



SUMMER NEWSLETTER – June 2012



Dear Friends,

I make no excuse for featuring a picture of the Park's baby owls on our front page. What pleasure Mabel and her brood have given us this spring! Inside this newsletter you can read more about Ipswich's famous owl family.

The Friends' annual series of "Brass on the Grass" concerts begins on Sunday 8 July (we have moved them a little earlier this year to minimize clashing with that other prestigious summer event, the Olympics). The concerts take place in the Arboretum, and in this edition we continue our history of Ipswich's first public park. It was created (in part at least) as a venue to host events for the town, and of course there are plenty of events being held in Christchurch Park this summer. We hope our comprehensive listing proves helpful.

According to a recent study, almost three quarters of UK butterfly species have declined in abundance over the past decade (even common species have seen a fall of 24%), with the distribution of 54% being reduced. Researchers say that loss of suitable habitats is thought to be the main reason for this, so it is timely that our butterfly garden at the north end of the Wilderness Pond is now complete. This has been designed and largely built by students from Ipswich School and we are delighted that one of our corporate members continues to make such a valuable contribution to the Park. The garden has been generously funded by the Papworth Trust whose focus on helping the disabled and disadvantaged benefits us all.

Whether you come to see the Olympic flame, enjoy the vibrant sounds of Music Day or revel in the beautiful natural surroundings, there is something for everyone in the Park this summer.

Richard Wilson

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Friends of Christchurch Park “Brass on the Grass” concerts

We very much hope that you will be able to attend one or more of our four Brass on the Grass concerts this summer. These hugely popular concerts take place on Sunday afternoons by the Arts and Crafts Shelter in the Arboretum and although we provide some seating, you are encouraged to bring your own chairs/rugs and of course a picnic or other refreshments. The ParkMobile will be giving free trips around the Park and an ice-cream van will be in attendance. All concerts run for about two hours, beginning at 2.30pm, and are completely FREE. Once again, we are extremely grateful to our sponsors who make these concerts possible.

8 July	The Ipswich and Norwich Co-op Band sponsored by The Ipswich Society
15 July	Suffolk Phoenix Brass sponsored by a generous Friend of Christchurch Park
22 July	The Ipswich Hospital Band sponsored by Scrutton Bland
29 July	Stacks of Sax sponsored by The Lions Club of Ipswich

Other events in the Park this summer

Information and booking: for Park events (P) contact the Reg Driver Visitor Centre 01473 252435, for Mansion events (M) telephone 01473 433554, and for Ip-Art events (Ip) see www.ip-art.com or call 01473 433100. See also the Friends’ website, www.focp.org.uk, for more details.

Margaret Catchpole and the Cobbold Family (P) Discover the stories of the Cobbold family and Ipswich legend Margaret Catchpole (2012 is the 250th anniversary of her birth) at this free display which can be seen on most days at the Reg Driver Centre. See the Friends’ website for availability information.

Park History Walks (P) These free, 90-minute walks are at 10.30am on the following Wednesdays: 13 June, 11 July, 8 August and 10 October. Please book in advance via the Reg Driver Visitor Centre.

Friday 15 June to Sunday 8 July – Tardis Trail (M) Get your time-traveling hat on and try out a Mansion multi-era quiz trail. Drop-in from 10am to 4pm (Tues-Sun), 50p per sheet.

Saturday 16 June – Suffolk Pride 2012 (P) 1pm to 7pm. “A day full of fun, diversity, laughter, celebration, live music and performance for everyone.”

Friday 22 June to Saturday 14 July – The Spectacular Dancing Spiegeltent (Mirror tent) (Ip) Daytime workshops and spectacular evening events in association with Dance East.

Wednesday 27 June – The Pantaloons: The Importance of Being Earnest (Ip) 7.30pm. The Pantaloons’ anarchic take on Oscar Wilde’s classic comedy of manners.

Saturday 30 June – ColourDome (Ip) Noon to 5pm.

Saturday 30 June – Global Rhythm (Ip) Noon to 6pm. A colourful celebration of worldwide cultures.

Saturday 30 June – Model boats on the Round Pond 10am to 4pm. Ipswich Transport Museum.

Saturday 30 June – The Last Night of the Jubilee Proms (Ip) 8pm. This open-air picnic concert will feature the Heart of England Philharmonic Orchestra and special guest stars Natasha Marsh and Nathan Pacheco. The event will also include a spectacular firework finale.

Sunday 1 July – Ipswich Music Day (Ip) Noon - 8pm One of the largest free music events in the UK.

Sunday 1 and 8 July – Ipswich Art School Gallery Pop-up Print Shop (M) 12pm to 2pm. Make a poster or decorate a T-shirt using basic screen-print stencil techniques. £5 per item (£3 if you bring own shirt). No need to book, just drop in.

Wednesday 4 July – Portraits and Panels (M) 2pm. A closer look at some of the earliest images from the Tudor and Stuart periods and what they tell us about the people and thinking of the time. Friends of Ipswich Museums, £4 per head, booking required. Tel. 01473 433681 or email ericab@btinternet.com

Thursday/Friday 5/6 July – Olympic Torch Relay 5 July event is for the 10,000 ticket holders only but there will be a big screen outside relaying the stage show alongside many other activities, free to all. The torch leaves the Mansion at 6.35am on 6 July. For details see www.ipswich.gov.uk/olympictorchrelay

Saturday 7 July – Passing the Time (M) 2pm. Find out about the Mansion's large collection of clocks, mostly by local makers. Friends of Ipswich Museums, booking details as for 4 July.

Saturday 7 July – Open Air Screenings (Ip) 10.30am. Cars 2 (PG), 8pm Mamma Mia! (PG).

Sunday 8 July – Indian Mela (Ip) Noon - 6pm. A rich and colourful celebration of South Asian culture.

Thursday 2 August – Wine and Talk “The Mildenhall Treasure” (M) 7pm to 8.30pm. Officially one of the top ten treasures of the British Museum, the 1600 year old silver Roman dinner set is an astounding example of the craftsmanship, artistic talent and wealth of our ancestors. For the first time since its discovery the Great Dish from the dinner set will be back in Suffolk. This talk will introduce you to this truly magnificent object. £7 per person, drink included.

Fridays 3, 10 and 24 August – Pony Rides for Children (P) 10am to 3pm by the Westerfield Road entrance. Come and meet the ponies from Newton Hall Equitation Centre. Price around £3.

Monday to Friday 20 to 24 August – Children's Waterfront Activities Week at the RDVC (P) Please contact the Reg Driver Centre for more information.

Wednesday 29 August – Bat Walk (Ranger event) 8pm to 9.30pm. Price £1 for children, £2 for adults, booking essential by telephoning 01473 433994. Long-sleeved clothing advisable.

Mondays and Tuesdays from 4 September to 5 November – Waterfront Arts Studio Drawing and Photography Classes 6.15pm to 9.30pm. For detailed information and to book a place see www.waterfrontartsstudio.com or telephone 01473 232069.

Sunday 9 September – Bandstand Marathon (P) 1pm. Details tbc.

Sunday 9 September – Cycling: The Tour of Britain (P) The Tour of Britain begins in East Anglia for the first time, with Ipswich hosting the Grand Depart of Stage One as riders head to the finish on the Norfolk Showground. Route passes through the Park, further details tbc.

Wednesday 12 September – Special Park History Walk with afternoon tea (P) 2pm. Booking essential by calling the Reg Driver Visitor Centre. £6 per person.

Friday 21 September – Discovering the house (M) 7pm. Experience the special atmosphere of the Mansion at night after the crowds have gone home with this guided tour in the quiet of the evening. Cost £8 including wine and light refreshments. Meet at 6.45pm the Bolton Lane entrance. Booking essential by telephoning 01473 433681 or emailing ericab@btinternet.com.

The final pieces in the jigsaw of “Mabel”



MABEL'S MATE
May 2012



MABEL AT HER NESTING ROOST April 2012

This spring we have seen the completion of the “jigsaw” in the life of Mabel, our nationally famous tawny owl. As usual, Mabel disappeared from her roost early in the year only to reappear in April. We had assumed that she was carrying out her breeding duties and on 6 May she was seen in her familiar roost looking quite agitated. The reason? Below her on a smaller branch was a tawny owlet!



owls were gone from the familiar tree but in one of the smaller trees opposite the roost site was Mabel and her mate, the first time he had been seen with her, together with three young tawny owls. Because of these sightings, we now know that Mabel is definitely female because when she disappears in spring, she is carrying out her female tawny owl duties. Not only that, we have now

We know that this is her mate and we also now know that the area where Mabel lives supports at least one family of owls. Analysis of the owl pellets found beneath the youngsters has confirmed that the young are being fed on a diet of woodmice, housemice and both young and adult rats. The parent owls will now stay with their young for about 3 months.

We have Paul Sherman to thank for his observations and his lovely photographs that have helped to resolve the story of Mabel.

Reg Snook

Ipswich School's Green Team helps to build the new butterfly garden

Regular visitors to the Park may have noticed that a few new flower beds have appeared north of the Wilderness Pond adjacent to the old croquet lawn. The area has been designed and built (with a fair bit of help from head gardener David) by students from Ipswich School who are part of a weekly conservation group known as the "Green Team".

The Green Team has been involved with work in Christchurch Park for nearly ten years and has helped clear leaves, pick up litter, tend hedgerows, put up revetments in the Wildlife Reserve and clear the Wet Meadow. But the team has longed to get involved in a really significant project and just over a year ago Sam Pollard bravely offered them a chance to design and build a butterfly garden. The team, which comprises about 15 students aged from 14 to 16 years, ran an internal competition to design the garden, based on a detailed brief provided by Sam. The design chosen by David and Sam was largely the work of a Year 11 student from Hong Kong and was based on a couple of curved paths leading to a circular seating area, surrounded by perennial borders.

Building work started in the winter and the team spent hour after hour digging up the grass and cutting the flower beds. They even took two truckloads of sods to Snow Hill, manhandling them up the slope and filling in gulleys there. It was very heavy duty work, but the students seemed to relish the challenge and were able to shift several tonnes of earth in just one afternoon. More recently, a path has been laid and covered with tarmac (with a stone covering to match the other paths in the Park to follow). On 23 and 24 May, the large flower bed was planted with a range of shrubs and perennials which will attract insects, especially butterflies.

The garden has been designed to provide a high degree of sensory impact – bright colours and strong smells. Plants have been chosen carefully to provide a range of pollen-rich flowers from early summer through to the autumn. Those which are particularly attractive to butterflies and bees include rudbeckia, geraniums, coreopsis, verbena, buddleia, lobelia, potentilla, lavender, achillea and sedum. Anyone who saw Sarah Raven's recent television programme about how Harrogate's parks department have changed their planting plans to try to attract more insects will know just what a difference the right selection of plants can make, and it is really hoped that this area will be buzzing with butterflies, bees and other insects on warm and sunny days.

Further work is planned. There is going to be a central seating area offering views across the Wilderness Pond and on towards Christchurch Mansion and there are also plans for interpretation boards explaining the planting and also the likely wildlife that will be observable in the new garden.

The whole project is being funded by grants applied for by the Papworth Trust, one of the East of England's leading disability charities. Members of the Green Team hope to continue their involvement by helping to manage the garden in the future (alongside the Papworth Trust) and will incorporate this into some of their other activities in the Park.

Peter Gray

To learn more about butterflies and how you can encourage them into your garden, visit these websites: www.butterfly-conservation.org, www.ukbutterflies.co.uk and www.bringbackthebutterflies.org.uk. For information specific to Suffolk moths and butterflies, see www.suffolkbutterflies.org.uk and www.suffolkmothgroup.org.uk.

A history of the Arboretum – part 3

In our recent newsletters we have been looking at the early history of Ipswich's first public park, the Upper Arboretum. We have seen how the Public Health Act of 1848 encouraged the Borough to form a committee "to determine on the propriety of selecting, in the vicinity of the town, an eligible spot for the formation of a park or place of healthful out-door recreation for all classes". Despite an "advantageous site" being suggested "consisting of two fields in Upper Bolton, lying between the Henley Road and Mr Fonnereau's park", from the outset the Council insisted that they would not pay for the park and discussions rumbled on for the next three years. It wasn't until 1 March 1851 that the idea became tangible when the *Ipswich Journal* announced that "A project for establishing a place of recreation for the inhabitants of Ipswich has long been in contemplation... During this week subscriptions have been solicited, and a committee formed to carry the plans into execution."

The Ipswich Arboretum Society's Prospectus reprinted in our last edition aimed to elicit support for the idea of a public park, and on the 15 March 1851 the *Ipswich Journal* reported that "The committee are forwarding this project with energy. During the week a number of men have been employed in levelling the ground, removing the turf, and forming the sites of the principal walks. Every exertion is making to get the grounds ready for planting, as soon as possible, in order to render the season available. We understand that two lodges will be built for the keepers of the grounds, and that a lake will be formed in the valley next Christchurch Park for aquatic birds."

The construction of the Arboretum, however, was anything but straightforward. A sale notice in the *Ipswich Journal* on 1 February that year had announced a large sale of plants by a Mr J. Burgess "who is leaving the County". Yet only six weeks later we see in the same paper that "Messrs. Cook and Sons are favoured with directions from the Proprietors of the Ipswich Arboretum, to submit by auction on Wednesday and Thursday, March 26th and 27th, 1851, without reserve, the Stock of American and other Hardy Shrubs, Harbaceous [sic] Plants, Fruit, Forest, & Ornamental Trees, which they purchased of Mr. Burgess, but for which they now have no occasion." It seems that the committee overreached itself, for this vast collection included (amongst many others) 3,000 Roses, 400 Rhododendrons, 350 Azaleas ("Glazenwood Hybrid varieties, unequalled in beauty by any yet raised in this country"), 600 fruit seedlings, 1,700 Oaks, 2,800 Laurels, 2,000 Yews, 16,000 White and Black Thorn, 500 Laburnums, 1,000 herbaceous plants and even "250 Varieties of Seedling Potatoes".

Perhaps these plants were at odds with the Arboretum's designs. On 1 March the *Ipswich Journal* announced that a plan had been procured from "Mr. Pontey, who designed the plans for an arboretum at Derby, and other towns", although a letter from "D.W." a couple of weeks later correctly pointed out that Derby "was undoubtedly designed by the late Mr. Loudon". I can find nothing more about Pontey's involvement, but William Pontey (1791-1862) – the IBC website erroneously says Poutney – worked with his uncle, also William Pontey (1782-1830), who was well-known for a number of well-regarded horticultural books including *The Profitable Planter* (1808) and *The Rural Improver* (1822), in a family nursery business in Kirkheaton near Huddersfield. Despite the younger Pontey's short obituary in *The Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser* saying that "for a lengthened period of years he enjoyed the liberal patronage of many of the principal nobility and gentry of the

kingdom”, we know that his plans for the design of the Nottingham Arboretum (which opened in 1852) were rejected, and Ipswich may be his only public park.

The *Ipswich Journal* article of 1 March goes on to say that “A bridle-way passes through the midst, which will divide the ground appropriated to the public from that reserved for subscribers. It is proposed that the northern extremity be open as a playground for youth. At the meetings of the committee, it was considered that the present amount of the subscriptions warranted the commencement of the design.” It is not clear when the privileged subscribers first had access to the Arboretum, but its construction was no doubt hastened by Prince Albert’s visit to lay the foundation stone at Ipswich School on 4 July 1851. An exhibition of the Ipswich Horticultural Society was held in the Arboretum on Thursday 11 September which included a performance by the Band of the Second Dragoon Guards (an early precursor of our Brass on the Grass concerts...). In December of that year, mention is made of “the lowering of the Arboretum fence”.

By May of 1852, however, the *Ipswich Journal* reflected that prospects for a public opening were not bright: clearly the Burgess plant purchase debacle was proving an impediment to the Arboretum’s development:

We have received some information respecting this place of recreation, which excuses those who have taken upon themselves the management from the charges of neglecting the public interest, and setting aside the authority of the committee. It ought to be well known that there is a very large debt incurred on account of the Arboretum, which the subscriptions already received are far from being sufficient to liquidate. Under these circumstances, some gentlemen have kindly advanced money to defray pressing liabilities; and we understand that, as soon as a satisfactory statement can be made, a meeting of the committee will be summoned. The delay that has arisen in throwing open a portion of the grounds to the public, is caused by the wish that the newly sown grass should have acquired firm root before subjected to the trampling of many feet. We regret to learn that the funds for completing the objects of the promoters are in so unsatisfactory a state. Nevertheless, we cannot believe that a project which tends so greatly to the benefit of the town will be suffered to fall for want of pecuniary assistance. A large sum is now required, and we trust an appeal to the gentry and clergy of the county will not be in vain.

However, the town’s frustration at not being able to gain access to the public park that was first promised some five years earlier is evident in another piece from the *Ipswich Journal* of 24 July 1852:

The present management of this inclosure is deserving of strong censure, and we again call attention to it, in the hope that the subscribers will insist upon the redemption of the pledge that a portion, at least, of the grounds should be open to the public. There should also be some enquiry into the management, that a stop may be put to some irregularities which have of late transpired. We know no reason why the gates should be left unfastened, or why women of questionable character should be admitted to the Arboretum after darkness has set in. Under the present secret system, we hold that those who have taken upon themselves the

management, are responsible for the abuses; and we cannot too strongly condemn the conduct of those who would convert the Arboretum, intended for the harmless recreation of the public, into an hiding-place for their illicit amusements. The only remedy for these and other abuses lies in the appointment of a Committee of persons of repute for honesty and integrity. As conducted at the present time, the Arboretum is a reproach to the town.

In response, a furious letter the following week from J. Allen Ransome (who had first proposed the Arboretum) asserts that “the inferences drawn from an exaggerated statement are calculated not only to damage the institution, but to give serious annoyance to individuals who were utterly unconscious of offence in the case referred to”. He states merely that “three ladies desirous of a stroll” had been locked in after an unfortunate mix-up over keys: “After very close enquiry, I can most unhesitatingly assert, that nothing, having the most remote approach to the abuses suggested in the paragraph alluded to, has ever been observed.” He continues: “The sole difficulty in the way of carrying out, to the fullest extent, the advantages contemplated by the Institution, lies in the question of finance: and I trust that, ere many days, even this may be removed.”

Ransome was as good as his word – in part at least. On 14 August we read that “It is with much pleasure that we announce that the Committee have decided upon granting admission during the months of August and September to all persons for two days in the week. On Sundays and on Wednesdays, from two o’clock in the afternoon until dusk, the gates will be open to the public free of charge.” The model was to be the Derby Arboretum whose regulations were to be adopted and whose financial success was trumpeted. However, “we cannot as yet speak favourably of the success, in a pecuniary point of view, of the Ipswich arboreta. The cost has been about £2,660, of which £1,250 remains as a debt, and the annual subscriptions do not yet amount to a sufficient sum to cover the current expences... The excess of expenditure [the original budget was £400] is mainly attributable to certain great improvements upon the original plan, such as the communication between the two portions by means of tunnel bridges, the entrance from Fonnerreau-street [sic], the extension of a piece of water into the grounds, and the invisible fence separating the arboretum from Christ Church-park. These were so great improvements which perhaps might not hereafter be available, that we cannot blame the Committee for the increased expenditure. As the Arboretum is now planned no town in the kingdom can have a more agreeable place of recreation, and it is one the natural beauties of which will rarely be excelled... We have no doubt that if the skies be propitious the first public day in the Arboretum will be welcomed by many thousands, and that the privilege may become a lasting one is our heartfelt wish.” The problem, however, was money – “the list of donors is very small”. Nonetheless, “It is impossible to think otherwise than that the nobility, clergy, and gentry of Suffolk who are ever forward in promoting useful and beneficent objects, will aid an undertaking which is conducive to the health, recreation, and social improvement of the working classes and their families.”

Stirring words perhaps. But it would be another year before the “working classes and their families” would have access to a truly public park, as we will see in our next newsletter.

Richard Wilson

Dangerous dogs

Subsequent to the article on dogs in our recent newsletter, the government has issued new guidelines for judges that will see owners of dangerously out of control dogs which harm others in a public place such as the Park facing up to 18 months in prison (with the sentence rising to the legal maximum of two years in exceptional cases). The Sentencing Council has said that, from August, this tougher approach will see more offenders jailed, more given community orders and fewer being discharged. Courts will also be encouraged to ban irresponsible owners who put the public at risk from keeping dogs, order genuinely dangerous dogs to be put down and arrange compensation for victims.

Within the Borough, Park Patrol officers are currently undergoing training and are already handing out fines (where appropriate) to owners whose dogs are out of control or who fail to clean up after their animals.

How soon we forget...



History repeats itself

Last month finally saw the removal of the mast from the doomed wind turbine. An advert from the *Ipswich Journal* of November 1851 (just after the Arboretum first opened) shows however that the winds of change are always blowing... "To be sold by private contract – All that Newly-built Tower Windmill now standing on Bolton, near Christchurch Park."

The Friends' Committee 2012-13

For full contact details, please go to the Friends' website: www.focp.org.uk

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Christchurch Park's new "Park Run" and "Trim Trail"

In the year that the Olympics come to London, outdoor exercise machines and other gym equipment are cropping up in parks and other public spaces around the country. Ipswich is no exception, and soon there will be two additions to Christchurch Park. A way-marked "Park Run" will be unveiled in June and later in the year three pieces of wooden gym equipment will be added, in all likelihood adjacent to the path that runs up the west of the Park near to the Bridle Way. The Friends have been consulted on design and positioning – we are keen that any additions of this sort are not visually intrusive – and thanks go to Councillors Inga Lockington and Andrew Cann who are funding the equipment from their Locality budgets.

Outdoor gyms – sometimes called adult playgrounds – have been growing in popularity in recent years, as Sophie Robehmed observed in a recent article for the BBC. The Great Outdoor Gym Company (GOGC) was one of the first companies to specialise in providing this sort of equipment in the UK. Launching in 2007, they drew inspiration from the Chinese government who were installing outdoor gym equipment in parks. "Cost and accessibility are the two main barriers for people wanting to exercise", says Charlotte Tarrant of GOGC. "Adult playgrounds remove these barriers and that's why their popularity has grown." Indeed, the London Borough of Camden now has nine such outdoor gyms – the most of any local authority in the country – and it cites research which suggests that 26% of those who use outdoor gyms have never exercised before. The run-up to the Olympics has seen a surge in demand for equipment, with orders apparently up 1,200% this year alone.

Adult playgrounds are supposedly an example of "nudge" thinking that has become popular with governments on both sides of the Atlantic. The idea is that humans are innately lazy and so are more inclined to take the easy option. The "nudge" is intended to gently guide us in the right direction – whether for our own good or to improve society. "Nudging never involves making anyone do anything they do not want to do nor does it involve telling people what to do", says Richard Thaler, co-author of *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Apparently we don't like being told what to do and we often don't respond well to advice, even when well-intended. The Department of Health recommends that adults do 150 minutes of physical activity each week and yet many of us do not achieve this. Council's such as IBC face problems if they focus all of their exercise promotion on leisure centres as there are not many of them and people can find them rather intimidating places. The sterile conditions of a gym, not to mention the fear of embarrassment they can instil, are obstacles for many, but as personal trainer Darren Putt observes, there isn't the same association with outdoor gyms: "Adult playgrounds help to overcome the problem that exercise has become a chore for many – few people find plugging away on the treadmill a pleasure. But by positioning these playgrounds in convenient locations, people will be more likely to take the opportunity to exercise when it presents itself." "My nudge mantra is 'make it easy'", adds Thaler: "if you want to encourage people to do something like exercise, remove as many obstacles as you can to that happening. If an outdoor gym does that, then hooray."

Outdoor gyms are aimed at adults of all ages and fitness levels and they are low-impact and intuitive to use (instructions are included). In Southampton, forty-two year old Margot Bloom found herself using her local adult playground: "I am able to do resistance training as a part of my dog-walking routine. Runners stop to use it and serious body builders use it to top off their workout. In the summer, the adult playground becomes a bit of a social event with everyone helping each other. I'm not fond of indoor gyms - or their prices."

So what's next for the adult playground? The latest product is the green energy gym where people create electricity by working out: as they peddle away on a bike, and the first of these "eco wellness" zones recently opened in Hull. It seems that more nudging is likely to follow...

A Morning's Light Work



Some years ago, when the Friends of Christchurch Park was in its infancy, a few of us thought that it would be a good idea to have a visible project on the Park. Because at that time we all lived near the Park Road entrance, perhaps selfishly we decided to work on the borders there. We enlisted help from the Probation Service and Ipswich School to do some of the heavy work such as removing dead shrubs and “weed” trees and we then set to pruning and cutting back so that we could literally see the wood for the trees. The Friends funded some shrubs to fill up gaps, soil improver was added and many, many trailer loads of weeds and clippings were taken off site.

The Lottery plan for the borders differed considerably from our amateur (but nonetheless knowledgeable) contributions to the planting and rather high-handedly (we thought) the designers planned to remove most of our plants and replace them with a Gertrude Jekyll like scheme going from white to red, rainbow like, along the borders. Reality proved to be rather different and what we got were inappropriate plants that in some cases died almost immediately. All the while we worked steadily on, waiting for the day when the Park was handed back by the contractors. Now we know what likes living in the borders and our successes have put on lots of growth despite no water being on site. There will continue to be discussions about what to do with the yew trees, which we feel will need serious pruning.

We meet monthly for a morning's work during the good weather, pruning, weeding, clearing excess leaf litter and waging war on alkanet, ivy and bitter cress. Park staff provide us with a trailer for the rubbish several times during our work sessions. It's not always easy talking to passers-by and trying to be original with our responses to old favourites such as “you can come and do my garden” and “you shouldn't be doing the Council's work”. We are also convinced that some people think that we are doing unpaid work as punishment for crimes! By and large people are complimentary and understand that if we didn't do the work then it just wouldn't get done. One border is currently being affected by developers working on the building next door, but they have made a donation to the Friends and will make good the area on completion. The Friends have generously agreed to pay for some more healthy and robust plants in the autumn, and so we continue. There will always be work to do so why not come along and help to swell our numbers? We meet on the first Monday of every month during the better weather and for more details please contact Ann Snook on 01473 251037.

Robert Burlinson

Spring Bird Walk and Dawn Chorus Walk

The 18 Friends who attended our spring walk on 17 March were greeted with rain and a leaden sky. However, even as we assembled, a nuthatch was seen and heard in trees adjacent to the Reg Driver Visitor Centre which was an excellent start. As so often happens, the gulls on the Round Pond were solely black-headed, a mixture of adults and immature birds; it was remarked that these adults would probably soon be leaving Britain to breed in Eastern Europe. We managed to track down a noisy green woodpecker in front of the Mansion which eventually flew off into St Margaret's Churchyard. The most spectacular sight of the morning was of five Mandarin ducks on fence posts surrounding the Mediaeval Pond. Four males accompanied one female with much posturing and crest-raising; we got really close to them because they were so engrossed in their activity – a magnificent sight!

We noted some spectacular, and very noisy, territorial aggression between rival Canada geese on the Wilderness Pond, which even involved the fleeing birds having to submerge completely to escape their attackers! Sharp eyes located a treecreeper on the main Wilderness Pond island. We listened to great and coal tits calling from dense vegetation in the Reserve where Reg Snook carefully explained the differences between the various nestboxes on display – let's hope they have been well used in 2012.

Jackdaws and stock doves were noted in trees adjacent to the icehouse. We had excellent views of two jays in the vicinity of the bowling green – it was explained that although jays are beautiful birds, they are also unscrupulous nest thieves of both eggs and young. Two treecreepers were watched ascending an ancient tree trunk near to the ice-cream pavilion and a nuthatch was heard calling in the species' traditional area near to the children's playground. As we walked back to the Visitor Centre a goldcrest was heard singing from the bushes adjacent to the tennis courts – though several of those present were gracious enough to admit that this song was too high-pitched for them to hear...

The weather in the days prior to our Dawn Chorus Walk on 12 May had also been distinctly inclement so it was with some considerable relief that a dozen FoCP members met in clear, calm, conditions at 4.30am in the Bridleway. Blackbirds and robins were already in good voice and we soon heard wren, chiffchaff and blackcap singing in the Park's north-west corner. Before long we were listening to coal tits, blue tits, goldcrests, stock doves, great tits, two chiffchaffs, two great spotted woodpeckers and up to four blackcaps. Dawn chorus walks in recent years have failed to find song thrushes, so it was a pleasant surprise to hear one singing by the Wilderness Pond – let's hope that this signals an improvement in the fortunes of this species.

Two sparrowhawks flew together overhead, but the most unexpected sighting was of a common buzzard heading west high over the Park's central area. Gulls were heard calling even as we assembled, and by about 5.00am as many as 45 lesser black-backed gulls had gathered on the Park's open area. The complete absence of young mallards and moorhens on the ponds probably indicated that the gulls had been up to their murderous antics. A family group of two adult Canada geese with five tiny goslings on the Wilderness Pond was much appreciated – let's hope that the adults successfully defend their young against the gulls. Of the Park's star species, the Mandarin duck, we located four males, which led us to speculate that the females were tending either eggs or young elsewhere in the Park.

Many thanks go to the hardy souls who accompanied me on both of these walks, and particularly to Reg Snook, who as always provided a wealth of background information.

Philip Murphy

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Christchurch Park Boules Club

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Sam's Notes

Oh the challenges of managing a Park!

Firstly there is the weather – if it's not one of the driest springs on record (2011) it's the wettest. That's the wettest followed immediately by temperatures of 25 degrees plus! We all joked about the hosepipe ban followed immediately by all that rain in April/May, but now we have had a spell when the sun and wind dries the ground very quickly. We are really in need of water again now for our new trees and shrubs but with the ban we cannot draw from our usual sources. We are combating this by drawing some water from the Wilderness Pond for our new plants. We are permitted to take up to 20m³ of water a day; however, we will not even take that amount in a week.

Secondly, there are the events. What fantastic events we have this year! All of the usual IpArt events as well as a return of the Spiegel tent (Mirrored Tent). The Spiegel tent is here for three weeks and has some really great acts performing there (see www.ip-art.com for details). On top of these we have the Diamond Jubilee (though the two days of celebration will be over by the time you read this) and we get to be an overnight stop on the Olympic Torch route. Weather permitting this event is likely to be bigger than Music Day and Christchurch will once again be the centre of attention. It is extra important in busy years such as this to protect the Park and we have shown that we are prepared to do that by adjusting the set up for the Historic Vehicle Run – keeping the vehicles on the paths when the grass was so wet. Let's hope the weather performs better over the summer!

Finally, there is the ongoing problem of wildlife against public safety. Christchurch is very popular and we will always have issues of how to maintain a public park whilst nurturing our natural residents. In the spring we were forced to fell a few trees which had been highlighted as "high risk". The trees were all inspected before removal and no nests or bat roosts were disturbed. It is clear that if we don't do anything about these trees once we have highlighted a problem we become culpable in case of any harm to the public.

On to new things... We have some new elements in the Park coming very soon. A "Park Run" is to be unveiled in June. This is simply a way-marked route around the Park encouraging healthy exercise. We will also be adding a few bits of low-key gym equipment to aid any joggers and others who want to exercise further (see page 9 of the newsletter for more details). This equipment has been funded by Councillors Lockington and Cann from their Locality budgets. Finally, we have a new Putting Green on the former croquet lawn in the Lower Arboretum. Operating during the school holidays this will cost £1.50 per player (plus deposit) and equipment can be obtained from the from the Ark kiosk.

I hope that you all enjoy the Park this summer!

Sam Pollard,
Area Supervisor Christchurch Park & Central, telephone 01473 252473

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members to the Friends:

Eddie Skales, Michael & Penelope Stranix, Sheila Barnes, James & Michele Runnacles, Ms S Pryor, Sally Wright, Cathy Greef and Judith Newman