Newsletter November 2026





Autumn is a season of many changes in our nature reserve. Gone is the searing heat of summer as temperatures dip and some welcome rain showers start to ‘green up’ the parched ground. The trees take on a whole new beauty as their leaves change colour before they lose them completely. However, at one of our early September workdays, our volunteers’ excitement at being drenched for the first time in months was short-lived. The prospect of further heavy rain didn’t materialise when the weather suddenly warmed up again and our waterways didn’t fill up as quickly as we’d hoped. Now, though, we are well and truly into autumn. The clocks have gone back, the nights are drawing in and we’ve had our first storm of the season. It’s wonderful to see our lake filling up again which is also great news for our wildlife.

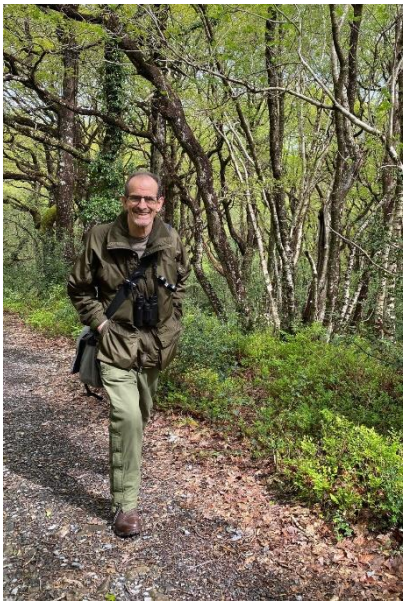
A New Interpretation Board



It’s on platform 2 at the lake and depicts birds of the lake and wetlands that are infrequent visitors or harder to spot because they live amongst the reeds. Funded through the Croydon Community Greenspace Grant with a top-up from the FoSNCP, we have dedicated the board to our dear Friend, John Hughes who sadly passed away two years ago. His wife, Karen and his son, Simon have kindly written a tribute to John for inclusion in this newsletter.

“The SNCP became John’s retirement project and his purpose in life. Over the course of fifteen years, he woke up before dawn and got himself down to the Country Park for sunrise to engage with nature and the birds in particular. Armed with his A7 notepaper and binoculars, he traversed the 125 acre site and faithfully recorded his bird sightings. Always a man of discipline, he was rigorous in his record keeping and strict in his decision making. Over the years, he built an invaluable database that illustrated the richness of bird life in the park and population trends over time. As

excited as the rest of us by occasional rarities, he was equally interested in the mundane. His stories of individual and families of birds transcended mere data so that his annual bird report gave us a joyful and colourful picture of bird life in the park. John was a deeply optimistic man and began each day with a positive outlook. Visiting the park in the morning set him up for the day ahead. Over time, he got to know the people in the park and developed deep and lifelong friendships. His collaborations with the Friends group gave him a real sense of purpose. He also delighted in getting to know the many dogs and their owners. In his last few months, he was deeply moved by the kindness shown towards him by this vibrant community and he came to understand that he was widely loved. We know he would want us to thank you all now on his behalf. It provided him with hope for the future and strength to carry on. Finally, we remember our last visit to the park. Sitting on Platform 2 in the sun studying the birds, chatting to each other and park visitors, he experienced extreme joy and peace of mind. The memory of his happiness that day will always be a comfort to those who loved him and we will always think of it when we visit 'John's Platform'. "



Karen Hughes and Simon Hughes

Our Feathered Friends – Howard Dingley



It was disappointing that the record high, sustained temperatures of the summer which caused the water level at the lake to fall and expose large expanses of mud, did not attract more waders other than a Common Sandpiper and Snipe. As compensation, gorgeous Grey Wagtail were more in evidence. One particular breeding success was a Little Grebe which grew to maturity from a brood of five which are pictured in our 2027 calendar. Moorhens had a great breeding season and a handful from a couple of large broods of Mallard managed to evade predators.

With higher water levels, Little Egret and Cormorant numbers have now ballooned but Teal, Shoveller and Tufted Duck are still nowhere near their usual numbers. A kingfisher has been dashing round the lake and utilising many fishing perches which is most pleasing after an absence of many months, and skulking Water Rail are staking out winter territories in wet ditches and reed beds, using their 'squealing piglet 'calls and fighting with competitors.

Away from the lake, the autumn migration brought in flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare to feed on the many berry-bearing trees and shrubs while Meadow Pipit, Brambling and Chaffinch have been seen. The Brambling, probably from Scandinavia, is very seldom seen here. In La Motes meadow, Stonechat are regularly spotted, perched conspicuously on top of teasel heads and brambles and characteristically flicking their tails. In terms of its infrequent appearances in the park, a Grasshopper Warbler photographed in the wetlands, is near the top of the list although it won't be staying as it is on its way to Africa. Even in its prime habitat, this bird is notoriously difficult to spot but is easily detected by the loud, continuous and penetrating song (called reeling) from dense, low vegetation; once heard, not forgotten.

Lastly, well ahead of its usual heart-of-winter arrival, a Common Gull accompanied a large flock of Black-headed Gulls. The name is misleading as other gull species are more common in the UK, but a famous 17th century Essex priest/naturalist, John Ray, believed it was the most numerous and the name has stuck.

Words from the Warden, Ian Glover

Fabulous Fungi

Autumn, according to Keats, is the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, a time of harvests and abundance. The much needed October rain, along with the fallen leaves, provided plentiful food to bring forth a profusion of fungi.

In 2023 the Friends of South Norwood Country Park held their first ever fungi foray led by Mycologist Clifford Davy. Since then, he has led a further nine fungi forays in SNCP, conducted five fungi surveys and, this autumn, taught a Mushroom ID course. Over the course of these events, 175 distinct species have been recorded. All of this contributes to our knowledge of SNCP and introduces attendees to the world of mycology.

In addition to their aesthetic value, fungi perform a number of important ecological roles such as breaking down dead wood and leaves, which returns nutrients to the soil, and forming mycorrhizal networks that benefit many plants by providing nutrients and increasing resistance to a variety of stressors including drought.



Some spectacular highlights from this season are the Cauliflower Fungus (*Sparassis crispa*) (pictured left) seen along route 666 and the Ink Caps (*Coprinopsis atramentaria*) (pictured right) seen along the footpath to viewing platform 3.



Update on the SNCP Beaver Proposal

A brief update this time:

My colleagues and I are currently working to secure funding for this proposal, a process which is definitely more of a marathon than a sprint.

Alongside this, the feasibility study is progressing. The Beaver Trust have independently assessed the site's suitability and are working on a method statement which will be an essential component of an eventual licence application to Natural England.

Finally, we are designing ecological baseline surveys which will give us a more detailed understanding of the flora and fauna of SNCP. This information will provide valuable insights that can inform the management of SNCP, support the licence application mentioned above, and, if we are successful and introduce a family of beavers to SNCP, monitor the impact they have on the site.

Autumn Volunteering

During the autumn, the Friends' volunteer work parties focus on some of the wetter habitats in SNCP – the main reedbed, South Norwood Stream and the wetlands.

The main reedbed is in the eastern lobe of the lake, to the right of platform four. It is one of the most sensitive and valuable habitats in SNCP, home to Reed and Cetti's Warblers in the Summer and Water Rail over the Winter. An annual maintenance task is coppicing the willow within and along the edge of the reedbed to prevent it from overshading the reeds. The arisings were separated into pliable rods for willow crafts and brash, which was added to the dead hedge that runs along the edge of the reedbed and helps to protect this sensitive habitat.

A note of dead hedges: a dead hedge is a linear assemblage of *dead* woody material. We make frequent use of them in SNCP as a barrier to protect sensitive areas, as a repository for cut or fallen material, and as a micro-habitat in their own right. As the wood starts to break down the dead hedge becomes moist and warm, providing ideal conditions for fungi and shelter for invertebrates and small mammals. Some members of FoSNCP have elevated the building of dead hedges into a fine art, taking exquisite care to make the finished item as densely packed as possible.



The wetlands are irrigated by a pipe that was installed in 2017, diverting water from the South Norwood Stream. Beyond the pipe, channels were dug which branch out into the wetlands, enabling water to flow in and through them. Since then, the channels have become overgrown with dense vegetation and clogged with silt. This season

FoSNCP, alongside teams of corporate volunteers, have focused on clearing the vegetation and silt from these channels and thinning the vegetation to maintain the inflow and increase the amount of standing water in the wetlands. The next stage of this project will be to increase the diversity of plant species within the wetlands.

Calendar 2027



Sales of our 2027 calendar are going well. All photos are taken within our nature reserve by local photographers. It is a wonderful celebration of the beauty on our doorstep and helps raise funds towards our conservation work and projects. Our remaining November sales dates will be Saturday 14th November and Saturday 28th November.



Our conservation workdays take place on the second and fourth Saturday mornings of the month and weekly morning/afternoon on Tuesdays. As Warden, Ian determines what work he would like us to help him with following his management plan. He begins each workday by explaining the tasks in detail and giving training to new volunteers. If you would like to join in with one of our workdays and learn more about the importance of conservation, please email us on friendsofsncp@gmail.com

For more information about SNCP and detailed workday reports, please visit our website www.friendsofsncp.org.uk. Our warden, Ian Glover, can be contacted on Ian.Glover@croydon.gov.uk.