HIGHBURY PARK Friends

January 2013

Park News

Early in the Year

Now is a good time to admire ***lichens*** on the bark of trees. They come in a variety of colours - grey, green or even yellow and are an amazing collaboration between a fungus and an alga. In the last 30 years air quality has improved and lichen species that were once rare in the park are now found on many trees. (See http://www.opalexplorenature.org/for more information about lichens and air quality).

One of the first flowers of the year is ***Lesser Celandine***, *Ranunculus ficaria*, often carpeting damp shady ground with heart shaped leaves and yellow starry flowers. Although all parts of the plant contain some toxins, it has been valued for its early leaves providing salad. The little bunches of roots bear some resemblance to haemorrhoids. For some strange reason this has been seen as reason enough for their use in the alleviation of that affliction! Look out for Lesser Celandine when the snow clears.

Seen in Highbury Park

Kingfishers

A Kingfisher is now a frequent visitor to the park, often seen in the morning on Henburys Pond where it is probably feeding on the numerous sticklebacks. Their nearest nesting places are on the River Rea and loitering on one of the bridges over the river is often rewarded with a blue flash as the kingfisher flies along its territory.

Badgers

Walking his dog one late evening HPF member, John Edale, noticed a badger in Highbury Park, and wrote, “I've been walking our dog there for over a year and have never seen any sign of them before, so don't know if they are recent arrivals from along the railway tracks?”

Paul Anthony, who leads the wildlife walks in the park wrote this response, and gives his views on badger culling. “Many park users are aware that badgers are present. Birmingham has a high density of badgers and one of the largest resident urban populations in the UK. A number of setts are historical and I know of one quite local to here where badgers have been in occupancy for well over a century. Others are more recent and have relocated to the suburbs because of greenbelt development. It is not because there are too many. They are then forced to disperse elsewhere but there isn't any available habitat for them to establish new territories. I heard the other day that ‘our’ badgers came after the Q.E. development. This is not the case as badgers are highly territorial and will not accept badgers from another social group.

The species most affected by redevelopment are slow moving terrestrial animals, amphibians are particularly vulnerable. Eco corridors, such as railways, canals, rivers and streams are critical for the survival of much of our native fauna. These routes link together a patchwork of suitable habitats. If they are fragmented by roads and houses then the animals die out.

The biggest single cause of badger mortality is traffic. About 70% die annually on the roads. This peaks during the breeding season in February and March. Illegal persecution accounts for a significant loss, too.

Add to these any sanctioned killings and you can understand wide spread concern. If the government decides to go ahead and kill 100,000 badgers next year that would remove almost 50% of the British population. Badgers would become extinct in large parts of the country, especially the South West. This policy will continue to be enforced until the resident population has been reduced by a minimum of 70%. This is without justification as, in my view, badgers are not responsible for the spread of bovine T.B. To dispel another myth, badgers are not vermin, and they do not attack people or domestic pets." (Paul Anthony.)

Recent Events

Wild Life Walk, 4 January 2013

A group of eight birdwatchers met up with Paul Anthony and set off towards the railway cutting. Almost immediately a great spotted woodpecker flew above us using its characteristic undulating flight. Next a flock of goldfinches flew over calling each other as they went. We walked along the line of an old hedge and many trees had ivy growing up the trunks. The ivy gives protection to tawny owls and they find plenty of insects sheltering there to feast on. All owls were persecuted by farmers until recently with a resulting drop in numbers of both barn owls and smaller owls.

We examined a fallen trunk where the birds had removed the outer bark and we could see the tracks of beetle larva in the recently exposed wood. The wooded area alongside the railway line has a warmer feel than areas exposed to the cold wind, which blew from time to time. .

Paul explained that some robins, blackbirds and pigeons migrate. In the case of robins the continental ones are more wary of us than our local robins. We spotted a buzzard overhead as we left the trees. Paul reckons that the number of grey squirrels is down due to predation by the buzzard. Buzzards also attack wood pigeons and collared doves. We watched parakeets in the Scots Pines and looked for the kingfisher which has been visiting the pool, but did not see it that day. We did see stock doves and blue tits and as we climbed towards Highbury Hall we had a very good view of five redwings in a tree. Join us on the February walk to enjoy the wonders of the park and to learn about its wildlife. (Margaret Tyler.)

Future Events

Wild Life Walks with Paul Anthony

Meet at Highbury Park car park.

Saturday, 2nd February 2013, 10.30 a.m.

Friday, 1 March, 1 p.m.

Friday, 15th March, 6.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Hope to see frogs, toads and newts moving to spawn in the ponds. Rain suits them. Wear water proof clothing and footwear and bring a torch if you have one. Children welcome.

Saturday, 6th April, 10.30 a.m.

Thereafter Friday 1 p.m walks in odd months and Saturday 10.30 a.m. walks in even months.

Highbury Park Friends Annual General Meeting

Thursday 21 February 2013, 7p.m.,

**All Saints Community Centre,
The Village Square, 2 Vicarage Road,
Kings Heath, Birmingham 14.**

Following the Welcome and Chair's and Treasurer's reports, give us your views on Highbury Park and Highbury Park Friends.

Next Adam Bates (Earth Sciences, Birmingham University) will tell us of **'The Incredible World of Bees: their lifecycle, use to us, and threats they face'.**

Then refreshments and time to socialise.

Useful Contacts

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