Winter Bulletin 2026

HIGHBURY PARK Friends

Welcome to Highbury Park Friends Winter Newsletter!

Happy New Year 2026! As winter settles in and the park takes on a quieter, more magical character, we're delighted to share the latest news, stories and discoveries from Highbury Park. Crisp mornings, bare branches and frosty paths reveal a different side of the park, one that rewards slow walks, keen eyes and a flask in hand.

Winter is a wonderful time to visit: migrating birds arrive from far and wide, fungi in unexpected corners, and the park's historic landscapes feel especially atmospheric. Whether you're popping in for a brisk stroll, joining one of our events, or simply enjoying the nature in the colder months, we hope this newsletter inspires you to wrap up warm and make the most of Highbury Park.Enjoy the park — whatever the weather!

Kings Heath Station - Latest News

How will the new train station affect us? Whilst we welcome the arrival of Kings Heath train station (circa Spring 2026), we wonder how the Highbury Park car park will be protected from station users leaving their cars there all day and we are concerened that litter will increase (see an update on our successes in achieving new bins, below).

Scan here to learn more about the next stages, now that construction work has finished.

There's lots of detail here too, from Kings Heath Neighbourhoods Forum blog (October 2025), a worthwhile read.

Highbury's Lost Gardens

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

Here is a lovely photograph of the Chamberlains entertaining a group of guests to tea in one of the many pleasure gardens which were part of the Highbury Estate. This was a pastime particularly favoured by Joseph Chamberlain's wife Mary, who liked to be able to offer guests tea in the afternoon or after dinner. The photograph doesn't give a precise location but was possibly taken in a garden located on the Eastern (Uffculme) side of the Estate, or on the main lawn, because we can see evidence of the rhododendrons in the background. Highbury, now a Grade 2* listed building, was built in 1879 and occupied by the Chamberlain family until Joseph's death in 1914.

The pleasure gardens which were developed over a number of years were linked by a circuit path which ran through the estate and was flanked by ornamental flower borders and floral covered arches. This has been restored, in part, by the Chamberlain Highbury Trust. The grounds, currently Grade 2 listed, are now included on the national register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. Some of the gardens on the western (Moor Green Lane) side of the estate will soon undergo restoration, namely the Italian Garden and the Sunken Rock Garden thanks to the efforts of the Chamberlain Highbury Trust.

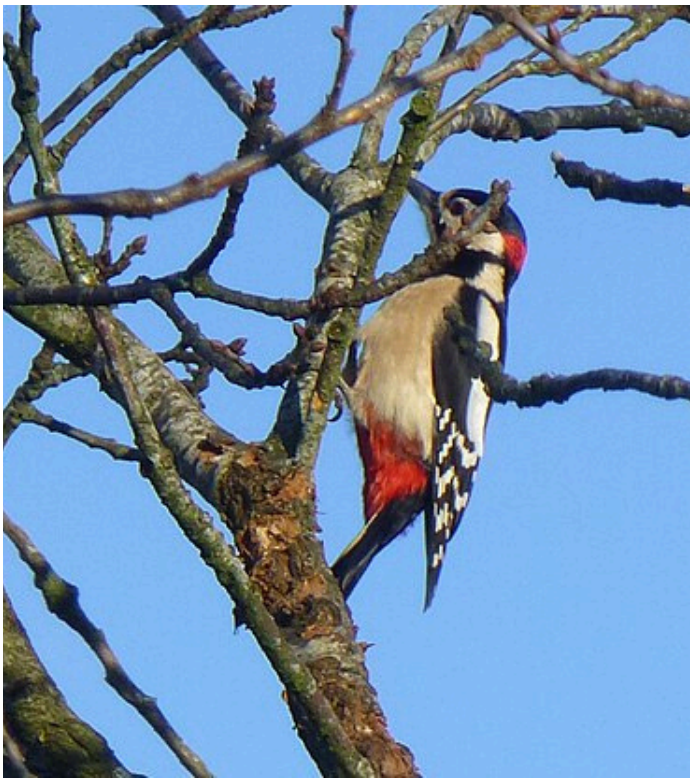
Gail Pittaway.

View further information on the history of the pleasure gardens here on our website or see the Chamberlain Highbury Trust website regarding forthcoming developments for Highbury and its gardens.

Mysteries of Migration - Our bird walk event

Last Autumn, Chris Millward, Team4nature, posed these question to this at the start of our Bird event. Why do birds migrate? Which birds migrate? Where do birds migrate to? How do they know the way?

We didn't get off to a promising start as it was pouring down but ten hardy souls weren't deterred. We circled a very wet park looking for birds and learning about the mysteries of migration. Chris shared some ancient myths. For centuries people believed that very little birds couldn't possibly fly across oceans to migrate and must hop on the backs of bigger birds; some ancient cultures believed that birds transmuted into different species when they disappeared over the winter or summer and came back in a different form. Bird ringing, which started in 1908, shed light on the process and enhanced our understanding.



Which species migrate? And why? Generally, birds are seeking warmer climates or better food supplies on migration. A large number make the journey including some that surprised us to learn about. We all probably know about birds like swallows and swifts migrating but as we stood in Hopyard Meadow we witnessed large groups of pigeons migrating south and also chaffinch and wagtail. Blackbirds and robins from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe are arriving at Highbury, headed south for warmer climes.

We are lucky to have diverse habitats at Highbury and we were on the lookout for incoming thrushes from Russia and Scandinavia – fieldfares and redwings. (See the article below). Some birds will stop locally and others will pass through Highbury because it is a green corridor connecting them to places further south.

How do birds find their way? Many use obvious physical landmarks such as mountain ranges, river valleys or coastlines to guide them. **Continued overleaf**

Migration continued

Others travel more directly even if this means crossing dangerous stretches of sea. Many migrating birds return along roughly the same route they followed on their outward journey. Other birds return a different way, taking advantage of different winds or food supplies only available at certain locations at different times of year.

We learned about the importance of prevailing winds and how to spot migrating birds - the flocks flying south in a straight line above Hopyard Meadow as opposed to the crows flying round in circles that will remain here. Chris recorded 317 pigeons, 14 redwings, 13 chaffinch and 6 fieldfares. Other highlights included seeing a great spotted woodpecker (above) and later watching a sparrowhawk trying to predate a ring-necked parakeet. We debated the pros and largely cons of the number of ring-necked parakeets at Highbury – are they taking roosting sites of bats, stock doves and great spotted woodpeckers? The jury is out but probably “yes”.

What a fabulous morning. Just before the end, the sun came out accompanied by a rainbow. We were cold and wet but energised by all we had seen and learned. A big thank you to Chris for sharing his expertise in such an accessible way.

Photocredit attribution: Male Great Spotted Woodpecker by Russel Will.

Bin Update

The story of the bins continues - in November, 2025, five new and much needed bins were installed in the park.

We lost two double bins earlier in the year - one to theft and one to fire - and so we are very grateful to Birmingham Municipal Charity for awarding us a grant.

Conservation work parties

A conservation group of volunteers from Birmingham University have been volunteering regulalry in the park. Here they are in action clearing a path and removing Reedmace. Our thanks for their efforts and to HPF committee member John Grayland for all the hard work!

Winter Visitors to look out for

Hundreds of thousands of Redwings and Fieldfares spend the winter in the UK. They leave their northern breeding grounds to feed in milder climes. Bird ringing data from Fieldfares shows that they may have travelled to the UK from 18 different countries.

Photocredits: Redwing (left) Notts Exminer; Fieldfare (right) Teresa Reynolds

Initially they feed in open areas e.g. farmland and as the winter progresses, these thrushes are more often seen in sheltered areas e.g. parks and gardens feeding on berries. The German name for Fieldfare is Wacholderdrossel translated as Elder thrush – evidently elderberries are a favourite food. Although Redwings and Fieldfares have the typical thrush speckled chests, they have key distinguishing features - Redwings have a distinctive white stripe above the eye and a chestnut patch below the wing. They are shy and often in large groups.

If you come into Highbury Park in the early morning you may hear the gentle trilling of dozens of Redwings in the trees. Fieldfares are much larger birds, have a grey head and rump and a speckled brownish chest which is whitish grey below. Windfall apples in your garden may tempt them to stay for a while. Often the first sign that they have arrived is a loud ‘chack check’ call.

Fungi in the park

The Fungus walk took place in the middle of October - our thanks to Lukas Large (Curator of Natural Science at Birmingham Museums Trust) for leading us on this fascinating activity. Just look at some of the wonderful fungi that were found! View the full list of species identified on our website here.

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.

Look ahead to see the events progamme in progress on our website and follow us on social media for the latest announcements.

View the 2026 Events Programme - scan here!

Looking back on 2025 - our AGM provided a rewarding evening

Highbury Park Friends is an entirely voluntary run organisation. We are dedicated to the preservation, improvement and enjoyment of Highbury Park. We were delighted to welcome so many of our members to our 2025 AGM, which was held at Highbury Hall in October (pictured below) - thank you for your attendance, thought provoking questions and enthusiasm for all the wonderful cakes that were donated and thoroughly enjoyed. Guest Speakers Lucy Bailey-Wright and Lucy Simpson from the Chamberlain Highbury Trust gave an update about the garden restoration project. For more details on the AGM and the mission and achievements of Highbury Park Friends, please view the following documents on our website:

HPF Accounts year end 2025

HPF Activity Report 2025

HPF AGM Minutes Oct 2025

Contributors to our Winter Bulletin: Anne Gilbert, Sarah Hill-Daniel, Gail Pittaway, Sarah Tomlinson, Ellen Pisolkar and John Grayland.

Our next issue is out : Spring 2026

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

@Highburyparkfriendsbrum **@Highbury Park Friends** **@highburyprkfriends.bsky.com**