

**Newsletter 67 – June 2016**

[www.friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk)

**Welcome to the June edition of the Friends of Cassiobury Park  
newsletter.**



*Photograph by Anna Brooks*



## Nesting Time



All gardeners understand how the progress through the seasons brings changes in colours, from the yellows of daffodils and primroses, through the bluebells and forget-me-nots, to the beautiful pink and red blossoms of apple trees, cherry, clematis and now rhododendrons. This is followed by the hotter colours of herbaceous borders – I wish for, in my garden. Sometimes the changes are so gradual that we almost don't notice the start of the new season.

After our cold April the arrival of some sunshine in May made us realise that summer was on the way. The natural world also seems to progress in sudden leaps as all the deciduous trees are now in leaf, with many different shades of green as the chlorophylls and other pigments build up. The sheer speed of growth of grasses, reeds in the river bank and all the shrubs and herb layer means that the park and LNR are full of verdant growth.



Open space seems reduced and birds become much more difficult to spot as the females (usually), hide away, incubating eggs on their nests. Bird song continues as males still stake their territories and hang onto their mates, but not all as faithfully as we once thought - male dunnocks may be supporting more than one family. Other calls are for alarm warnings, such as frantic 'chakking' by magpies when they spot a bird of prey or the sudden descending calls of blackbirds when disturbed. Other quiet ticking calls might be robins or other species, just staying in touch.



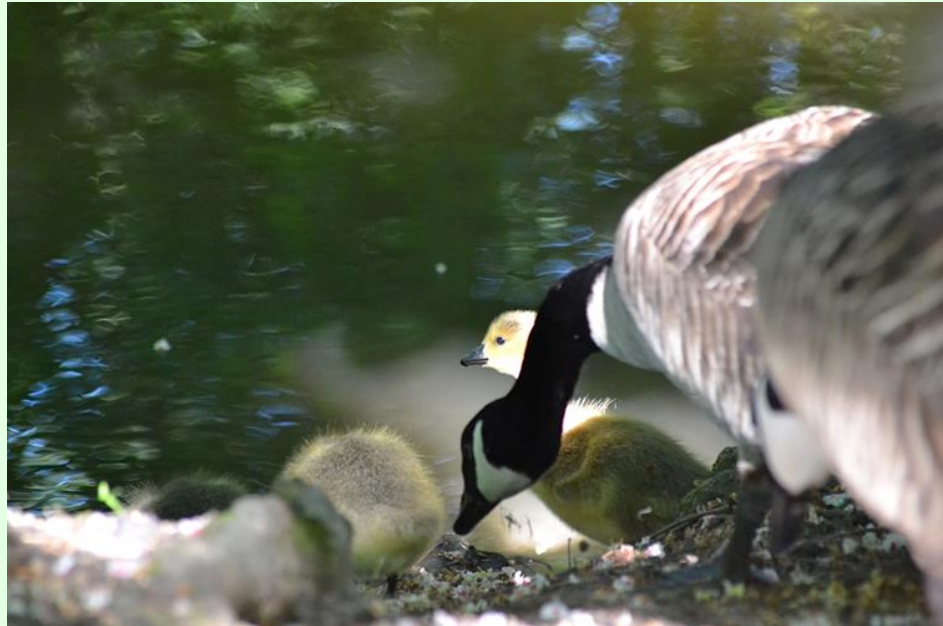
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Our HMWT warden Rob Hopkins led nature reserve walks on Tuesday 17th and Saturday 21st May, during the breeding season, when we stop the reserve work in the park. On the Saturday he answered questions from a group of around 20 people, whose knowledge of the natural world was quite varied.

One question was why do birds sing? We listened to migrants like black cap and chiff chaff, robins, wrens and blackbirds. I'm already spotting robins with beaks full of invertebrates to feed chicks, and mallard duckling are no doubt cruising around the river and canal with one small one constantly getting left behind. It's that time of year again when Springwatch comes back on TV to watch all the fledglings...We are not to be outdone as Anna Brooks has captured some wonderful pictures of ducklings and Canada geese goslings.

The group walking with Rob included Jon Pettifer, who leads our work parties. This was a chance to appreciate just how much work goes into maintaining the reserve - everything from pond and channel clearing, willow coppicing, woodland felling and new tree planting, even nest box cleaning in the autumn. This month we will be pulling out Himalayan balsam, which would otherwise compete with our native species on the river banks. All this work is to maintain the habitats for so many different species which live in the Nature Reserve. Rather than telling you more about what we saw in May, I'd like to move us on into 'glorious June' and imagine that the great crested newt eggs which we found in Archie's pond, glued under the folded edges of leaves, have now hatched into tadpoles and are well on the way to morphing into baby newts. These will later leave the pond and spend winter hibernating under fallen leaves below the shrubs which surround the pond.





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The more newly created smaller ponds may provide alternative sites to breed another year. Meanwhile the redampions and buttercups are still flowering around the banks, and yellow irises in the damp areas close to the river. Meadow sweet, which was visible just as small leaves, will soon be opening its white frothy flowers. It was used as an herbal medicine as it produces the aspirin chemical, salicylic acid was of course originally discovered in white willow bark. The clear spring-fed channel into the river which passes the ponds has a gravel bottom where crayfish live. Caddis fly larvae and dragon fly larvae spend most of their life there in the fast flowing water but about now the dragon fly larvae become nymphs which crawl up the stems of water plants and undergo ecdysis – splitting and shedding their skins. The newly emerged dragon or damselfly pumps air into their vessels which inflate the wings and off they fly over the river, looking beautiful in the sunshine. They then find a mate and more eggs get laid to complete the 'circle of life'. Our guided walk ended by passing over Crowfoot Bridge where we saw an ash tree which had signs of 'ash die-back' disease. The ends of some smaller branches had no signs of life, no buds opening, so this tree will be one to keep an eye on. Then as we all paused alongside the weir and had a chance to notice that water crowfoot is now well established again and was just about to put up aerial flower stalks (look now for white flowers) something quite amazing happened. We found ourselves staring at an equally startled muntjac deer in the old cress beds on the far bank. These dog-sized deer have two downward tusks around the mouth, which are actually upper canines, were once escapes from the Woburn Park collection and are now widespread throughout the South. If you manage to get out to walk during June look out for the flat white flower heads on musty elder bushes and, as the hawthorn blossom fades from white to rusty pink, so the dog roses open as bright pink flowers which gradually fade to white petals. Most importantly enjoy it all!

Elizabeth Gower 10th June 2016.

Thank you to Anna for her wonderful camera work.



## Cassiobury Birdwatch with Peter Jenkins



### A special Spring bird...

In the past the park has been one of the best places in the NW of London to see Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus minor* or 'Lesser Spot' to birders!). These delightful sparrow-sized woodpeckers have always been difficult to find. Even in woods where they are known to breed they unobtrusively feed high in tall trees and cover a large territory. But in spring they are often first identified by their repetitive high pitched calls and by their drumming, which is lighter, faster and more prolonged than their larger and much more common 'cousins', the Greater Spotted Woodpecker.

*Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Cassiobury Park on 27 April  
(Photo: Andrew Moon)  
Note the small size of the bill and the barring on the back  
(Greater Spots have 'paint splashes')*

Lesser Spots are quite a specialised bird in terms of habitat and feeding requirements and in the last ten years they have been steadily declining. So it was a wonderful treat this spring to have our first definite record in the park for 5 years. A bird was first seen by Ian Bennell on 31st March when he was working on the Croquet Lawns. Ian works for Veolia and has a long association with the park. He is an expert birder and can identify most species by sound, as he did this time. He also keeps a complete list of bird species recorded in the park.

By the time I caught up with the news via Herts Bird Club it was already well into April and there was a daily trickle of visitors hoping to see the bird. On the second of May I was lucky enough to be around when two male birds were seen together. The last record was of one bird was on the 4th.

Let's hope that both birds found females and are breeding successfully. The large older trees in Cassiobury Park and the presence of water are key requirements for this species and long may we continue to protect their habitat.

## HLF Renovation Project Update

Since starting in February building works across the park are really starting to take shape, the Hub building has foundations, steel frame and concrete floors completed.

The bandstand has been returned from the workshop following its restoration and is due to be completed and sited in its' new location by August.



*Photographs by Anna Brooks*



The Cha café area demolition work has been completed with the new garden and play area progressing well. Internally the new toilets are near completion. The café will be re-opening to the public in late August

To view room 60's exciting video for the Cassiobury Park restoration project please click on the link:  
<http://vimeo.com/70483322>

More information, updates and contacts  
[www.watford.gov.uk/cassioburypark](http://www.watford.gov.uk/cassioburypark)  
Matt Hill, Cassiobury Park Project Manager  
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## Cassiobury Walks

[www.cassiobury-walks.co.uk](http://www.cassiobury-walks.co.uk)

Raffi Katz

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**Where are they now? Where were they then? Who made them...and what for? Four mysteries.**

### Mystery 1.

The lady of wood (I expect she does have a name). Here are two photos, one taken in April 2013 showing the lady in all her splendour, and the next photo taken in January 2015 by which time she has aged. Please will someone tell me about her. And where is she now?



### Mystery 2.

These giant ramps in Whippendell Wood. Who built them and what were they for? Did they once support something massive? A ski slope? A railway??

### Mystery 4.

Sorry, this one does not have a photograph, because I came across it soon after I'd moved to this part of Watford, and that was so long ago that I wasn't in the habit of carrying a camera wherever I went. In the Woods, Whippendell Wood or very nearby. A 'pit', and at the bottom is a single, solitary gravestone. Can anyone tell me where this is and the story behind it?



### Mystery 3.

Also in Whippendell Wood, if it wasn't for this photo, I may have thought this beautiful bench had been a figment of my imagination, I've walked through the wood many times and have never managed to find it again. Where is it?



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And so to my four best photographs of the last few weeks. The lock, the bluebells and the sky (next page). Though I must admit, I can't be sure exactly where the sky is. Please see lots more photographs on my website at [www.cassiobury-walks.co.uk](http://www.cassiobury-walks.co.uk), and see my famous book of walks, they all start from Cassiobury Park.





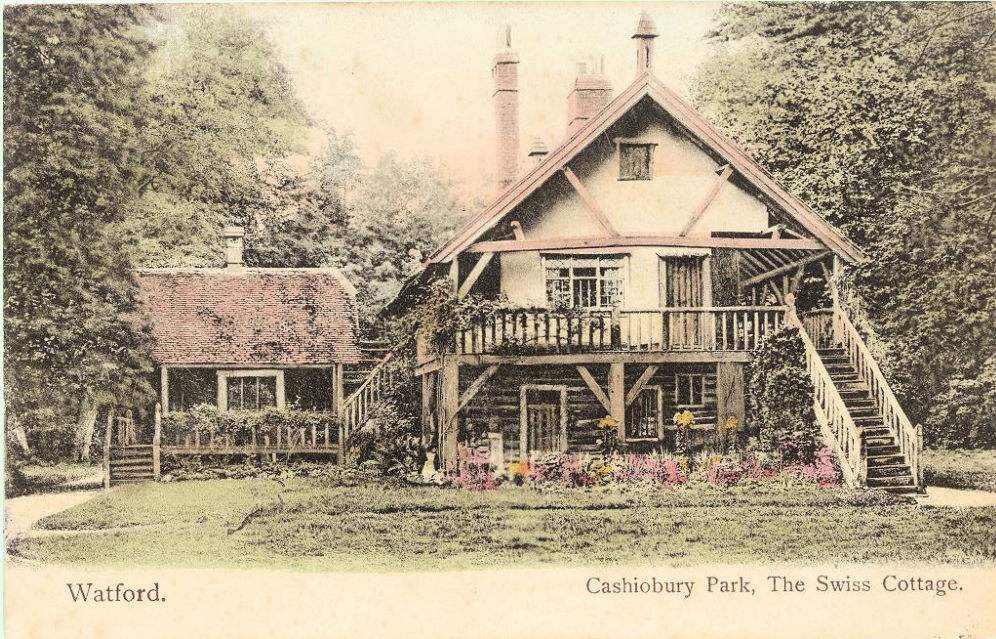


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## Opening up the past to see the future

The community archaeology dig at the site of the Swiss Cottage in Cassiobury Park has uncovered some interesting finds.

All four brick corners have been unearthed highlighting the scale and size of the old building that burnt down in the 1940's. The archaeologists, led by Laurie Elvin and Graham Keevil from the South West



Herts Archaeology and History Society, alongside members of the public trained to take part in the dig, have also unearthed pieces of herringbone decorated smoking pipe, slithers of lead window piping, decorative oven grills and handles from pots and pans. But the most exciting part has been the unearthing of the complete, but damaged old iron oven range sited in the centre of the building. The dig lasted for two weeks and the site has been a great feature for educational events with one or two schools spending some time visiting the site. On June 18th there was an Open Day for the general public to come along and see the site, talk to the archaeologists, have a tour of the area and see the exhibits found alongside some family archaeological fun events.



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Interpretation is a major part of the Heritage Lottery Fund and there is only one of these older buildings left standing now, the charming Cassiobridge Lodge on the corner of Gade Avenue and the Rickmansworth Road

Brick posts have also been uncovered that were the bases for the wooden balcony significant to the chalet style of the building (a private residence not open to the public). Further to linking in to the history of the estate, the dig site will be left as it is and fenced off, as a piece of lasting heritage for future generations of visitors and young people to see.



The Swiss Cottage was a swiss chalet style designed brick and wooden building, used by the generations of the Earls of Essex as a holiday home on the other side of the estate from the main Cassiobury Mansion which stood on what is now the Cassiobury housing estate and was demolished in the 1920's. In later years, the Swiss Cottage as it is known, was used briefly as a small school as well as a home for various house staff and gamekeepers attached to the estate.



**Debbie Brady Cassiobury Park Community Ranger**



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**As well as providing the Friends with her wonderful photographs, Anna has been helping us to update and maintain some of our social media sites:**

[www.facebook.com/FriendsOfCassioburyPark](http://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfCassioburyPark)

[www.instagram.com/friendsofcassioburypark](http://www.instagram.com/friendsofcassioburypark)

[www.twitter.com/cassioburyFOCP](http://www.twitter.com/cassioburyFOCP)

**Website : [www.friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk)**