NEWSLETTER No. 26

SPRING & SUMMER 2014

THREE IN A ROW!

We heard in July that we have won the right to fly Keep Britain Tidy's prestigious Green Flag for 2014-15, our third successive year.

Cllr Ron Hetherington, Mayor of Rushcliffe, with Trevor Jones, Eric Bryson, Mollie Jacques & Alan Barlow of FMP, plus flag and one regular, four-legged, park user. (Photo by Dave Whitby)

The park was judged in the "Community" section, where the involvement of local residents is a crucial criterion, which FMP meets by its very existence. Other boxes which must be ticked include accessibility, biodiversity, sustainability, safety, litter management, education and information ..... the list is very long!

FMP is physically the most active group in the three-tier care structure concerned with the park, but we are obviously very much the junior partner.

Paul Phillips, Community Environment Officer, is our link with Rushcliffe Borough Council. He can give advice on, for example, weed control issues, and he also sometimes dips into the borough's conservation kitty on our behalf.

An excellent working relationship has developed between East Leake Parish Council and The Friends, which has contributed greatly to the generally improving state of the park. Mainly through the contact we have with Parish Clerk, Lesley Bancroft, the council is always supportive of FMP projects, and responsive to ideas about management practice, for instance the annual mowing regime.

There has been less innovation this year, nothing to compare with the major path improvement programme we were able to fund over the last two years. But there **is** now a second "Bee World" in Bateman Field, close to the one created last summer as part of The Friends of the Earth "Bee-Cause" campaign; these and various other wildflower sowings have all made a colourful show much appreciated by insect and human visitors alike.

See p2 (arboretum) and p4 (willow sculpture)

For information only.

A Forest School comes to a park near you!

It's likely that not many Friends will have heard of the Forest School movement.

It is *"an innovative educational approach to outdoor play and learning.....the philosophy of Forest Schools is to encourage and inspire individuals of any age through positive outdoor experiences"* (from the Forest Schools website - www.forestschools.com).

Lantern Lane School has been granted permission by Rushcliffe Borough Council to run a series of Forest School lessons in an area of Gibson's Field. Two teachers have completed the necessary training and, starting in September, will be bringing groups of 8-9 year-olds to the park on a weekly basis. Each time they come, they will create a camp, and each time they leave, they should leave no trace - now that's woodcraft for you!

So, don't be surprised if you notice some unusual activity, and if anybody asks you what on earth is going on, please enlighten them.

It sounds like a lot of fun, with a serious purpose.

It is with sadness that we report the death of Ian Weekley, who in 2001 became the first chairman of The Friends of Meadow Park.

This was not an easy role, given the sometimes conflicting objectives in our multi-purpose park. With his love of wildlife, especially birds, he was by nature an environmental conservationist, but he was no pedant, and was just as concerned to make the park as pleasant as possible for the casual user.

We all benefited from his wisdom, common sense and great good humour.

THE ARBORETUM

With the planting of an alder, a black poplar that Neil Hunter kindly supplied, and our third beech (now in a more favourable position on the highest spot in the park, close to the Bateman Road entrance), we can say that East Leake's Arboretum is at last complete. There are thirty three individual trees, which represent practically all native British species, together with a few interesting more recent arrivals on these shores.

Come Autumn, visitors may notice a third oak tree on display. The Sessile Oak in the original planting turns out to be probably not a true specimen (maybe a hybrid cross with an English Oak), so we have recently ordered what we hope will be right this time. The differences between the two species are quite subtle, so in due course people will be able to compare them. The new one is being given as a family donation, which is greatly appreciated.

The new Beech

QR Coding

This will be installed in the very near future. Smart-phone users will then be able to access comprehensive information about each tree as they explore the arboretum.

Tree Sponsorship Scheme

As previously reported, for £10 anyone may sign the "Arboretum Book", choosing a tree and adding whatever dedication they wish. The proceeds are being ring-fenced for the long-term maintenance of the arboretum. The response so far has been very generous, but there are plenty more spaces to fill. The book is kept in the Parish Office (open weekday mornings). To make alternative arrangements, phone 852217 or email meadowpark@eastleake.net.

Information Board

We are actively seeking funding for a fixed information board (like the green boards at the entrances to the park) relating just to the arboretum, to be sited midway along the Bateman Field footpath. If we succeed, it should be in place within the next few months.

Leaflets

In addition to the detailed explanatory leaflets we produced last year, there is now a junior version, entirely researched and designed by a group of pupils from Lantern Lane School, under the guidance of their teacher, Frances Groombridge. Both versions are available in the Parish Office or Library.

SUMMER WALKS

Some Bird Spotters spotted!

We managed to arrange just two guided walks this year.

Ian Morrissey kindly stepped in, at short notice, to lead a bird-spotting walk. Unfortunately, only a few people turned up, probably because we had very little advertising time. There were plenty of birds in evidence, however, perhaps rather easier to hear than see, given the wonderful foliage cover they enjoy in the park in late Spring.

A month later, Ann Weekley and Kevin Gibbons led a combined butterfly and wildflower walk, a successful repeat of last year's event. The star attraction, as usual, was our orchids (someone counted twenty-two in Hall Field), but the masses of meadow cranesbill, birdsfoot trefoil, ox-eye daisies and, for the first time, corn marigolds, were attracting more attention from the plentiful local insect population.

"ACTIVITY DAYS"

JANUARY

Eleven volunteers came for the first session of the year. Tasks included:

- Hedge laying on the south side of Hall Field
- Selective chain saw management of woody growth in Hall Field.
- Repair & replacement of bird boxes
- Compiling a tool inventory of FMP equipment - we've accumulated quite a stock over the years.

Hedge layers adopt some strange postures!

FEBRUARY

A party of just eight managed to:

- Put up 4 repaired nest boxes
- Pollard willows in Gibson's Field (offcuts saved as withies in readiness for planned willow sculpture)
- Carry on with the hedge-laying in Hall Field

MARCH

There were 11 of us, in 2 main groups

One group created a second butterfly-friendly area near to last year's at the Bateman Road entrance.

Another group assaulted American dogwood in Play Field.

APRIL

Our annual Spring Clean Day, with 12 people present. While most tackled the known hotspots in the fields, a couple of us donned our new armpit-high waders and had a go in the brooks.

Amongst our pickings were the usual gas lighters and bottles, but new for 2014 was a discarded air rifle in a case (in Gibson's Field near the picnic bench). We also pulled an umbrella from the brook, along with a traffic cone.

Perhaps we should have put them on e-Bay?

MAY

Seven of us attended. Tasks done were;

- Securing of tree stakes in the arboretum.
- Freeing off tight tree bands.
- Lopping some overhanging branches around the park.
- Re-instatement of supporting stakes in hedge laid last Dec/Jan (these had been removed by some very unofficial den-builders)
- Removal of dead beech in Gibson's Field

JUNE

Today there were seven of us:

- Dock pulling in Oak Meadow
- Planting violets on a bald patch near path in Oak Meadow
- Cutting back overgrowth on path through Stonebridge Field

The anti-dock brigade

JULY

There were 8 of us today.

We pulled Ragwort in Little Meadow, Oak Meadow, Bateman and Gibson's Field, in readiness for mowing.

Any Cinnabar moth caterpillars found were re-located to Lagoon Field, which was not scheduled for mowing until September.

NB All sessions include picking litter

2014 Total volunteer hours so far - 137

EXTRA WORK SESSIONS

Friends contributed a further 42 hours of unscheduled work (January to July):

Coppicing willows in the osier bed in Gibson's Field. Preparing withies for "living sculpture".

Making the "willow house" sculpture. Watering as required.

Repairing sculpture after it was vandalised.

Strimming the "wildflower ribbon" and "bee worlds", sowing wildflower seed.

How to contact the
FRIENDS OF MEADOW PARK
c/o The Parish Office,
45 Main Street, East Leake, LE12 6PF,
tel: 852217 (weekday mornings)
or email our Secretary:
meadowpark@eastleake.net

THE SAD SAGA OF THE WILLOW HOUSE

1. Friends & pupils from Lantern Lane building the house.
2. Job done - four happy builders!
3. Wrecked within days.
4. Repaired by John Roulstone
5. Wrecked again, and now being left to grow until next Spring, when we hope John Roulstone will be able to work his magic again

A so-called "living sculpture" had long been on FMP's wish-list, and early this year we cut willow stems (withies) from the osier bed that had been planted specially for the purpose, then bundled and soaked them ready for weaving. One day in April, a team of volunteers, led by expert basket-maker John Roulstone, joined forces with a group of pupils from Lantern Lane, and built what would have grown into a leafy shelter from which to view the park. Many people said what a great idea it was, but as illustrated above, their satisfaction was sadly short-lived. Even more than for the adults, it was a hard way for the children to learn what stupid behaviour others are capable of.

THE MOWING CONUNDRUM

Farmers and nature conservationists have conflicting requirements when it comes to looking after grasslands, and how to strike a balance is a matter of continuing debate.

The farmer who mows our meadows would like to cut them in early July, when the hay is at its best, but is willing to wait till the end of the month, by which time the majority of wildflowers have shed their seed, butterflies and bees have had their fill of nectar, and most caterpillars have pupated. He also leaves a few areas uncut to provide cover for small birds and animals. FMP co-operate by pulling ragwort and dock to improve the hay quality.

On a working mixed farm, cattle or sheep would then be put to graze and no more mowing would be necessary; this is not the case here, of course (where we only have dogs, not known for grazing!), so there has to be a second cut, as late in the season as the weather permits.

By contrast, for the benefit of the park's human users, the parish council groundsman mows some of the field verges and "desire lines" (i.e. informal routes) at frequent intervals through the year.

A workable compromise seems to have been reached, by the exercise of goodwill all round, .

P.S. On the strength of this, plans are afoot to develop Play Field, which is very little used as the kick-about area first intended. Designing is at an early stage, but a combination of mown and unmown strips would have a central focal point of a bed of poppies in commemoration of the First World War.

AUTUMN ACTIVITY DAYS

Saturday September 13
Cutting back overhanging branches along paths, pulling & cutting Dogwood in Hall Field

Saturday October 11
Tidying & extending the wild-flower "ribbon" in Oak Meadow.

8 November and 13 December:
to be confirmed, probably hedge-laying

Plus, ALWAYS, Litter-picking

PLEASE JOIN US WHENEVER YOU CAN

Meet at the depot behind the Parish Office at 9.50am, to collect tools and discuss the morning's work.

From time to time, unscheduled jobs crop up, and we get small work parties together during the week. If you would occasionally be free and willing to join in at short notice, please let the Secretary know.