HIGHBURY PARK Friends

January 2015

Ring Necked Parakeet

Kingfisher

These fantastic pictures of our local bird life were taken at Highbury in the last few weeks by Barbara Copperthwaite, a local freelance writer and journalist. You can check out more of her photos on her blog at www.gobewild.co.uk. A big thank you to Barbara for sharing these impressive shots with us

Robin

Do you have any great photos of Highbury you would like to share with other members? If you do, please send them in to us. If you want to learn more about our local wildlife why not join one of our wildlife walks? Details below.

Nature Notes

Birds of Prey

Sparrowhawks are secretive birds of prey with smaller birds forming their diet of choice. They approach with stealth but often miss their prey. I have seen a sparrowhawk pin down a blackbird for a few seconds but the lucky blackbird then

escaped. Female sparrowhawks are larger than the males and feed on larger birds, even woodpigeons. Sparrowhawks have nested in Highbury Park, building a new nest each year high in the fork of a tree. For many years sparrowhawks were rare due to pesticide and mercury residues affecting breeding. Now with many of these chemicals banned, the population has risen nationally and sparrowhawks are often seen in gardens. Buzzards, an even larger bird of prey, are also regulars in Highbury Park, much to the consternation of all the crows (like crows, they will take eggs and young from the nest and even eat fledged birds).

Sparrowhawk

Henbury Pond

Henbury pond has been the source of delight for many people over the last couple of months with a female kingfisher regularly seen catching sticklebacks and then hitting them against a twig before swallowing them.

The kingfisher may spend most of its time along the Rea valley but when the water is turbid after rain, fishing is probably easier in the ponds of Highbury Park.

Dead trees.

Highbury Park is a wildlife haven due in large part to the careful management of the trees. Where dead or dying trees do not form a danger to people, they are left to support the abundant insects, birds and bats that rely on them. A tall couple of trees next to the path by the allotment entrance have this year had three bird species nesting in them: stock doves in a hole high up, further down a gash in the tree has been plugged with mud by nuthatches leaving just a small hole as an entrance to the nest. And under some loose bark, a treecreeper was seen transporting nest material. An avian high-rise indeed. EMP.

Wildlife Walk. December 6th 2014

The morning was frosty, with a pale winter blue sky. The old Henbury's pond was partially frozen with a thin sheet of ice as twelve wildlife watchers scanned the old field boundary for birds. Six blackbirds were scavenging for fallen red yew berries on the ground, as the sugar in the fruits is important in helping birds maintain their body weight over the winter. Two of our resident ring necked parakeets were at home in the scots pine trees where they roost, treating us to flashes of bright yellow-green plumage as they squawked overhead. The conifer trees provided some welcome greenery against the very bare branches of the deciduous trees.

Jays were numerous, feeding on the acorns from the old oak trees; chattering and flying from tree to tree, their beautiful chestnut plumage showing a flash of blue on the wings. It was a morning of thrushes. First we witnessed a song thrush perched high in the silver pendent lime tree, and heard its churring song. At the Henbury's pond a flock of twenty plus redwings congregated together with a few fieldfares. These Scandinavian and Russian thrushes migrate to Highbury over the winter months, surviving on a diet of berries in the park.

Our wildlife guide Paul Anthony urged us not only to scan the trees but also to look skywards for birds of prey, as we

crunched our way through the carpets of golden brown leaves. We meandered back towards the Community Orchard and were rewarded by the wonderful sight of a sparrowhawk perched high on the bare branches of the willow tree. The bird was a male (identified by being a third smaller than the female). Sparrowhawks have vision twenty times more acute than humans. As it flew off to hunt for prey, we witnessed his cruciform shape gliding against the blue winter sky.

We also recorded greater spotted and green woodpeckers, chaffinch, greenfinch and goldfinch; an excellent morning's bird watching. AMG.

Redwing

Do you know your Christmas trees?
13th December 2014

Did you know there is a pinetum in Highbury Park? No major paths cross it, and you would be forgiven for overlooking this quiet corner of the park, situated close to the Shutlock Lane entrance.

The Townswomen's Guild planted the pinetum in 1993, with the aim of enhancing the park landscape. At the time it was thought best for two trees to be planted together to help them grow. This turned out not to be true, as a number of the original conifers died from root congestion.

Which trees survive? On this event organized by the Park Rangers we discovered an amazing collection of evergreens; pine, spruce, larch cypress, juniper, cedar and giant redwood, standing green and proud against a very blue sky.

Here a few random facts we learned

- There are only three native conifers – yew, juniper and Scots pine. They colonized the landscape after the Ice Age
- Yew trees can live for thousands of years
- Most conifers are evergreen but larch trees are an exception, shedding their leaves
- Pine tree "leaves" consist of clusters of two, three or five needles
- The berries of many evergreen trees, such as yew, are poisonous
- Some conifers produce a sticky resin that protects them from attack by insects and fungi

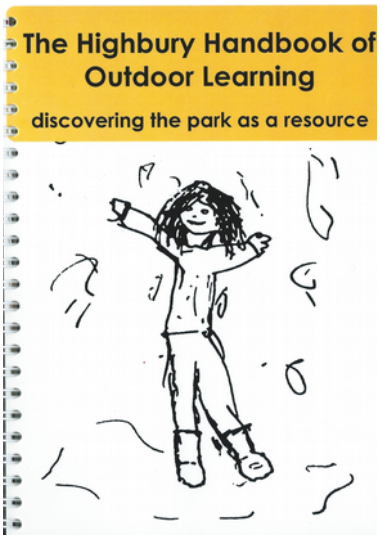
So next time you're in the park, take a few minutes to go and admire our conifer collection. Thanks to park rangers Alf and Jan for organizing the event. AMG

Highbury Handbook of Outdoor Learning

Highbury Park is fast becoming a popular place for families to bring their youngsters, to play and explore in the woodlands. This is partly due to the Forest Education project run by Highbury Orchard Community (HOCCIC), which received Big Lottery funding in 2013. With this fund we provided outdoor sessions for families, and produced a handbook. Its purpose was to show schools and families how to discover and learn about nature when visiting the park.

A team of outdoor leaders, rangers, parents and teachers collaborated to produce the handbook, and it came into print in the autumn of 2014. It has sections on safety, practicalities and maps; outdoor activities with links to indoor learning; and background information on the park and other organisations associated with forest school. 150 copies are in the process of being delivered to local schools, parents and outdoor practitioners. A version will be online soon at peopleandland.org.uk.

The Forest Education project continues with two cohorts of families on a regular basis: the Down to Earth home-schooling families (mostly under 5s) and the Woodland Play after-school club (for 5 - 8s). Both groups meet with me in the park on Wednesday afternoons. We have plans to produce a larger version of the handbook's park map, adding to it the children's ideas on what to play where. This will become a separate resource to schools, libraries and the local community in autumn/winter 2015. A Birmingham Community Safety Partnership Small Grants award has funded its production.



If you would like a copy or wish to know more, please contact Liz or David on hoccic@gmail.com.

Liz Wright, Highbury Orchard Community CIC

Wildlife Walks Programme 2015

March 21st
Spring comes to Highbury
April 25th
African migrants in the park
May 30th
Butterflies and birds
June 27th
Butterflies, dragonflies, birds
July 25th
Butterflies and dragonflies
Walks led by Paul Anthony
Meet in Highbury Park Car Park.
10.30am – 12.30pm
Please wear suitable footwear for walking on uneven ground
August 20th
Bat walk led by Brumbats.
Details to follow

Historical Open Day at Highbury Hall.

March 22nd 2015

View historic Highbury Hall, go back in time and find out about the history of the house and eminent MP Joseph Chamberlain. Light refreshments will be available for sale. Chamberlain memorabilia will be on display with guided tours available during the day for £3.50 per person. Doors open 11.00am. Doors close 4.00pm. Free admission.

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