



Friends of Harrold- Odell Country Park

Newsletter No.15
Summer 2012

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The Park has won the **Green Flag Award** for the fourth consecutive year. Congratulations to the staff and all the volunteers who have worked so hard to achieve this success.

Public Appeal



The Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park are working with Bedford Borough Council to replace this burnt out shell of the former bird hide with a fine new hide and educational facility. The estimated cost is £15,000 of which £10,000 has already been found from the Borough, The Friends and from donations. We are now looking to make up the balance of £5,000 from further donations.

If you would like to make a donation, no matter how small, it would be greatly appreciated. Cheques should be made payable to '**The Friends of Harrold-Odell Country Park**' and posted to the Treasurer, the Friends of HOCP, c/o The Park Office, Harrold-Odell Country Park, Carlton Road, Harrold, MK43 7DS. Alternatively, donations can be left with the Rangers at the Park Office in the Visitors' Centre, preferably with a covering note so that they can be acknowledged. Fund raising ideas and sources of funding will also be welcomed.

The Enemy below the water

Lurking below the surface of the River Great Ouse as it runs through the Park is a deadly enemy, the American Signal crayfish. Not even the most ardent conservationist is prepared to speak out on behalf of this small crustacean that is related to the lobster.



It first appeared in the UK in the 1970s, having escaped from crayfish farms established to supply the catering industry. Since then it has infested freshwater lakes and rivers the length and breadth of the UK. In forty years or so, it has killed off 75% of our native crayfish and currently threatens them with extinction.

The American Signal Crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus* to give it its correct name) is about 25cms long with its claws extended. The undersides of the claws are bright red, making it easy to distinguish from the native species. It also accounts for the inclusion of 'signal' in its name! It lives on the beds of lakes and rivers and is present in the River Great Ouse at Harrold Bridge and beyond.

As a scavenger, it clears up detritus and the remains of dead creatures. If it stopped there it might not be such an enemy to the environment. Unfortunately, it carries a deadly fungal disease that attacks our native crayfish and for which there is no cure as yet. It also accelerates the erosion of lake and river banks by constructing burrows that can be up to a meter long.

It can live up to 12 years and the females lay up to 275 eggs each year. As a result, ecologists now say that it has reached plague proportions. Research is in hand to find methods of controlling this pest. Until they come up with something more effective, the only practical solution is to trap them and even that has only limited success.

Here in the Park we are fortunate that this pest has not found its way into our lakes. However it is found along the river where fishermen are instructed to destroy them as is the Water Bailiff. We are licensed to trap them on a regular basis. Their only saving grace is that they make good eating!

Beware! You may meet crocodiles and bears in the Park

It was a visit to a craft fair in Wales some four years ago that first encouraged Carrie Yuen to pick up a chainsaw. Inspired by the 20 or so chainsaw artists she saw at the fair, Carrie started experimenting on a piece of waste land near her home. Her first efforts resulted in 'exotic firewood', cobras and eagles that ended up as firewood for a neighbour. Slowly she taught herself to control a chainsaw sufficiently to create saleable owls and other small creatures. It is amazing to think that it was only two years ago that Carrie started to work professionally in her work area off the main roadway through the Park.



Carrie works mainly on commissions that can vary from monks to wolves and bears. Her preference is to create wooden sculptures of wildlife. She works mainly in cedar but also in elm and oak. One of her biggest problems these days is obtaining the basic raw material and getting it transported into the Park.

Her works attracts a lot of attention from visitors to the Park, especially children. But even adults can be seen stroking her sculptures!

Having selected a piece of timber in which she can 'see' a creature, Carrie starts by roughing out its shape using a 30 inch chainsaw. She will work at the sculpture for up to two weeks, depending on the subject and its size. The detail is finished off, first with a 10 inch chainsaw and then chisels. The final surface is achieved using a sander and oil.



Sounds easy when you say it quickly but days of work can be ruined by a simple mistake. Does it happen? Yes, just before the interview for this article!



As you walk past Carrie's work area, you will see various carvings, all at different stages. Please do not enter the area that is taped off, especially while Carrie is working. It may seem obvious to say but **chainsaws are dangerous tools**.

At different points around the Park you will see various examples of Carrie's work. There's the commemorative seat near the Visitors' Centre and the fence-top carvings in the top car park that are much loved by children. Her work not only enhances visitor enjoyment of the HOCP, it illustrates in a very practical way the beautiful use that artists can make of a natural resource, timber.

Carrie's most recent creation for the Park is another seat on the far side of Grebe Lake. This commemorates the life of Michael St John Booth who died in action during the Normandy landings in 1944 at the age of 21. This is one of many commissions that enhance the landscape not only here but around the UK and overseas.



You can see more examples of Carrie Yuen's work at <http://www.carrie-on-carving.co.uk/>



Activities in the Park

New bike rack - The Friends group is working on yet another project, the installation of additional bike racks next to the veranda at the rear of the café. We are getting many more cycling groups in recent months and the racks by the main entrance are no longer sufficient. In addition, they are kitting out the wood processing area outside the workshop so we can properly deal with our firewood stocks this autumn. Our thanks to the main men, Simon Carter, Trevor Sudds, Bob Collyer and John Donovan and Peter Hall from Carlton for supplying the oak timber.

Fishing arrangements - The fishing season began again on June 16th. Now that Vauxhall AC no longer lease the fishing we are running it ourselves. There are no day tickets, only season permits as this is primarily a nature reserve. A passport-sized photo is required to go on the back of the permit, and proof of possession of a current Environment Agency rod licence is also required. The permit covers the stretch of the river Great Ouse within the park boundaries and both lakes with a few exclusion zones.

There are carp to 35lb, pike to 30lb, bream to 8lb, tench to 6lb+ in the lakes and chub to 6lb+, barbell to 16lb & perch to 4lb in the river. Fishing for pike is from Oct. 1st to March 14th and we observe the closed season from March 14th - June 16th.

Fishing Tariffs

Day & Night £63.00; Day only £40.00

Concession Day & Night (OAP/Junior) £28.80; Concession Day £16.30

Pike (from Oct 1st) £28.80

Forthcoming Activities in the Park

Conservation Days

Come and join like-minded Friends of the Park in practical work that aims to enhance the park for wildlife and visitors. All tasks start at 10am and finish mid afternoon, but you need stay only as long as you wish. Tasks vary to cater for a

range of experience. Please bring a packed lunch. Tea, coffee & biscuits are supplied.

Next Conservation Days: Aug 30th; Sept 24th; Oct 29th and Nov 26th.

For additional information please contact Park rangers Janet Munro or Richard Dowsett on (01234) 720016 or email hocp@bedford.gov.uk

Health Walks

Health walks are run fortnightly on Thursdays throughout the year. Meet at 10.30am at the Visitor Centre. Each walk lasts about an hour and is guided by a trained leader. The aim is to improve physical health and mental wellbeing. Walking regularly can reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes and depression.

Next Health Walks: August 16th and 30th; September 13th and 27th;
October 11th and 28th.

Wanted

Contributions to this Newsletter either in the form of articles or ideas for articles. Our aim is to provide information about what's going on in the Park and to interpret the landscape and the activities of the wildlife. If you can help, please contact the Editor on 01234 714000 or email da.taylor@btinternet.com.

Friends' Committee Meeting

At the AGM held on the 19th July, Nina Bransgrove Knight stood down as Chairperson. We wish her and her family well and thank her for her efforts on behalf of the Park, which have extended over many years.

The next meeting of the Friends' Committee will be held on 1st November at 10am. This will be an open meeting, held in the Visitors' Centre at the Park.

If you would like any further information about The Friends, please contact the following:

Chair: David Taylor - 01234 714000
Treasurer: Rachel Halton - 01234 720572
Secretary: Barry Halton - 01234 720572