September Bulletin

Our September bulletin has a wildlife theme to bring you up to date with recent events in the park.

If you have a few hours to spare and would like to help write our bulletins or edit then, then please get in touch. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Wildlife Walk, September 5th 2014

There were distinct signs of Autumn as we set out from the car park; a thin scattering of crunchy golden brown leaves on the grass, squirrels busy secreting acorns for their winter stash, and the remains of conker casings from the horse chestnut trees that had been foraged by the crows and discarded. The tree forms cast longer shadows because the sun was lower in the sky than earlier in the year. There were some magnificent spider's webs woven low down the tree branches.

As we strolled up the ancient field boundary towards the Henbury's pond, we heard a young sparrow hawk calling for food. A few minutes later very high above us against the blue sky we saw the cruciform figure of the female sparrow hawk gliding past. She descended sharply and flapped her wings ready to attack her prey

As we walked we sampled the plump wild blackberries that were sweetening in the autumn sunshine. Robins were both visible and vocal as they claimed territory. The pond looked beautiful with white water lilies in bloom, lots of small minnows in the water, and moorhens on the surface.

Butterflies can be very hard to identify as they sail by at great speed, but we identified 6 species; meadow brown, gatekeeper, red admiral, small white, large white, and were particularly captivated by the speckled wood. This brown butterfly with its yellow spots was newly hatched (our wildlife guide Paul Anthony was able to glean this from the intensity of colour of its spots). It perched close to us, practically merging with the foliage. We were sad to hear its lifespan may only be three weeks, unlike some other butterflies that hibernate.

Bat Walk, August 21st 2014

Is a bat a mammal? Are bats blind? How many species of bat live in the UK? And in the world? Chris from Brumbats posed these questions to the 40 adults and children who gathered at 8.00pm one August evening for a bat walk around Highbury Park. We quickly learned the answers. Bats are small furry flying mammals that feed on insects. There are four resident species in Highbury Park, 75 in the UK and 1000 worldwide. Chris showed us samples of dead bats in plastic cases and demonstrated via a role-play with a glove puppet and a young volunteer how they catch insects on the wing to feed.

Following this lively and informative introduction each family group was given their own hand held bat-detecting machine. Bats, contrary to popular belief, are not blind but rely on echolocation to catch insects. As they fly they make a series of clicking sounds and the returning echo informs the bats of the whereabouts of insects. Bat detectors are able to magnify and pick up the bats' noises and help us establish if they are present in the vicinity.

As the evening darkness fell we were about to walk across the hay meadow and down to the Long Pond, but in the car park we spotted our first noctule bat. With great excitement we watched it circling high above the foliage.

It turned out there was no shortage of bats in the park, as they use our many trees to roost, and soon our hand held machines were clicking constantly to alert us to their presence. The highlight of the evening was watching three pipistrelle bats flying low around a dead tree near to the lake. We could see their tiny webbed wings flapping very hard to keep them flying in larger and larger circles to catch insects. Fantastic!

We heard chiff chaffs calling but didn't see them. This small bird is the first to arrive from Africa in the Spring. Although usually an insect eating bird, some of them are eating berries at present to build up their strength for the return flight to Africa. We also saw wrens, great tits, crows, wood pigeon, stock dove, ring necked parakeets magpie, blackbirds and coal tits. We enjoyed a very pleasant walk in the autumn sunshine.

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Our chatty and cheerful group returned to the car park by torchlight feeling very satisfied. We identified three sorts of bats on the walk: Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle and Noctule. I never imagined I would end up so charmed by these night flying creatures. Thanks to Brumbats and Dean Paul of the Park Ranger Service for organizing the event.

Brumbats are undertaking a 7year project called the Batlas to develop detailed bat records for the whole of Birmingham and the Black Country, which they hope to publish on line eventually. There are more areas to record over the next few years including Kings Heath. If any HPF members would like to join in and borrow kit to help survey, please contact Brumbats.

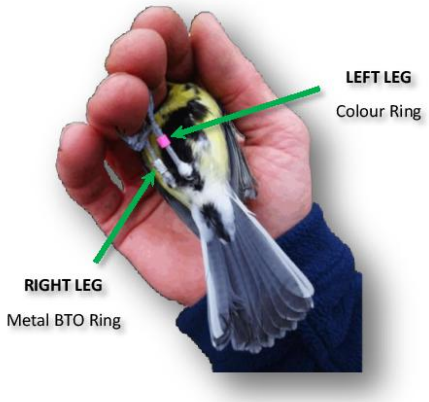
BrumBats
Birmingham and Black Country Bat Group

URBAN BIRD STUDY

The **University of Birmingham** is conducting research into what is happening to birds within parks and other green-spaces across Birmingham.

We are currently looking at how the levels of connected tree cover and built land cover affect the **movement patterns** of common garden birds such as Dunnock, Great Tit, Robin, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit and Coal Tit (pictured right). As part of the study we are carrying out a programme of mist netting which involves the temporary installation of fine nets set between poles to catch birds in flight. Once caught a lightweight, uniquely numbered, metal ring is fitted onto a bird's leg by licensed handlers. These standard British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) rings provide a reliable and harmless method of identifying birds when they are encountered again.

This year birds are also being fitted with small, brightly coloured rings to enable identification by study site and we are asking for your help to record any birds you see wearing coloured rings. We will then be able to find out how far these birds move around the City.



For each study site we are using one of the following colours:

Red	Dark Blue	Dark Green	Yellow	Violet	Black
Light Pink	Light Blue	Light Green	Orange	Grey	White

This means that the Great Tit pictured above is wearing a light pink ring first issued at Woodgate Valley Country Park.

So If you a see colour ringed bird in your garden or whilst out and about then please tell us the following: bird species, ring colour, time, date and sighting location.

To find out more about the project or to report a colour ring sighting please contact the researchers via email dxh232@bham.ac.uk **OR** telephone **0121 414 5531.**

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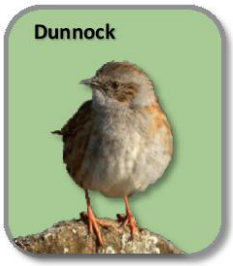

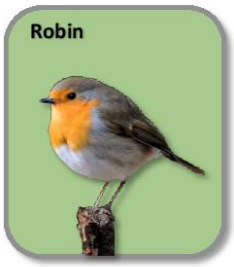

The watery world of Highbury Park

Have you ever wanted to know more about the various ponds and streams in Highbury Park? What lives in them? How are they managed? Where does the water come from?

Highbury Park Friends have commissioned the third leaflet* in a series to cover just these questions and to inspire people to seek out the hidden watery gems within the park. We expect the leaflet to be ready at the end of November.

**Discover Highbury Park* and *Birds in Highbury Park* are the other two leaflets

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Abandoned in the park.

The park is many things to many people. For some it is a place to abandon their unwanted pets. In the past these have included snapping turtle, chickens, micropigs, giant rabbits and even a ram! Some of these animals were subsequently taken to the Wythall Animal Sanctuary.

Parakeets nest again this year.

It appears that two parakeet pairs nested in the park this year. However the family near the Long Pond probably became food for Sparrowhawks. Recently two adults have been spotted by the allotments.

Himalayan Balsam continues its march around the park. Volunteers have removed some (before the seeding stage) from part of the stream and next year the same thing will need to be done again as this plant is an annual (the largest in the Uk).

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