



Friends of Oaks Park Newsletter 2021

2021 – A year of new activities and opportunities

When we put together last year’s newsletter, we could never have imagined just how much would change during 2021. Thank you so much to everyone who has worked so hard to keep the park and café open, particularly the Council and Idverde and those who picked litter, planted bulbs and helped in many ways.

The icing on the cake was that in October 2021, we achieved a Gold Award from London in Bloom and were awarded a Green Flag, which shows us to be a safe, well-cared for park. London in Bloom judges commented on the planting and care of the gardens, the extremely popular café and the work of its leaseholder, Ilhan and praised the highly active Friends’ group.

The pandemic has made us look at parks and how we use them in a new way. We have had more visitors and have organised new activities to help people appreciate the park and get involved. We have started Tai Chi classes, run nature walks and put in chalk scrapes to encourage the wildlife and natural chalk grassland. We were featured in Sutton Scene, the Council’s weekly newsletter and our Chairman was interviewed on BBC Radio Surrey.

We have lots of ideas for 2022, including a big effort to plant more trees to celebrate H.M. the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. It should be exciting!



We've been busy

Another year, and another lockdown but at least this time we were ready for it. The café already had its covered outside area ready for wintry days and a cold spring. The weather threw everything at us and the early spring was certainly cold and wet. Even so lots of people visited the park and were able to relax, exercise and enjoy the tranquillity of green spaces, wonderful trees and lots of new spring bulbs from our planting in October 2020.



The Friends helped getting the park ready for the new season having a couple of litter picks and the new informal gardening group helped plant new white roses in one of the formal beds and Penstemons and Salvias in another ahead of the London in Bloom and Green Flag, judges’ visits.

The summer saw a lot of the Covid restrictions lifted and we all relaxed more and many people were able to get away on holiday. The number of visitors to the park has remained high and we have been so pleased to welcome more new members of the Friends. Who knows what we’ll be able to achieve in 2022?



Tai Chi

Mid-week Tai Chi sessions over the summer months became a mindful and gentle way of trying a new skill, developing co-ordination and relaxation techniques.

Being outdoors, surrounded by the trees and flowers of the formal garden, added beautifully to the overall experience, expertly guided and instructed by David Talbot, who showed great patience with a group of novices.

Amazingly, no class was cancelled due to the weather. Certain moves in the Tai Chi routine such as ‘Parting the Clouds’ made sure the sun usually appeared. Let’s hope we can do something similar next year to make the most of the ambience of Oaks Park.



AGM Reminder:

Saturday 20th November at Wallington Library at 2.00 pm

Dawn Chorus Walk

I loved this walk, such a pleasure to see and hear Nature at its best.

It was 6 a.m. on May 2nd. As we waited for the group to gather, I couldn't believe the intensity of the dawn chorus, such a variety of sounds, layer upon layer of song. We started the walk at the Oaks' café, heading into the woodland at the side of the park. David Warburton was an excellent guide. He could pick out and identify so many birds singing among the trees. Bluetits and great tits, blackcaps, chiff chaffs, robins, wrens and blackbirds to name a few.

Leaving the woodland, we came out of the park onto the Woodmansterne Rd. Following the footpath to the junction, we crossed the road and went into Carshalton Meadow. This was a new area to me and such a surprise to see this open stretch of chalk grassland, definitely worth another visit. From here we headed back to the Oaks via the Lavender fields.

David gave us a valuable introduction to the plants and wildlife which flourish on the chalk and the importance of maintaining and developing this habitat. The Oaks is a wonderful area, full of interesting species, it was a privilege to be able to see some of them with such an expert guide. Thank you for organising this. I do hope we can do it again.



Discovering Bats

On 3rd July this year, 15 of us assembled by the café at 9.30pm ready to find out about Oaks Park's bats and hopefully detect some of them. David Warburton, Sutton's Senior Biodiversity Officer, and Biodiversity Field Officer Mark Featherstone were ready and waiting with a supply of bat detectors. These instruments can be set at various frequencies to detect the incoming bat calls. They then reduce the frequency to make it audible so we can hear the bats. David told us about the life cycle, feeding habits and behaviour of bats and explained they are a protected species and are much in need of conservation.

We set off very excitedly to the tarmac circle behind the café and there heard our first bat. With a frequency of 45kh it was probably a common pipistrelle, one of our commonest small bats and, because it was not quite dusk, we also saw it flying around the treetops. We could distinguish the flying frequency, a series of regular pips, from the feeding / prey catching frequency, a rapid series of pips ending in a "burp." It was fascinating.

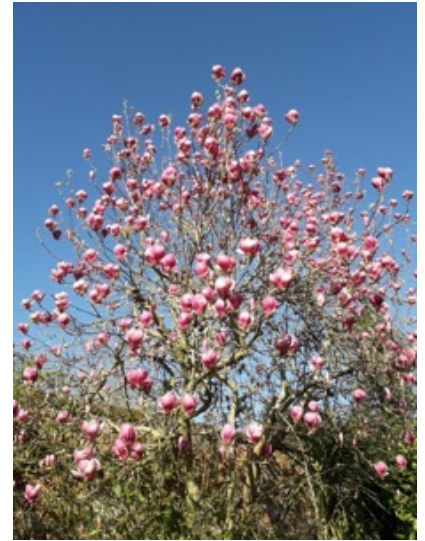
We walked off along the tree line bordering the drive and heard several more pipistrelles and also a larger bat, the Noctule, with a frequency of around 25kh. We caught a glimpse of this bat too. We heard many more bats down by the Woodmansterne entrance to the park. It was getting quite dark and there was lots of feeding activity. We heard a soprano pipistrelle at a frequency of 55kh as we headed back up along the hedge which divides the large open green space. We didn't hear many bats from then on but had fun switching frequencies to scan for any new ones.



Informal Gardening

Are you a gardener? Do you like weeding and dead heading? We have an excellent gardener, Tony Moorhouse, from Idverde, who looks after the Oaks, mows the lawns, picks up litter and does a lot of work on the flower beds. Some of us have started to get together occasionally to do some of the time-consuming bits around the flower beds to help Tony and the park. This year, we have planted a new bed of white roses, spent hours dead-heading roses and planted the centre bed in front of the grotto with salvias.

We have made new friends, learnt more about the plants and had to have coffee or ice-cream afterwards! Tony, his colleagues, the Council and the Friends were absolutely delighted that all our hard work led to us winning a Gold award from London in Bloom. Now we need to keep it! If you would like to get involved, please email us at: friendsofoakspark@gmail.com or speak to any of the Friends when we're in the park. We usually wear Friends' badges or high visibility jackets.





Bees

Bees have existed for millions of years and man has used honey bees as a source of food from early times. Bees probably originated in Eastern Asia and then spread to Europe and Africa. The first known exploitation of bees by man was recorded in cave paintings in Spain some 15,000 years ago. 10,000 years later the Egyptians kept bees in hives for their honey and wax and transported them along the Nile following the flowering seasons.

Today, the honeybee *Apis mellifera* is farmed by man but remains a wild outbred and non-domesticated animal unlike other farm animals. UK beekeeping is largely made up of many amateurs and a few commercial bee farmers. The British Beekeeping Association (BBKA) administers all aspects of beekeeping through county associations of which Surrey has eight. The importance of bees is to pollinate flowers and trees to ensure their existence in the world ecosystem. Pollen collected from flowers is an important protein source for the developing young brood and for the bee colony. Bees are highly susceptible to climate change and the impact of man on their environment and they pollinate 70 of the 100 crop species that provide 90% of food worldwide.



Tree Trail

We are producing a tree trail booklet for Oaks Park. To begin the work, we had the help of Ben Morris and Bill Wyatt, the Sutton Council's tree experts. A group of us set off, notebooks and cameras/phones to hand and were shown a huge variety of beautiful, unusual and very interesting trees, around the café and Croydon Lane end of the Park. Among the trees spotted were the Millennium Oak near the formal gardens. This is a Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*) with beautiful autumn foliage and was planted to commemorate the Millennium,

Down the drive from the café, towards the Woodmansterne Road Park entrance, there is the stump of a very old Oak tree. It's thought to be one of the original Lambert Oaks, named after the park's original owners.

These are just two of the 30 or so trees we were shown on our walk and we hope to include more in the finished leaflet. We still have lots to do but hope to have the booklet ready early next year.



Our Plans for 2022

There are many things the Friends would like to do to support Oaks Park. However, we need people to get involved to do them. Here are some of the things we are considering:

- *Tree Planting to mark H.M. the Queen's Platinum Jubilee*
- *Hedgehog monitoring project*
- *Tree Trail booklet*
- *Reviewing disabled access to the park*
- *Running another Tai Chi course in late Spring/Summer*
- *More nature walks*
- *Retaining our Green Flag and gold status with London in Bloom*
- *Supporting our artists at CAOS 2022*
- *Developing an art project for young people*
- *Encouraging more concerts*

We would love you to help us. More details will be coming out soon.



Why I joined the Friends:

"Joining the Friends of Oaks Park is a great way of meeting like-minded local people. You even get the chance to take up new hobbies such as Tai Chi, and of course doing your bit for the environment."

"It's a great park and I get a real buzz out of doing something to help by litterpicking"

"I joined the Friends because I walk in the Park regularly, and feel that I am blessed to have such a lovely natural environment so close to me. It has given me an opportunity to give back a little of what I gain."

Sponsorship

We are very grateful to Surrey Trees and Gardens (STAG) for sponsoring the purchase of some of the woodland bulbs we have planted this year.

Earlier in the year, a number of the Friends sponsored the purchase of 4 owl nest boxes, 3 bat boxes and 2 house martin nests. All the boxes are up around the park and we hope they will be well used.

Thank you to Ilhan and the team at Oaks Café for their ongoing support of the work of the Friends and collecting donations for bird food.

We are very lucky that our good friends at the Downlands Trust have continued to support us in many ways and have offered us funding for projects we are developing for 2022.

If you are interested in contributing something to the work of the park through a financial donation, or in some other way, please email us at friendsofoakspark@gmail.com and we'll get in touch. Thank you again to all our sponsors.



AGM

Our Autumn meeting will take place in the Mallinson Room (1st floor) at Wallington Library on **Saturday 20th November** from 2-4 p.m. There will be a short business meeting when we will elect the committee and approve the accounts, a chance for you to tell us what you would like the Friends to be doing and then a talk by Philip Shepherd about 'The Honey Bee'. Please come and join us if you can.



Farewells

In the last two months we have lost two valuable longstanding members of the Friends:

Marion Joyce Llewellyn, known to us all as Joyce, joined the Friends of Oaks Park as a life member in October 2004. She joined the committee soon after and was an enthusiastic and tireless supporter. She brought her forthright approach and quick scrutinising mind to bear on everything she, and everyone else did and was an invaluable member of the team. Her support was always generously given and she will be sadly missed by us all.

John Pickup was a life member of the Friends and took considerable interest in the history of the park. He was actively involved for a long time, even planting trees on a very wet December day when he was almost 90. We will miss his ideas and enthusiasm.



Committee

Chairman: Anne Pearcey
Secretary: Ray Shepherd
Treasurer: Tina Bates
Publicity: Anne Jameson
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Thank you to Tony Moorhouse for some of the photographs in this newsletter.