



# The Park

Edition 37 Winter 2017/18

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

**Cover photograph:**  
**Long Tailed Tit by Trevor Sudds**

**The Friends of Harrold-Odell  
Country Park invite you to**

## **Come a-Wassailing on Friday 26th January 2018**



**Meet at the Overflow Car Park at 6.00pm, then  
Wassail through the Park making as much noise as  
possible to the Wassail ceremony where a cup of mulled  
cider will be enjoyed by one and all.**

**(Please bring something with which to make a noise and a torch)**

**“Orchard-visit Wassailing” is an ancient custom  
that dates back to Anglo-Saxon times. Its purpose was to  
awaken the cider apples and scare away evil spirits to  
ensure a good harvest in the next year.**

**Please book your place by ringing  
Janet on 01234 720016  
by Wed 24th Jan.**



## **Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park**

Carlton Road, Harrold, MK43 7DS  
Tel 01234 720016

**Newsletter**  
**Winter 2017/18**

*2017 proved to be quite a year for the Friends. The volunteers working in the Park helped it gain its 10th Green flag. They laid hedges, cleared the main culvert out of Grebe Lake, coppiced areas of the Nature Reserve, repaired broken ground, cut and split logs, cleared paths, mended benches and tables and picked up litter and dog mess consistently throughout the year.*

*Behind the scenes, they created learning materials, raised money, managed projects that gave the Park an outdoor classroom, a learning & picnic area and a new bird hide. They wrote and designed new notice boards and continued with a bird project that has given the Park new nesting boxes and recently, a Bird of the Month project.*

*Thanks and congratulations to all the volunteers.*

*David Taylor, Editor (da.taylor@btinternet.com)*

Can you identify some of the birds in the Park this winter?



1

2



3

4





5

6



7



8



Answers : Page 6

## Children prompt research into the colour of snails

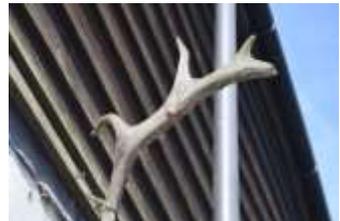
by Richard Dowsett, Park Guardian

School parties, youth and other groups have been coming to the Park for over ten years. Among the most popular activities are pond dipping and willow weaving. Over the years visiting pupils have also investigated log piles and different habitats in the Park.

Children have the habit of asking straightforward questions that take some answering. What follows is an example of one such question and the results of the investigation that followed and is ongoing.

One creature that always turns up during pupil investigations is the common snail. You all know them - small but visible and easily handled, brightly coloured with various patterns of banding. This is *Caprea nemorosa* the banded snail. The question asked by pupils was - does the colour of a snail's shell match its environment as some form of camouflage?

Pink snail on an antler



### Observations:

1. Once the snails are caught it is easy to see that the dark brown ones are found in woodland.
2. The light green ones are confined to grassland.
3. The pink ones are found on more open woodland and hedgerows. Banding varies but not to a predictable extent.
4. The obvious explanation is that the snail's colour matches its environment. This can be described as "survival of the fittest" in Darwinian terms...

## Except it's not!

There will always be snails that do not conform to the hypothesis; dark brown snails appear in grassland and yellow/green ones in deep shade. In the woods the brown ones will dominate and in the grass there will be none, or very few, brown snails. It turns out this is all due to genetics. These snails have the slightly annoying habit of being male, female or both. So, if either parent is brown then the offspring will be brown. If either parent is yellow or pink, then all the offspring will be pink. If both parents are yellow then all offspring will be yellow.



One good place to sample the snail population is at the 'anvils' used by song thrushes to break open shells.

## Results of observations:

- Shells found on the Rabbit Warren always appear to be the camouflaged yellow-shelled varieties. This means that the birds have to work quite hard to spot them.
- Along the Bridleway hedge, the snails can be yellow, pink or brown.
- In woodland such as the Shelter Belt however, there are the expected brown ones but also there are always a few pink and yellow ones as well.
- It seems that this genetic variation (polymorphism) in the colouration of snails is influenced by a number of factors but that the main influences in one place may not be so important in another.

## Conclusions drawn from the research:

- The Song Thrush should be driving the selection to yellow on the open Rabbit Warren and this appears to be the case.
- What is certainly happening elsewhere is called "frequency-dependant selection". Here, the fitness of the variant depends on how common or rare it is relative to others. The fitness or potential for survival increases as the variant gets rarer and visa versa. There is thus a balance point where all variants have equal fitness to survive.
- It also seems possible that camouflage-coloured species "know" it and can be found in exposed positions.
- Predators form "search images" of their prey based on the forms/colours they find most often. So rarer types will be missed, allowing them to breed.

This study all started from visiting pupils finding snails and asking questions about variations in colour. What is written here represents possible answers to their questions and there is clearly more research to be carried out. We need school groups to visit the Park, record, think and ask the obvious.

### Answers to the Bird Quiz on pages 2/3

1. Red Crested Pochard
2. Black-headed Gull
3. Goldeneye
4. Goosander
5. Bullfinch
6. Tufted Duck
7. Goldfinch
8. Shoveler

## What's this?

It's amazing what you see if you look up into the bare branches of trees at this time of year. Yes there are birds but occasionally you will spot things that you might not have seen before. Here's an example:



Look at those black blobs on some of the branches. They are almost certainly a gall of some sort where the willow has responded to an attack or infection. Similar structures are oak galls, spangle galls and robins' pincushion on oak and briar caused by egg laying and larva biochemistry of insects. Probably, in this case, the cause is a bacterium or fungus. In practical terms they are unsightly but harmless.

## Art in the Park

### Carlton Primary School Project

When we planned the new outdoor classroom we didn't want to specify how schools might use it. Obviously it could be used as a base in which children could be briefed for the tasks awaiting them; and it could also provide a handy place to eat lunch. Last November, pupils from Carlton Primary School turned it into an art studio to extremely good effect.

The National Curriculum for Primary School Art requires that pupils "know about great artists, craft makers and designers and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms." WOW! That's a mouthful! Where do you start?

Carlton Primary School decided to look at the work of Andy Goldsworthy OBE as one of the artists to study. Andy is a sculptor, artist, photographer and environmentalist. He specialises in art work created in natural and urban environments, often from local materials.

Clearly the children chose to ignore this quote from the great man: "I think it's incredibly brave to be working with flowers and leaves and petals." The photos that follow show just how the children chose to ignore his words, using the outdoor classroom as their very large canvas.

**Natural materials at the ready: let's go...**



**Youthful creativity pays off**



## Community Links

The Friends' Committee was recently asked to define the links between the Park and the community. We try to offer support to any people or organisations wanting to make use of the Park. However, it came as something of a surprise when we sat down and drew up a list of the various bodies with which we have dealings.

Obviously Bedford Borough Council features more frequently, as the managers of the Park. Less frequent are our contacts with the Parish Councils of Odell and Harrold, although the piece opposite contradicts this!

This last year we developed learning materials for local schools and this we intend to continue as a project funded by a NextEnergy UK donation.

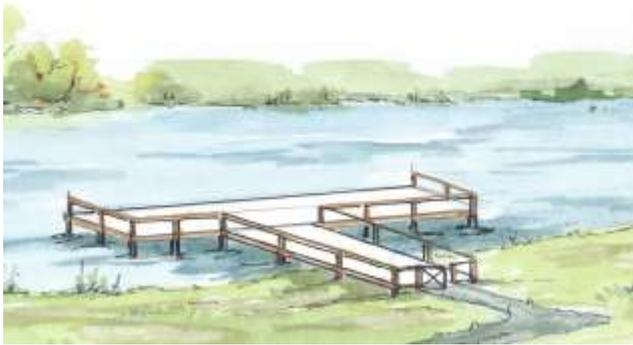
On a national level, the Park works with Nature England, the Environment Agency and the British Trust for Ornithology. Local groups include the local Moth Group, cubs and scouts, art groups, the Bedfordshire Bat group and the Natural History Society. We are always pleased to entertain groups from the Chellington Centre and local colleges and universities. Finally there are the various walking groups that make extensive use of the Park to very good effect.

If you or your group have any queries about using the Park, please contact the Park Guardians in the first instance.

## Thank You to Harrold Parish Council

We are aware that villagers from Harrold have long used and supported the Park. We are also aware of their appreciation for the work that the Friends do to conserve and maintain the environment for walkers, bird watchers and dog walkers.

The Friends were delighted when, at a meeting of the Parish Council in September, our application for funding was approved. The intended purpose is the construction of a pond-dipping platform on Kingfisher Lake. Although the final plans are still under consideration, this sketch provides an artist's impression of what is intended:



We want to provide this as a facility for local and visiting schools and as a safe facility for local children with their parents. **Many thanks to Harrold Parish Council for their generous grant.**

## Regular 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  
Jan 11th, 25th; Feb 8th, 22nd; Mar 8th and 22nd;  
April 5th & 19th.**

### 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  
Jan 29th, Feb 26th, Mar 26th, Apr 30th**

## 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 Winter?**

**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 910850**

**Website — [thebellinodell.co.uk](http://thebellinodell.co.uk)**