

News From Harrold Odell Country Park

June 2011

I can't believe that we've come through the mid summer solstice already! It only seems like yesterday that we were wading through ice and snow.

Richard and I have been hosting a large number of school parties in the run up to their summer break. Many are from Bedford and the local villages but we are seeing increasing numbers from Milton Keynes and the Northampton area as well. We are also working with The Chellington Centre when they have groups staying with them. There will be a group from the Prince's Trust sometime in August participating in a taster day looking at environmental work opportunities. Hopefully this will help them decide on a career path in the future.

We've been teaching science in the form of pond dipping and minibeast hunts, simple willow weaving and geology. Other groups have participated in scavenger hunts and nature walks. We derive a great deal of pleasure from helping children explore their environment.. It helps them to see the country park in a different light. Not just a playground but a force for nature too.

Talking of nature, our sightings board outside the café is jam packed with the flora & fauna seen during the last few weeks. The warm weather this year has led to a lot of grass snake sightings. They have been breeding in the habitat piles of rotten wood that have been left around the park during the winter clearance work.

These piles also provide food for insects of various types and shelter for the park's amphibians. Of course it follows that the birds will come to feed on the insects and fungi will colonise the wood – an ecosystem in miniature.

Richard, together with some of the volunteers from the Friends Group has been going to Bedford Museum to pick up materials being discarded during their lengthy refurbishment. They have returned with timber and building materials which will be put to good use around the park over the next few months. We also gained two benches from their courtyard that we've placed in some gaps over the far side of the big lake.

Some materials will be used to refurbish the bird hide which is currently being re-felted and painted with wood preservative. After this, new metal cabinets, paid for out of car park donations, are going to be installed inside to house seasonal information for visitors. We hope to complete this over the next couple of months.

In response to visitor comments we have now had the path resurfaced that goes through the woodland next to the café. The sandy surface we had previously was too soft for wheelchairs. Thanks to Jon Powles, our contractor, it is now a pleasure to use for all visitors whatever the weather.

Lynette Hall from Odell W.I. was kind enough to nominate the park for a Landscape Improvement award from the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. This is for the work done around the whole park by volunteers, Community Payback and

staff. They were also interested in our education work, mentoring programme and community involvement opportunities such as the work of our Friends Group.

The judges came out on June 22nd for a tour round. Previously we have won a Highly Commended for setting up the Community Orchard at the back of Horsefair Lane. We won't know whether we've won anything until September so I'll report on their decision then.

We have recently become a stop-off venue for groups of classic car owners. We welcome this wholeheartedly but we ask that if large groups of any sort wish to use the park that they contact us well in advance and book. Two groups appeared at the same time recently and put a severe strain on parking spaces, toilet facilities and the café. If we know you're coming, we can plan your accommodation and let you know whether we are already booked by other groups etc. If the weather is good we will already be busy with general visitors who will be vying for the same facilities. Tel. 01234 720016.

Dates for your Diary

Health Walks

Meet every other Thursday at 10.30am at the café and walk for an hour. There's an option to stop afterwards for a natter over refreshments in the café.

July 7th & 21st and August 11th & 25th

Friends Conservation Tasks

Meet at the café at 10am. Refreshments provided but bring a packed lunch and wear stout footwear and old clothing.

July 25th and August 22nd

For information: There will be an event at Priory Country Park, Bedford on July 17th
For info call Jane Moore on 07920 769689.

Janet Munro
Ranger