Autumn Bulletin 2025

HIGHBURY PARK Friends

Welcome to Highbury Park Friends Autumn Newsletter!

As the leaves begin to turn and the air takes on a seasonal crispness, we're delighted to bring you updates from across Highbury Park. In this issue, you'll find highlights from our recent events, news about rare wildlife sightings, a glimpse into the park's rich history, and plans for the months ahead.

Whether you're a long-time supporter or new to the park, we hope you'll find inspiration to visit, get involved, and enjoy all that Highbury has to offer this autumn.

Enjoy the park!

Summer days ...

It's always wonderful to see the different ways people enjoy the park; this was an outdoor session of pilates last month. Thanks to the participants for allowing us to share this picture and to remember the warmer days!

Highbury's History - the Park

Postcard from the private collection belonging to Gail Pittaway, HPF member.

Here is a lovely photograph showing a young woman strolling through Highbury Park. It's difficult to give the precise location within the park or the decade in which this photograph was taken. However we do know that the 42 acre park, which was established adjacent to Highbury Hall and its estate, was made possible directly as a result of the generosity of the Chamberlain and Cadbury families, who bequeathed land from their estates to the people of Birmingham to create a public park.

Evidence of these estates can still be seen within the park in the form of the Highbury and Uffculme mansions along with footprints of the old 'model' farm, which was once part of the Highbury estate.

There is also evidence of the much older Henbury's estate in the north eastern area of the park adjacent to the railway line. The parkland was previously used for agricultural purposes in earlier centuries, and there is evidence of medieval ridge and furrow farming practices in parts of the park along with evidence of burnt mounds which date back to Bronze Age times. Look out for events arranged by Highbury Park Friends which provide guided history walks around these areas of the park.

Gail Pittaway.

Wildflowers in the Meadow

Top row: purple betony; buttercups; meadow cranesbill
Bottom row: common spotted orchid; cowslip; knapweed

How a Hay Meadow Gets Established

Some have asked why there were less of certain species in our hay meadow his year?

There are many factors that affect each meadow plant species and these can vary from year to year - weather, soil, management (is it cut?, time of cutting?, is the hay removed?) and/or other species in the meadow. The meadows in Highbury Park have had a good start with a variety of species introduced from a species diverse meadow but of course the conditions at Highbury will be different and changing over time.

In addition some species will flower early and the seeds from other species will take longer to germinate. See the table here from Plantlife's Meadow Guide.

How long might it take for certain plants to flower?

1-2 years. Yellow rattle, eyebright, buttercups, white clover, lesser trefoil, selfheal, common mouse-ear, yarrow, ribwort plantain.

3-4 years. Oxeye daisy, cat's-ear, hawkbits, common knapweed, red clover,

Meadow continued

common bird's-foot trefoil, common sorrel, field scabious, wild carrot, Devil's-bit wild carrot, Devil's-bit scabious, Lady's-bedstraw, betony, cowslip, great burnet, ragged-Robin.5-7years, Tufted. vetch, meadow vetchling, common spotted orchids, marsh orchids, bee orchid, pyramidal orchid, pepper saxifrage, meadow saxifrage.

7-10 years. Burnt orchid, green-winged orchid, greater butterfly orchid, dyer's-greenweed, snake's-head fritillary

In our meadow, it's been very pleasing to see spotted Pepper Saxifrage - this was recorded for the first time last year and it's back this year. Just as the above information anticipated, it has appeared five years after seeding! Wonderful. What will we see in the next few years?

EMP

Newly Created Habitat Hosts Rare Species

It's amazing how quickly wildlife appears when new habitats are created. The new scrape by Shutlock Lane has hosted a rare damselfly throughout the summer - the Scarce Blue-Tailed damselfly. This particular damselfly will only tolerate shallow pools with scattered vegetation, so its presence at sites is often short-lived as vegetation increases.

Thanks to HPF member Des Jennings for spotting the species and for his wonderful pictures. One image is of a male, and the other is of an immature orange female. The female loses the orange colouration as it matures and looks like the third image.

Butterfly Walk 16 August

Chris Millward, from Team4nature, led an enthusiastic group around Highbury searching for butterflies on an overcast August morning. How many species is it possible to find in Birmingham? The answer is 24! At Highbury over recent years we have recorded an amazing 22 species, showing what an important habitat the park provides.

Even before we set off Chris had already spotted and taken a photograph of a Small Copper butterfly (above right) – a first for Highbury. We then walked a circuit of the park exploring different habitats. We learned that some butterflies such as Speckled Wood (above centre) prefer woodland locations, others such as Meadow Brown prefer open grassland like our hay meadow.

Chris also informed us that butterflies are cold blooded and like to come out when the temperature soars above 17 degrees so they can absorb some of the heat. We discussed the importance of certain plant foods that butterfly and moth caterpillars feed on. There are plenty of them at Highbury including nettles, cuckoo flower, brambles and garlic mustard.

Butterflies come in a huge variety of colours, blue, yellow, white, brown and orange. When trying to identify butterflies, we learned the importance of noting the size, colour and shape of the wing edge in terms of trying to decide which species it is. We also learned if a butterfly is stationary on a plant, it's probably a female laying eggs, whereas if there are two in flight together, they are probably males fighting for territory.

We recorded Speckled Wood, Red Admiral (above left), Green Veined White and Meadow Brown. We also found Straw Dot moth. After the event Chris sent us a summary of all the species recorded at Highbury in recent years that we've posted on our website.

A big thank you to Chris for a fantastic morning and to all our volunteer spotters, too. The final words come from Chris, "If butterflies thrive, we all thrive".

Forthcoming Events

We look forward to seeing you at one of our events. if you're planning to attend, please wear footwear suitable for uneven and muddy ground.

View the 2025 Events Programme:

Look ahead to see the events planned for the rest of the year on our website (scan the QR code) and follow us on social media for the latest announcements.

Would you like to be more involved with HPF? Some opportunities

Our treasurer, Charles Barnwell, who has been in post some years. would like to step down from his role. Charles will be staying on the committee to help us with IT. If you are interested in becoming treasurer, please let us know, and we can provide full training.

We would also like some help looking after our noticeboards (full training provided and opportunities for career progression!). Sometimes we need help with events, too. Please email anne@highburyparkfriends.org.uk for more info.

IContributors to our Autumn Bulletin: Anne Gilbert, Sarah Hill-Daniel, Des Jennings, Gail Pittaway, Sarah Tomlinson and Ellen Pisolkar.

Our next issue is out : Winter 2025/26

Don't forget to follow Highbury Park Friends on Social Media!

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