

Welcome

Welcome once again to our Spring Newsletter and thank you for your continued support.

As you will note from Sarah Horton's article we are at last making some headway with our campaign to provide new facilities for the older children.

I hope everyone noticed the makeover given to the football hut. The graffiti that appeared earlier this year will shortly be removed. (We ran out of paint)

Events for 2008

As usual we will be holding our annual Easter Egg Hunt and a Spring Clean up. (See front page for details)

We also intend to have another Bat Walk. A Coffee Morning with bring & buy Cake & Plant stalls and a Tombola will be held in June.

Additionally, weather and water levels permitting, another Pond Dip will take place. So please keep watching the notice boards for details of these and any other activities.

Cheese & Wine Social (Annual review)

The decorators were in at the The Red Cross Hall which gave us an opportunity to try a different venue for the annual get together. We also moved the event from November to January with the hope that this would encourage a greater number of attendees. Around 35 members & friends turned out to the meeting in the Church of Our Lady church hall on the corner of Connaught & Kings Road As

usual there was plenty to eat and drink and I can assure you that nobody went home hungry or thirsty. We look forward to seeing more of you there next year.

We were very pleased to welcome as our guest speaker Colin Gray, Chairman of The Fleet Pond Society, who gave an excellent presentation with quality slides on the nature reserve.

For those who have not joined us in the past, the evening is primarily a social event for you to enjoy the company of your fellow members. A small amount of time is given over to business to keep you informed of events, concerns and projects.

Volunteers Needed

Just to remind everyone that we are always on the lookout for new committee members. The task is not too onerous; meetings take place around 10 times a year over a glass of wine. I have now been chairman for 9 years and will be looking to step down next year. So please give any of us a ring if you would like to join in and help out.

Ron Ayton

Signs of Spring in Oakley Park

As I write this article it is only the beginning of February but one could easily mistake it as being early April as the signs of spring are everywhere. Already, like clockwork, the birds are beginning to change their behaviour, preparing their bodies to produce next year's generation of Oakley Park's song birds. Some birds, like the house sparrow and wood pigeon, are

fortunately already with their breeding partner, having overwintered with them. Blackbirds, tits and robins are similar in the sense that they often have the same breeding partner for a number of years, but need to rekindle their feelings for each other as they do not spend winter together. All the rest of the parks birds, however, are fully fit, fresh and feeling fancy so start to sing their little hearts out, make nests and patrol their territories.

The first flowers or catkins are appearing on hazel and alder trees. These are amongst the first flowers of the year to appear. Because of this many insects, such as bees, have been waiting for this moment and visit these dangling food stores to collect nectar and pollen to help build up their pollen stores, which act as baby food for their eggs when they hatch into the larvae.

The gorse bush on the island will be almost in full flower emitting its beautiful summer holiday smell (it always reminds me of sun tan lotion) to attract the insects into it to pollinate its flowers. As the saying goes 'when gorse is in flower, kissing is in fashion' so the island will soon be surrounded by frogs and newts also getting involved in their springtime activities. The bluebells, planted by *The Friends* over the last couple of years, would normally be out in full bloom by the end of April or beginning of May, but if the weather continues like it is they will be early, probably blooming at the end of March or early April so make sure you visit them.

All seems to be warming up nicely and progressing well in the woods so let us just hope that there are no more heavy frosts

which will put a dampener on all of the activity which has preceded it.

Elliott Fairs

Hang out in Hart

You may have seen in the Press that Hart District Council were successful in their “Hang out in Hart” lottery bid for funding to increase play opportunities for teenagers across the district. In Fleet, *Oakley Park* was allocated a budget of around £11,000. To receive this, we have to meet the lottery criteria to provide an innovative play area for teenagers. We also have to do some of the groundwork ourselves. We will be looking for willing teenagers and others to come and help us prepare the ground later in the year.

It is quite a tight time schedule. We need to have completed the project within a year of winning the bid. At the moment we are poring over catalogues and talking to companies to see what is available. We have been told that the cost of the equipment is about 1/3 of the cost of the project. The other costs are installation and safe surfacing (which has varying costs depending on what we choose). We are due to attend a meeting (late February) with the council to find out what other rules we have to obey. We’ll keep you updated!

We know that the old kickboard is very much missed. The council took it down as it was too old and unsafe. We are looking into replacing it using *Friends of Oakley Park* finances. You will be able to see the fundraising being put to good use.

Sarah Horton

Pond tidy up in Oakley Park woods

Hart’s Countryside Rangers have recently spent a day clearing out the pond in the woodland area of the park. This has been carried out in the past, but being in a woodland, the pond easily becomes clogged up with leaves and these do not rot down very fast as light levels to the pond are poor, so further maintenance is required. Rotting leaf litter has been raked out using pond rakes and a mechanical digger. Trees and scrub have been removed from the banks to allow more light to get to the water.

The pond is important for wildlife; ducks and herons have been seen using it and it is a great habitat for frogs and newts. In the summer many aquatic invertebrates can be found, such as dragonfly and damselfly larvae, water beetles and many others. All of these different species will hopefully benefit from the clean-up and that will make this pond great for pond dipping as part of the Countryside Services’ education program.

Joanna Lawrence
Countryside Ranger