Winter Bulletin January 2023

Welcome to our first bulletin for 2023. Now we are past the Winter solstice, it is a comfort to know, that as each day passes, we gain an extra two minutes of daylight. Yet even in the depths of Winter, there is much to see and delight the senses as you walk through our beautiful park. On a dewy morning, you might see the lower hay meadow clothed in the jewelled, silken webs of spiders, or on a foggy day, hear the muffled yaffle of a Green Woodpecker calling out in the distance. Look out too, for the first of the snowdrops as they brave the frost and ice and watch for the slow, graceful unfurling of hazel catkins as the season progresses. Wrap up warm, boots on and go explore!

Events 2023

We are delighted that our events programme for 2023 is already beginning to take shape. We have 3 Winter events, which began with our Annual Bird Count on the 18th January. Our free events are open to all and are a great way to find out more about the park and to meet other people with an interest in Highbury. We meet at the Car Park. If you have suggestions for future events that you would like us to host or would be interested in being an events volunteer, then please email: **info@highburyparkfriends.org.uk**

Counting the Birds: The Changing Bird Life of Highbury

A brand new year-long project in Highbury Park

Did you know that nightingales once sang in Highbury Park? Paul Anthony, a local ornithologist, chronicled the changing bird life at Highbury for us some years ago. On the eve of World War 1 much of the area surrounding Highbury was still farmland, tree-lined lanes, heath, hedgerows and open watercourses. Numerous birds could be spotted that have since disappeared locally; Long-eared Owl, Partridge and Nightingale to name but a few.

With increasing industrialisation and a greatly expanded urban population some new birds have arrived that didn't live locally during Joseph Chamberlain's time: Common Buzzard, Ring – necked Parakeet and Collared Dove are all common sights in the park nowadays. There are other birds that we can spot today that were also living locally 100 years ago; Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Goldcrest and many more. So, we know that bird populations change over time depending on local habitat and conditions.

For the last decade we have counted the number of bird species in the park annually to coincide with the RSPB Big Garden Bird Count in January, so we have a pretty good idea of what species might be residing locally at the present time. The RSPB writes that there has been a serious, countrywide, decline in the numbers of many birds, including many well known and loved species such as the Song Thrush, Skylark, Lapwing and House Sparrow. This decline has been gradual. Most of the declining species are farmland birds. On the other hand, most woodland species such as the Blue Tit, Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker are still doing alright. However, declines may have started in woodland habitat too, with Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit now red-listed because of their severe drop in numbers.

We have decided to start a new project for 2023 in order to monitor the number of resident, visiting and breeding birds at Highbury in more detail. We can then use the data to decide if further habitat improvements are needed. Alf Dimmock, Senior Park Ranger, will lead the project and we will undertake bird counts much more frequently for the duration of the year. The project launched at our Annual Bird Count event on the 18th January.

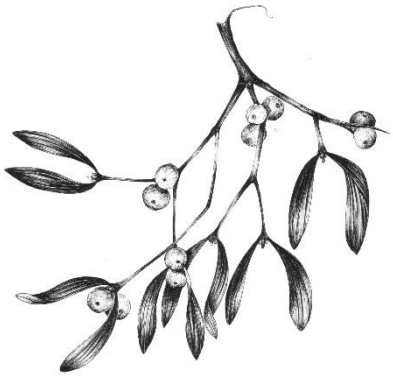
Don't forget, our e-book and associated leaflet *Birds of Highbury Park* written by Paul Anthony and illustrated by Catharine Clarke are free to download from our website: www.highburyparkfriends.org.uk

Nature Notes by E.M.P

Heron (*Ardea cinerea)*

Early morning listen out for the ethereal chatterings of the redwings as they start their day after sheltering in the trees. As with other members of the thrush family they are feasting on the ivy berries at this time of year – holly berries seem to be left until later. Holly bushes are either male or female and it's only the females that carry the berries.

A young heron can often be seen standing motionless at the edge of scrub areas – it appears that they are waiting to spear rats that are oblivious to these large sit-and-wait predators. Crows are always present in large numbers in the park and watching their antics is a favourite pastime of mine – smaller Jackdaws may join them in foraging parties. Sometimes they all fly up in the air to hassle a passing buzzard or raven. With the trees bare of leaves now, old nests can be spotted but some of the 'nests' look rather round and lacy. These may be mistletoe which is actually quite common in the area.



Mistletoe (*Viscum Album)*

. **Fungi Foray, October 28th 2022**

Lukas Large, Curator of Natural Sciences at Birmingham Museums led a fungi foray with almost 40 adults and children. We enjoyed the best of the autumn sunshine as we walked round Highbury to see what we could discover.

One of the first fungi recorded looked like a patch of slime and went by the very descriptive name of Dog Sick Slime Mould. We learned that fungi come in many shapes and sizes, some tiny, and some enormous. They have impressive names: Poison Pie, Parrot Waxcap, Rufus Milk Cap and Jelly Ear. The variety of colours was stunning – purple (Blewits), yellow (Hairy Curtain Crest) orange (Slime mould) and red (Rusulas)

Lukas taught us about the connection between certain trees and fungi. Fungi interconnect with the root systems of plants and trees, passing nutrients, water, and even chemical communication signals between the different organisms. In fact, around 90% of all plant species depend on these mutually beneficial mycorrhizal relationships with fungi to survive. Certain trees have a symbiotic relationship with certain fungi; search around birch trees for the beautiful red with white spots Fly Agaric, and beech trees for Milk Caps. Not all fungi are beneficial though, and the Blackening Polypore around the roots of the Beech trees at Highbury is causing the tree roots to rot and the trees to decline.

Children seemed to be best at spotting fungi (is this because they are nearer to the ground?) but in total we spotted between 40 and 50 species, an impressive tally. We will post the list on our website in due course.

A big thank you to Lukas and all the attendees who made this such a great event.

Highbury's History

Highbury's Neighbours – Part 1

Uffculme – former home of Richard Cadbury

Crucible Wall – Highbury Park

Famous as a chocolate-maker, inventor of the first Valentine's Day chocolate boxes, philanthropist, Quaker and resident of Uffculme, Richard Barrow Cadbury (1835-1899) was neighbour to Joseph Chamberlain at Highbury. Both Chamberlain and Cadbury sought to improve the lot of working men through social reform choosing the paths of party politics and philanthropic measures respectively to effect this. Their radical differences made them reluctant neighbours and local folklore suggests that the crucible wall erected by Joseph Chamberlain along the eastern edge of Pleasure Gardens at Highbury and forming part of the boundary between the two properties was designed to afford the Chamberlains' additional privacy (and probably to shore up the Pleasure Grounds much higher landscaping.) Local legend also has it that Chamberlain was not an admirer of Uffculme's architectural design and the wall helped to obscure his view of the house.

As well as home to Richard Cadbury and family from the mid 1890's until around 1907, the house has had various other uses including a hospital for soldiers wounded during WW1 and was later gifted to the City of Birmingham in 1916 a centre for furthering psychiatric health which it continues to do to this day under the auspices of the NHS.

New! for 2023 in Highbury

Our New Bike Rack

Community groups from across the city were invited to apply for bike racks that had previously been used during the Commonwealth Games. Success! Our new bike racks were installed last November, located close to the car park.

Blossom Together - new trees

Following on from the successful planting last Autumn of new fruit trees near the Henbury's Wall, donated by the National Trust, NT(Birmingham) has donated 5 new fruit trees that are older varieties.

These were recently planted in the Fruit Forest above the old bowling green. We are delighted to now have one each of apples 'Newton's Wonder', 'Ashmead's Kernel' and 'Pitmaston Pine Apple' and two Jargonelle pears. All three apples have strong Midlands connections.

The 'Pitmaston Pine Apple', (above) was first introduced by the renowned plant breeder, John Williams (1773 - 1853) in 1845. Williams resided at Pitmaston House in Worcester.

Highbury Hall Open Days

New dates and times have been announced for the popular monthly Monday Open Days at Highbury, organised by the Chamberlain Highbury Trust. With an earlier opening time of 10am, 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. Plus, the cafe will be open for light refreshments. Spread the word and why not book a tour!

UPDATE Camp Hill Line: Drop-in sessions about our new local train stations are planned for:

Thursday 26th January (12pm-2pm) Kings Heath Community Centre, Heathfield Road

Saturday 28th January (10am-12pm) Moseley Hive, Alcester Road

Wednesday 1st February (5pm-7pm) Stirchley Baths, Bournville Lane

All three stations will be discussed at all the sessions.

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