



PARK LIFE

AUTUMN 2001

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TOWN PARK USERS GROUP

NEW BREEDING PROGRAMME AT PETS CORNER

Artificial insemination has been used for the first time on one of Pets Corner's rare breed animals following an urgent appeal by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust to boost numbers of Gloucester Old Spot pigs decimated by the recent foot-and-mouth outbreak.

Staff were asked to try the new method in response to continuing restrictions on the movement of live animals which would have otherwise prevented natural breeding from taking place this year.

Annie, is due to farrow on Boxing Day with a litter sired by the champion boar Kenerton Vulcan.

According to the Trust, 25 per cent of Gloucester Old Spots – also known as the orchard pig – have been culled since the outbreak of the disease last February, threatening the long-term viability of the breed in Britain.

A large crowd gathered to watch Pets Corner staff assist with the birth of a Red Poll heifer on the afternoon of Saturday, 1 September. Starlight Ember – the name chosen for the calf following a competition organised by local radio station Mercury FM – is said to be doing well.

Jenny the donkey, one of Pet's Corner's oldest residents, died on October 10. She was 31.

Rebuilding work on the area of Pets Corner devastated by last year's fire was due to commence in late October. The project is expected to last several months, and it is hoped will not create too much disruption for staff and visitors.

Meetings with Remarkable Trees

The Town Park boasts many fine examples of both native and foreign trees, perhaps none more so than the Coast Redwood, which towers over Spurriers Café and the skating rink...

In its native home on the Coast Ranges of northern California, the coast redwood, *sequoia sempervirens*, grows to great heights and is one of the tallest trees in the world, reaching over 350ft (107m). It is also one of the most long-lived, with a few reaching over 2500 years of age.

The species was first introduced into Britain in 1843, which would make the redwood next to Spurriers one of the first specimens to be grown in this country. It thrives in Britain and has been planted widely in parks and large gardens, but it grows best in the south-west of England, away from drying winds, where moisture is higher.

We might speculate as to the reasons why such a large tree was planted so close to Spurriers house rather than as a more distant ornamental feature elsewhere. A clue might lie in the tree's bark, which has unusual fire-retardant properties.

The redwood's ability to resist fire would have made it an effective lightning conductor for Spurriers' 19th century owners, who may have been drawn as much to the tree's utility value as to its perceived novelty or aesthetic value. (Another fine example of a coast redwood, next to Kingsmoor House in Great Parndon, was hit by lightning a few years ago. It had to be felled only because the bolt split the main trunk.)

On close inspection the cinnamon-red trunk appears very thick and soft with stringy fibres – so soft and fibrous, in fact, that it can be stripped away by hand with little effort. In mature specimens, the bark becomes very deeply furrowed. Coast redwood is one of the few conifers that will sprout coppice shoots from cut stumps and this re-growth will occur even in the shade. Despite its unusual regenerative powers, it has hardly been tried as a forest tree, even though the rate of growth is good and the timber excellent.

Left well alone, our remarkable redwood at Spurriers could still be standing in the year 4001 – a curious and ancient attraction to any future Town Park users.

D.W.

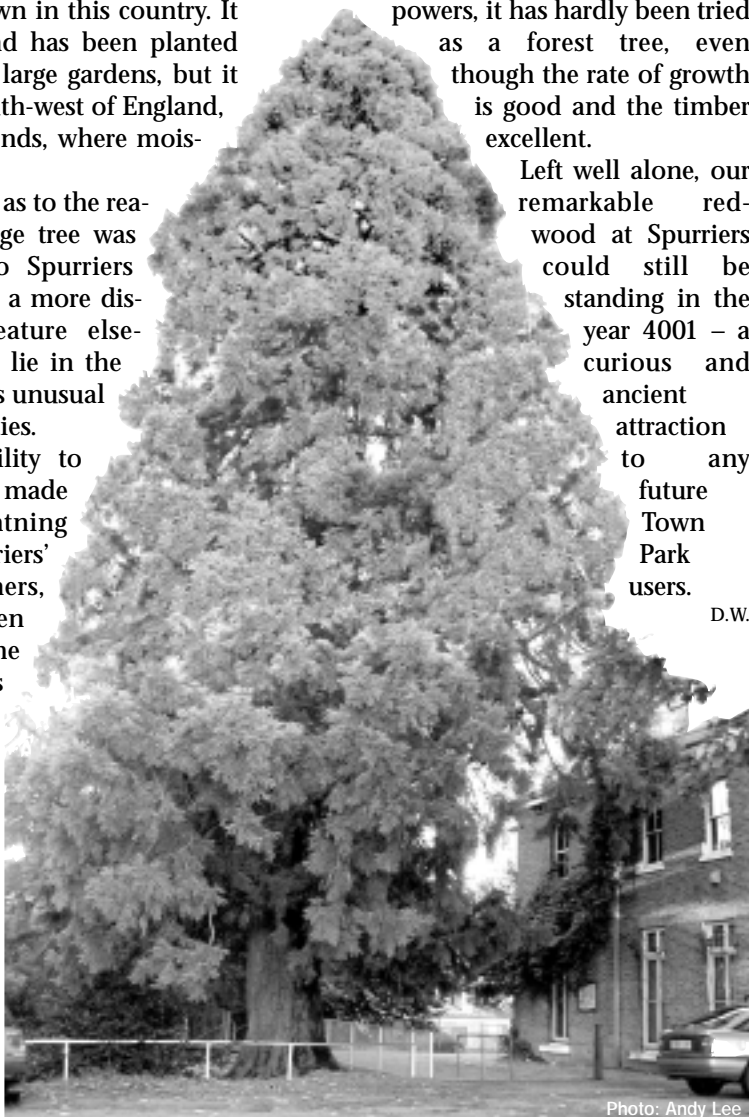


Photo: Andy Lee

A Stroll Along The River

Many people think of the Town Park as the area centred on the Greyhound at Netteswell Cross and extending northwards to Spurriers and the Bandstand, not realising that this is only half the total area. In fact the Park extends well beyond Edinburgh Way, past the railway as far as the River Stort...

Furthermore, it extends in a narrow strip right along the river from Burnt Mill lock as far as Harlow Mill. These areas by the riverside are more akin to a country park than a municipal town park, and it is this juxtaposition of the formal and naturalistic areas which is one of the things that makes Harlow's Town Park so special.

These naturalistic areas are part of a whole series of habitats along the length of the Lea and Stort rivers, some of which are nationally important for the wildlife they attract. Within the boundaries of the park are two local nature reserves, one of which has received in the past the designation, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These areas are managed with wildlife in mind by a mixture of the council's parks department doing the regular maintenance work and Harlow Conservation Volunteers doing the more unusual and experimental management tasks.

To explore these areas start by taking the lane leading off School Lane running alongside Harlow Council's parks department Marshgate Depot. The hedge by the side of the lane opposite the depot is believed to be centuries old and contains a good variety of native tree species. It is the subject of an experimental restoration project by conservation volunteers using the traditional laying technique after many years of being managed simply by trimming with a flail. At the end of this lane take the underpass under Edinburgh Way. The path then takes you past an area of rough grassland between the Pearson building and the Road Safety Training Ground. This has been planted with a variety of wild meadow flowers, including cowslip and celandine – again by volunteers. The area is cut only once or twice a year to allow them to flower and set seed.

Continue along the path over a small wooden bridge (built by Harlow Conservation Volunteers from a kit supplied by the council) towards the railway, and take the footbridge over the railway which is a good vantage point to see the whole of this part of the park. Between the railway and river are a whole series of meadows, where in recent years a mowing regime has been established, which it is hoped will encourage more wet meadow wild flowers. The meadows are separated by dikes bordered by willows. These have been coppiced or pollarded – that is, cut at ground level or head height respectively (also by vol-

unteers) – in such a way that the tree regrows from this point. This is a traditional way of managing the banks of watercourses – it encourages tree root growth, stabilising the banks, it prevents branches falling in and blocking the water, and as a bonus it produces a dense bushy growth of new shoots providing ideal cover for nesting birds.

Heading parallel to the river away from the Station and the Moorhen you come to the May Meads Marsh wildlife area. Here an area of open water complete with island has been created in the marsh for wetland creatures. Gently sloping banks support a variety of wetland vegetation including, common reed and reedmace. From the hide the constant activity of ducks, coots and other bird life can be observed. On the edge of this area is a screen of tall poplar trees. An experimental project has been underway by conservation volunteers to coppice the first row of trees. Unlike the willow it has been found that the poplar does not regrow significantly from the stumps themselves; rather a mass of suckering shoots spring up from the root system, achieving the same objective of diversifying the habitat by creating a thicket of dense cover.

At this point is the start of the River Walk, which is a long finger of the park running all the way along the Stort past Latton lock to Harlow Mill. There is one more area which should be included in any tour of this part of the park. Returning by the footbridge back across the railway, take the path to the little wooden bridge and then turn left along a narrow wooded path by the side of the Road Safety Training Ground. On the other side is an area of marsh managed in conjunction with British Waterways by periodic cutting of the reeds and coppicing of the willows along the dikes. At the end of this path you come to Marshgate Spring local nature reserve (LNR) commonly known as Bluebell Wood. Amongst the mature standard oaks, as well as some larch, there are coppiced hazel trees. Conservation volunteers have been cutting back willow and alder which have been encroaching on the adjacent marsh as water levels have dropped somewhat in recent years. There is a further hard-to-reach section of the wood sandwiched between the railway and Toys R Us where hazel and hornbeam have been coppiced (again by volunteers).

Andrew Tomlins

EVENTS DIARY

5th Nov – Bonfire & Fireworks Night. Bonfire to be lit at 7.15pm by the Chairperson of Harlow Council, Robert Long. Fireworks display to start at 7.45pm, with funfair Mercury FM roadshow.

30th Dec – Harlow Conservation Volunteers, coppicing party at Marshgate Spring. The “sodge-buster” returns! If you find yourself stuck indoors with the relatives over Christmas, this is an ideal opportunity to work off the excess and do something for the environment at the same time. HCV will be continuing the coppicing from previous years of trees invading the marsh. Bring along suitable clothing and boots. Expect to finish by lunchtime.

Meet in the Toys ‘R’ Us car park, Edinburgh Way, 9.30am.

☎01279 434322 for further details.

EDITORIAL NOTES:

Park Life is written and produced by members of the Town Park Users Group. Anyone wishing to contribute written or photographic material for the next issue (published February 2002) should send it to Dean Weston, 48 Rivermill, Harlow, CM20 1NS, or they can email it to: dean.weston@ntlworld.com by deadline January 31, 2002.

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