and rear.

**Facebook — TheBellinOdell Tel — 01234 910 850
Website — thebellinodell.co.uk**

TheBellinOdell