

Senior Ranger's Report

October 2018 to March 2019

The winter of 2019 has been a very good winter for the Rangers. The first half the winter saw a lot of the annual management jobs being undertaken. A bit of a restructure of the habitat management by the Senior Ranger meant that some jobs which have traditionally been undertaken in the later part of Winter were done in October and November, leaving the Rangers with more time to undertake the smaller jobs in early 2019.

Work undertaken as part of the annual management of the site includes:

- Felling a section of the new plantation – this annual job took the Rangers just 2 days to complete. Enough trees were felled to heat the Countryside Centre for a year, with enough surplus to continue exploring the possibility of generating income from log sales and charcoal production.
- Removal of Alder regrowth between the wildlife lake and the wash – this alder copse naturally encroaches more every year, meaning the site loses valuable wet grassland habitat. The Rangers removed a large section of it meaning this job won't have to be done again for at least another 2 years
- Removal of scrub in the old Llama paddock – these fields are managed as part of the Service's Higher Level Stewardship programme and were in a declining state. The removal of encroaching scrub and bramble means HDC can maximise the grant contribution for this area.
- Management of the 2 balancing ponds on site – both the Christie Drive and Dartmoor Drive ponds have had their annual cut. This not only keeps both areas looking presentable to the public but also maximises wildlife potential.
- The Green Team from Huntingdon Regional College have spent a lot of time managing the park's Golden Osier beds for willow production. Much of this material was used as part of the Santa's Grotto event, which was a huge success for the service.
- A new group called Fireflies Forest School started using the park in Feb 20189 to run Forest School Sessions for young children throughout term time. These sessions are run on a Friday morning and will run in blocks of 6 weeks. It is hoped that there will also be extra sessions run for older children in school holidays.

In the coming month the Rangers will be:

- Extending the jetty on the main lake to enable wheelchair users to access sailing dinghies.

- Replacing 3 existing dog bins which are in a poor state for new litter bins. This has been grant funded by Leeds Building Society via FHCP and Parkrun.
- Installing an anti-slip surface on the Troll's Bridge to maximise safety for the park's visitors. Again, funded by Leeds Building Society via FHCP and Parkrun.
- Process this year's timber produce. The Ranger's will split and stack a majority of the produce but will leave some unsplit to cater for the market of people who are happy to buy it unprocessed and split it themselves at home.
- The fortnightly cutting of the short grass areas in the park will begin shortly to maintain a good appearance throughout the summer months.

Volunteer Activity

The volunteer numbers on site have, again, been steady at around 70 days a month for the last 6 months. The Rangers regularly get up to 9 on a Wednesday work party, and 8 on a Thursday. There is still scope to increase these numbers of practical volunteers in the coming months under the new Senior Ranger.

The number of event volunteers is growing with a keen number of people regularly helping with breakfasts. All the Christmas events were only possible with the help from these people. This is a growing team and attracting a totally different type of person.

The Green Team from Huntingdon Regional College have held a steady presence on site. They have had their own staffing issues which have meant their numbers have been reduced; nevertheless, they have still been vital to the park's management.

The Rangers and Countryside Centre staff hosted a Christmas lunch for all the Volunteers at the end of December. This gesture was widely appreciated by all and is a vital way of keeping volunteers happy with their experience, and keeps them coming back again. The country park would not look as good without their input and now with a steady staff team the supervision will be in place again to increase the amount of work that can be undertaken.

Countryside Centre

	Occupancy	Bookings	Revenue from room hire
Oct – Mar 2017/2018	5220	160	£11,244.75
Oct – Mar 2018/2019	5569	167	£14,433.75

- Larger groups booking for longer meetings
- Weekly bookings produce a regular source of income

- Evening and weekend bookings have increased. Some weeks the building is used four evenings a week. This does have a staffing implication but is manageable through flexible working patterns

Income comparison over financial years

	Room hire
April – March 2017/2018	£20,943.08
April – March 2018/2019	£27,202.25
April – March 2019/2020	£14,362.25 potential revenue for confirmed bookings so far

User demographic

We have a consistent number of groups who rebook every year: Probation Service; Alzheimer’s Society; Parkinson’s Society; HBKA; BRJ Run & Tri; Carer’s Trust to name a few.

2018-19 has seen the continuation of regular evening bookings The Dog’s Trust every Wednesday evening throughout the year £3600 per year. Huntingdonshire Youth Theatre every Tuesday evening in term time and generates a yearly revenue of £2000.00, plus revenue from performances.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

The country park hosted more events over the Christmas period than it has for quite a few years.

Christmas Fair in November generated about £450.00 in revenue.

Overall, Christmas events generated £4246.00, with a profit of £3200.00. The amount of publicity via Facebook, goodwill and the comments in person cannot be quantified but other than income, we have gained more volunteers and users.

Santa’s Grotto proved a very successful weekend. Volunteers and rangers created the grotto inside the Countryside Centre and activities for young people whilst they waited in the warm were provided. 183 tickets sold online and 70 on the door and generated an income of £3255.00.

Initial outlays such as Elf and Santa costumes, snow and fog machines, presents for children, PRS music licence and lights so the spend was about £1000.00. However, it is expected that next year’s expenditure will be a lot less as we now have everything required for making the grotto a great experience. We have also had a provisional booking for one day of the grotto in 2019 for a corporate day, so this will be guaranteed income

We also had a Breakfast with Santa event which generated £610.00 and Hot Chocolate with Santa £381.00.

New Year's Breakfast continued as last year but were not as popular. After evaluating the event, it was identified that when New Year's Eve and Day fall in the year has a significant impact: this year it was a Monday and Tuesday rather than a weekend. £820.00 revenue was generated from this event.

Facebook feedback



Facebook

Our Facebook page continues to be a great resource for promoting the park, as well as all the events and activities that take place. We currently have 5265 followers. As such we can put on extra events at short notice and know the word will be circulated.

<https://www.facebook.com/hinchingbrookecountrypark>

Events 2019

We have planned a solid calendar of events for 2019, with the Country Park's 30th Anniversary celebrations over the summer being the largest. This will run over a week and weekend in August and will involve stakeholders and lots of activities, stalls, exhibits to attract visitors. Rangers will be running some children's activities, the first of which was den-building on 21 February. Allocated and bookable timeslots for activities seem to work well and create income whilst using resources efficiently. Two hours of ranger time can generate £240.00. The Grotto will run over four days rather than two to maximise revenue for the effort of creating the setting. We have 6 people again volunteering to be Father Christmas and 3 to be Mother Christmas making this a very practical and sustainable event.

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/3768/events-at-hinchingbrooke-park-2019.pdf>