



**Friends of Harrold-Odell
Country Park**

**Newsletter No.13
Winter 2011/12**

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Friends of HOCP are people who care about the countryside, especially Harrold-Odell Country Park, and who work with the Bedford Borough Council Park Staff in different ways to make the Park a welcoming place for everyone.

Just a walk in the Park



After an evening of torrential rain, Monday the 12th December dawned bright and clear, just what was needed for the Friends' Christmas Social and the associated guided walk. In bright sunshine we stepped out across the river meadows, through the Nature Reserve and on to the Community Orchard, led by Richard, who pointed out recent projects undertaken by the Conservation Volunteers.

The walk proved to be sheer delight, interspersed with an informative narrative from Richard. It also provided an opportunity for Friends who rarely see each other to catch up and to share their knowledge of things environmental.

Quite amazing for the time of year, the entire walk was completed in the dry! In the Nature Reserve, where the ground was originally shaped by the outflow from the gravel-washing plant, surfaces that would normally be under a foot of water were totally dry. This can be directly attributed to an exceptionally dry autumn, which has resulted in the water level in all three lakes being below that expected for this time of year.

Almost in the middle of the river meadows there is a stand of hybrid poplar trees. They provide a focal point which sadly we are going to lose. At first glance there is nothing to suggest that all the trees are rotten - literally to the core - and will have to come down. The evidence is there for all to see in the form of a tree stump bearing evidence of the rot and the work of the Clear Winged Moth.



So far this year, some 35 tons of logs have been harvested as a result of tree felling and this is about the limit for this year. Tree management is a feature of the Park and this is very evident within the Nature Reserve where what was a thick tangle of vegetation has been reduced to start the coppicing cycle.



This may have produced a sparse landscape in the short term but in the medium to long term it forms part of a deliberate strategy. This will result in approximately 80% of the existing trees in this area being felled in due course. The end product will be a return to the landscape of our forbears and a treescape that the Iron Age and Roman settlers of the Ouse valley would have recognised. It will also

make the Park sustainable in terms of timber for fencing, spiling, weaving and logs.

Throughout the walk we encountered examples of recent tree planting by the Rangers and the Conservation Volunteers. This is part of a strategy to replace felled trees with native species and species that visitors can relate to. The Rangers estimate that 80% of the trees planted recently, including those in the Community Orchard, would have been lost to drought this year if it hadn't been for the watering carried out by the Volunteers. This has been of particular importance in the Community Orchard where the 60 examples of Bedfordshire varieties of fruit trees continue to flourish.

Returning to the Visitor Centre for a fine lunch in convivial company, we saw something glistening near the end of the island. This is the replacement tern platform built by Conservation Volunteers. Rowing the tools and materials over to the island proved a tough job but is now completed save for a layer of gravel for the terns to

build their nests in this Spring. Terns provide one of the distinctive features of the Park with their amazing aerobatics and ability to take insects and small fish from the surface of the water.

For the fishermen

We are well into the pike fishing season (Oct. - Mar). Members of Vauxhall Angling Club have been reporting several double figure fish from both lakes and a 13lb barbel was caught in the river. We have pike to 30lb and 6ft in length in the large lake. Anyone wishing to join the club should see the Bailiff, Trevor Smith or log on to www.vauxhallanglingclub.co.uk for more information.

Cry "Timber!"

A recent tree survey identified potentially hazardous branches in various locations in the Park. These will be dealt with professionally with some having the weight taken off selected limbs. Others will be pollarded and allowed to re-grow.

For the last two months we have been creating almost 1km of low hurdle fencing (spiling) around the northern shore of the large lake. This is to protect the banks from undercutting by wave action. If allowed to continue, trees would fall into the water more frequently and eventually the damage would begin to eat into the footpath. Once the fence is complete, we will backfill with hardcore, soil and twigs to reinstate the banks.

Our thanks go to the various Friends Volunteers for their assistance in this mammoth task. The raw materials come from the willow coppice plots in the nature reserve. These are harvested on a 10 year rotation. These will re-grow vigorously next year and provide new products in the future. The same applies to the mature willow that has been cut down along the lake edge. This will re-grow and mature timber will be seasoned and sold next year for firewood. All proceeds are returned to the Park.

Wildlife to be seen in the Park this winter

Woodland and Meadow Birds

Blackbird
Blue Tit
Buzzard
Carrion Crow
Chaffinch
Dunnock
Fieldfare
Goldcrest
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Great Tit
Green Sandpiper
Hen Harrier
Jackdaw
Kestrel
Lapwing
Long Tailed Tit
Pheasant
Red Kite (x3)
Redwing
Robin
Rooks
Song Thrush
Tawny Owl
Water Rail
Wood Pigeon
Wren
Yellow Wagtail

Water Birds

Canada Goose
Coot
Cormorant
Gadwell
Greylag Goose>
Goldeneye
Grt.Crested Grebe
Heron
Kingfisher
Mallard
Merganser>
Moorhen
Mute swan
Pink Footed Goose
Pochard
Shoveler Duck
Teal
Widgeon



Mammals

Otters
Mink
Grey Squirrel
Muntjac Deer>
Rabbits



Mystery Sighting!

There have been several sightings of what appears to be a lynx. These need to be verified, ideally with a photograph. The sightings have been on the rough land between the river and Chellington.

Activities in the Park

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. Next walks: Jan 19th; Feb 2nd & 16th; March 1st, 22nd & 29th.

Please contact the Park on (01234) 720016 for dates or email walk leader Janet at janet.munro@bedford.gov.uk

Friends Conservation Tasks

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

Next Conservation Days: Jan 30th; Feb 27th; March 26th; April 30th.

All tasks finish mid afternoon but you need stay only as long as you wish. For additional information please contact Janet Munro or Richard Dowsett on (01234) 720016 or email hocp@bedford.gov.uk

Donations to the Park

If you feel that you cannot attend any of our events but still wish to help, you can donate money to The Friends of HOCP. It will be used to improve facilities for both visitors and the wildlife. Cash or cheques should be made payable to 'Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park'.

You can also subscribe to this, our regular FREE newsletter, which is available via email or post - please contact the Secretary for more details. For further information, contact any of the following:

Nina Bransgrove-Knight (Chair) Tel: 01234 721149

Rachel Halton (Treasurer) Tel: 01234 720572

David Taylor (Secretary) Tel: 01234 720930

Friends' Committee Meeting

The next meeting of the Friends' Committee is on **January 26th** at 10am, in the Visitor Centre at the Park. This is an open meeting.