



Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

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spring 2013

a word from the chair

For many, the 70s were a grey decade of industrial decline, appalling fashion and a brooding pessimism. Some readers may remember the year 1973 as if it was yesterday; others weren't even born. One thing is certain: a lot has changed in 40 years. The music charts were dominated by Slade, Gary Glitter, The Sweet and assorted Osmonds. The Docklands still had ships and warehouses rather than aircraft and riverside apartments. And a war was raging in the Middle East (OK, some things haven't changed).

In some ways, the wildlife in our area was very different, too. Willow Tits and Tree Sparrows bred in the sewage works; now we don't even have a sewage works, let alone those birds (the first of which is extinct in London and Essex and the second is not far off). Several pairs of Treecreepers nested in Wanstead Park, something that hasn't happened for many

years. On the other hand Gadwall was a real rarity, there were no wild Sparrowhawks, or Peregrines wild or otherwise, and Common Whitethroats certainly weren't common.

It was at that time that a group of nature enthusiasts set up the Wren Action Group to encourage young people's interest in natural history – rather than egg-collecting. So it was that George Dormer and Terry Wilkins organised regular meetings in East Ham, along with birdwatching outings. Richard Oakman, prompted by Peter Rumsey (the local RSPB representative), went along to find out what it was all about. He was impressed, and when George moved out of the area soon afterwards, Richard helped to establish the Wren Conservation Group, along with Colin Plant and Hedley Morgan. It is quite an achievement for an organisation run and funded entirely by the energy and sheer determination of its volunteers to last for four decades, but that is what has happened and it's something we should celebrate.

We don't come up against some of the challenges that were faced in the East End in the early 70s. Egg-collecting is now a thing of the past, apart from among a handful of professionals. The Wildlife and Countryside Act gives most of our flora and fauna much greater protection now. And planning restrictions are tighter than they

were then, although we should be wary of attempts to relax them again. These changes have come about because many people - including the pioneers of the Wren Group - cared enough that they were prepared to argue the case for wildlife and for our historical heritage.



But we still face issues locally. In my view, two of the biggest are how to strike the right balance between conserving our natural heritage and allowing local people the opportunity to pursue a wide variety of leisure options; and how to inspire a new generation to take an interest in, and work for, our natural environment. Challenges, yes, but I believe our enthusiastic team will rise to them.

Tim



a word from the editor

Welcome to the spring Wren newsletter. Remember this is an electronic newsletter so we can include links to other sites and snippets of information. When you see blue underlined text it means that it is a link. Just click on the link for more information or to be taken to another site. Clicking the link will always take you to another

frame so your newsletter will still be there in the background – just close the new window to continue reading your newsletter.

Previous newsletters can now be found on the wren website at <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/about-us/newsletter/>

Remember this is your newsletter and cannot be produced without your support so if you have any news, views or stories please send them to me at editor@wrengroup.org.uk



epping cattle

past, present and future

Having lived in Capel Road in Manor Park for over 20 years, I have fond memories of cattle grazing on Wanstead Flats. I remember them galloping past me when I was running on the Flats and what seemed like the whole herd having a stroll down Capel Road with a gathering traffic jam building up behind them. I also recall returning home one day to discover a single cow totally filling and consuming our front garden. (It is a small garden!) In the last ten years, post BSE, I was involved in a public meeting concerning the return to cattle grazing at a number of Epping Forest locations, including Wanstead Flats. I thought it would be interesting to trace the history of the cows in this area, their current whereabouts and future possibilities. I want to thank staff the Corporation of London for their invaluable input into the process.

The history

According to the Corporation, cattle-grazing has taken place in Epping Forest for well over a thousand years. For 800 years after the Norman Conquest, common rights of grazing, along with wood-cutting, created the unique landscape and wildlife diversity of Epping Forest.



Up until the onset of the BSE crisis in 1969 cows were common place on Wanstead Flats and neighbouring areas - here can be seen one of our bovine friends on Capel Road. Pic by Paul Ferris

The agricultural and industrial revolutions destroyed much of the countryside around London but Epping Forest survived because of the strength of its local community in defending its important right to graze livestock across the whole Forest. The Corporation of London, which had common rights because it owned land at the City of London Cemetery, led a long legal battle to save the Forest. The Corporation won and in 1874 the 'enclosure' of Forest land for private development, which prevented commoners from freely grazing their cattle, was declared unlawful. In 1878 the Corporation took on the role of 'Conservators' of Epping Forest. Meanwhile, on Wanstead Flats in

1912, there were as many as 972 cattle grazing, though by 1970 the highest number was 543.

More recent times

In the early 1980's, farmers in the Waltham Cross area periodically released around 200 cattle onto the Forest. As I recalled earlier, they were a familiar sight wandering towards Wanstead Flats – which was apparently the cattle's favourite feeding area. When the vegetation was good, the cattle tended to stick to Wanstead Flats, but in dry summers and in the latter parts of the summer when they had gained confidence, they were often tempted towards people's gardens and wandered into adjacent roads. (See photograph of Ridley Road) People who had lived in the area for many years were used to it and were usually prepared to put up with it for the unique experience and pleasure of the cattle being there at all! Only occasional complaints were made to the Corporation of London, to the owners, and to the newspapers, apparently. At the beginning of 1986, a letter from the Manor Park Cemetery Company was distributed to local householders suggesting they write to the local newspaper - the *Newham Recorder* - if they had been troubled by cattle. The object was to "get the area (Wanstead Flats) re-designated from Common Land and thus prevent distant farmers taking advantage of a very ancient law which causes inconvenience and harassment to our neighbourhood". The result published in the newspaper consisted of three responses in favour and only one against!

Grazing by free-ranging cattle continued but on a declining trend, until the onset of the BSE crisis in 1996, which led to the cattle being kept off the

Forest. This was followed by Foot and Mouth that resulted in no more cattle being released after 1996. Fortunately, commoners' grazing survived on a small heathland area of the Forest which had been temporarily fenced by the Conservators, and this provided the basis for a conservation herd that was re-established in 2002, with a herdsman to keep the cattle within an area between High Beach



Although always called known locally as 'cows' they were in fact bullocks. Here they can be seen on walkabout in Ridley Road - Pic from Katy Haigh Kah

and Chingford. A fence was built around the boundary of this area, and was completed by June 2002. The cattle seemed to settle in well, and early in 2003 it was proposed to supplement this herd with another 50 animals. However, these developments were limited to only one section of the forest.

Decline in grazing

Evidence suggests that as grazing has declined in the Forest, the habitat variety has decreased.

Mowing by machine alone, whilst important in preventing scrub taking over grassland, cannot provide the complex mix of habitats that make up a pasture-woodland like Epping Forest. With the decline in grazing, many forest flowers have reportedly been lost or drastically reduced in numbers, since grazing stimulates more flowering and helps spread any surviving species and can greatly increase plant diversity. Regularly cut hay meadows support few insects compared to the extensively-grazed pastures of the past; there has been a reported loss of some insect species and a decline in others, including butterflies.

The lords and tenants of the manors around Wanstead Flats, like those elsewhere in the forest, enjoyed rights of common pasture.

Those of Wanstead manor had the special right of sheep pasture on the flats. The parish cattle mark was a 'Q' surmounted by a cross. In the 19th century, and probably earlier, it was used also to mark beasts from Aldersbrook.

The commoners of both Wanstead and Cann Hall manors had the right of turbary in the forest. The lord of Wanstead manor claimed the right to take honey and beeswax. He also claimed estovers, or the right to take wood from the forest, and sometimes even the right to fell mature trees or to license their felling by his tenants. Until the 19th century there was rarely any opposition to small-scale felling licensed by the manor courts.

Furthermore, experts observe that the vegetation in areas such as Wanstead Flats is already ranker than it used to be; there has been a phenomenal growth in tree-scrub in some area whilst other lower-growing species have declined.

Looking forward

Over time it has become apparent that cattle grazing freely on the Forest do provide a spectacle, particularly for many children who may have never seen cattle before. The cattle are part of a historical link dating back thousands of years. Perhaps an even more significant realisation has been the value of the cattle's grazing habits to the natural environment and wildlife.

Although cattle, cars and people have co-existed in Epping Forest throughout the 20th Century, the past thirty years have seen a considerable increase in the number of vehicles on the roads. For the Conservators and others involved, there are now significant safety concerns in allowing the cattle to wander freely without extra controls. However, in its consultation documents published to support the public meetings I referred to earlier in 2006, the Conservators emphasise that they are 'fully committed to protecting the commoners' ancient rights and believe that grazing is of vital importance to preserving the Forest's special character and wildlife'

In the very long-term, it is hoped that commoners' cattle-grazing could therefore be safely re-established across the Forest, from Wanstead in

the south to Epping in the north and public consultation revealed community support for this trend. The Conservators report that it would require a significant increase in cattle numbers back to earlier levels but that the process could take 10 – 25 years. In the immediate future the 50 or so cattle grazing the Forest at the moment is regarded as an effective number and as in recent years it is seen as best for conservation and visitors, if the



A small herd of long-horned cattle has been established in a fenced-off area on Chingford Plain in an attempt to maintain grazing rights. Pic by Tony Morrison

cattle are split into small herds of no more than 12 - 20 cows on an area. To achieve this and separate the cattle across the Forest some of the control measures described would be necessary.

Those of us at Wanstead Flats could be in for a long wait!

Article by Kathy Baker



Volunteers clock up a Herculean 61,414 hours work since 2010.

city corporation thanks epping forest volunteers

The City of London Corporation, which owns Epping Forest, is celebrating the achievements of the 242 volunteers who have helped manage the ancient woodland since 2010.



Alderman Gordon Haines, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Epping Forest Committee presenting Luke O'Keefe with a 'Gold' award

The volunteers were recognised at an awards ceremony at Butler's Retreat, Chingford on Thursday 31 January.

Volunteers were given a tour of new visitor centre, 'The View' at a special late opening, followed by a party at the nearby Butler's Retreat cafe, where they dined on a Tudor-themed buffet.

In the last three years the volunteers have clocked up an amazing 61,414 hours – equivalent to 8,773 days of work or 1,253 full working weeks.

Luke O'Keefe [pictured] – who is studying for a level 3 diploma in Horticulture at Capel Manor College - received a 'Gold' award for volunteering over 600 hours in just one year, alongside City Corporation green keepers at Chingford Golf Course.

Veteran volunteer Stan Shepherd, 92, of Chingford was awarded a 'gold' medal and special mention for sharing his expertise in Tudor timber framing with visitors to Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge.

Stan first visited the Lodge as a boy in 1928 and he is an expert in its Tudor period-structure and joinery. The Lodge was built in 1543 as a grandstand from which King Henry VIII could view the Royal hunt - and participate by shooting the deer with crossbows from the upper floors.

Alderman Gordon Haines, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Epping Forest Committee, said:



“Volunteers make an exceptional contribution to the care and management of Epping Forest. They help shape the Forest's future and have always played a major role in its past.

“The team enables us to greatly improve the experience for visitors to Epping Forest. A brilliant example is the new boardwalk at Connaught Water which now provides an opportunity to walk amongst the reeds and observe the colourful aquatic wildlife.

“As part of our '[Branching Out](#)' project we're recruiting more volunteers across the whole Forest. If you are 16 to 80 years old and want to get involved, we want to hear from you.”



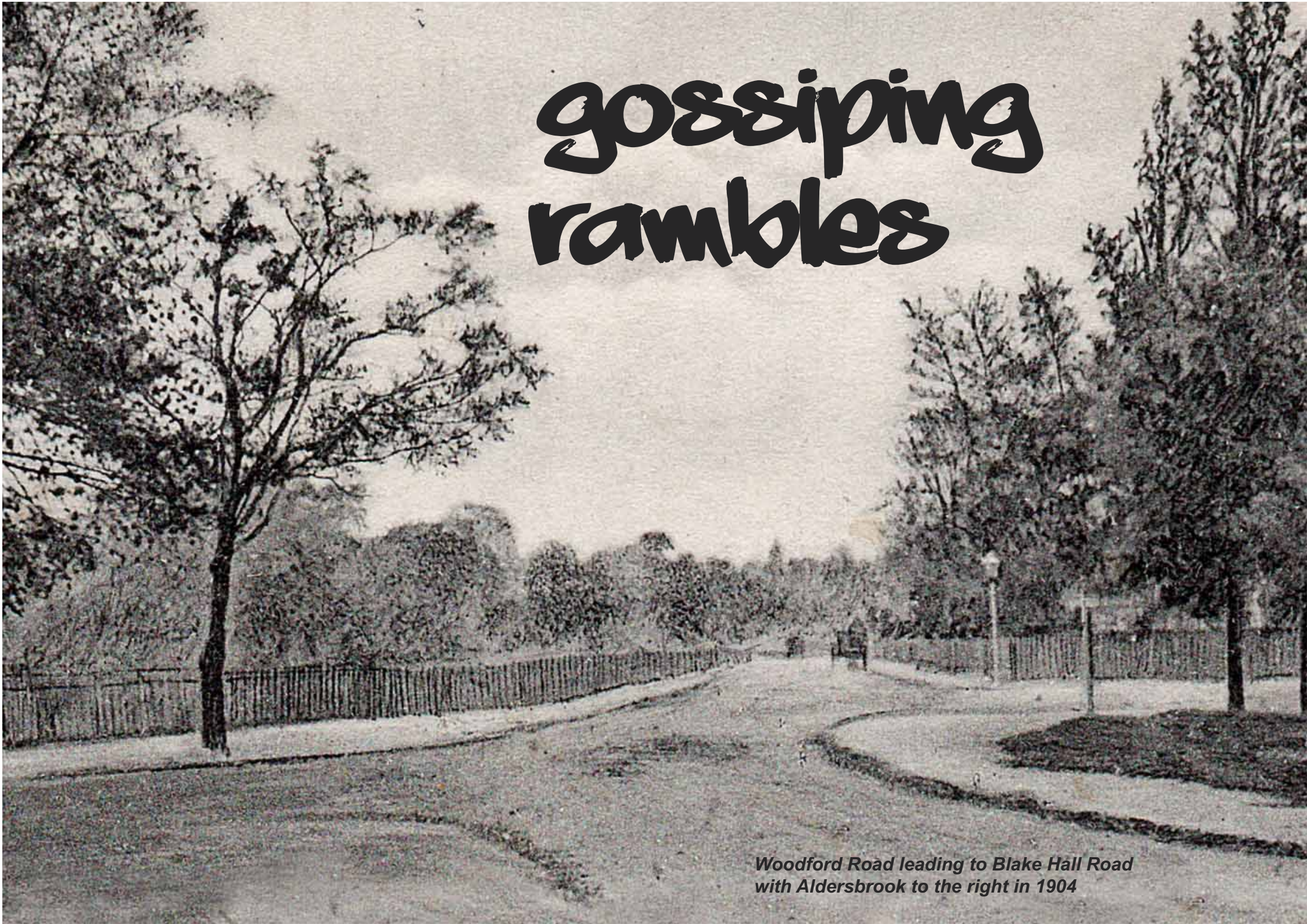
Alderman Gordon Haines with some of the many volunteers helping to complete improvement works to the much-loved local lake, Connaught Water, last November.

To get involved in volunteering in Epping Forest, visit:
www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforestvolunteers

Yvette Woodhouse
City of London Corporation



gossiping rambles



*Woodford Road leading to Blake Hall Road
with Aldersbrook to the right in 1904*

Tom Hood and Lake House

We cross the Flats by way of the Woodford Road which is a continuation of Woodgrange Road; and on the far side we deflect a little to the left hand, in order to pay a tribute of respect to the memory of Tom Hood, who lived in the house (known as Lake House) which we see embowered amid the trees.



The house, originally called the Russian Farm, was an early 18th century building and may have originally been a banquetting hall or summerhouse - an outbuilding to Wanstead House. It was situated on an island, or at least a peninsula, of the lake. Later it was used as a residence, and Thomas Hood the poet lived there from 1832-35. It was demolished in 1908, having been used for some years as a sports pavilion by several clubs.

It is in a sadly dilapidated condition, built of wood at the back and sides, with a somewhat imposing-looking portico in the Grecian style, with four or five Corinthian pillars supporting a gable. In Hood's day it must have been a very beautiful spot as far

as situation went, as it is surrounded by trees, and had a small lake in front; hence the name. The insatiable maw of London has nearly swallowed it, as the land on which it stands, though surrounded by the Flats and Bush Wood, is being sold and a new street made right in the heart of this part of the district. Steps were recently taken to buy Lake House and its grounds for the use of the people, but were not successful. Here Tom Hood wrote a novel called "Tylney Hall," which was well thought of at the time. Much of the description of scenery in it was taken from the surrounding neighbourhood.

Originally built as a banquetting hall or summer house in connection with the great Wanstead House near by, Lake House had fallen into sad disrepair even when Hood lived in it. His son says, "There was a beautiful chimney piece carved in fruit and flowers by Grinling Gibbins, and the ceiling bore traces of painting. Several quaint Watteau-like pictures were panelled on the walls, but it was all in a shocking state of repair. In the



The entrance to Bush Wood around 1906 showing the keepers lodge

twilight the rats used to come and peep out of the holes in the wainscot. . . . From the windows one could catch lovely glimpses of forest scenery, especially one fine aspen avenue." Tom Hood is best remembered as the author of the pathetic "Song of the Shirt."



Evelyn's Avenue taken in 1908, part of the elaborate system of tree-avenues that radiated from the estate of Wanstead House. The remains of secondary avenues, leading off the main one, are also present in Bush Wood and include the remaining specimens of sweet chestnuts that were planted perhaps some 300 years ago.

Evelyn Avenue, Bush Wood

Leaving this interesting spot, we turn our steps towards the noble avenue of trees known as Evelyn Avenue, Bush Wood. This formed part of the main approach to Wanstead House and must have been a lovely sight when in all its summer glory in the days of the Earl of Mornington, of whom more anon. It is even yet of great beauty and led by a grand sweeping curve to the front of Wanstead House and beyond. It is situated in what

is known as Bush Wood, in which are many fine oak, elm, and lime trees, intersected by paths in all directions. In addition to the forest trees above mentioned, there are very many of a smaller kind, such as the Hawthorne, growing in thick bushy clumps in great profusion.

After winding our way through Bush Wood we cross the Blake Hall Road, which is a continuation of the Woodford Road before mentioned, entering between a pair of iron gates near the house of Sir John Bethell, M.P. This is a public road and leads us near a large pond, almost circular in shape, known as The Basin.



The two gateposts which originally stood at the end of the drive leading to Wanstead House can now be seen by the traffic lights at the junction of Overton Drive and Blake Hall Road. They bear the monogram of Sir Richard Child. The gates were moved slightly when the present block of housing was constructed and the road widened.

This handsome lake stood in front of Wanstead House, referred to more fully a little later on.



The Basin, which stood in front of Wanstead House. The golf club house constitutes part of the 18th century stable-court. It is built of brick and weather-boarded timber. This picture taken c1904 shows St Mary's in the distance.

Wanstead Church

The path we are following leads to Wanstead Church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The present structure was built in 1790 on the site of a smaller edifice which formerly stood here.

Not so long since this church stood in the middle of a field, the nearest houses being some distance away. Today it has lost a great deal of that purely rural aspect, and is being surrounded by well-built houses of a good suburban type, isolated or semi-detached. It will always be a favourite residential spot for those who can afford to live here, as no small property is allowed to be built; there are no public-houses and no shops. The church itself is neat and pleasing in appearance, and contains a fine marble monument to the memory of Sir Josiah Child, Bart, whose memory is so bound up with

Wanstead Park. He died in 1699. Further mention is made of him later in the text. At the end of the churchyard are the foundations of Wanstead House, all that now remains of what was once one of the finest structures of its kind in England, whose melancholy history forms one of the most striking chapters on record of the instability of riches and grandeur.



St. Mary's is one of the finest examples of a late 18th century church to be found in Greater London. It is particularly rare because of its virtually unaltered state. The pews used today are the original pews of 1790. It is the only Grade 1 listed building in Redbridge.

Taken from 'Round London' Publishing Company Gossiping Rambles in Suburban Essex, Epping Forest and Beyond. Published in 1908 and written by Charles William Burdett. His guide gives a marvellous setting of scene at the beginning of the last century at a time of transformation from the village era to the urban townscape we know today.

Researched by Tony Morrison



peregrine

In the first of a series about Essex nature writing, Peter Aylmer revisits J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine*



‘A land to me as profuse and glorious as Africa.’

Those of us who know Essex may make many claims for our county but none, perhaps, as confident and outrageous as this. But read the man’s works, and you will believe.

J.A. Baker was born in Chelmsford in 1926 and lived there most of his life until his death in 1987. He left school at 16, had a succession of jobs, and gave up work before he was 40. Until disabled by arthritis, he then spent his time cycling out along the Chelmer valley, below and up the Danbury ridge, and on to Maldon and the coast. And from that came one of the great classics of nature writing in English, *The Peregrine*.

It records a winter, or more likely a portmanteau of winters, along this valley, in prose informed by great observers of the natural world such as Thomas Hardy and Gerald Manley Hopkins. If one of those was part poet, and the other entirely so, then their influence is evident from the start, October 1st:

Autumn rises into the bright sky. Corn is down. Fields shine after harvest.

Day after day, the evocations of bird life are governed by the relationship between prey and hunter. Different habitats, times of the day, weather patterns, all provoke different hunting-patterns from the peregrine, described in precise and haunting detail. Take, for example, a partridge in the moment of death, February 10th:

... the arched reredos and immense fan-vaulting of his flight, was consumed and lost in the fiery maelstrom of the sky.

Man does not often appear. An occasional tractor might pull a plough. But Baker acknowledges his own presence, and this gives another dimension to what, by itself, might be an avowedly beautiful but essentially rather limited work about bird life in the English home counties. For there are two hunters here, the man Baker, and the peregrine. As the book develops, it becomes not so much a matter of Baker seeking out the peregrine’s haunts, as each mutually recognising the presence of the other, culminating in an encounter of March 15th in which the hunter is without doubt not the human:

He ... hovered twenty feet above my head, looking down ... I could not look away from the crushing light of those eyes, from the impaling horn of that curved bill.

In this book and its successor *The Hill of Summer* Baker left, in his sadly truncated career, an inestimable gift to nature writing in English, and a reminder to of how tightly the wild remains folded into our civilisation.

mucking tip



A proposal that we visit Mucking Tip on the Thames marshes, opposite the oil depot, did not seem very appealing, especially in the grey, cold days of New Year. However, four of us from the Wren Group decided to go on what turned out to be a very sunny and enjoyable day.



Mucking is positioned right on the working River Thames and the new visitor centre affords fantastic views over the mudflats and the Thames.

Thurrock Thameside Nature Park, its official name, is one of Essex Wildlife Trust's new reserves. It commands extensive views up and down the river as well as adjoining creeks and rough grassland. When we arrived, the tide out, hundreds of birds were enjoying brunch on the mudflats.

The new visitors centre is ingeniously designed. A ramp spirals around the outside allowing access for all and great views in all directions. Inside we found a warm welcome

and enjoyed watching the river and birds whilst tucking into decent food and drink. Avocets complemented a wide variety of waterbirds - godwits, plovers, curlew, dunlin, redshanks, wigeon, oystercatchers etc.

Afterwards we visited the bird hide and walked the reserve and clearly there was scope for longer walks along sea wall. We vowed to come back another day to investigate. A last unexpected treat, as we were driving away, was a large Short-eared Owl sitting on a gate. Unable to get to our cameras, we instead had the pleasure of watching it hunting over the grassland to then be joined by another.



Gill James, Jackie Morrison and Tony Abbot 'hiding' away at Mucking Tip earlier on in the year.

You never know what each day will bring. But certainly we'd recommend a visit to Thurrock Thameside.



An Avocet - one of the many visitors to the Thameside Nature Reserve.

The park and visitors centre is open daily, except Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Telephone: 01375 643342

Email: ttnp@essexwt.org.uk

Web:

http://www.essexwt.org.uk/visitor_centres_nature_reserves/thurrock_thameside_nature_park/

Opening hours vary with season but current opening hours : Daily 9am - 5pm. Check website or ring beforehand.

Address: Cory Environmental Trust Visitor Centre, Thameside Nature Park, Mucking Wharf Road, Mucking, Stanford-Le-Hope, Essex SS17 0RN

Story by Jackie Morrison

Pics by Tony Morrison (no relation)





skylarks

our pride and joy

*Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.*

From Ode to a Skylark - Shelley 1792-1822
<http://www.poetsgraves.co.uk/shelley.htm>

Picture by Tony Morrison

With the arguable exception of Nightingales, which don't trouble the scorers too often in the East End, Skylarks are probably the UK's most celebrated songsters. Most people have to travel to hear and see them. But for the lucky residents of Manor Park, Forest Gate and the Aldersbrook estate, a short walk will often do the trick. Why? Because Wanstead Flats has one of London's most important breeding populations. The epicenter of our population is just east of Centre Road, south of Long Wood. There, and on the west side of Centre Road, areas of unmown grass



The Skylark's characteristic songs are delivered in flight. They are fairly undistinguished: streaked brown above and pale below, with a short, blunt, erectile crest. In flight, they display relatively short, broad wings. The tail and the rear edge of the wings are edged with white.

sit cheek by jowl with patches of broom and brambles. The birds nest in the long grass and feed on the shorter sward of the tracks running through it, the football pitches nearby, and – yes – the model aircraft runway.

In many ways it defies belief that the closest population of Skylark to central London and the second or third biggest concentration anywhere in the capital, can survive here at all. Although people are asked to keep to the tracks and dog-walkers to keep their animals on the leash, it is still a common sight to see canines rampaging through the area. Grass fires are common in summer. On sunny days there is the regular drone of a model aircraft looping the loop overhead. And desperate defenders or wayward strikers often send footballs into the grass.

Despite this, the numbers of territories in the period 2009-2012 were respectively 16, 16, 11 and 9. Only Rainham Marshes consistently beats these figures, with Richmond Park – where protection of the breeding area is more clearly policed - about the same. Away from the main area, there are sometimes overflow territories near Alexandra Lake and in the Site of Special Scientific Interest between Centre Road and Lake House Road.

Turn up quite early on a bright and not-too-windy day between March and early June and you will hear territorial birds singing 50 metres or more in the air, or on one of the many anthills. Watch out as you walk along a track and you may well see birds feeding on the edges of the main tracks. In late July, August and early September, with adults moulting, our Skylarks seem to become invisible. But they're back on the manor later in September and some start to sing again. Migrants pass over the Flats in October and November and birds also winter here. What is not clear is whether the winter birds have come from elsewhere or whether they are the remnants of the breeding population.

What of the future? The City of London Corporation mows the breeding area on a rotational basis, with about 20 per cent cut every autumn. This management definitely helps the larks – as well as Meadow Pipits, which breed in the same area – but with the amount of pressure on the area during the breeding season, I do fear for the future. Considering the fact that Britain's Skylark population has fallen by two-thirds since the mid-1970s, and also reflecting on the fact that this is the easiest place for several million Londoners to see the species, surely more protection during the breeding season, for example, more signage or even some roped-off areas, is not too much to ask for? This spring the Wren Group is organising



systematic survey work to find out exactly how many larks we have. Please email tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk if you are interested in helping.

Story by Tim Harris - Pics by Nick Croft





winter invertebrate report

Trying to prepare a report on invertebrates over the winter period is not an easy task. As most of us will perceive, there apparently aren't many invertebrates around, especially if we think of insects.

However dig in any compost heap, or look into the dark damp places in our gardens, and we will probably notice at least snails, probably some worms and maybe some small jumpy or crawly things which are possibly best looked at with a magnifying glass! There may be some crustaceans, too – in the form of woodlice or allied creatures.

Pic Honey Bee - by Tony Morrison

Apart from the occasional fly or swarm of midges on one of the warmer days, the best I could do with free-roaming creatures until very recently was the occasional micro-moth found in the house, or perhaps a lacewing. There was also a daddy-long-legs of the arachnid type in my kitchen one day, but it rushed off in a fragile frenzy when I tried to photograph it!



*The Pine Ladybird This is a small ladybird (3 to 4 mm), with red comma-like front spots on the black elytra and a flange around the base of each elytron. Though mainly found in areas of Pine, it also lives on other trees and shrubs, such as Hawthorn when its preferred Pine is absent.
Pic Paul Ferris Text Wikipedia.*

However, only a week or so from snow in the garden, I visited the City of London Cemetery on a day when not only was there sunshine but also a bit of warmth in the sun. On the stem of a rhododendron near the entrance was my first ladybird of the year (not counting one seen walking around at a "do" at Butler's Retreat a couple of weeks ago). Closer inspection showed more enjoying the sunshine, plus torpid ones sheltering in the dried up flower-husks, which is where they probably overwinter. These were Pine Ladybirds –



*The larva of the Drone Fly (E. tenax) is a rat-tailed maggot. It lives in drainage ditches, pools around manure piles, sewage, and similar places containing water badly polluted with organic matter. The larva likely feeds on the abundant bacteria living in these places.
Pic Paul Ferris Text Wikipedia.*

quite small and coloured black with red markings. Crocuses were flowering, as were Winter Aconites and just one flower of Lesser Celandine, but it was on some flowering shrubs that more insects were to be found. On the white flowers of Viburnum, three species of hoverfly were found. The most obvious and prolific were the Drone Fly *Eristalis tenax*, which is a largish fly that mimics a bee. In lesser numbers were another with a fairly commonly used English name – the Marmalade Hoverfly, *Episyrphus balteatus*. This one is distinctive because of its colour and because it has double bands on its abdomen. The third species was a single individual of a smaller size, its wings set back along its body. This made it difficult to identify using its body markings, but it was probably *Melicaeva auricollis*. On an adjacent Mahonia, its yellow flowers were attracting mainly Honey Bees, *Apis mellifera*.

The sunshine was warm enough for me to keep a

look-out for early butterflies. Last year Red Admirals were seen on Wanstead Flats on 26th February, but no butterflies were seen this time. It was on the heathers – many of which were flowering – that the most insect activity was taking place. The flowers were attracting large numbers of Honey Bees as well as Bumble Bees, the large and familiar *Bombus terrestris*.



*Bumblebees are social insects that are characterised by black and yellow body hairs, often in bands. However, some species have orange or red on their bodies, or may be entirely black.
Pic Paul Ferris Text Wikipedia.*

Disappointingly, by the next day the weather had again turned colder. From about 11C on 19th, the 20th was more like 5C, and I made no attempt to look for insects. I'd intended to put out a moth trap early this year, but so far on the few occasions that I have, the catch has been nil.

Report by Paul Ferris



Jubilee Pond

Past, Present and Future

The Wren Group got together with the Lake House Project for a joint event in late February, the first of many we hope. An illustrated talk by Robert Howell about the Jubilee Pond, which many of us know as the old model yacht pond on the south side of Wanstead Flats.



The Jubilee Pond in its heyday at the turn of the last century. Note the crowds of onlookers standing on the embankment.

The Pond was originally dug out by West Ham unemployed labourers and was opened in 1905. It was extremely popular as a boating pond for many years and we saw some fascinating photos of the pond in its heyday.

Robert Howell is the Secretary of the Lake House Project, which was set up as a local pressure group to persuade the Corporation of London (as it then was) to do something about the dried up and wrecked state of the pond. After long negotiation, with Dave Salt as the leading light, and with pressure from local people and schools who wanted it to become a wildlife conservation pond, a working partnership developed, and the pond was cleared. A fifty pound unexploded bomb was detonated, the pond with its three islands was lined and planted up by hand with reeds and rushes and reopened on the twelfth of July 2003. Sadly, the Canada Geese consumed most of the vegetation within two weeks, but they left the pond-dipping area alone, possibly because they did not like the railings there.

Unfortunately, the contractors did not do a good job, and the newly lined pond developed a leak. This means that the pond has had to exceed its EA license to maintain a reasonable water level. The City of London has now agreed to part-fund draining and relining the pond, supplementing the money received in payment for hosting the Olympic Police Muster Station last year. The twelve week project, which begins very shortly, will be done in two halves, using a dam to minimise disturbance to wildlife. The contractors will do both the design and the build this time. The Epping Forest Branching Out Project is involved, and volunteers will help to recreate the pond-dip area



The same view taken late 90s. No crowd and a rather sad leaky pond which regularly dried out in the summer months.

and build a natural play area. The meeting felt that a monitoring process should be in place to ensure that the job is done properly this time.

The Group runs walks, fortnightly litter-picking sessions and does scrub clearance to discourage antisocial behaviour. It is affiliated to the conservation charity BTCV, and has two trained pond wardens who run three regular pond-dipping sessions per year. The Pond supports an interesting soup of invertebrates and some beautiful waterbirds. The Group is keen to work with other groups such as the Wren Group and were kind enough to show Gill James and Jackie Morrison the basic rudiments of pond-dipping before they tried this out with Wanstead Nature Club last year. We hope to enjoy a joint walk to see the wonderful grasses in flower on Wanstead Flats in late spring, led by Fred Wanless, who is a grasses expert.

Report by Gill James.



Works to Jubilee Pond Update

The City of London Corporation is about to begin major improvement works to Jubilee Pond, one of the most popular sites in Epping Forest. Funding for the £445,000 project will come from the City of London Corporation (£145,000), the Heritage Lottery Fund, as part of the City Corporation's 'Branching Out' project, (£130,000) and the Met Police (£170,000).



The Jubilee Pond as it looks today.

Landscaping of the pond on Wanstead Flats, which attracts 400,000 visitors a year, is scheduled to start in mid-March and to finish by summer 2013.

Works will vastly improve the visitor experience and include a new accessible path, pond dipping decks, a wild play area and re-lining the pond.

Jubilee Pond was originally the concrete-lined 'Model Yacht Pond' built in 1907, which was converted into a 'conservation pond' in 2003. Since then, water loss has been identified at the site. Last year, the local community voted for the Met Police's £170,000 compensation from the siting of the Olympic police muster station on Wanstead Flats to be spent on relining Jubilee Pond - and the City Corporation has also added money from its maintenance budget.

Relining works will progress in two stages, with each half of the lake being worked on in succession. The water will be moved from one side of a temporary dam to the other, ensuring that important pond habitat and aquatic life remains on the site and can quickly re-colonise the new habitat.

After the completion of the re-lining works, landscaping will begin. The planting of aquatic plants will significantly improve the habitat with the addition of native species such as water mint, reeds, water lily and water forget-me-not alongside natural regeneration.

The new plants will be surrounded with temporary fencing to protect them from water fowl and dogs until the plants establish after a year or so. The addition of accessible pathways with new benches, pond-dipping decks and a play area will also make the site much more visitor friendly.

The pond re-lining works will be undertaken by Kingcombe Aquacare Ltd and the landscaping by Ground Control Tilhill to the designs of landscape architects, Chris Blandford Associates.

Community involvement is a large part of the

process. Local group the 'Lakehouse Lake Project' has already played a big part in initial consultation and design plans and will be key to caring for it in the future.

Paul Thomson, the City of London Corporation's Superintendent at Epping Forest, is excited about the project:



"We are so pleased to have the opportunity to revitalise such a popular part of Epping Forest, for the enjoyment of all London's and Essex's communities. It's a major

opportunity to improve the much loved facilities here and the active role played by the Lakehouse Lake Project in looking after this pond is very welcome."



Epping Forest's legendary volunteer force will also be helping with landscaping tasks like planting and construction of the pond dipping platform. The City Corporation is encouraging local people to join the Lakehouse Lake Project in helping with improvements and keeping the area looking beautiful. For more information or to become a member, email bob.howell@btinternet.com.

Update by Yvette Woodhouse - Corp London





apples and pears and fieldfares

Article by Nick Croft

Lovely, a bit of snow and a cold snap. Birders love a bit of weather upheaval. Not so good for the birds but for us selfish few, great news and a chance for a bit of variety and perhaps a local rarity instead of the usual winter fare. To think just a few weeks back in December I had been seeing Pipistrelle bats over the River Roding at dusk!

This time last year we had a bonanza. Lapwings by the hundreds, Snipe, Jack Snipe (the first for many years), Woodcock, Golden Plover, Grey Plover (the first recorded on the patch ever), Smew and shed load of Goosander. Could we better that? Er, no we couldn't!

The omens had been good. Lapwings, Fieldfare and Redwing began pouring through on their way west as the ponds iced over and froze. Expectation ran high. The skies were scoured for other refugees from the continent or nearer to home. While we waited, and watched, we hit upon the none-to-original plan to feed the birds. Hawthorn trees at our visible-migration point were festooned with apples, pears and a few suet-filled coconut halves, out of the way of squirrels but close enough to Long Wood to entice any roving tit flocks. Even as I was hanging up the offerings, Blue Tits were investigating and a Robin fluttered up to the shells.

Porridge oats seemed like a good idea, but with fresh falls of snow and the occasional thaw I don't suppose much of that went the way it was intended. Too soft and absorbent. I tried dog biscuits, scattering them in a few snow free hollows and on stumps, but I have this feeling that I was just feeding the local dog and fox population, though the gulls loved them.

It didn't take long for Fieldfares to join the party, offering great photo opportunities and a chance to get close to this flighty thrush. By now hundreds were passing overhead, but our trees could only offer a few a buffet to enjoy, so those that did pitch up were loathe to leave and quite territorial about the bushes.



Yellowhammer - Pic by Tony Brown
<http://www.thecowboybirder.com/>

Of course our main target had to be Waxwing. Having seen the video of a young boy on Fair Isle feeding the birds from his hand with others perched ridiculously on his head, we may have been expecting too much. Even then to coincide

with them would require luck, we had three or four largish flocks pass south before the New Year, and while many had headed off to the continent and south, plenty more were making their way from up north. So it turned out, while walking around the patch with Josh, we made one more visit to the growing orchard. While we watched a few Fieldfare gorging themselves a flock of Redwing sized birds came in and flew around a bit. Waxwing. Unbelievable! Then came their trilling. I am sure they would have reeked havoc on the remaining fruit if they hadn't been put to flight by a pack of dogs.

Subsequently we've had Waxwing reports from the allotments near the cemetery, Wanstead Park Avenue and just off Warren Drive, so get some apples out in the garden and you may still get a visit.

As for our hoped for rush of all things wonderful and scarce hereabouts; Bob Vaughan got a brief glimpse of a red-head Smew on the Roding before it flew downstream, I picked up two wayward Goosander over Long Wood, add to that a Golden Plover or two and a record number of Snipe in the SSSI. Tony Brown snapped a rather good picture of a Yellowhammer consorting with Reed Bunting by the Esso Copse (the year's second bird), and later in February Dan Hennessy found a group of Goldeneye on Perch; three displaying males and one disinterested female who stayed the whole day and looked like they were set to stay longer.

Not quite the bonanza we had in mind but it keeps the year-list ticking over and we now stand on 81 for the whole patch. Water Rail reappeared (at Shoulder of Mutton) after a two-month absence, and there were several sightings of Peregrine over Wanstead Park. However, Lesser Spotted



Drake Goldeneye - Pic by Nick Croft

Woodpecker has so far been a noticeable absentee. The first Wheatears will be here in a matter of weeks as the year's cycle turns once more, and soon the first Swallow will be flashing over the grass on their way north. I'll miss the winter and its possibilities, but you never know what the spring may bring. Well we've got an idea; Stonechat, Whinchat, Common Redstart and an ouzel or two. This year looks like it could be good for waders. Angell pond is looking its best for years and even poor Cat and Dog pond may hold a few gems. Alexandra Lake will be the centre of attention just because of its track record: Common Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Water Pipit and Rock Pipit. But don't rule out the Jubilee Pond and, more importantly, dust off those bins, keep watching the skies.

If you do have any sightings mail nickcroft61@yahoo.co.uk or want to keep abreast of the doings on the patch you can follow us on twitter [@WansteadBirding](https://twitter.com/WansteadBirding) or follow us at <http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>



winter bird report

RSPB

Who's watching who?

Think small... if you look closely you will be amazed at what is under your nose.

RSPB Rainham Marshes is a haven for more than just the birds, with countless insects, spiders, amphibians, reptiles and mammals leading their own lives around you as you take a stroll around the reserve.



Many will pass you by unnoticed but if you look carefully, you will be surprised to see how many are out there.

Reed Bunting keeping 'em peeled - Pic by Tony Morrison



Records fall in cold snap

Winter bird report

December 2012 and the first fortnight of 2013 featured spells of mild and very wet weather punctuated by some hard frosts, which froze most of our area's open water at times. In mid-January, snow ushered in a period of very cold weather, and this dominated for much of February.

A nice surprise for one lucky observer on the last day of the old year was a Brent Goose flying east over Wanstead Flats. A big influx of Gadwall in late January and early February resulted in a record count of 258 in our area on 10th. To put this in perspective, according to the latest published London Bird Report (for 2009), only two London sites had counts exceeding this figure. Gadwall is not one of the flashier of our wildfowl but it's nice to know that our area is an important winter domicile for this subtly beautiful species. Sawbills appeared in the mid-January freeze: a redhead Smew was on the River Roding by the exchange lands on 17th and two Goosander flew over Long Wood two days later.

Single Water Rails were seen on several dates in Wanstead Park before Christmas and then sightings abruptly stopped until 24 February when

one was by the stream running into Shoulder of Mutton pond. Flights of Lapwings were seen over Wanstead Flats on several dates before and after Christmas, presumably birds relocating from flooded or frozen fields elsewhere. A total of 121 flew over the Flats on 19 January. A few Woodcock were inadvertently flushed, in Wanstead Park, Bush Wood and Wanstead Flats. Most were seen very early or very late, but one was seen at 11:30 one morning at the end of Long Wood. With several months of above-average rainfall, the SSSI and Cat and Dog pond areas were very wet, and this encouraged Common Snipe. In fact, reports were almost daily throughout the winter period, including a local record count of seven on 24 January. An adult Mediterranean Gull flew across Ilford Golf Course on Christmas Day. A part-flooded Wanstead Flats attracted huge numbers of gulls between Christmas and the year end, including 1,600 on 27 December. These were mostly Common and Black-headed Gulls. Another popular site for bathing and loafing gulls was on the flooded Fairground.

Tawny Owls were vocal in Reservoir Wood in February, and on at least one date in Bush Wood. After an absence of almost two years, a Little Owl put in a welcome appearance on Wanstead Flats in late December. It was seen again on the New Year's Day birdrace ... then went AWOL.

By the beginning of March there were at least seven Skylarks on the Flats, and three birds had been heard song-fighting. The first Waxwing of winter was in Wanstead town centre on 12 December, and four days later a flock of 12 was seen flying parallel to Centre Road. 15 more were in the SSSI on 27 December. This or another flock was attracted to Nick Croft's feeding station south



Fieldfares are large, colourful thrushes, much like mistle thrushes in general size, shape and behaviour. They are very social birds, spending the winter in flocks of anything from a dozen to several hundred strong.

Text by Wikipedia Pic by Nick Croft

of Long Wood in mid-January. Fieldfares far outnumbered Redwings, with up to 180 feeding on Wanstead Flats in late January. Good numbers of Goldcrests were noted in Wanstead Park and on the Flats, and their much scarcer Firecrest cousins were seen in the Dell, by Alexandra Lake, in Bush Wood and two were regularly in the grounds of Snaresbrook Court. Our area seems to have become one of the most reliable to see this stunning little bird. The species does like holly and this no doubt explains regular observations in Bush Wood. Another species seen there was Nuthatch, which (I hope I'm not being premature, here) seems to be making a bit of a comeback locally. Nuthatches were also seen in Reservoir Wood. No such success story for Treecreeper, however; there was not a single winter record. Single Yellowhammers were seen on two dates.

Report by Tim Harris



Brewer's duck spotted on Connaught Waters

One afternoon at the end of January, myself and fellow WG members Jackie Morrison and Gill James, plus another friend, Pat Bishop, went for a walk around Connaught Waters in Chingford. We noted the various Mallards, Coots, Mute Swans,

Mandarins etc, and myriad Tufted Ducks on the pond, but the identity of one duck puzzled us. It had the body of a Gadwall, but its head appeared to be that of either a male Mallard or a Common Teal. None of us were sure what it was, so I took a few photos of it (a difficult task, as it was quite far away, and the light was against me), with the intention of emailing it to WG Chairman and 'bird guru', Tim Harris, to ask his opinion.

Tim responded quickly to my email, confirming that we were indeed thinking of the right 'mixture' of ducks – for instance, the vermiculated markings on the flanks definitely suggested Gadwall - and that he was more inclined to go with a Gadwall x Mallard hybrid. This particular hybrid is so relatively common that it has its own name, 'Brewer's Duck' – although I suggested to Tim that it could be called a 'Gadlard'! Gadwall have also been known to hybridise with Teal, but the Brewer's Duck scenario is more prevalent.

For those of you such as me who may not have heard of the term 'vermiculated' before, it refers to the attractive marble-like patterns on the Gadwall's body. Jackie also informed me that vermiculations are marks that look like worm tracks, such as those seen carved into stonework in classical buildings. Being in the Wren Group can be quite educational at times!

Story and pic by Kathy Hartnett



superintendent report to volunteers

The annual party for volunteer groups in Epping Forest was held at The View and Butler's retreat Chingford, on 31st January 2013, and Paul Thomson, Superintendent of Epping Forest, gave volunteers an update. What follows draws largely, and with thanks, on notes from Rob Howell of Lake House Lake Project.

The Forest has been awarded a Green Flag award for the 9th consecutive year. These are annual awards for excellence in Britain's parks and open spaces. All three visitor centres also received awards.

Paul talked about the 50,000 'veteran' trees in the forest, of which 1,200 have been designated 'keystone' trees, the most ancient and important trees in the forest. These receive special attention including high level pruning and the clearing of new growth from the base of the tree. The trees are responding well to this on-going work. However, disease continues to threaten a number of trees. This includes the plane trees around Wanstead Flats, (where Newham Council has also been taking radical action to remove diseased trees). Ash die-back has been identified in Chigwell and Horse Chestnut canker has taken hold in Woodford Avenue.

The second phase of the management plan is about to kick off starting with a web consultation in May, which will inform the development of a ten-

year plan. Forest managers are also contributing to local planning, and an aviation survey looking at noise levels from aircraft. Paul referred to Wanstead Park's "at risk" status, and said special attention will be paid to this. Developments in the park include the clearing of scrub and improvements to the banks of the lakes.



1,200 of the 50,000 veteran trees in the forest have been designated important 'Keystone Trees' receiving special care and attention

There are plans to increase the number of cattle from the current 50 to 150. Trials of 'invisible fencing' have proved very successful; "invisible fencing" is a buried wire that sends a warning signal to the collars worn by the cattle. Epping Forest was the first open space in the world to use this type of fencing when it was initially trialled successfully in 2011.

Paul also referred to the forest's perennial problems, ranging from flytipping to dog attacks and rough sleepers. The City Corporation is working with police, social services and charities to

address this latter issue. Bush Wood had seen a spate of muggings, as a result of which clearing has been carried out around the 'through pathway' and police and community officer patrols have been increased. Over 750 cases of fly-tipping were reported across the forest last year.

The Green Flag Award® scheme is the *Keep Britain Tidy* benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK.

It was first launched in 1996 to recognise and reward the best green spaces in the country. The first awards were given in 1997 and, many years later it continues to provide the benchmark against which our parks and green spaces are measured. It is also seen as a way of encouraging others to achieve high environmental standards, setting a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas.

<http://greenflag.keepbritaintidy.org/>

Paul said that the Olympics had been a success, with minimal effect on the forest. The Muster Point site on Wanstead Flats is recovering although some of the re-seeding has been deferred until the Spring because of the poor weather. He noted the work done by the Lakehouse Lake Project on scrub clearance on Dames Road. Work is due to start on the redevelopment of Jubilee Pond in February.

And finally the good news is that Epping Forest continues to grow, with 30 acres of buffer land acquired in Upshire.

Report by Mark Gorman





Wanstead nature club

For children aged 7-13 years

Bring your youngster along to have fun with others learning about our local nature - birds, plants, trees, butterflies, pondlife, insects etc.

We meet at the changing rooms building, Harrow Road, Wanstead Flats E11 3QD the forth Saturday of every month 10 a.m. - 12a.m.

Run by local volunteers. Only £1.50 a session
To find out more and register to join please contact
Gill James 0208 989 4898
[e-mail \[gill.james@btinternet.com\]\(mailto:gill.james@btinternet.com\)](mailto:gill.james@btinternet.com)

Supported by The Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group
and the City of London

Wanstead nature club

DECEMBER NATURE CLUB: WATER BIRD WATCH & MAKING CHRISTMASSY THINGS

A very wet day near Christmas so only three children turn up. Rosie brings four waterbird calls to listen to and Haydn has some great pics on his laptop of the likely birds we might see on Jubilee Pond: mallards, shoveller ducks, coots, black headed gulls, heron, and Canada Geese. None of the children know these.

We look at feathers under the microscope, so we can see how they are designed to zip up and keep our birds warm and dry.

We make Christmas stars and wreaths and strange twiggy beasties out of a great pile of bendy twigs and greenery and string. Lyn and Hassan make up some funny stories for their beasties. Gill tells the story of the Ant and the Grasshopper (an old fable by Aesop).



Hassan and Sara make twiggy things

It stops raining at last so Haydn takes the children to the Pond to see if they can see any birds- and guess what, when they come back, we quiz them and they now know the birds and their names!



Joe and Gill make a willow Christmas star

JANUARY 2013 NATURE CLUB: SNOWBALLS AND BIRDFEEDERS

The Harrow Road Pavilion was closed for health and safety reasons as the snow lay round about and it was indeed very cold. Three stalwart children appeared, so we went for a winter wonderland walk to the Cat and Dog Pond instead...



A very chilly Cat and Dog Pond last January

Impervious to the weather, muffled up in their balaclavas and ski clothes, the children raced about in the snow looking for fox trails. When the grownups could stand the cold no longer, we all decamped to Haydn's kitchen.

From the kitchen window we had a great view of green parakeets, pigeons, and blackbirds around the garden and we tried to entice them nearer by playing the right birdcalls on Gill's Birdvoice.

Then we made simple birdfeeders out of old drinks cartons and made a lovely messy bird cake out of suet, nuts and raisins, which we squidged into small yoghurt pots and pine cones to hang up at home in our gardens.



Sara finds out how feathers zip up

Then Haydn tested us to see if we had learned to identify any garden birds yet and we had- so well done again Joe, Sara and Hassan, you are getting to be great bird detectives.

FEBRUARY: MEET A TREE

A nice clear day for February if a little muddy underfoot as there has been so much rain. Only three children again. Does this imply that we should abandon winter sessions? This seems a shame when there is so much still to see and do in winter!

First we checked up on our increasing knowledge Garden Birds and their songs, looking at the Wildsquare sheets for this month and listening to the Birdvoice, before setting off into the woods to find the Biggest Tree.

We found it- eventually! A giant sweet chestnut with big twisty roots, which we climbed as far as we could before we measured the circumference of the trunk with a piece of string. When we stretched out the string it was 7 metres long. According to our calculations that made it over 300 years old so it was probably planted around 1667, just after the Great Fire and the Great Plague. Wow. Now I wonder why it is known as the Witches' Tree?

We also had a go at bark rubbing to see the different patterns on different kinds of tree trunks. We will have to have another go at this as we ran out of time...

Next meeting is on Saturday March 23rd, 10am -12pm, meet at the Harrow Road Pavilion on Wanstead Flats, We plan to go frog and toadspawn hunting on the Cat and Dog Pond and also draw a massive Tree Skeleton.

On April 27th we will look for skylarks and hear their wonderful song, and on May 18th we will have a visit from Batman himself (Keith French in disguise) who will tell us all about BATS!



If you would like to know more about the Wanstead Nature Group why not get in touch with Gill Tel: 0208 989 4898 or e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Update by Gill James





a summer of flowers

By Tricia Moxey

A significant feature of the Olympic Park during last summer were the vibrant colours of the flowers in the floral displays which included plants from other countries as well as many of our own native meadow flowers. The trend to brighten up many public areas by deliberately planting 'wild' flowers in grassy areas is a good one and the managers of many urban parks are starting to be more creative in leaving some areas of grass unmown or are planting in wild flower mixtures to provide nectar and pollen for various insects, which in turn are fed to various nestlings or get eaten by shrews or bats.

Prairie planting with flowers from North America or the grasslands of South Africa have become firm favourites and are often used by garden designers in their show gardens. Many of us have now found space in our own gardens for plants such as Asters or Cone flowers, Red Hot Pokers and Agapanthus. Their colourful presence can prolong the flowering season and they do supply nectar and pollen for our native bees.

Many of these introductions add bold splashes of colour in the flower beds but we must not forget that our own native plants are important too and should be encouraged. Enhancing the urban green spaces and gardens is a key element of the Biodiversity Action Plans for the local boroughs. This is tied into the proposals outlined in London's Green Grid to provide greater connectivity between habitats by encouraging the planting of native species with the aim to improve not just the appearance of areas, but adding value by providing many different food plants to support a range of herbivores both large and small.

Flower rich meadows have almost disappeared across the countryside and with their loss, many butterflies, moths, bees, beetles and other insects are now much less common due to lack of suitable foraging areas. 2013 has been designated the Year of the Meadow – with various schemes encouraging us to plant more wild flowers. Some schemes suggest that even a metre square patch in a garden will help – although this would be best planted with a number of small to medium plants rather than just one large one such as a Teasel!



Every garden needs pollinators and bees are among the best. Without them there would be limited flowers and even fewer fruits and vegetables. It's worth putting some thought into making your garden inviting for them. Pic by Tony Morrison

The idea is to build a patchwork of small meadows, but this does need to be augmented by establishing larger areas where possible along roadsides or within local parks. Just leaving some of the grass unmown in the early part of the summer will allow the plants within the sward to flower and set seed. Wild flower meadows do include various grasses too!

Suitable plants which can be included in a wild

flower meadow in your own garden could include the perennial Ox-eye daisy, White and Red clover, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Bugle and Yarrow. Agrimony and Salad Burnet might make useful additions to your wild flower meadow alongside Meadow Buttercup and Lesser Stitchwort. Meadow Crane's Bill, Ragged Robin and Cowslips can be encouraged to grow and the overall aim would be to have plants of different heights and different flowering seasons.

We are inclined to think about providing nectar rich flowers for bees and other pollinating insects, but there are many insect herbivores which feed on every part of a plant – leaves, seeds and roots. These in turn get eaten by something else creating a complex food web in each location. The increasing list of locally recorded moths is an indication of the variety of food plants available within nearby gardens and adjacent Forest.

Some common plants provide food for a range of different moth caterpillars. Over 80 different species of moth have been recorded as feeding on Dandelion and Bramble. Yarrow can support many different species of beetle, flies, aphids and bugs as well as moths. Bird's Foot Trefoil and the clovers are attractive to several species of butterfly, moth and beetle – so these are important components of any wild flower patch.

You may be tempted to sprinkle such wild flower seeds right across the countryside, but this should be resisted as it will alter the status quo and make the task of recording the natural trends in plant distribution rather difficult to monitor.

Allowing natural colonisation of your wild flower patch can be slow, so buying seed and planting

them does speed up the process. Reputable firms will have selected seed from home grown plants as imported seeds from Europe will have a different genetic makeup to our native plants and may be less suited to the UK's climate and soil.



Michaelmas Daisies continue blooming until autumn and provide late-flying butterflies such as peacocks and small tortoiseshells with a good source of nectar. The lilac flowers have bright yellow centres. Pic by Tony Morrison

Pollinators are essential for the survival of many of our wild flowers and it is welcome news that selected pesticides have now been withdrawn from sale by a number of garden centres as a result of pressure concerning the impact of these chemicals on the viability of bees and other essential pollinators.

Do enjoy your flower rich gardens this summer and hopefully we can also see more swathes of colourful vegetation in other places too, as well as lots more butterflies, bees, beetles and birds.

Story by Tricia Moxey



not such a pretty boy then

The Ring-necked Parakeet is the UK's only naturalised parrot - it is large, long-tailed and green with a red beak and a pink and black ring around its face and neck. In flight it has pointed wings, a long tail and very steady, direct flight. Often found in flocks, numbering hundreds at a roost site, it can be very noisy.

The picture to the left is a Ring-necked Parakeet in Wanstead Park, clearly showing snow on the tree branches. It has proved to be an adaptable species and its adaptations to cold winters where it originates in the Himalayan foothills allow it to easily withstand winter conditions over here.

Gregarious and living in large flocks, the birds are an agricultural pest in parts of continental Europe. This, say their detractors, is only part of the problem. Parakeets are crevice-nesting birds. They make their nests early in the year and choose holes in tree trunks favoured by native species, including Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, owls and Willow Tits. Some conservationists fear that with such rapid expansion they are out-competing and, possibly, eradicating rare native birds by nabbing their nesting sites as well as their food, rather like the grey squirrel has decimated populations of the native red in the last couple of centuries. It seems likely that any such population explosion would upset delicate ecosystems and there have been several instances in our own backyard of native birds being ousted by this cheeky newcomer.

View by Tony Morrison



toil and trouble on Wanstead flats

On Saturday afternoon, a man drove a horse and van across the flats. The van contained one loaf of bread. The day was hot. It occurred to the man to drive into one of the smaller ponds, in order to cool the horse and wash the van. So he drove into a pond.

Then he found he could not drive out of it. The wheels sank deep in the soft mud, and the horse also stuck fast. The man's efforts to extricate his vehicle attracted a crowd of cricketers and others, to whom he explained that his original object had been to wash the van and cool the horse, but that he had only just become aware that the bottom of the pond was soft. As he was talking, the horse rolled over lazily, and lay in the pond. The crowd cheered. The man resolved on instant action. He took off his hoots and stockings and waded into the pond, where he also became stuck.

Many people now

now & then

In each edition of the Wren newsletter we will be showing you a picture of a street in our area taken around 100 years ago and how it looks today. Just for fun have a guess where this picture was taken (answer back page).

If you would like to see your area in this slot why not get in touch and we will see what we can do.

began to advise many things. But the man succeeded in getting out of the pond, though in a very muddy state, and the horse also was, after some difficulty, rescued by the aid of the crowd, and sent to a stable to be cleaned. The difficulty of the van remained. The vehicle was gradually, sinking, and fears were expressed that it might soon totally disappear.

For some reason or other, the man now placed supports beneath the van, and removed the wheels. A huge crowd had by this time gathered who surveyed the operations with interest, made humorous remarks, and gave gratuitous advice.

Finding that the removal of the wheels did not help matters, the man replaced them. A long chain was now fetched from Forest Gate, and one end being made fast to the van, the chain was seized by the crowd, several ladies taking a hand. At an exciting moment, the chain broke, and many people fell on the grass and mud. It was then explained that

one link had been supplied by cord.

Further efforts were made and at last the van was pulled out. The horse now reappeared looking calm, and apparently all was well.

The cricketers subsequently invited the man, who had now become the hero of the hour and the centre of wondering crowds, to have tea with them in a tent. Here the hissing urn was accidentally upset by a lady. All the tea was spilt, and the lady (it is said) was moved to tears. But a fresh supply of the fragrant beverage was obtained, and everything ended happily.

Stratford Express July 24th 1896



lord mayor launches gifford wood appeal

City Corporation extends Epping Forest at Upshire, Essex

Roger Gifford - the Lord Mayor of the City of London, and head of the City of London Corporation - today planted the first three trees to officially launch his 'Gifford Wood Appeal' at Upshire, Essex –and expand Epping Forest.

In July 2012, The City of London Corporation, which runs Epping Forest, paid £270,000 to acquire 30 acres of land at Horseshoe Hill and the Appeal will fund the planting of 4,500 trees on the site, as well as scrub, glades and ponds.

Epping Forest has over 50,000 veteran trees, far more than any other UK site. The trees planted at Gifford Wood will mainly be native oak and hornbeam, to reflect the mix of veteran trees for which Epping Forest is the most important site in the UK, and indeed in Europe.

However, the project will also provide an opportunity to plant some species more tolerant of projected changes in climate. A mix of alder, birch, beech, cherry, field maple, rowan, small lime, wild apple, wild service, holly and yew will

also be planted, potentially creating a seed-bank to secure these species for the future. Shrubbery will include hawthorn, hazel and spindle.



Alderman Haines, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Epping Forest Committee (R) Lord Mayor Roger Gifford. Pic by Clive Totman

'Future proofing' will not only safeguard habitats for the diverse species in Epping Forest's woodland, but will provide valuable insight for

those visiting 'The View', Epping Forest's newly opened visitor centre, into the need for planning ahead to conserve our countryside heritage.

The Gifford Wood land has been designated as 'Epping Forest land' – meaning it becomes protected under the Epping Forest Act 1878 which prevents it from development – and the wood will improve the 'connectivity' with adjacent habitats allowing animals to move across the landscape more freely.



"The City Corporation's development of Gifford Wood reflects our historic commitment to supporting London's communities.

"I'm committed to supporting Epping Forest and the future of this land which we've secured as a place of public enjoyment and a haven for wildlife, for London and the nation to enjoy."

*Roger Gifford, the Lord Mayor
of the City of London*



For more information contact John Park, Media Officer, City of London Corporation
Tel: 020 7332 3639 / Mobile: 07824 343 456
e-mail john.park@cityoflondon.gov.uk

gallery

1



6



2



5



7



4



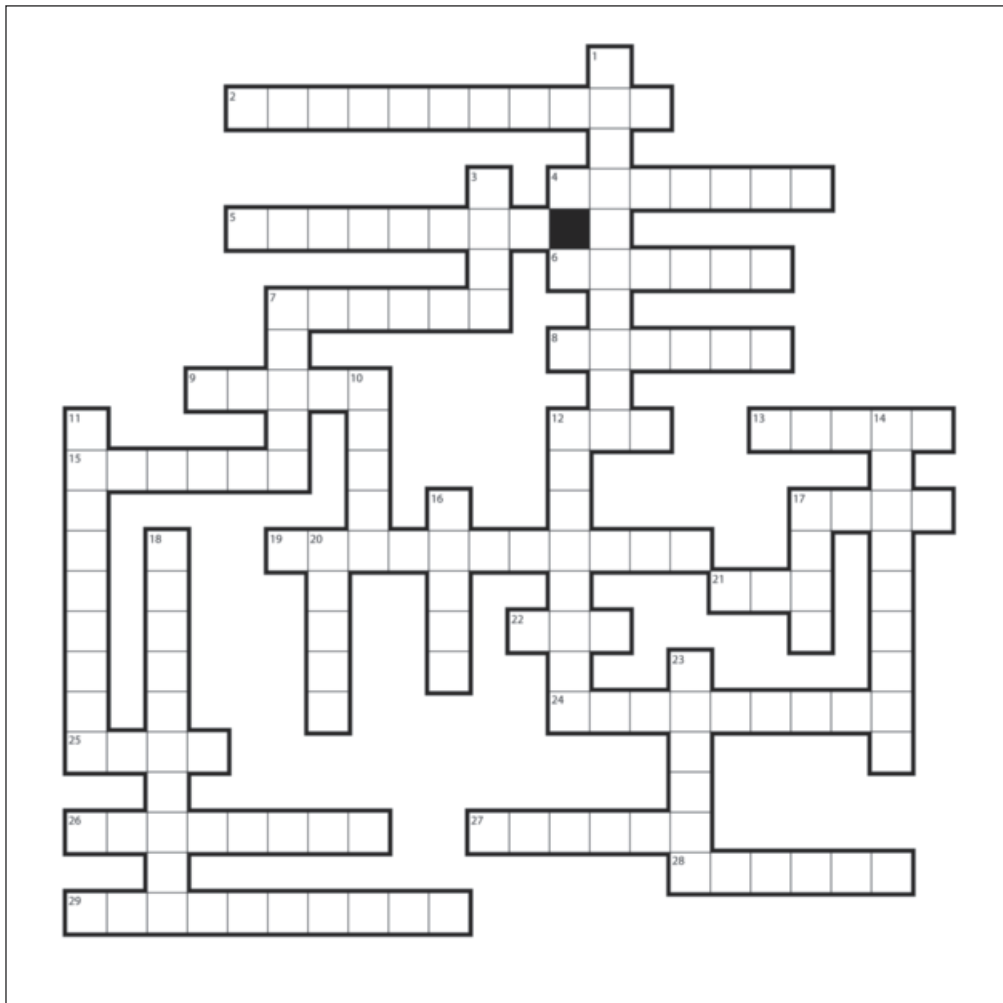
3



- 1. Witches Tree - Gill James
- 2. Avocet - Tony Morrison
- 3. Fieldfare - Nick Croft
- 4. Wren Walkabout - Jackie Morrison

- 5. Stonechat - Nick Croft
- 6. 'Frosty' - Gill James
- 7. Grey Heron - Kathy Hartnett

Wren Crossword



Across

2. What is the name for a collection of starlings (11)
4. What is the most common bird of prey found in Britain? (6)
5. This flying insect is a bit of a sweetie (8)
6. Ants eat a sweet fluid called honey dew, where does this fluid come from? (6)
7. Which creature produces gossamer? (6)
8. What is the hairy covering called that covers a deer's antlers? (6)
9. An open area in a forest (5)
12. Which mammal do the Germans call a flying mouse? (3)
13. Arboreal animals are those living in which type of habitat? (5)
15. Which creatures may collectively be described as an unkindness? (6)
17. These busy little insects communicate with a dance (4)
19. Turned into a butterfly (11)
21. A tree called Douglas (3)
22. A baby bat is called a ... (3)
24. What some animals do when winter comes (9)
25. Started off as an ugly duckling (4)
26. When a Hedgehog sheds its baby spines for adult spines it is (8)
27. This black and white bird is a bit of a hoarder (6)
28. What is a group of Moles called? (6)
29. This royal bird always catches the fish (10)

Down

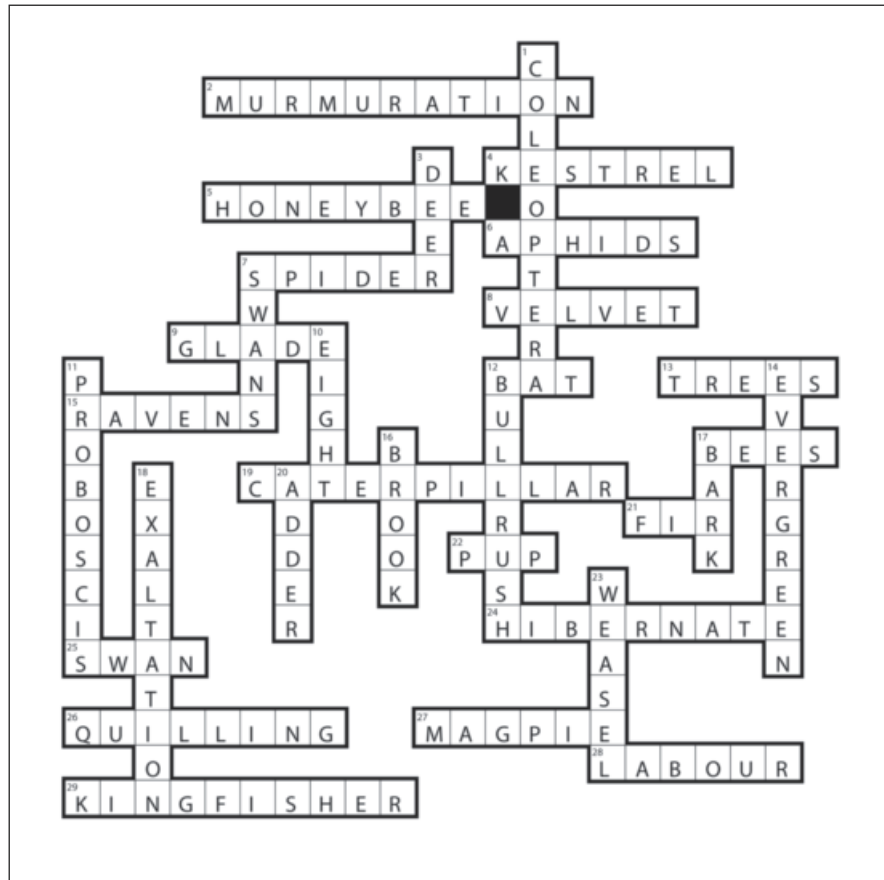
1. What order do beetles belong to? (10)
3. This beastie is very expensive (4)
7. A lamentation is a collection of (4)
10. How many eyes do most spiders have? (5)
11. Bees use it to get honey from flowers (9)
12. This bovine reed is always in a hurry (8)
14. A tree that has leaves even in winter (9)
16. A babbling rivulet (5)
17. A trees clothes is worse than his bite (4)
18. A collection of larks is called an (10)
20. This snake has no problem with his sums (5)
23. Which animal family does the Pine Marten belong to? (6)

find the word

HIBERNATE, CARNIVOR, DEER, FOREST,
 KESTREL, HONEYBEE, EVERGREEN,
 MALLARD, KINGFISHER, BARK, MEDOW,
 DRAGONFLY, BOG, HABITAT, BULLRUSH,
 BROOK, CLEARING, MAGPIE, HAWTHORN,
 TREES, BUTTERCUP, ASHGROVE, ROOT, KITE,
 SQUIRREL, STARLING, ASH, SWAN, FIR,
 MUDDY, ELM, LARK

A	I	E	L	C	N	F	R	A	K	O	T	H	A	W	T	H	O	R	N
Q	B	M	F	Z	X	I	P	J	M	H	M	U	N	J	R	Z	E	X	O
C	M	A	L	L	A	R	D	Q	X	A	B	U	T	T	E	R	C	U	P
N	P	G	O	G	Q	C	E	S	C	C	Q	Q	E	H	E	G	U	A	P
B	H	P	Q	H	I	B	E	R	N	A	T	E	T	C	S	N	R	Y	U
M	I	I	B	O	J	X	R	B	R	R	Z	F	Y	G	R	P	O	U	D
E	N	E	Z	N	Q	E	Y	O	U	N	Z	T	M	E	A	D	O	W	P
L	U	K	G	E	R	S	U	I	W	I	R	E	X	T	H	Q	T	J	X
M	U	D	D	Y	Y	T	Y	K	F	V	S	V	G	E	J	S	P	A	S
F	N	P	C	B	I	A	P	A	F	O	R	E	S	T	A	W	P	S	P
A	B	X	O	E	Q	R	Y	F	L	R	R	R	P	Z	R	A	S	H	I
Y	U	D	R	E	B	L	A	R	K	T	P	G	T	Y	C	N	X	G	Z
X	L	Z	P	I	Q	I	U	T	W	B	B	R	O	O	K	U	M	R	Y
C	L	E	A	R	I	N	G	H	P	Y	Q	E	T	X	F	K	S	O	P
I	R	Q	C	H	C	G	Y	A	Q	X	Q	E	M	U	Y	E	C	V	F
W	U	I	Q	G	N	Z	Y	S	I	K	I	N	G	F	I	S	H	E	R
X	S	D	U	T	L	X	H	U	Z	I	P	N	U	P	N	T	R	A	H
C	H	A	B	I	T	A	T	O	M	T	T	S	Q	U	I	R	R	E	L
J	Y	Z	O	P	Z	Q	L	T	H	E	K	T	S	J	M	E	D	O	W
D	R	A	G	O	N	F	L	Y	N	J	T	C	Q	U	H	L	D	W	I

teaser answers



A	I	E	L	C	N	F	R	A	K	O	T	H	A	W	T	H	O	R	N
Q	B	M	F	Z	X	I	P	J	M	H	M	U	N	J	R	Z	E	X	O
C	M	A	L	L	A	R	D	Q	X	A	B	U	T	T	E	R	C	U	P
N	P	G	O	G	Q	C	E	S	C	C	Q	Q	E	H	E	G	U	A	P
B	H	P	Q	H	I	B	E	R	N	A	T	E	T	C	S	N	R	Y	U
M	I	I	B	O	J	X	R	B	R	R	Z	F	Y	G	R	P	O	U	D
E	N	E	Z	N	Q	E	Y	O	U	N	Z	T	M	E	A	D	O	W	P
L	U	K	G	E	R	S	U	I	W	I	R	E	X	T	H	Q	T	J	X
M	U	D	D	Y	Y	T	Y	K	F	V	S	V	G	E	J	S	P	A	S
F	N	P	C	B	I	A	P	A	F	O	R	E	S	T	A	W	P	S	P
A	B	X	O	E	Q	R	Y	F	L	R	R	R	P	Z	R	A	S	H	I
Y	U	D	R	E	B	L	A	R	K	T	P	G	T	Y	C	N	X	G	Z
X	L	Z	P	I	Q	I	U	T	W	B	B	R	O	O	K	U	M	R	Y
C	L	E	A	R	I	N	G	H	P	Y	Q	E	T	X	F	K	S	O	P
I	R	Q	C	H	C	G	Y	A	Q	X	Q	E	M	U	Y	E	C	V	F
W	U	I	Q	G	N	Z	Y	S	I	K	I	N	G	F	I	S	H	E	R
X	S	D	U	T	L	X	H	U	Z	I	P	N	U	P	N	T	R	A	H
C	H	A	B	I	T	A	T	O	M	T	T	S	Q	U	I	R	R	E	L
J	Y	Z	O	P	Z	Q	L	T	H	E	K	T	S	J	M	E	D	O	W
D	R	A	G	O	N	F	L	Y	N	J	T	C	Q	U	H	L	D	W	I

events

March 2013

Saturday March 23rd - Nature Club
Contact Gill James Tel: 0208 989 4898
gilljames@btinternet.com

Saturday March 30th - Joint Migrant Watch walk
with British Naturalists Association
10.30 am - Alexandra Lake
Contact Tim Harris Tel: 07505 482 328
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

April 2013

Saturday April 6th - Joint RSPB Waterbird Walk.
8.30 am - Jubilee Pond
Contact Tim Harris Tel: 07505 482 328
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Monday April 8th - Wren AGM, with a presentation
by Peter Aylmer.
7.30 pm Wanstead House
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Sunday April 14th - Waterbird count, Wanstead
Park. Meet at 10 am by the tea hut.
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Saturday April 27th - Nature Club
Contact Gill James Tel: 0208 989 4898
gilljames@btinternet.com

May 2013

Saturday May 18th - Nature Club
Contact Gill James Tel: 0208 989 4898
gilljames@btinternet.com

Sunday May 19th - Nature Walk in Wanstead
Park. Meet at 10 am by the tea hut.
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

June 2013

Sunday June 9th - Discovering Grasses on
Wanstead Flats. Details tbc.

Thursday June 20th - Midsummer Flowers. Meet at
7.30 pm by the Aldersbrook Riding Stables.
Leader: Tricia Moxey.
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

July 2013

Saturday 13th July, 2pm - 10pm Music in
Wanstead Park. See the amazing 50' whale! Meet
the Valkyrie Vikings and Bosun Barnacle! Climb
Spider Mountain! - and, in the evening, dance to
jazz funk with Bad Ass Brass !
gilljames@btinternet.com

Sunday July 21st - Nature Walk in Wanstead Park.
Meet at 10 am by the tea hut.
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Sept 2013

Monday 23rd.
A presentation on Mosses and Ferns by Tricia
Moxey.
Details tbc

Oct 2013

Sunday 20th
Fungi Foray in Bush Wood, led by Tricia Moxey.
Meet outside Friends Meeting House, Bush Road,
at 10:30.

useful links

Got any links to go on this page ? Get in touch
editor@wrengroup.org.uk

RSPB North East London Group
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/northeastlondon/>

The Wildlife Trust <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>

BBC Nature <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/>

City of London - Epping Forest
<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/Pages/default.aspx>

British Naturalist Association
<http://www.bna-naturalists.org/>

Wanstead Wildlife <http://www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk/>

Friends of Wanstead Parklands
<http://www.wansteadpark.org.uk/>

East London Nature <http://www.eln.yorkshirefog.co.uk/>

RSPB <http://www.rspb.org.uk/england/>

UHK Safari <http://www.uksafari.com/index.htm>

The British Deer Society <http://www.bds.org.uk/index.html>

Wanstead Birding <http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>

Newham Story <http://www.newhamstory.com/>

Leyton & Leytonstone Historical Society
<http://www.leytonhistorysociety.org.uk/>

and finally

Birds of Wanstead 2012

For the third year running, more than 130 species were seen in the Wanstead Park/Wanstead Flats area. Highlights were many and included the first Jack Snipe, Grey Plover, Greenshank and Hawfinches for a very long time – and the second Wryneck in three years.

A full resume of the birds of the Wanstead area, Wanstead Birds 2012 by Tim Harris is now available to view as a pdf click on the following link <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BoW-2012.pdf>



now & then

Were you right ?

Answer
The Robin Hood, Epping New Road around 1917 and how it looks today.