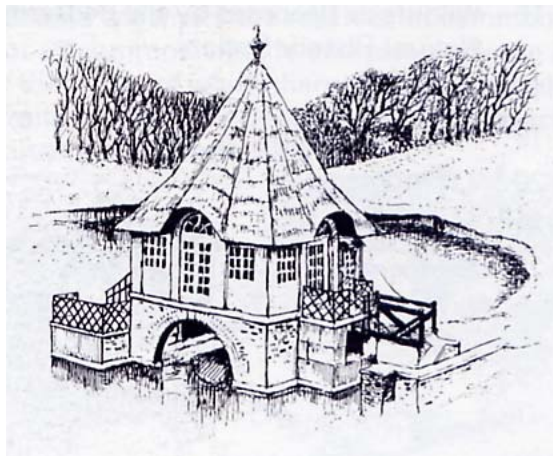


Stockgrove Country Park - Extract of original introductory brochure

STOCKGROVE COUNTRY PARK



INTRODUCTION

Stockgrove was jointly purchased by the County Councils of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1971 and was extended in 1973 to its present size of 74 acres. It was opened to the public on 25th May 1972.

The purpose of a Country Park is to provide an area for quiet informal recreation in a countryside setting, a place where you can quietly relax, explore or roam as the mood takes you.

The Park offers a variety of landscapes and habitats which are the reserves of common and not so common wildlife and plants. Please keep to the paths, of which there are many, in order to avoid unnecessary disturbance, and respect the enjoyment of other visitors.

A Brief History of the Stockgrove Estate

The earliest known historic features to be seen in the Park are the mounds which form a medieval woodbank. These are to be found on both sides of the public footpath which forms the southwest boundary of Bakers Wood. Woodbanks were mounds of earth which defined the limits of ownership of parts of the wood, and these at Stockgrove suggest this part of the estate was held by a number of owners in medieval times.

The pathway referred to is described as Coker (or Cocoa) Way on the Inclosure map, and was a former roadway until 1845. The same map names the open meadows south-west of the House as 'the Bomes'.

The present Country Park is formed from parcels of two much larger estates. One of these estates was owned by a Thomas Staunton who died in 1784. He owned land in Essex, Sussex and Buckinghamshire, including the Manor of Smewnes and Stock Grove Farm. The estate was advertised for auction in the Northampton Mercury on 7th January 1792 and on 7th April 1792 was sold as lot No.10 at "Mr Christies Auction Room in Pall Mall". The purchaser was one Edwin Hanmer who paid £3,200 for the estate and timber valued at £233 - 10s - 3d. The other estate was the Bragenham Manor Estate which was purchased in 1734 by the Leighs, who were the Lords of Leighton Buzzard. In 1852 they sold part of their estate to Edwin Hanmer. Part of this newly enlarged estate was leased by Hanmer on 10th April 1885, for a period of seven years, to one Henri Baron de Ville of Liphook. The estate leased consisted of The Mansion House, 2 entrance lodges, rights of shooting over 1,760 acres, the freedom to fell trees and cut fern from Rammymere (now Rammamere) Heath, Lords Hill and Coker Way.

The building of the first house on the site can be traced to the period when the estate was owned by Hanmer. This house was built as a replacement for the Prebendal Manor House in Leighton Buzzard. The dating of the house came from evidence given at the Leighton Inclosure Award Hearings on 19th December 1843 in which were included statements by Thomas Chew, Thomas Tomkins and Thomas Arnold.

Thomas Crew (aged 47) said "I worked for the late Edwin (father of the then owner) as a labouring boy and I remember it well because I was nearly smothered in a gravel pit". The gravel was being used in the construction of the garden and the roads to the house.

A particular feature of these woodlands is the large numbers of bluebells which appear every year. Stockgrove's bluebells are preceded by a display of naturalised daffodils. If you visit the park during this period please leave these flowers in their natural surroundings for others to enjoy.

Evidence exists in Bakers Wood to indicate that the woodlands were once managed for the provision of materials for fencing and firewood. This was done by means of coppicing, that is the cutting back of new growth at comparatively short intervals (up to 25 years in Oak), thus allowing new shoots to develop on the remaining stump (the stool).

Although the area is recognised as a Primary Oak Woodland, Oak is not the only species of tree growing in these woods. It is, however, the dominant tree in Bakers Wood where the Boulder Clay overlies the Lower Greensand rock on this side of the Park. This soil also provides suitable growing conditions for Hazel, Silver Birch and Hawthorn. Poplar and Aspen also grow well in this area as does the rowan which is thought by some to ward off evil spirits. A small plantation of Christmas Trees can be seen on the edge of the wood as can the occasional Red Oak and Sessile Oak.

On the woodland floor a wide variety of wild plants can be identified, such as Bracken, Cushion Moss, Bracket Fungus and Honeysuckle. Old Mans Beard can be seen climbing over the smaller trees and shrubs and is most noticeable in late Autumn. In Summer Herb Bennet (also known as Wood Avens) shows its yellow flower among the Yellow Archangel otherwise known as Weasel Snout or Yellow Dead Nettle, and the Dogs Mercury which flowered in Spring. The Marsh Birds Foot Trefoil shows its yellow flower between July and September. The purple flowering Rose Bay Willow Herb also shows during this period among the Hawthorn and Elder and the instantly recognisable Foxglove. The interesting Nettle-leaved Bell-flower and Wood Anemone can also be found.

The Parkland

This area of about 25 acres lies to the right hand side of the car park as you enter and contains some impressive trees. The ground rises from the car park to a plateau which supports a wide variety of flora, and then drops away to the left to a large clump of Rhododendrons in the valley at the edge of the main conifer plantation. Another small triangular shaped conifer plantation runs alongside the road and acts as a screen between the road and the Country Park.

As you walk up the slope to the plateau you may notice a small valley to your left, and lying in this valley beneath the thick bracken is an extensive rabbit warren. Underfoot grows White Clover, Heather and the yellow flowered Hawkweed, which should not be confused with the more common Dandelion. The easily identified bracken and equally distinguishable Gorse have established colonies in the parkland. Popping noises caused by the gorse pods splitting and dispersing their seeds may be heard in the autumn.

There are a few easily identifiable trees in the area, notably the stately Wellingtonia or Californian Big Tree. These trees are noted for their long life span, great height and growth. The tallest in the British Isles is some 50m high. The tree is also known by some as the 'Punchy Tree', so called because of its soft spongy bark. At the top of the slope a group of three young Wellingtonias have been planted to take the place of the single tree which still stands on the plateau despite having been struck by lightning in 1975. Fine specimens of Horse Chestnut, Beech, Oak, Hornbeam and Atlas Cedar can also be seen in the parkland.

Where the parkland and the main conifer plantation meet at the large Rhododendron plantation, the grasses of Sheeps-fescue and Velvet Bent with its purple flower head, give way to the Scarlet berried Woody Nightshade and Honeysuckle. Growing out of the Rhododendrons can be seen the common Bramble with its free harvest of Autumn fruits, the Buttercup like Tormentil, white flowered Stitchwort and the pretty Red Campion. Among the nearby Welshed Thistles can occasionally be seen the Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper Butterflies, and you may also see the more common species of British Grasshopper and Cricket.

The Conifer Plantations

This section of the park covers some 7 acres and is dominated by Norway Spruce, Scots Pine and Birch Scrub with the occasional Larch, Oak and Cherry.

Because of the dense canopy of the plantation there is very little vegetation underfoot. The majority of the ground cover which exists in the plantation is the easily recognisable Bracken.

Here the Coal Tit and the Goldcrest make their homes and the trees provide a well equipped playground for the Grey Squirrel, which is a nuisance to the forester, as it strips the bark off many trees, especially beech and sycamore, eventually killing them.

The area does, however, provide material for use within the park as the trees taken down in the period of thinning the woods are used for fencing.

The Stream and Lake

This water area of the park consists of a stream feeding a small man-made lake with the outfall cascading over an artificial waterfall to form another stream. In all this extends to approximately 6 acres.

The stream commences in a ditch lying between the car park and Bakers Wood and acts as the host for the lush undergrowth to be seen beneath the Poplar, Willows, Ash, Norway and Sitka Spruce, Sallow, Red Oak and Alder. There is also one surviving Serbian spruce, a native of Yugoslavia. As one approaches the lake from the Car Park the water from the springs, which supply the majority of the water to the lake can be seen emerging into the right hand side of the ditch. This boggy area forms an ideal habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal life. The most colourful of these plant species, which range from Wild Angelica to Devils-Bit Scabious, is the yellow Loosestrife and it is thought that this was introduced to the Park. This area is also the home of the last known surviving colony in Bedfordshire of the Wood Vetch and its purple flower can be seen in Summer among the bushes growing along the stream.

The island which is covered with thick vegetation beneath the Willow, Poplar and Dogwood, provides an ideal resting place for the resident duck population of the park.

The lake itself was divided into two sections by a concrete wall, with a gate mechanism which allowed the lower section to be drained. It is thought that this lower section was once used as a swimming pool and the remains of the boathouse still stand on the west bank of the lake.

Growing in the lake can be seen the well known Water Lilies and Curled Pondweed with its wavy leaves. The Common Reed, Bur Reed, Lesser Pond Sedge and Common Spike Rush can be found on the margins of the lake.

Growing on the banks by the waterfall the Royal Fern can be seen among its more common relations. In springtime primroses also appear in this area.

Wild strawberry, Forget-me-not's and Dock can be seen and among these you may be fortunate enough to spot the rare Fragrant or Sweet Agrimony. The well known Elder tree with its flowers and berries much favoured by home wine brewers also excels in this area.

Until recently the park had large colonies of Lily of the Valley and a single surviving Marsh Orchid both of these species have been exterminated by indiscriminate picking and uprooting. Please do not be the cause of the extermination of any more species of plants in the park. Let others enjoy them as you have enjoyed them, in their natural state.

The Park is also well known for its fungi, and Bakers Wood and the Conifer Plantation provide two distinctly different habitats supporting a wide range of different varieties.

THE PARK WILDLIFE

Stockgrove Country Park is the home for a wide variety of wildlife ranging from the Small Fan Footed Widgeon to the Common Rabbit.

As the park covers a compact 74 acres some creatures which may not be associated with certain habitats may be seen passing through them to their own particular patch. For instance the smallest British bird the Goldcrest, only 3.5" (85mm) long, which likes to build its nest suspended from the branches of a Conifer, may sometimes be seen over the parkland or Bakers Wood.

There have been over 70 species of birds recorded at Stockgrove from the secretive Water-Rail to the Wood Pigeon and a full list of these is given at the back of this booklet.

The more common birds, which you may see on your visit will be Starlings, Magpies and members of the Tit family, while down at the waters edge you may see the Coot, Moorhen and Mallard, which have made their homes at Stockgrove. These are sometimes joined by Canada Geese. Until recently Swans used to visit the lake, but the tree canopy now interrupts their flight approach.

In Summer, high overhead the Skylark may be heard and you may see the occasional Kestrel resting on the wind searching for its next meal, which may be one of the wide range of mammals, possibly one of the short tailed Voles which live in the park.

One of the larger mammals frequently found in Stockgrove is the Muntjac Deer, also known as the Barking or Rib Faced Deer, because of its unique call and the long pedicles down each side of its face. A pedicle is the permanent stump of bone upon which grow the antlers. This small deer (about 22" - 23" high) was introduced to England around 1900 by the Duke of Bedford. The particular genus was the Indian Muntjac which survived, bred successfully and soon colonised the surrounding area. Their summer coat is a deep chestnut with white belly and a dark chestnut back turning to slightly darker shades in winter.

Later the Duke of Bedford decided to replace his Indian Muntjac with the Reeves or Chinese Muntjac from south east China. These were distinguishable from the Indian Muntjac by having a reddish

chestnut body with limbs coloured blackish brown, a white chin and throat and the forehead between the pedicle ribs being a brownish red. Another method of distinguishing between the two is that the Reeves Muntjac has a longer tail than the Indian with the Reeves tail having a white underside.

In order to ensure that there was no cross breeding taking place the Duke ordered the killing of all Indian Muntjac. This was not successful and now there are recorded cases of successful cross breeding. Unlike their larger relatives, this little deer has no fixed rutting season and the fawn, of which there is usually only one, can be born at anytime during the year.

Down at the lake the Common and Crucian Carp share the waters with Tench, Perch, Roach and Rudd. There are also some Goldfish which may be the progeny of the original stocking of the lake when it was used as an ornamental pond, after ceasing to be used as a swimming pool. A list of the best weight of fish caught from the lake is given at the back of this booklet.

Frogs, Toads, Water Boatmen and Pond Skaters watch the Water Snails and Water Beetles, whilst overhead on a warm summer's day the Damsel and Dragon Fly busily hover. Lazing away on the banks the Common Lizard, Slow Worm and Grass Snake are ever alert to hurry away from the approaching visitor. The ponds Ducks, however, may well swim towards the more cautious visitor and the visiting Tufted Duck and Little Grebe can sometimes be seen with the resident flock, particularly in winter.

The parkland area provides host to a wide range of Butterflies from the Meadow Brown to the Large White and in Bakers Wood you may be lucky enough to spot a Purple Hairstreak.

Remember that Stockgrove is the home of all these creatures, so try not to damage their habitat while you are in it.

WILDLIFE AS RECORDED BY THE BEDFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

BIRDS

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Blackbird | Flycatcher - Spotted | Pipit -Meadow | Tree Creeper |
| Blackcap* | Goldcrest | Pipit – Tree | Wagtail – Grey |
| Bullfinch | Goldfinch | Pochard | Warbler – Garden |
| Bunting – Corn | Goose – Canada | Redpoll | - Willow* |
| Bunting – Reed | Grebe – Little | Redstart* | - Wood |
| Buzzard | Greenfinch | Redwing | WaterRail |
| Chaffinch | Hawk Sparrow | Robin* | Whitethroat |
| Chiffchaff | Heron | Rook | Woodpecker |
| Coot* | Hobby | Sandpiper–Common | - Lesser Great |
| Crossbill | Jackdaw* | ** | Spotted |
| Carrion Crow* | Kestrel | Siskin | - Green |
| Cuckoo | Kingfisher | Skylark | - Lesser Spotted |
| Dove - Stock | Lapwing | Sparrow - Tree | Wren* |
| -Turtle | Linnet | Starlings* | Yellowhammer |
| Duck – Mandarin | Magpie | Swallow | |
| - Muscovy | Mallard* | Swift | * indicates recorded |
| - Tufted* | Martin – House | Thrush - Mistle | as breeding at |
| Dunnock | Moorhen* | - Song | Stockgrove. |
| Fieldfare | Nuthatch* | Tit – Blue* | ** indicates Rare |
| | Owl – Little | - Coal | |
| | - Tawny | - Great | |
| | Partridge-Red | - Long Tailed | |
| | Legged | - Marsh | |
| | Pigeon - Wood* | - Willow | |

MAMMALS

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Badger | Common Shrew | Mole | Stoat |
| BankVole | Water Shrew | Pigmy Shrew | Water Vole |
| Bat(Pippistrelle) | Muntjac (Reeves) | Rabbit | Wease |
| | Fox | Rat-brown | Woodmouse |
| | Grey Squirrel | ShorttailedVole | |

FISH AND REPTILES

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Recorded Weight of Fish: | Carp – Common -10 lbs | Roach -1 lb | Toad – Common |
| | - Crucian -1 lb8ozs | Rudd -1lb8ozs | Newt – Common |
| | Goldfish | Tench -5 lbs 4 ozs | Grass Snake |
| | Perch -2 lbs 5 ozs | Frogs - Common | Slow Worm |
| | | Lizard -Common | Damsel Fly |
| | | | Dragon Fly |

LEPIDOPTERA

Butterflies

Brimstone
Brown Argus
Comma
Common Blue
Holly Blue
Gatekeeper

Moths

Angle Shades
Antler
Archer's Dart
August Thorn
Barred Light Green
Barred Straw Chevron
Barred Yellow
Blood-vein
Bordered Pug
Bright-line Brown Eye
Brown-line Wainscot
Brown Silver-line
Buff Arches
Buff-tip
Burnished Brass
Cabbage
Campion Coronet
Canary-shouldered Thorn
Clay Wainscot
Cloaked Minor
Clouded Border
Common Bedstraw Carpet
Common Bordered Clay
Common Footman
Common Lackey
Common Light Arches
Common Marbled Carpet
Common Rustic
Common Shark
Common Silver Y
Common Snout
Common Wainscot
Common Waved Silver
Common Vapourer
Common Yellow Underwing
Copper Underwing
Dark Arches
Dark Marbled Carpet
Dark Barred
 Twin Spot Carpet
Dotted Clay
Double Dart
Double Square-spot
Drinker
Dun-bar
Dusky Brocade
Dwarf Cream Wave
Ear
Elephant Hawk
Engrailed
Figure of Eighty
Flame Carpet
Flame Shoulder
Flounced Rustic

Green Hairstreak
Green Veined White
Large Skipper
Large White
Meadow Brown
Orange Tip
Painted Lady
Peacock
Purple Hairstreak
Red Admiral

Garden Carpet
Garden Dart
Ghost
Green Carpet
Grey Arches
Grey Dagger
Grey Pine Carpet
Gold (or Yellow) Tail
Heart and Dart
Iron Prominent
July Highflier
Large Nutmeg
Latticed Heath
Lesser Bordered Yellow
 Underwing
Lesser Yellow Underwing
Light Emerald
Marbled Brown
Marbled Minor
Miller
Mottled Beauty
Mottled Rustic
Mouse
Narrow Bordered
 Five Spot Burnet
Narrow Bordered
 Six Spot Burnet
Oak Hook-tip
Old Lady
Olive Kidney
Pale Prominent
Pebble Hook-tip
Peppered
Plain Golden Y
Poplar Dagger
Purple Clay
Rib and Wave
Rustic Shoulder-knot
Scarce Footman
Scarce Silver Lines
Setaceous Hebrew
 Character
Sharp-angled Carpet
Shuttle-shaped Dart
Silver-ground Carpet
Six-striped Rustic
Small Angles Shades
Small Dotted Buff
Small Fan-footed Wave
Small Phoenix
Small Rivulet
Smooth Rustic
Small Square Spot
Small Twin-spot Carpet
Small Wainscot
Smoky Wainscot
Spectacle
Square-spot Rustic

White Admiral
Ringlet
Small Copper
Small Tortoiseshell
Small White
Speckled Wood
Wall Brown

Straw Underwing
Stout Dart
Sulphur Thorn
Swallow Prominent
Swallow-tailed
Sycamore
Tawny-barred Angle
Tawny-speckled Pug
Triple-spotted Clay
True Lover's Knot
Uncertain
White Dot
White-line Dart
White Satin
White Waved Silver
Willow Beauty
Wood Swift
Yellow Shell