Summer Bulletin July 2023

Welcome to our Summer bulletin. One of the many aspects of Highbury Park that make it so special is its variety of habitats and the Summer months are a perfect time to explore the diversity of landscape. A walk can take you from shady woodland, to summery meadows, formal planting to the winding paths of the Rhododendron Gardens and the towering canopy of the Beech Copse. If you always take the same route through the park, then why not ring the changes and try a different walk?! Or come along and join us at one of our many free themed guided walks throughout the year. Check out our newly re-vamped website for a full listing of our 2023 Events Programme.

Forthcoming Events

Discover Wild Flowers at Highbury: a chance to plant and learn event. 18th June 2023

Our enthusiastic group of 9 members gathered during the heatwave to plant wild flowers supplied by artist Carolyn Morton. She is a local allotment holder and had a surfeit of wildflowers that had seeded on her plot. Carolyn brought them along to Highbury for us to learn more about the plants and re-home them.

We brought trowels, forks and gardening gloves along. We elected to plant most of the plants in the Fruit Forest just below the railway line in the Henburys Wood. We have a tradition of planting wild flowers in the park. The Birmingham and Black Country Trust previously helped us underplant the woodlands with Primroses, Red Campion, native Bluebells and Wild Daffodils and our hay meadow was planted with bales of hay from a local Worcestershire Wildlife Trust nature reserve to produce the wonderful display you can see currently.

Carolyn brought us a variety of plants; Hemp Agrimony, Meadow Sweet, Dog Rose, Great Bird's-Foot Trefoil and Silverwort found homes amongst the fruit trees. Sweet Woodruff, Primrose and Lesser Stitchwort were planted by the woodland edge, and Soapwort by the stream. We traded information about the properties of the plants as we worked.

For example, we learned that Lesser Stitchwort *(See photo above*) was used as a remedy for a stich; Hemp Agrimony has been used for liver and gall bladder disorders. Soapwort contains saponins and can produce soap by immersing the leaves in water.

The ground was baked dry from the recent heatwave and progress was slow. We had to walk over to the Henbury's pond to fill watering cans to drench the earth and settle the plants in. It was hard work but rewarding. A big thank you to Carolyn and our hardy volunteers. We look forward to seeing the plants flourish in their new homes.

Find out more about Carolyn's work at **camostudio.org**

Counting the Birds at Highbury - Project Update

Every January we count how many species of birds we can spot at Highbury. We send our records to Ecorecord (part of the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust). Our annual event coincides with the RSPB Big Garden Watch when members of the public are encouraged to record how many species of birds they can record in their gardens in one hour. This helps the RSPB monitor trends nationally, which birds are increasing in number, which are decreasing, which are in danger. It also helps us, the participants, to become citizen scientists, paying more attention to what's happening with the wildlife locally. Our bird count at Highbury helps us to be aware of trends on our small patch. An average bird count for an hour in the last few years has recorded around 22 species on each occasion.

Nationally there has been a big decrease in the number of birds. The Natural History Museum states that between 2015 and 2020 almost half of all bird species declined, with woodland bird species being the most affected. UK bird populations have steadily declined over the past 50 years. New data released by the UK Government reveals that 48% of bird species have shown a decrease in just five years between 2015 and 2020. Birds such as the turtle dove, capercaillie, tree sparrow and grey partridge are now less than a tenth of their numbers from 50 years ago.

We have been aware that some species at Highbury seem fewer in number in recent years. As a result, we decided in the Spring to conduct a more detailed survey of our local bird population. With the help of Senior Park Ranger, Alf Dimmock we devised a route around the park. A small group of members interested in bird watching volunteered to help. Between April and July, we have undertaken surveys every few weeks and then we will tally the results when we finish. Volunteers brave an 8.00am start to maximise what we might record. When we started in the Spring it was easier to spot birds before the trees were in leaf.

We also have a recorded sighting of two Firecrests, male and female, in early March. They stayed for several days. Firecrests and Goldcrests are confusion species but can be easily separated. Though similar in size Firecrests can be identified by a white wedge - shaped stripe which goes over the eye with a black stripe which goes through the eye. This is diagnostic. The crown has a broader, more intense orange patch for the male and yellow for the female. The Firecrests would have been on spring passage migration as they breed in Southern England.

Recently we have been helped by a great new phone app called "Merlin" that accurately identifies bird song and has been a blessing when few birds have been visible through the tree canopy, but bird song can be clearly heard. The results of the survey will be available later in the year and will help us decide if further habitat improvements are needed. It will also provide a baseline for further survey work. We will share results with you when they are available. In the meantime, a big thank you to everyone who has helped us to record.

Nature Notes by E.M.P

Tenthredo Sawfly
Larvae feed on leaves and the adults feed on flies and other insects

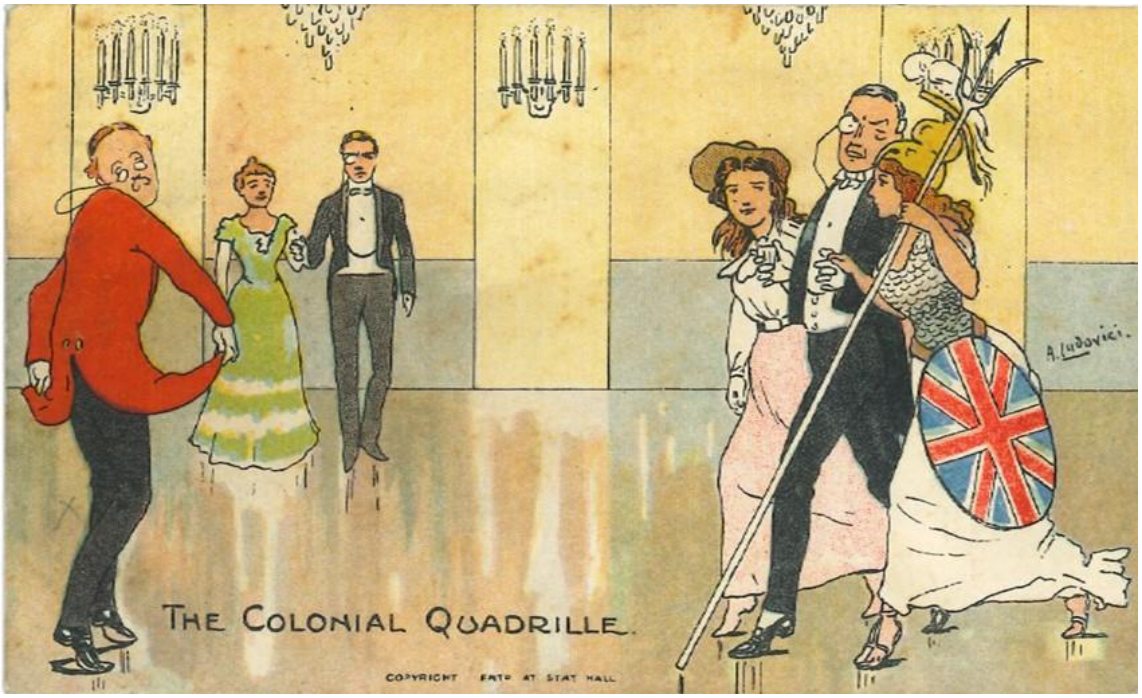
Black Knapweed *(Centaurea nigra)* **with Skipper Butterfly** *(Ochlodes sylvanus)*

The beauty of the meadows in the park is that they keep changing with the seasons but also each year. Common Spotted Orchids are slowly increasing down the slope as is Birds-foot Trefoil and Betony. One of my favourite grasses, Yellow Oat Grass comes up each year but there is only one patch and it's not spreading. Some Hawkweeds were prolific in the first couple of years but have now disappeared. However, in late summer the purple flowers of Black Knapweed are well established, particularly in the lower meadow.

Before the meadows were created, there were certainly brown and skipper butterflies in the park but in low numbers – now they are abundant in the long grass on sunny days. This indicates that maybe the less flamboyant insects that thrive in meadows may also be establishing good populations. Perhaps one day the sound of chirruping grasshoppers will join the buzzing of the bees in the Highbury Meadows.

Don't forget our Wildflower Leaflet is free to download from our website at
www.highburyparkfriends.org.uk
and available at our events.

Included within the leaflet are self-guided Spring and Summer Wildflower Walks



Postcard image taken from an original by Albert Ludovici (1852 - 1932) and produced by Davidson Bros Pictorial Postcards (1901–1911)

Joseph Chamberlain's policies were frequently lampooned in the media, as shown in this postcard image of Chamberlain performing the Quadrille arm in arm with Britannia. The dance was introduced in France around 1760, quickly becoming a craze in Europe and its colonies. It reached English high society in 1816 and over time its popularity made it a metaphor for the constant formation of fresh political alliances with different partners in order to maintain the balance of power in Europe.

Arthur Balfour (PM from 1902 – 1905) may be seen opposite Chamberlain cautiously embracing imperial preference as championed by Chamberlain. Chamberlain favoured trade preferences with the British colonies in order to protect British trade from competition from abroad in the face of growing German and American economic power. Imposing tariffs or taxes on foreign goods (other than those supplied by the colonies) would not only protect British jobs and goods but also provide the necessary revenue for the social welfare legislation he favoured such as free education for all, pensions for workers and other social reforms.

(Postcard from private collection of HPF member Gail Pittaway)

Highbury Community News

Highbury Hall Open Days

The regular monthly Monday Open Days at Highbury, organised by *Chamberlain Highbury Trust* are continuing throughout 2023. Open on the first Monday of the month from 10:00am - 3:00pm it is a great opportunity to explore the former home of Joseph Chamberlain and to find out more about the Trust's work and plans; both for the building and the former estate.

Guided tours take place throughout the day and last about an hour. Groups are welcome. Hot and cold drinks and cakes also available during the day.

NEXT OPEN DAY is Monday 7th August

TWITTER: @HighburyPark FACEBOOK: Highbury Park Friends
INSTAGRAM: @Highburyparkfriendsbrum

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Our next bulletin will be out in October 2023