



April 2015

Editor's Note: we have invited comment from a frequent park user on the topic of habitat degradation around Highbury. What she writes is a personal view. Please get in touch if you have opinions you would like to contribute to the debate.

Illegal parkland clearance

A mystery man with a machete is wreaking havoc on wildlife in Highbury Park. In the last few months park users have noticed entire sections of valuable undergrowth have been cleared without the permission of park rangers. This is illegal damage, and if the person is caught it could result in prosecution.

The damage started innocuously. Small sections here and there simply looked a bit tidier. But now large sections have been cleared and damage done to areas that are habitat sensitive. Brambles, undergrowth, ivy and nettles are absolutely necessary for all manner of wildlife. Insects thrive in them, butterflies feed amongst them and lay their eggs, small mammals need them to survive (which impacts on larger mammals), and without them there will be no smaller birds such as wrens, no medium-sized birds such as thrushes, and no larger birds such as sparrow hawks (which feed on the smaller birds and mammals that hide in undergrowth).

Pressure is now being placed on protected species as a result of the wholesale clearing. There is an official management plan in place, but it is being ignored by the mystery machete man.

The wooded area beside the railway line has acquired an entire network of

footpaths, all crisscrossing over one another. A couple is fine, wonderful even, but so many is overkill. Large sections of this area are now looking empty and bare as a result.

A new wide path has also been cut from the children's play area to the orchard section. Why, when there is a much better, wider, easier-to-use path that is tarmacked, within spitting distance of it? Not only is it superfluous, and again is taking away from a piece of land that is vital for wildlife, it also means that instead of looking at greenery as people walk that section, they are faced with the buildings on the other side of the fence. One of the things which is so wonderful about Highbury Park is that it is a little piece of countryside, away from city life – but this new clear view of buildings ruins that.

The brambles that so many birds hide in along the stream have been removed on both sides too. It looks a mess.

Around the back of the orchard area, heading towards the pond and Highbury Hall, large sections have also been cleared. Again, this is placing pressure on protected species during their breeding season. This is against the law.

The person doing this clearing needs to be stopped. Next time you are in the park, please keep an eye out for him. He may be wearing a high visibility vest. Don't approach anyone directly, but please call the park rangers office to alert them of what is happening on 0121 675 0937.

Barbara Copperthwaite

Mapping and monitoring our footpaths

In response to concern about the proliferation of paths we are keen to map and monitor the pathways in the park. If you would like to help please email anne@highburyparkfriends.org.uk

Nature Notes

Why do birds sing?

Birds, usually males, sing to claim their territory and attract a mate. Spring is the peak singing time. By the summer, the birds have raised their young and may be moulting, so that is not the best time to attract attention from predators. Bird song starts at dawn and different birds appear to wake up at different times. My favourite is the Blackbird's song with its deep, rich notes.



Another skilled songster is the aptly named Song Thrush. Perched high in a tree it usually repeats each phrase twice. Its song becomes more varied over the season as it incorporates more sounds into its repertoire.

It is even possible to identify individual birds by their own unique song. International Dawn Chorus day (3rd May this year) celebrates this marvel of nature and we hope to hold such an event in Highbury Park in the future (in the meantime go to Moseley Bog for the closest International Dawn Chorus Day event)

Bluebells



If you look in the wooded areas around Highbury Park, including the ancient hedgerows, you will find bluebells. Apart from their beauty, they are special because 25-49% of the world bluebell population is found in the UK. They carpet the ground in some places, but by the summer, the leaves and the flowers have vanished. In the sunshine, the flowers emit a delicate sweet scent, designed to attract pollination by flies and beetles. Spanish bluebells, often found in gardens are more robust with less tubular flowers, wider leaves and a wider range of colours from pink to pale blue and white. The two species often hybridise so it is recommended that Spanish bluebells stay in gardens!

EMP

Wildlife Walk. March 21st 2015.

At first sight the park seemed still in a state of winter dormancy with a sharp nip in the air, but Spring was emerging. Our wildlife guide Paul Anthony informed us that birds such as chiffchaffs and blackcaps had already returned to Highbury from Africa.

The prunus tree by the old Henburys pond was fragrant with pink cherry blossom. Yellow and purple crocus adorned the pathways. We saw signs of various birds pairing and nesting. Two magpies flew past carrying twigs in their beaks. Two long-tailed tits dived into the ancient hedgerow carrying soft down. A pair of wrens flew furtively from the ivy.

We were surrounded by bird song. The drumming of the greater spotted woodpecker echoed from the hay meadow way across the park. Great tits made their metallic "Teacher, teacher" call. Robins, wrens and blackbirds sang melodiously to welcome the Spring. We spared a thought for our city-feathered friends who have to learn to sing louder than their countryside counterparts in order to be heard above the noise of the traffic in Birmingham.

Paul urged us to think of bird life at different levels. On the ground in Highbury we have small birds feeding such as wrens, robins, blackbirds and thrushes. Mid way up the trees we have greenfinches and chaffinches that often operate in social groups and nuthatches and tree creepers that climb the branches. Crows and other corvids are always at the top being the dominant birds. Circling high above are birds of prey such as buzzards that are nesting locally. So when you walk in the park keep a look out at all these levels, and you will quickly be rewarded by glimpsing the diversity of our local avian life. AMG

Tree Walk, April 11th 2015

Under a blue sky and bright sunshine, Tony Sames led 28 people and 2 dogs down through the ancient woodlands from the car park. He reminded us that Highbury was originally farmland and the old-field boundaries and hedgerows are still clearly delineated in the landscape.

Most deciduous trees were still dormant, so we studied shape, form and buds for identification. We found numerous hazel trees, the shrub layer of the woodland that are a good renewable source of wood as they can be coppiced every 5 years. Only the horse chestnut trees had begun to shoot new bright green leaves. We were amazed by the diversity of the woodland; scots pine, oak, crab apple, rowan, field maple, poplar, ash and white prunus

blossom. A variety of seedlings had planted themselves randomly, demonstrating a determined will to survive.

Under the surveillance of a blackbird and with the aid of maps we studied our second habitat, the pinetum, planted in the 1980s by the Townswomen's Guild. Whilst a robin serenaded us we learned to identify pine trees whose cones are upright from spruce where they are pendulous. We admired the blue cedar, larches and redwoods.

We ended our exploration in the arboretum and Italian garden at the top corner of the park. We noted many exotic specimens from Chamberlain's collection – the Chilean monkey-puzzle tree, the tulip tree, the gigantic *parottia persica* (Persian ironwood) and the unusual purple oak tree grafted on to a common oak stem. Sadly we ran out of time. A big thank you to Tony for bringing his excellent knowledge and enthusiasm to this glorious morning's exploration of Highbury's trees. AMG

HPF Events Diary 2015

April 25th Wildlife Walk with Paul Anthony

10.30am – 12.30pm

May 14th HPF AGM. Moseley CDT. 7pm – 8.30pm

May 30th Wildlife Walk with Paul Anthony.

10.30am – 12.30pm

June 6th Archaeology Walk with Mike Hodder.

10.30am – 12.00pm

June 27th Wildlife Walk with Paul Anthony.

10.30am – 12.30pm

July 11th Local History Walk with Andy Bishop.

11.00am – 12.00pm

July 25th Wildlife Walk with Paul Anthony.

10.30am – 12.30pm

August 20th Bat walk led by Brumbats, details tbc

For all events, apart from the AGM, meet in Highbury Park Car Park.

Events are free of charge and open to everyone

Please wear suitable footwear for walking on uneven ground

Walking Meditation

Every Friday morning from April 3rd

An introduction to walking as a form of meditation and relaxation. Meditation can improve health and well-being. Meet at Alcester Road entrance to Highbury Park.

An Active Parks session.

Highbury Hall Event

Spring Craft Fayre. Sunday 19 April 2015
Come and do some indoor shopping for unusual personalised gifts, from a variety of stalls and relax in our pop up tea room. Explore this historic house and grounds.

Doors open: 11am. Doors close: 4pm.
Free admission

“Discover Water Habitats of Highbury Park” by Ellen Pisolkar and Catharine Clarke.

We very much hope to see you there!



Illustrations by Catharine Clarke, botanical artist and illustrator from Discover the Water Habitats of Highbury Park

Highbury Park Friends
c/o York Supplies
55- 57 Waterloo Road
Kings Heath
Birmingham B14 7SD
info@highburyparkfriends.org.uk



**An invitation to
Highbury Park Friends AGM
Thursday 14th May 2015
7.00pm – 8.30pm, Moseley
CDT, 149-153 Alcester Road,
Birmingham B13 8HP**

This year's AGM will include a report on the last year's activity in Highbury Park and the launch of our new leaflet,