



Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

spring 2014

<http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/>

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a word from the chair

People's priorities for our open spaces are different. Even among those who express a concern for wildlife it's quite often difficult to achieve a consensus. For example, is it better to open up an area for the wider public or leave it as a wilderness? Or should we transform parkland from down-at-heel to ornamental so that a historic legacy is not lost? Because our green areas are relatively small, while the pressures on them are enormous, we have to accept that there are conflicts of interest.

One case in point is very dear to my heart: Wanstead Flats. It is important for many groups, some large – like the footballing community – and some rather niche, for example the model aircraft enthusiasts. Its uses are many, and all are important for the densely populated boroughs of Newham, Waltham Forest and Redbridge. Whether it's going for a jog, having a picnic, practising with the camera, fine-tuning their sax (yes, that is an 'a'), birding or walking the dog, I'd like to think that it's a big enough area and we're grown-up enough to get along.

In the past there has sometimes been friction between some dog-walkers and birdwatchers, centering on canines running uncontrolled through the long grass where the ground-nesting birds are. The Wren Group has long

campaigning for better protection for this area and its birds but I must admit that I've often felt frustrated that nothing seemed to be happening. Well, something is happening now and that should be a cause for celebration. The City of London Corporation has put up more signage around the area, asking that dogs be kept on the leash and on the paths when being walked through this area during the breeding season. And dog-walkers themselves are starting to wage a battle for hearts and minds to persuade their fellow caninophiles to act responsibly. There will still be some who ignore the requests, but I reckon most will respect them. And we'll all be better off for that.

Regards, Tim



a word from the editor

Welcome to the Winter Wren newsletter. Remember this is an electric 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 will not survive without your support so if you have any news, views or stories please send them to me at editor@wrengroup.org.uk



gossiping rambles

Researched by Tony Morrison

Continuing on our journey taken from 'Round London' Publishing Company's 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.

Picture Chingford - entrance to Lark Wood c1904

Walthamstow

The famous Earl Beaconsfield was educated at Walthamstow, which in his boyhood days was but a small village, but to-day is a great town with tens of thousands of inhabitants, a service of electric cars to various outlying parts, including the Forest, a motor-bus service to the City, and an all-night service of trains to Liverpool Street. From a small centre of village life it has developed into one of London's busiest suburbs, and is still rapidly extending. The mere fact of an all-night service of trains shows its immense activity.



Walthamstow, Forest Road showing the Bell Public House around the time of Burdett's rambles in the early part of the last century

It has become a veritable human hive, whose workers for the most part get their daily bread in the City of London, using Walthamstow as a dormitory.

It has many fine streets and thoroughfares, open spaces for the rest and recreation of its toiling thousands, it is near the River Lea which provides

good boating; fishing also may be obtained. And last, but not least, it is only a very short distance from Epping Forest.

William Morris

At Walthamstow, in 1834, was born William Morris, poet, painter, artisan stained-glass, decorator and designer of some of the most artistic productions in rare book printing ever seen; author of "The Earthly Paradise" and many other fine poems.



The 18th Century Water House, William Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856, and set in Lloyd Park in Walthamstow.

On our way we have noticed numerous large sheets of water with wild fowl, swans, and other aquatic birds at play upon them. These lakes are the reservoirs of the London Waterworks Company, and cover hundreds of acres. The small clear stream near the engine-house is the

New River began by Sir Hugh Middleton in 1606, three hundred years ago. Its source is at a point in a valley between Ware and Hertford, about twenty miles away. His statue stands on Islington Green near the famous "Angel." The "King's Shares" of the New River Company are worth an enormous amount. The possession of a dozen or so of these would suffice to make the fortunate possessor very wealthy indeed; he would "be rich beyond the dreams of avarice."

Chingford

On detraining at Chingford we find ourselves in an open space where formerly stood a triumphal arch commemorating the visit of Her Majesty, the late Queen Victoria, to open and dedicate the forest to the people of England for ever. This was on Saturday, May 6th, 1882. The archway stood until August, 1901, when having become very dilapidated it was removed. An event of such national importance as the opening of the Forest is worthy of a more lasting memorial. It is a pity that some steps are not taken to put up a suitable



Chingford Mount Road showing the Royal Albert Public House c1905

inscription in a conspicuous place. Many an event not nearly so well worth remembrance finds itself recorded in stone or brass. Why not this?

Chingford is possessed of many items of historic interest, but it is not our purpose to detail these on the present occasion, our immediate concern is with the forest itself.

Chingford Plain

On leaving the station we turn to the right, and after walking a few yards find ourselves upon Chingford Plain. This extensive open space, like a gigantic carpet of greensward, stretches across to the edge of the forest several hundred yards away. In the distance the dark green foliage of thousands of forest trees contrasts very prettily with the lighter green of the grass. The scene is a very animated one. Hundreds of happy children are playing at hide and seek, or riding upon patient donkeys, or chasing each other with gleeful shout in and out of the dells and glades which here abound. Their noise reaches us but faintly; they are too far away to interfere with the enjoyment of those children of a larger growth who are also on Chingford Plain, which indeed is roomy enough for all.

Queen Elizabeth's Lodge

We continue on our way obliquely to the right, to find the old structure known as Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge. It will be noted how very often this royal lady's name crops up in these pages almost as persistently as King Charles' head in Mr. Dick's celebrated memorial in David Copperfield, but it cannot be helped. To omit all mention of her would be impossible—she and

Essex are indissolubly united. Our references shall be purely incidental, however, and the reader will not find a treatise on history inflicted upon him.

Entrance to the Lodge is free. It is an old oak-beamed, oak-stained, oak-panelled structure of three floors. Legend tells us that once upon a time Queen Bess rode up the stairs on a favourite horse. Certainly they are wide enough to permit of this being done. The feat is also said to have been accomplished by a local sporting celebrity in the 17th century, who won a purse of guineas by it. The Lodge is now used as a museum, and contains many curious and interesting exhibits, found at various times in the forest and other parts of Essex and is well worth inspection. Here are specimens of flint arrow heads, Roman pottery, British and Saxon remains, bones of the rhinoceros (which at a date long before the history of man roamed the forest wilds), butterflies, moths, bird's nests, and plant life, many fossil



Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge is a three-storey timber-framed building, completed in 1543 by Henry VIII. Its purpose was to provide the monarch and court with a good view of the hunt, and hence its upper windows were originally open.

remains, specimens of the plants, fruits, leaves growing in the forest (changed weekly), with names in English and Latin, aquaria with living specimens of pond life; fine pieces of old tapestry, depicting scenes from history, sacred and profane; valuable and scarce old prints dealing with cognate subjects such as the old oak at Fairlop, of which there are several copies; maps and plans; elegant drawings of the fungi to be found hereabout; in short a treasure trove of rare and curious objects. The Corporation of London is responsible for the upkeep of the Lodge, but the exhibits are placed here by the loving care of the Essex Field Club. A portion of the exhibit was removed some few years ago to Stratford, where it may be seen in the Passmore Edwards Museum in the Romford Road, next door to the Technical Institute. Unfortunately there is no catalogue available for the public, nor has there been for several years past.

Noticing the hospitable looking Royal Forest Hotel so close at hand we determine to enter, and are met by the genial host himself. We are conducted over the principal rooms in the hotel, and after our inspection of the same, we are not at all surprised at its popularity.

The ordinary rooms of the place are just what we would expect to find anywhere in similar institutions, but the Royal Forest Hotel has comforts, and attractions which are all its own. On the ground floor, is a spacious dining saloon, furnished with every convenience. And the view from the windows! There stand the noble old trees in silent majesty, there the grassy plain and the rolling upland, and in the far distance one catches sight of a little group of golfers. In the hotel grounds are beautifully laid out beds of flowers.

On the right-hand side of the enclosure thus formed is an extensive club room, used by the Chingford Golf Club: and on the left is one of the finest ball or banquetting rooms to be found for many miles around; indeed, there is not such another in all Essex.



Chingford - The Royal Forest Hotel at the turn of the last century

It is known as the Queen's Pavilion, and is lighted from domed roof and side windows. It will seat about 1,500 persons comfortably, or will accommodate 750 dancers. When used for the latter purpose the delighted votaries of "the light fantastic toe" find themselves gliding over a magnificent parquet floor, laid on springs, and yielding rhythmically to every sinuous movement made in waltz or cotillon. In this room are held the fine concerts of the Epping Forest Musical Society, of which His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, K.G., and the Right Hon. the Earl of Warwick are presidents: and among the vice-presidents we note the names of many distinguished men, including Colonel Mark Lockwood, M.P. Some of the best music and singing to be heard out of London may be listened

to at these charming concerts, which are given every fortnight during the season. About 1,000 members belong to the Concert Association.

We are conducted by another door into the main entrance to the hotel and up a flight of stairs into the Connaught Room. Its groined roof, its massive fire-places adorned over their mantle-pieces with portraits in oils of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, its stained-glass window commemorating its opening in 1878, and bearing such honoured names as those of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton and Mr. (now Sir John) Pounds, and many others, all speak eloquently of the prestige of the place. At the head of the stairs is a very fine piece of stained-glass window work, the Royal Stag Hunt representing Queen Elizabeth on a milk white palfrey in at the death of a royal buck, surrounded by huntsmen, dogs and horses.

From there we enter the Japanese Room. This again is quite an unexpected development. The walls are hung with bold, striking pieces of Japanese embroidery and tapestry in blue and gold, an aesthetic dream! From this we pass into room after room, such as the beautiful Renaissance, the Watteau, the Elizabethan, the Queen Anne, the Spanish, Dutch and Louis Seize rooms, etc., until we come to another large room fitted up with all the paraphernalia which go to make a masonic lodge. Also here are three of the grandest arm-chairs to be found in Essex. One can imagine that many a Royal personage must have sat in them, they look so solemn and dignified.



Connaught Waters in Chingford - named after the Duke of Connaught, Ranger of the Forest, an 8 acre stretch of ornamental water opened in 1883 and enlarged in 1893 when the islands were formed

Connaught Waters

On leaving the Lodge we make our way to Connaught Waters, which lies due north across the plain. Here we spend a pleasant half-hour in wandering around its banks watching the straining efforts of a lover who is taking his lass for a ride, and is evidently more accustomed to driving a quill than pulling an oar. But he appears very happy and his lady-love looks so too "All's well that ends well." Many other equally happy swains are to be seen engaged in like pursuits; their tiny craft gliding in and out between the various wood-crowned islands with which the lake is studded; and we are more than glad that such innocent joys and pleasures are placed within the reach of all who care for them.

Researched by Tony Morrison



in search of the wild

In this series on Essex nature writing I have surveyed works mostly from the latter half of the last century. For the final piece, we come up to date by looking at perhaps the most gifted of contemporary nature writers, Robert Macfarlane.

Macfarlane's reputation rests principally on three works, *Mountains of the Mind* (2003), *The Wild Places* (2007) and *The Old Ways* (2012). But it was through none of these that I first discovered him. That pleasure came from a BBC documentary, *The Wild Places of Essex*, first broadcast in 2010: an extraordinary love-letter to the power of wildlife, its ability to hang on and re-colonise the most unlikely of habitats. "Flawless and poetic", *The Observer* said, in one of many appreciative reviews.

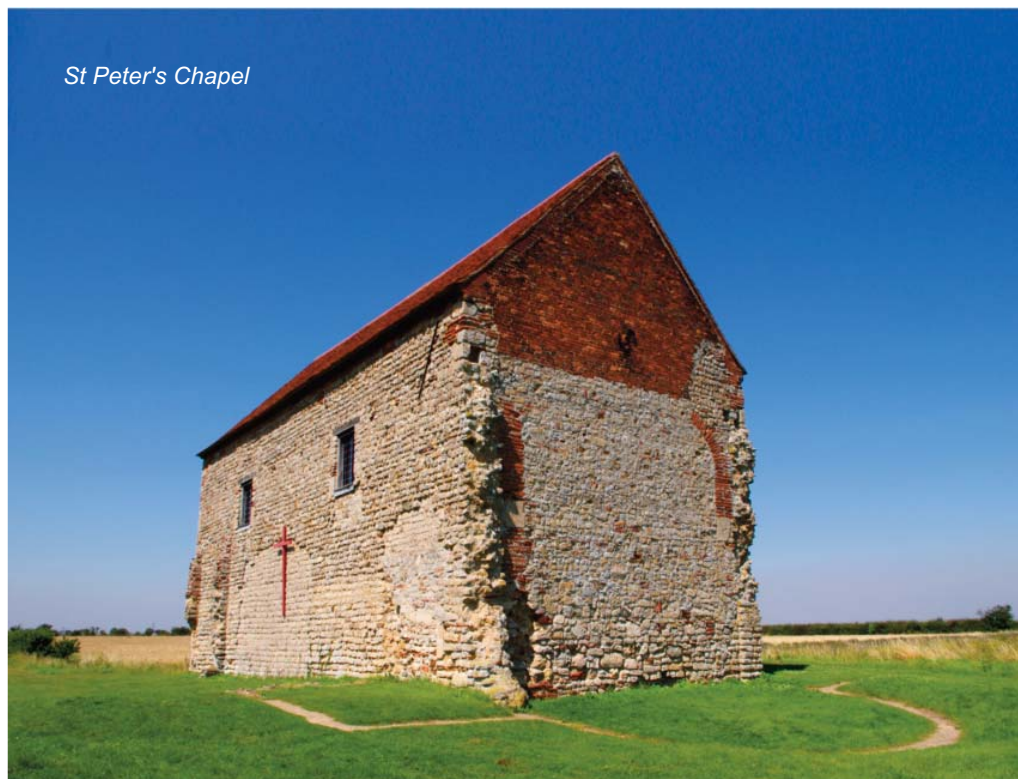
Tellingly, he mostly avoided the obvious, chocolate-box strips of tourist Essex, around Finchingfield maybe, or along the Colne valley, or the chalk-valleys around Saffron Walden, instead looking to peregrines at Tilbury, deer rutting in earshot of the M25, and bluebells in Billericay. To us, perhaps, not surprises; but these images of the unexpected did much to open the eyes of the unknowing to what our county possesses.

So I looked to the books. *Mountains of the Mind* is exclusively concerned with the Cairngorm massif of Scotland and is hence just a little out of scope for this article. *The Wild Places* and *The Old Ways*, though wide-ranging – the first covers all of the British Isles, the second takes us as far as Tibet – both examine key aspects of the wildlife and topography of Essex.

Specifically, it is to the sea-margins of Essex that he turns, to the Dengie peninsula, hemmed in by the Crouch and Blackwater estuaries, and to the coast off Foulness Island. Now, there is a school of thought – made evident by the renowned rock-climber turned writer Jim Perrin – that Robert Macfarlane is in some way too soft to be a proper nature writer; Perrin sought escape to the wild from the gritty back streets of 1950s Manchester, but Macfarlane's background is altogether more patrician, leading to his current day-job as a Fellow of Emmanuel College Cambridge. Much as I revere Perrin too, it's not an easy argument to sustain, given the privations Macfarlane seeks out, and his trek on the Broomway described in

The Old Ways is a good exemplar.

The Broomway is the Essex walk that so far I have not been brave enough to do. It ranks, with the crossing of Morecambe Bay, as one of the two most dangerous paths in Britain. People do die here, and yet it runs for barely six miles across



St Peter's Chapel

sand and silt within sight of Foulness Island, east of Shoeburyness, and the adjacent coast at Great Wakering. There are organised trips with a professional guide; Macfarlane instead befriended a former resident of Foulness, and took his hand-written notes, with their final warning of 'if it's misty, turn around and go home'.

It was misty, yet Macfarlane and his friend David ('probably the only Marxist tax lawyer in London') did not turn round. They set off into what he described as a mirror-land, so disconcerting was the duality of sea and mist in the grey.

"The tide had recently turned, and just offshore the exposed Black Grounds were steaming: a brown mudscape of canyons and buttresses, turgid and gleaming, through which streams riddled ... The surfaces of my body felt porous, absorbent." Holding their nerve, they reached landfall on the island, and the mandatory return the same way. He starts to hallucinate, fancying that in the white mist he saw Viking longboats, dhows, Istanbul, the Houses of Parliament. Safely returned, however, "[for] days afterwards I felt calm, level, shining, sand flat". Walking as drug, the Broomway as the LSD of the Thames estuary.

In part this chapter is a memorial to the villagers of Foulness, long-departed now as the island has been turned over to military purposes. The Dengie chapter in *The Wild Places* is in part a memorial too, but to one person, not a multitude. That individual is JA Baker, author of *The Peregrine*, bringing us nicely full circle to the work with which this Wren series started. The land, estuary and coast from Chelmsford, along its river, and out to the saltmarshes beyond the Dengie were the areas in which Baker sought the elusive raptor and its prey. Macfarlane, as so often

he does in his writings, recreates those wanderings, the better to get under the skin, into the thoughts, of the earlier writer.



Sea wall and borrow-dyke, Bradwell Marshes

So one autumn, after walking from near Woodham Walter by wood and hedgerow, he made his way to the sea wall on the Bradwell Marshes. Here he bivouacs, just a sleeping bag between him and the night sky, and as dusk falls watches the first

of the migration flocks, and then the meteor showers.

"I woke just after dawn. The sun, over the sea, was round and flat as a coin, orange in colour ... The structures of the barns, footless in the mist, seemed even more ark-like. The copses and spinneys stood out like islands."

This is land that he calls

"... provisional land, borrowed land. Stepping onto it, you are stepping into a ghost of water."

Indeed even now the Dengie's boundaries are being refashioned, either by the sea or by human hand in anticipation of the sea; and as if to underline the point, the couple he meets at St Peter's chapel on the tip of the peninsula are old enough to remember the terrible floods of 1953.

There is no one better than Macfarlane currently writing about that nexus of self and place, the individual in nature re-fashioned by human hand but still intimately, and sometimes terrifyingly, wild. He is a worthy successor to Baker, the writer he has done so much to champion. Read Macfarlane, and see our world anew.

Article and pictures by
Peter Aylmer



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.



invertebrate report spring 2014

Report and pictures by Paul Ferris



As I started writing this for the spring edition of the Newsletter, there hadn't been much opportunity to look for invertebrates – nor with all the rain for some invertebrates to be out and about. However, a week or so before the deadline for copy, things brightened up – with the weather.

Not really relevant to Spring, but nevertheless an interesting local record, Kathy Hartnett saw a **Red Admiral** butterfly as she was walking across Wanstead Flats on 28th December last year. Perhaps due to climate change, and particularly during this particularly mild winter, several species of butterfly have been reported on sunny days in various areas. Even when the ambient temperatures may be less than 10 degrees celsius, the warmth of the direct sun on a sheltered spot may be enough to start a flutter.

My first butterfly this year – and the first I heard of locally – was a **Comma** on 24th February. It flew rapidly away from me into Wanstead Park as I walked along Northumberland Avenue. Gill James reported one from her garden nearby a few days later.

My other first real sightings of invertebrates this early part of spring was in the City of London Cemetery on 19th February – one of those nice days which were interspersed with rainy ones. There are usually a few locations that I look at this early for insects, and I wasn't disappointed. On the glossy leaves of Azaleas I found just a couple of **Pine Ladybirds** *Exochomus 4-pustulatus*, and – looking much the same colour in this case, but a lot bigger – a **Harlequin** *Harmonia axyridis*. I had in fact seen Harlequins a number of times throughout the winter, indoors and out. They are hardy things.

Picture. Woodlouse - a crustacean with a rigid, segmented, long exoskeleton and fourteen jointed limbs. Woodlice form the suborder Oniscidea within the order Isopoda, with over 5,000 known species. Wikipedia

The next ladybird species I encountered was on Alan James' glove as we were working in Chalet Wood on 27th February. This was an **Orange Ladybird** *Halyzia 16-guttata*.



The Pine Ladybird - a small ladybird (3 to 4 mm), with red comma-like front spots on the black elytra (casing) and a flange around the base of each elytron. Wikipedia

Back to the sunny day in the cemetery on 19th, and – also in some of the usual spots – three species of bee: two bumbles and a honey. The bumblebee species were **White-tailed** *Bombus lucorum* and **Buff-tailed** *Bombus terrestris* and the **Honey Bee** *Apis mellifera* was just that. There were a few of the bumblebees, but I only saw one honeybee. There was also a hoverfly, but it flew off before I could identify it or photograph it. Back to the *lepidoptera*, and in this case, the moths. Tim Harris contacted me to suggest that we might both put out moth traps on 23rd February, so that we might compare results. The forecast had looked favourable, but in fact on the

night, rain threatened. I risked it, and it didn't rain. Tim decided not to; the end result anyway was that we both caught nothing, although there were a couple of flies in my trap.

The City of London Cemetery on the 5th March showed more **Pine Ladybirds**, and a few **Orange Ladybirds**. Also, the first spiders to speak of – little **wolf-spider** hunters basking in the sunshine and darting away at shadows. Also, lots of **Honey Bees** and quite a few **Buff-tailed Bumbles**, and a first identifiable hoverfly – the **Drone-fly** *Eristalis tenax*. Just to add something new, there was a Tree Bee *Bombus hypnorum*. It must be said that this bee wasn't active like the other species seen on the day – it was just clinging to the trunk of a tree. It is most likely to be seen from April to July, with a peak in late May and June. This is an attractive bumblebee, with an orange thorax, black abdomen and white tail. It was first recorded in Britain in 2001 but has already become widespread and common – particularly in gardens. I saw my first one in my garden in 2011.

Whilst working in Chalet Wood on 6th March, Gill James showed me some lovely little blobs she had found on some rotten wood. I was intrigued; they looked like balls of black metal on a stand. I suspected fungi or slime mold, but had never seen the likes. When I say “little”, I mean tiny. The “balls” were less than a millimetre across. A photograph and a discussion with local naturalist/biologist Roger Snook eventually ran them down to – probably – *Metatrichia floriformis*. This is a **slime mould**, so whether it should be included in an invertebrate report is somewhat controversial. They definitely don't have a backbone, but whether animal or not has changed with the ages. The group, *Myxomycetes*, have

been classified as fungi, and as protozoa, which is a subkingdom of the Kingdom *Animalia*. Take your pick. The following day, most of the balls had gone and instead was a mass (a small mass!) of orangey dehiscence. You've gotta catch 'em on the day!



Tree Bee - *Bombus hypnorum*, the tree bumblebee or new garden bumblebee, is a species of bumblebee that is common on the European continent and parts of Asia. It has recently spread to United Kingdom and Iceland. Wikipedia

Whilst having another look at the slime mould on 8th, the same rotting piece of wood harboured a couple of rolled up **Pill Millipedes** *Glomeris marginata*. These are crustaceans, most of which group you would expect to find in water. However, like the more familiar woodlouse, these are happy in damp places or damp material. One species of woodlouse also rolls into a ball and is known as a pill bug – apparently because this trait reminded people “in the olden days” of pills. It is said that people even resorted to popping them (into their mouths); sympathetic medicine, perhaps?

Regarding woodlouse, these are very common in our gardens and the familiar species is *Porcellio scaber*, and I have noticed these recently as well. Also on the 8th March - a lovely warm day - the first **Peacock** butterfly appeared in my garden, and there were a couple of Commas in Wanstead Park. There was also a single pond skater - first seen the day before - on my garden pond. There were a few small beetles swimming about in it, and a host of water fleas or "daphnia" as well, but I wasn't going to get the microscope out. In the pond on the 9th I was thrilled to see a **Great Diving Beetle** *Dytiscus marginatus* and a backswimmer - probably *Notonecta glauca*. which is the most common of the four British



Slime moulds (Myxomycota) and right slime mold in dehiscent form the following day

backswimmers. The garden is usually an easy place to find something worth seeing and a look on the underside of the lid of a compost bin and an old-fashioned dustbin produced a few Daddy long-legs spiders *Pholcus phalangoides* and some



other spiders that I'm having a bit of trouble identifying, plus a few worms which I haven't identified at all. There sometimes seems too much out there. On the brick wall - climbing about in the sunshine - a **Zebra Spider** *Salticus scenicus*.

The night of the 9/10th March I put the moth trap out for the second time this year, and had a haul of two micro moths and 7 macro moths: the micros were a melanistic **March Dagger Moth** and a **Common Plume**. The macros were a melanistic **Brindled Pug**, **Double-striped Pug**, **Common Quaker** and 4 **Hebrew Characters**. Melanistic – by the way – means a dark-form (ie black or almost black). I've appended Tim Harris' results from moth traps on the Lakehouse Estate.

So – from an early dismay when asked to write an invertebrate report for the Spring Newsletter for lack of subject matter, to a fast-approaching copy deadline when I am having trouble keeping up with all the creatures that are making an appearance!

Report and pictures by Paul Ferris, March 2014

Slime moulds (*Myxomycota*)

Until recently, slime moulds were regarded as organisms of uncertain taxonomic status, claimed as fungi by biologists and as an organism by zoologists. To make things worse, several groups of organisms have been included in the general term 'slime mould'. They include the cellular slime moulds which are unicellular amoeboid organisms such as *Dictyostelium*; the endoparasitic slime moulds such as the damaging plant pathogen *Plasmodiophora brassicae* (clubroot disease of cruciferous crops), and the plasmodial slime moulds such as *Physarum* species.

Analysis of DNA sequences has now shown clearly that all these groups are evolutionarily distinct from one another, and also distinct from the fungi. So they can be regarded as separate kingdoms of organisms or separate lineages within the protozoan group.

The myxomycota grow as a naked network of protoplasm, engulfing bacteria or other small food particles by phagocytosis. They are common in moist, organic-rich environments and especially on damp, rotten wood, where there is an abundance of bacteria as a food source. However, they are seldom seen in nature until they begin to sporulate, when they can produce conspicuous and brightly coloured fruiting bodies. These ripen to release masses of small, walled spores resembling fungal spores. For this reason, the slime moulds were once considered to be fungi.



Wikipedia.



Early March Moth Trapping on the Lakehouse Estate.

With the onset of dry and mild weather at the start of March, moth trapping resumed once more. Species to appear in traps at Overton Drive and Belgrave Road included **Common Quaker** and **Hebrew Character**, the latter's name a reference to the distinctive black markings on its forewings. The Belgrave Road trap also attracted **Twin-spotted Quaker**, **Small Quaker**, **Chestnut** and the micro-moth **Common Plume**.

There is a very interesting contrast in the lifestyle of Common Quaker (*Orthosia cerasi*) and the Chestnut (*Conistra vacinii*). The former, along with the other quakers, spends the winter in an underground cocoon as a fully formed adult. It emerges as a flying adult with milder weather between March and May, then feeding on Blackthorn flowers and willow catkins. After mating, the female lays eggs and these develop into caterpillars, which feed on a range of broadleaved trees, including oaks, willows, birches, hawthorns, Sweet Chestnut and Hazel, from April to June. The caterpillar then produces a protective cocoon and undergoes metamorphosis. In contrast, the Chestnut overwinters as an adult, becoming active in mild conditions, so the adult Chestnuts we see in early spring may have been on the wing - at least intermittently - since the previous September, and that explains why they often look tatty - unlike the quakers, which are pristine. Quaker larvae are active from late April to June, feeding on such plants as oaks, Blackthorn, hawthorns and Sweet Chestnut.

Tim Harris.

a thoroughly good day out

Three Mills and its surrounding waterways is a beautiful conservation area for industrial heritage and astonishingly abundant wildlife. A meander alongside the river channels and canals offers tranquility and a living lesson on an era of huge technological and social change. The River Lea nearby also attracts a surprising variety of wildlife.



the house mill

bromley-by-bow

Travelling to the Mill can be one of contrasting experiences. Arriving at Bromley by Bow Station crossing via the underpass to Tesco is not really how you want to start the day. However this only makes the surprise greater once you slip pass the supermarket, turning right and over the bridge onto a cobbled walkway to the Mills entrance. The footpath from Stratford High St along the River Lea is a much better option. This brings you by the new lock to the back of the site and continues round to the entrance. Unfortunately the river has often been

polluted due to illegal domestic plumbing arrangements. This allows sewage to enter the river from as far up as Hertfordshire and reduces the oxygen levels for fish. There are however a variety of birds, ducks, swans and herons to be seen here and along the canal which is nearby.

The House Mill is an inspiring and beautiful building, set on a man-made island. It is a Conservation Area and is of special architectural and historic interest for its continuous and rich industrial heritage, dating from the 12th century together with a network of waterways which surround the site. The Mill is unique link to the past and a gem in the midst of what has been a very deprived area. It is a rare survivor of this areas rich industrial heritage and has been used as a

backdrop for a number of films such as Anna Karenina and Master Commander. Although geographically in Newham very little is ever heard about the Mill in publicity. It is the only tidal mill listed as Grade 1 and one of only 165 Grade 1 structures recognised for their importance as industrial monuments. It is the **LARGEST REMAINING TIDE MILL IN THE WORLD.**

Grain probably arrived at the Three Mills mainly by water, either in coastal craft from Essex and Kent up the Bow Creek, or down the Lea River from Hertfordshire. A sack hoist would then take the grain to the beginning of it processing on the 4th floor. The supply of grain throughout the mill was then by gravity, grain falling through holes in the floor to each stage. The large water wheels, of



which there are four, are 8ft across and were capable of producing something like 45 horsepower. The head of water needed to run the wheels came up the Thames and Bow Creek and was trapped by gates behind the mill in the back rivers and mill pond. When the tide had gone out again sluice gates opened to direct a jet of water powering the waterwheels. The axles then would turn a series of gears to drive the many millstones.

The process would take about 5 hours, twice a day with the changing tides. Tides have been known to have reached Lea Bridge Rd in Hackney.

The Mill was part of a large industrial complex. The House Mill, a Clock Mill which also still exists and a windmill. It is still known as Three Mills. From about 1727 to 1940 it ground grain for distilling except for periods between 1758 and 1813 when the use of

corn for distilling was forbidden due to grain shortages. The basic alcohol produced was then sold to be made into Gin, the effects of which can be seen in Hogarth illustrations of Gin Lane. The mills were also used in the production of chemicals for perfume and ink etc. For a short period the Mill produced gun powder ! The Navy also had a victualling contract which almost certainly included not only meal for ships biscuits, but pork for salting.



The waste from the distillery went to the local pig farms!

On October 15th 1940 an incendiary bomb fell on the bonded warehouse and set the river on fire. The houses on either side of the House mill were so badly damaged they had to be demolished. The mill stopped working but continued to be used as a warehouse. Much of the machinery was intact until metal thieves hacked it out just after the war for scrap.



The River Lea Tidal Mill Trust was established in 1985 to secure the freehold of the House Mill. Trustees are responsible for the management of the day to day running supported by volunteers. There are no paid staff. It is intended to complete the restoration already begun and get the mill operational again. Much has already been achieved and in 2010 a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund allowed plans to progress. This funded a range of surveys, design, development and further research. They have also earmarked £2.4m for a Round 2

Wildlife is becoming commonplace along the once polluted Lea. Pictures: Common Tern; right, redundant sewer pump made into modern sculpture; far right, Grey Heron on riverside.



application this year 2014. However the total project will cost £3.1 and the Mill needs to raise £700.000 to release this funding. There are a number of initiatives to do this which include the local community and access to the mill via educational programmes. It is also a listed visitor attraction with a café conference rooms and a gallery available for hire. Last year the first wedding took place within the mill.

The House mill has survived two world wars and attempts to demolish it. There is a programme of year round events planned but this will mean increasing volunteer numbers.

If you have time a volunteer training day is arranged for Saturday 12th april at 10.30 a.m. - a good lunch is provided

Having visited the mill you might like to continue with a walk along the canal to the Highway which follows the Thames. Here you can find some interesting pubs and restaurants e.g The Prospect of Whitby and Town of Ramsgate and then onto Tower Bridge.

Keep up to date with other events at Three Mills over the summer including craft exhibitions at our website <http://www.housemill.org.uk/> There is a cafe and guided tours. Come and discover one of Stratford's most intriguing, hidden delights on the River Lea waterways.

If you're looking for a stroll or bike ride in open spaces, head for Riverside Green and Three Mills Green. To the south you can reach Limehouse Cut, or head north towards Leyton, Tottenham and Hertfordshire. There are toilets and a welcoming café at The House Mill.



<http://www.theaa.com/walks/three-mills-and-the-canals-420735>

<http://5thstudio.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/AYA-2012-Boards-5th-Studio1.pdf>

Article by Paula Duggan



Wren Group's Peter Williams and Mark Gorman are trustees of the charity that runs the House Mill. That part of the Lea Valley is developing a higher and higher profile. Cody Dock just to the south is to be restored, and a new walkway and cycle track is being developed from the mill south to Trinity Buoy Wharf on the Thames with spectacular views of the O2 arena. The wharf has London's only lighthouse and is already a thriving arts and cultural centre. There will be a link to the Royal Docks.



Nearby is the Bow Ecology Park, a small nature reserve. Currently this part of the valley is difficult to access but it is all opening up, and a new boat service into the Olympic Park is scheduled to open this summer linking Limehouse basin, Bow Locks, the House Mill (which has its own waterbus stop) and on into the park. A 1000 home development by the same company that owns IKEA is due to start

construction this summer right next to the mill with a new marina and will bring a new audience to this heritage gem. There will be more bars and cafes on the waterfront. With increased footfall, the mill is developing a better cafe offer, and is hoping eventually to employ staff and open during the week. This summer a major arts project called the Line will again open up the valley. Turner prize winner Mark Wallinger and Danny Boyle and others are promoting a temporary sculpture park along the Lea valley with 30 pieces displayed. All these plans will draw more people and help in the House Mill Trust's business plan to create a sustainable attraction, with working waterwheels, fantastic interpretation, and a venue for all sorts of events - we can even manage weddings, parties, book launches, music and arts events now before the next phase of restoration.

The southern Lea valley is an exciting place at the moment, a hidden gem for both nature and heritage lovers, gradually be opened up and made better known - for more details contact Mark lucasgorman@aol.com or Peter. wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com

For a map of the area click here <http://5thstudio.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/AYA-2012-Boards-5th-Studio1.pdf>



time to take care of essex rivers

By Germaine Greer

The rivers of Essex are canalised, diverted, turned into 'navigations' and generally mucked around with: small wonder they misbehave.

There is a part of north-west Essex which, though it is high-lying, can be extraordinarily soggy. Rain cannot soak through its London clay to the underlying chalk, and so within its low hills four rivers rise. The Stort rises in the Langley Hills and runs west to join the Lea at Hoddesdon, the Chelmer rises near Debden Green and flows east to join the Blackwater, the Cam rises a few miles away and, after describing a curve like a monkey's tail, settles down to flow north, and the Roding rises near Molehill Green and flows south. To travel the lanes in this part of Essex is to splash through an infinity of runlets and rivulets, all nosing their way to one or other of these four rivers; every tiny watercourse knows where it's going and can go nowhere else, because river catchments cannot overlap, but it is probably a safe bet that most of the householders in the area neither know nor care which catchment they are living in. Even the most detailed of maps identify only major watercourses; the most important tributaries are likely to remain nameless.

This lack of concern is reflected in the treatment of the watercourses themselves. All four have been

mercilessly mucked about with, diverted, straightened, canalised and turned into "navigations" according to the whim of the moment. Because rivers follow a logical course, roads are often made to follow it with them, with the result that the stream is shouldered aside and made to run in a cut alongside the road. The construction of the road disrupts the hydrology of the area drained by the stream, and the run-off from the road pollutes it, though probably not as much as the run-off from cultivated land. From birth, our rivers are struggling: none more so than the Roding. As you might expect of any live thing that is continually either bullied or ignored, the Roding responds by behaving badly. Most years it will flood somewhere along its 50-mile length. Though it

had probably been flooding parts of its rolling valley more or less annually since time immemorial, it was not until 1926 that this behaviour became problematic because the valley of the lower Roding had become suburban. Earth banks were thrown up and stretches of the river in Woodford and Wanstead were walled in and canalised but the flooding continued. Last year three prolonged flood alerts were issued for the Roding, in mid-April, in late June and in late November.

The Essex Wildlife Trust has developed a plan for a River Roding Living Landscape; the last sentence of its mission statement reads: "Roding River Valley has virtually disappeared from public consciousness." As long as that is the case, nothing will be done to improve the health of the river. One way of restoring the Roding, and a great many other rivers, brooks and creeks to public

consciousness, would be to label them. Though I have driven over scores of bridges in north-west Essex, I have yet to see a single sign to tell me which stream I am crossing. It is hard for people to care about something if they don't know it when they are looking at it. The Roding was not always forgotten. It takes its name from the Roding's, the Anglo-Saxons who settled



Pic - Stream of consciousness: the much-messed-around River Roding at Passingford Mill near Abridge in Essex, a town which has flooded on numerous occasions Photo: Alamy

the upper river in the sixth century; they, the river and no fewer than eight villages shared the name. The area is still called the Rodings but you may drive up and down the lanes for a whole day and never be sure that any water you are seeing is the river or any part of it. Some of the churches have become separated from their villages as houses have been built nearer the through routes. If you turn down the dead-end lanes that lead to the now isolated churches you may catch sight of the slender river lazily sliding between its banks, and

you may not. There are occasional footpaths but they seem to start nowhere in particular and end unpredictably. The entity responsible for managing the river corridor, including eight metres either side of it, is the Environment Agency but, as the vegetation is nothing but brambles, nettles, willow-herb and old pollards, there's no signoff their doing anything much. The river must have looked very different when Hroda led his longboats upstream from its confluence with the Thames and decided to settle his people among its headwaters.

A river is a system. It regulates and is regulated by its catchment, that is, the area that it drains. It would make sense, therefore, if water management was organised catchment by catchment, but it isn't. The Environment Agency divides Britain into 11 "river basins"; these are then divided into "catchments", many of which actually contain a number of catchments. The Environment Agency has included the Roding in the Thames River Basin District, as one of three rivers in the "Roding, Beam and Ingrebourne Catchment". At another level local authorities or bodies set up by local authorities manage stretches of a single river. In too many cases the river is the boundary between administrations, or abandoned to the mercies of the people who hold the surrounding land. There is no agency set up to manage any entire river catchment as a coherent individual entity.

Even in the wettest year, the Roding will be no more than a rivulet when it slips invisibly under the new A120 by Canfield End. By Chipping Ongar it is a proper river, even before its waters are joined by those of Cripsey Brook – the only one of its tributaries that the map-makers think worthy of name. Canoeists rate the Roding navigable from

Shonks Mill, only a few miles upstream from Passingford where the M25 roars over it. The river meanders back and forth between Epping Lane and the Ongar Road, before nudging up against Abridge, which it has flooded on innumerable occasions. It is here that the river came into collision with the new M11 and the M11 won. The river's meanders were straightened and it was cut off from its floodplain by walls, so that pylons could be safely sunk and the huge road built overhead. Around Wanstead the Roding is largely canalised, which has the effect of causing the water entering the walled section to flow through sofas that it becomes virtually sterile, while the surplus water is forced backwards to flood low-lying land as far back as Epping. The Roding continues to flow unseen and unsuspected beneath the M11 until the junction with the North Circular, where it turns east, to be obliterated by another six-lane highway.

All it takes to poison a river running under a motorway is a single overturned lorry. In 1979 trailer accident between the M25 and Passingford Bridge caused slurry to spill into the river; in 2003 a septic tank was fly-tipped into the river at Yield. It is the more remarkable, then, that the Roding is considered a clean river and supports a considerable variety of fish. Current management proposes to allow sections of the river to flood onto uninhabited land, reserving more expensive flood management measures, barriers, pumps and so forth for areas of greater and more costly potential damage. This is described as allowing the river to flow "more naturally"; flowing naturally means that in a dry season the volume of water in the Roding can dwindle to a sluggish trickle. After many years of excessive abstraction from Essex rivers, the Environment Agency has been applying

catchment abstraction management strategies in a bid to protect riverine ecosystems, with some degree of success. The last phase of the Roding is the most ignominious. It loses a huge amount of surface water to irrigation, and more from its underground aquifers to supply London; it receives in exchange the discharge from 300 permitted agencies, culminating in the outflow from the Thames Water sewage treatment works. By that time it has lost not only its character and its water but its name as well, and become merely Barking Creek.

Catchment ecosystems are essentially self-regulating, which is why it is rash to interfere with them. When it comes to a conflict between power boaters, developers, anglers, ecologists, canoeists, dam builders, water skiers, houseboat owners, the Highways Agency, farmers, kayakers, market gardeners, rowers, irrigators, swimmers, hydroelectricity generators, and industry, the river should have the casting vote. All too often it comes last. Rivers run across boundaries, through parishes, districts, shires and regions; every drop of rain that falls within a catchment, and everyone who lives anywhere lives under the aegis of a river. That river should be managed like the dynamic, organic creature that it is, from its first rising to its final destination.

By Germaine Greer courtesy of
Telegraph Media Group



clever birds hitch a lift

Anyone watching the autumn sky knows that migrating birds fly in a V formation with birds taking turns taking the lead. More attentive birdwatchers have always assumed that the reason for this was to somehow share the burden of flying what can sometimes be very large distances.

Scientists from the Royal Veterinary College at the University of London in Hatfield have now confirm, in a recent study of ibises, that these big-winged birds carefully position their wingtips and sync their flapping in order to catch the preceding bird's updraft - and save energy during flight.

It was known that squadrons of planes can save fuel by flying in a V formation, and many scientists suspected that migrating birds did the same.

The study, published online today in Nature, took advantage of an existing project to reintroduce endangered northern bald ibises (*Geronticus eremita*) to Europe. Scientists used a microlight plane to show hand-raised birds their ancestral migration route from Austria to Italy. A flock of 14 juveniles carried data loggers specially built by Usherwood and his lab. The device's GPS determined each bird's flight position to within 30 cm, and an accelerometer showed the timing of the wing flaps.



Just as aerodynamic estimates would predict, the birds positioned themselves to fly just behind and to the side of the bird in front, timing their wing beats to catch the uplifting eddies. When a bird flew directly behind another, the timing of the flapping reversed so that it could minimize the effects of the downdraft coming off the back of the bird's body. "We didn't think this was possible," Usherwood says, considering that the feat requires careful flight and incredible awareness of one's neighbors.

The findings likely apply to other long-winged birds, such as pelicans, storks, and geese, Usherwood says. Smaller birds create more complex wakes that would make drafting too difficult. The researchers did not attempt to calculate the bird's energy savings because the necessary physiological measurements would be too invasive for an endangered species. Previous studies estimate that birds can use 20% to 30% less energy while flying in a V.

Scientists still do not know how the birds find that aerodynamic sweet spot, but they suspect that they somehow align themselves either by sight or by sensing air currents through their feathers. Alternatively, they may move around until they find the location with the least resistance. In future studies, the researchers will switch to more common birds, such as pigeons or geese. They plan to investigate how the animals decide who sets the course and the pace, and whether a mistake made by the leader can ripple through the rest of the flock to cause traffic jams.

For more click on the links below

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v505/n7483/full/nature12939.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-25736049>

http://english.pravda.ru/science/mysteries/16-01-2014/126613-bird_formation-0/

Article and pics by Tony Morrison

a room with a smew

And you ...and about fourteen other Wren friends.



My first view of January 12th was of a brilliant white Wanstead Flats frozen over in ice. It looked stunning from the warmth of my bedroom, but the imminent trip to the very chilly, distant marshes of Essex was a more challenging prospect. But how pleased I ventured out. It certainly proved worth it.

Having shared cars, fourteen of us met at Essex Wildlife Trust's recently enlarged and improved Abberton Reservoir centre. The bright, sunny day also provided the other key ingredients of a great birding day out....interesting and varied birdlife, wide scenic views, an inviting visitors centre, good company..oh, and cake.

A very special bird highlight for all was when a Bittern, looking like a flying sheaf of reeds itself, suddenly



broke cover, flew over the water and, just as suddenly, sunk into a further reed sanctuary. How many times I had stared into a Bitternless patch of reeds only to go away unrewarded. Here, unexpectedly, was my very first Bittern...and in flight too. Wow.



The reservoir and banks were alive with birds, waterfowl and gulls. I developed a particular respect for the several birds who, though of mixed and dubious heritage, defied categorisation, and were to be praised for holding their own in the marauding crowds.

Peregrine, Marsh Harrier, Kestrel and



Buzzard kept a keen eye out from above. Lapwing, Golden Plover, Geese and Mute Swans passed overhead and "skeins" became the byword of the day.

Our special views, greatly helped by Tim, Nick, their telescopes and knowledge, were of birds we had never or rarely seen. These included Pintail, Red-crested Pochard, Scaup, Goldeneye, White-fronted Goose, Swan Goose,and, of course, Smew. The group's photos illustrate our visit.

Article by Jackie Morrison





Blackthorn Winter

by Felix Dennis

Scraps of blackthorn blossom fleck my coat,
Another gust of hail, and down they float;
A fine spring this-the earth as cold as stone,
North-easterlies that cut you to the bone.

The primroses have withered, one by one,
The bluebells cower, praying for the sun,
Rumbling thunder stalks the streaming hills,
Sneaking frost has slain the daffodils.

My boots are caked in mud; the dog is, too.
Above a clump of ash, the sun breaks through,
A sudden glance of light on bud and bark,
My heart leaps up-the soul song of a lark!

Sent in by Jordan Thomas
Forest Keeper - CoL

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www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforest



spring bird report

Report and pictures by Nick Croft

So winter is over, but then again it never really started. Unrelenting wind and rain, and then some more. It was like being on Shetland in the autumn. Tired of wet feet every day I bought some 'Muck Boots' and they are brilliant, just a shame that me and my brilliant 'Muck Boots' (sponsorship opportunities here!) enjoyed many a puddle and flooded field, but didn't get to see many brilliant birds.

The year 2013 really ground to a halt in December, which was kind of disappointing considering what had gone before. So we were stuck on (a still very impressive) combined total of 135 species for Wanstead Flats and Park for the year.

December's highlights included record local counts for Linnet and Gadwall, the latter peaking at 363 on 15 December. Then Tony Brown found, and photographed, a Mealy Redpoll in the SSSI, both Firecrest and Treecreeper were still present in Bush Wood (though sometimes hard to find), there were a couple of Woodcock sightings, two Chiffchaffs and Golden Plover were seen on Christmas Day, and 'Valentino' the Mediterranean Gull paid just a single visit to Wanstead Flats. Talking of the Flats, a Little Owl returned during the month.

New Year bird race

New Year's Day provided an all-round enthusiastic start to the year, which at one point looked like it might even eclipse last year's pretty solid start. But then it didn't. So there was to be no Golden Plover or Lapwing, no interesting ducks nor, of course,

Waxwing. There was to be no Short-eared Owl, Brambling or Yellowhammer. No doubt a victim of the gales, a few days later a very tired adult Kittiwake was on the Flats, and other goodies early in the month included Mealy Redpoll again, a Water Rail at the Shoulder of Mutton, and a Woodcock on New Year's Day (a 'first' for Josh Selfe). Single Firecrests were seen in Bush Wood and off Warren Drive, and Bob Vaughan was the only person to see a Wigeon, a drake on Heronry on 5 January.

Dull, some would say of January, but that is patch working: a lot of the mundane with a few nuggets thrown in. We don't just go around ticking stuff: we do notice things, like the fact that few Siskins made it this far south, and there were no big movements of Redwings and Fieldfares. On the positive side we've been serenaded by Song Thrushes since December and for every five to ten of them there's a Mistle Thrush banging it out, too!

Not a month on from record numbers of Gadwall, Heronry emptied of these wonderful ducks.

Shoveler, too, were well down on 2013, and while Tufted Duck appeared to be at similar levels, our other diving duck, the Pochard, was notable by its near-absence early in 2014.

The mild weather may have encouraged sightings of Chiffchaff and Blackcap, but it also meant that the Goldcrests we'd have expected failed to materialise, and the Firecrests were stubbornly non-



Tufted Duck

cooperative. No, I've yet to see one yet this year and I'm getting rather bored of failure in Bush Wood. But on the plus side the Nuthatches were checking out holes and making a racket whilst doing so and the Treecreepers were still hanging on, so fingers crossed for both these former breeders.

Was the mild weather the reason for the record number of Linnets on the fairground (peaking in February at 54 birds), and possibly for the good number of wintering Skylarks there too? Has the unseasonal warmth meant Meadow Pipits just haven't bothered moving so far south as usual? February déjà vu

The weather was the same as January and for the most part so were the birds. Two non-Valentino adult Mediterranean Gulls made it a total of five on the Flats over the course of the winter. A Pheasant was spotted by the riding stables, a Yellowhammer flew over Heronry Lake on 26 February, and a Red Kite drifted over the City of London Cemetery the following day.



Meadow Pipit

Only the Tufted Ducks braved the dullness that was February. Pretty much all the Gadwall and other wintering duck left during the month. Gull numbers fluctuated depending on how horrible the weather was (the worse the better) and as their temporary pools on the Flats recede, so the dominance of Common Gulls was usurped by the Black-headed.



Cormorant

On the raptor front, has anyone seen a male Kestrel? There only appears to be the one female hanging around north of Long Wood, which is quite worrying. There were no signs of Sparrowhawk displays and only singles when they are seen. On the other hand Tawny Owl reports have increased



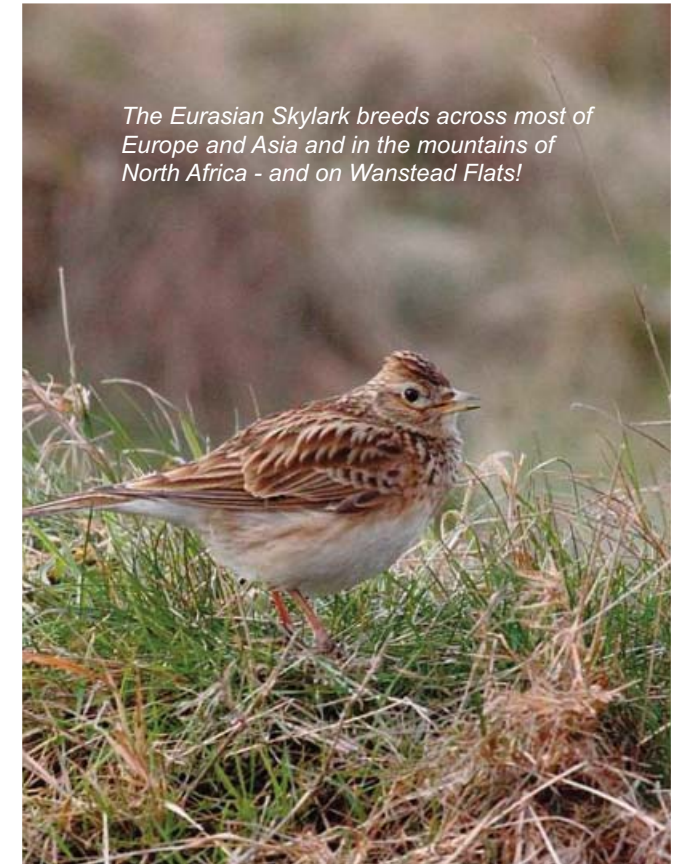
The Firecrest regularly winters in Bush Wood.

– with birds heard in Chalet Wood and Bush Wood, at least.

Fieldfare and Redwing numbers fell, with just a few of the latter left on the Flats. A few Blackbirds joined in the thrush medley, but even their numbers appear down from last month. It's been a poor winter for finches, with a few Siskins hanging on in the park, but Redpoll numbers were small. There were 16 by Perch Pond in early March.

Rook is a rarity around these parts, so two flying south over the Flats early in March was little short of momentous. The first two Sand Martins were over the Alex on 15 March, by which time

Chiffchaff song could be heard in most areas with trees, and a few Blackcaps were joining in. On the WeBS count the following day just three Gadwall could be found – the huge numbers of midwinter seemed like a very distant memory. One total surprise was a Woodcock flying south across the



The Eurasian Skylark breeds across most of Europe and Asia and in the mountains of North Africa - and on Wanstead Flats!

Plain in mid-morning! It is early days, but (writing in mid-March) Skylark territories look as though they could be one up on last year. And Meadow Pipits are also back on territory. Fingers crossed. And to herald the arrival of spring, the first Wheatears turned up on 20 March. Superb!

What to look out for

Should you be out on the Fats and see a group of strange men with binoculars standing by a bush or some such, it could be good. If they are with coffee, better; and if there is one wearing a red woollen hat it is probably very good. However, looks can be deceptive!

March kicks off the migration season with early summer visitors including: Wheatear, Sand Martin, Chiffchaff and Blackcap. This is the time of raptor movement so look to the sky for Buzzard, Red Kite and potentially Osprey. In the last three years we've had two Stone Curlew, two Little Ringed Plover, Great White Egret, two Marsh Harriers, Woodlark and Black Redstart, so potentially anything could drop in or fly over. A Hoopoe would be nice ...

In April migration really kicks in: Stonechat, Whinchat, Common Redstart, Nightingale, Ring Ouzel, and it's warbler time - Willow, Garden, Sedge and Reed Warblers, and Common and Lesser Whitethroats fill the bushes with their song, while Swallow and House Martin (and later Swift) return to claim the sky. A little later still and our Hobbies will be back and we may get lucky with a few Cuckoos passing through.

Bring it on!

Report and pictures by Nick Croft

Follow Nick on his blog
<http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>



The Common Chiffchaff is a common and widespread leaf warbler which breeds in open woodlands throughout northern and temperate Europe and Asia.

work in progress at chalet wood

We had a very successful morning clearing paths in Chalet Wood today.

After a rainy start we were joined by Don Kinnebrugh and Tony Abbott so a weekday session for us retired oldies is not such a bad idea! In the time available we managed to sweep the main paths clear, and move some of the proliferating dens back from the paths. We still need to finish clearing the side paths, maybe next week.



We were joined by Geoff Sinclair and Martin Whitfield. We settled on which were the main paths to define and Geoff later sent down a party with some 12 foot

cordwood lengths to peg down the the sides of the paths as far as possible. Signs will go up saying something like 'Bluebell Trail - please keep to the paths'. If this is successful, it will be followed up next year.



I think a notice at the Tea Hut and a word with the dog-walkers to encourage this will help. I will email the local scouts/cubs asking them to avoid the bluebells when den-building!

We spread the raked leaves about over the bluebells instead of bagging them up as Geoff suggested.

I think we need to monitor what is happening with the paths over the next two months and move either dens or cordwood edging back in place if necessary.

Update by Gill James





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)

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

Wanstead Nature club

DECEMBER: WATERBIRDS ON JUBILEE POND

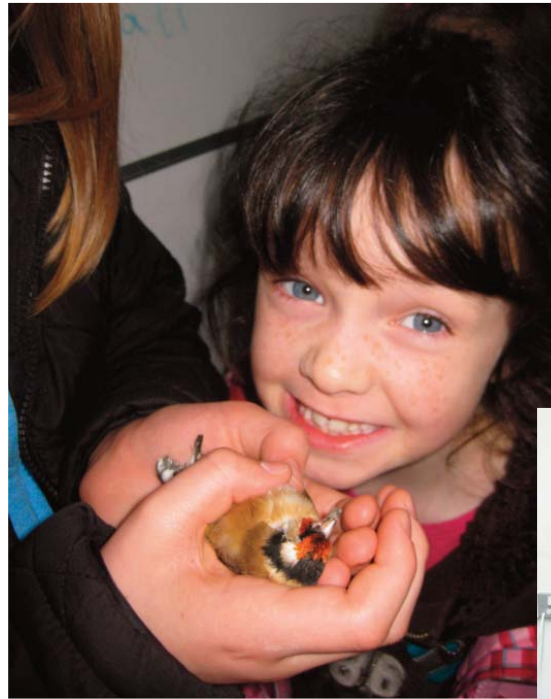
We looked at pictures of birds we were likely to see on Jubilee Pond and looked them up in bird books to identify them. Then we put on our wellies and went out to see what was really there ! It is muddy around the pond since it was relined this summer. We saw lots of different kinds of waterbirds: black-



headed gulls, Canada geese, greylag geese, Egyptian geese, shoveller ducks, tufted ducks, mallard ducks, coots and swans. Then we came back and played Bird Bingo ! Jacob was the caller and Hassan won. We'll see who wins next time....

JANUARY 2014: GARDEN BIRDS

We examined and drew a beautiful but dead garden bird which was very light and did not smell nasty at all - it had black and yellow wings, a short thick beak and a bright red face mask. We looked it up and found it was- a goldfinch, which likes to eat seeds and is quite likely to visit our gardens. After a while we got brave enough to handle it and we gave it a very nice burial in the little wood outside, where it will be food for creepy-crawlies. We also walked to Jubilee Pond where we spotted lots of waterbirds and tried out our binoculars to do some birdspotting in the nearby wood. We are getting quite good at naming the waterbirds now.



FEBRUARY: FLOODS & MOTHS

We don't often see moths, as they fly at night, so it was surprising to see Tim's lovely pictures of moths and learn about their weird and wonderful life cycle. Thanks Tim. We coloured in a large moth shape, which started off as a Death's Head and ended up a very mixed but colourful moth. Then we played Bat and Moth where the blindfolded Bat has to find the very quiet and elusive Moth. Then we went for our wettest walk yet ! As it has rained so

much this year Jubilee Pond had flooded right over its banks and across the new path in many places. It was impossible to see where the Pond banks were so we had to be careful not to fall in ! After that we had a game of Bird Bingo and this time Sara and Alanna won. There were 8 children today plus one little'un.



Article by Gill James



To find out more about the Nature Club and register to join please contact Gill James Tel. 0208 989 4898 gill.james@btinternet.com

london's biggest green space just got bigger

Ancient Epping Forest is famous as being London and Essex's biggest green space - but not all of it is quite so old. In fact, the City of London Corporation, which runs the Forest, brought together nearly 100 spade-wielding locals in December to help grow 'Gifford Wood' and expand the Forest by 2,000 trees.



The City Corporation, which runs over 11,000 acres of green space in the capital, including Hampstead Heath, paid £270,000 to acquire the 30-acre site in July 2012. The woodland is named after the 'Late Lord Mayor' Roger Gifford, who headed the City of London last year.

Epping Forest has over 50,000 veteran trees, far more than any other UK site. The new trees planted at Gifford Wood are mainly 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.

And the project is also providing 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 were also planted, creating a seed-bank to

secure these species for the future. Shrubbery includes hawthorn, hazel and spindle.

Alderman Gordon Haines, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Epping Forest Committee, which sets Forest policy, said: "The City Corporation's development of Gifford Wood reflects our historic commitment to looking after London's green spaces, which we've secured as wildlife havens and places of public enjoyment, for Londoners to enjoy. Thanks to this development we are now taking care of over 11,000 acres in and around the capital."

Project Officer Laura Lawson, who leads the Gifford Wood programme for the City of London Corporation, said: "It was fantastic to see so many people, especially families with young children, planting the trees for the benefit of their community. The weather was kind and we had a very productive morning. I'm looking forward to more school planting visits in January, children get so excited and their enthusiasm is infectious!"

The land has now been designated as 'Forest Land' which is protected under the Epping Forest Act 1878, securing the land in perpetuity as a place of public recreation and a haven for wildlife.

For more information contact John Park, Media Officer, City of London Corporation

<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/>

T 020 7332 3639 / M 07824 343 456
E john.park@cityoflondon.gov.uk



what's happening

membership keeps on growing

WREN membership is growing fast! There are now more than 150 of us as more and more people take advantage of Group membership. Thanks to all of you who have renewed your memberships already. If you haven't had a chance to do so yet, please take a couple of minutes before your next walk in the forest to drop a payment in the post, and continue to enjoy the benefits of WREN membership.

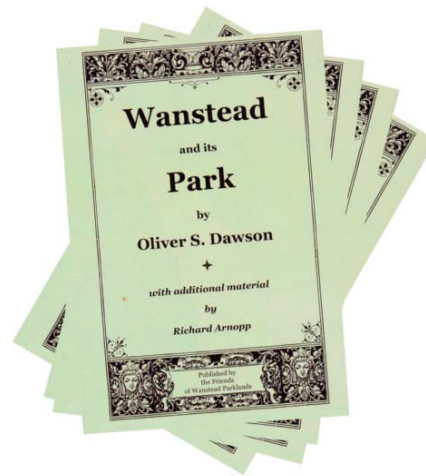
Looking for a public relations expert...

...Or a non-expert with an enthusiasm for WREN's aims and activities, who would be willing to spend a few hours each month to keep both the Group and our concerns with our local wildlife and environment, in the public eye. Help us to link with the local (and national) media, and with local publicity resources, letting local audiences know what's new with the Group, and to highlight concerns we want to raise, as well as our regular activities.

If you're interested, and/or would like to know more contact Mark Gorman at lucasgorman@aol.com or ring 020 8553 5220

"Wanstead and its Park"

In 1882, when the City of London first opened Wanstead Park to the public, a young solicitor's clerk named Oliver Dawson had just moved with his family into West Ham. Dawson was to live in the area until his death at Wanstead in 1916, becoming a professional in the nascent photographic industry. During that time he also developed an interest in the newly opened park and its surroundings, and in 1894 he published "Wanstead and its Park", a booklet he later expanded in magazine articles on the park's social and environmental history.



Now republished with additional material by Richard Arnopp, "Wanstead and its Park" gives a unique glimpse of the park and its area at the turn of the last century. As Richard writes in his introduction, "the Wanstead estate, over several centuries, was associated with a remarkable cast of characters". These ranged from Tudor

monarchs to the eighteenth century business magnate Sir Josiah Child and his family, who largely created the estate of which Wanstead park is the last surviving remnant. Dawson's booklet records this history, as well as the subsequent downfall of the estate and its eventual rescue by the City of London. In doing so he also casts light on features such as the park's lakes and ponds, the now-ruined Grotto, and the Temple, as well as surrounding landmarks, some of which survive today.

Dawson illustrated his work with photographs, including those showing the Perch Pond, the "Bathing Lake" (now Heronry Pond) and Bush Wood on Wanstead Flats, as they were in the 1890s. Now vanished buildings such as the "Refreshment Chalet" which once stood on the edge of Chalet Wood, are also featured. As an additional bonus maps and period advertisements from the original booklet are included.

In this republication Richard Arnopp has combined Dawson's booklet and articles and added an introduction about the author, together with substantial endnotes which significantly enhance the original (as well as correcting some errors that crept into Dawson's work). This makes "Wanstead and its Park" a must-read for anyone interested in the area.

"Wanstead and its Park" is published by Friends of Wanstead Parklands and is available via the "Friends" website www.wansteadpark.org.uk priced £9.99.

Mark Gorman
Membership Secretary



gallery

1



3



2



5



4



6



- 1. Nature Club - Gill James
- 2. View from Lea walk - Tony Morrison
- 3. Fly Agaric - Jackie Morrison
- 4. Smew - Tim Harris
- 5. St Peter's Chapel - Peter Aylmer
- 6. Woodlouse - Paul Ferris

Please e-mail your pictures to editor@wrengroup.org.uk

look out for

Early April

Birds: Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs are early summer visitors whose voices join those of resident Wrens, Robins and Blackbirds. If weather conditions are poor, look for Sand Martins feeding over Heronry Lake. The first Swallows pass through our area, but they won't stop. Listen for Meadow Pipits in song on Wanstead Flats.

Butterflies: On sunny days, look for Small Tortoiseshells, Commas, and Peacocks pretty much anywhere. Brimstones can be seen in Wanstead Park, while Holly Blues will visit gardens around the area.

Damselflies and dragonflies: On a warm day look for Large Red Damselfly, the first of our 'damsels' to appear in spring.

Late April

Birds: The big arrivals of summer migrants take place. Common Whitethroats will be back on territory in the SSSI and the old sewage works. House Martins reappear, and Skylarks should be song-flighting over Wanstead Flats. Listen out for a Cuckoo!

Butterflies: The first Small Coppers should emerge on The Plain and in the old sewage works; Orange tips may be seen in Wanstead Park.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Early Common Blue and Azure Damselflies emerge to add a bit of colour to lake margins.

Early May

Birds: The late arrivals of spring finally turn up: Hobbies and Swifts. Listen for the descending lilt of a Willow Warbler or the tuneless rattle of a Lesser Whitethroat in the old sewage works or on Wanstead Flats; they may attempt to find a mate for a few days but will probably move on.

Butterflies: Green-veined Whites and Small Whites can be seen in gardens and in Wanstead Park. Look for Green Hairstreaks on Wanstead Flats: a colony was discovered there last year. If we are lucky a Brown Argus or two may be in the old sewage works, but this species is notoriously fickle, appearing one year and disappearing the next. Small Heath should appear in areas of rough grassland on The Plain and on Wanstead Flats. **Damselflies and dragonflies:** Large Red

Damselflies should be visible around the lakes in Wanstead Park. Hairy Dragonfly is one of the first of the 'dragons' to appear in spring; it may be on the wing in April, but early May is a good time to look for it.

Late May

Birds: With 50 species of birds breeding in our area, the dawn chorus now an in early June is worth getting up for. Mind you, they're not all great songsters. Egyptian Goose anyone? **Butterflies:** Large Whites can be seen in Wanstead Park and in gardens. Hopefully, the first Common Blues should be flying near Long Wood and in the old sewage works. Small Heaths will still be on the wing.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Large Red Damselflies will still be visible around the lakes in Wanstead Park. Common Blue and Azure

Damselflies and Blue-tailed Damselflies can be seen with them. Look on lily pads for Red-eyed Damselflies; later in the year these can be confused with Small Red-eyed Damselflies, which emerge later.

Early June

Birds: The dawn chorus is starting to peter out as birds get down to the serious business of raising chicks.

Butterflies: Many of our regular species will peak around now but for some it is still too early. **Damselflies:** Banded Demoiselles should be flitting around aquatic vegetation along the banks of the River Roding. The sluice by the old sewage works is a good place to watch them. A few Emperor dragonflies will probably put in an appearance. Broad-bodied Chaser and Black-tailed Skimmer dragonflies may be seen around Heronry Lake; the latter often bask on the concrete rim of the lake.

Late June

Birds: Bird song seems like a distant memory, but plenty of young birds will be begging for food or making their first flights.

Butterflies: Large Skippers appear in the old sewage works and on Wanstead Flats. Several species of whites will still be on the wing. Early Purple Hairstreaks breed in oaks; now is the time to look for the first of the summer, especially flying high around the canopy in Bush Wood.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Emperor dragonflies patrol powerfully over the lakes in Wanstead Park; good luck if you try to photograph this species – it rarely stays still!

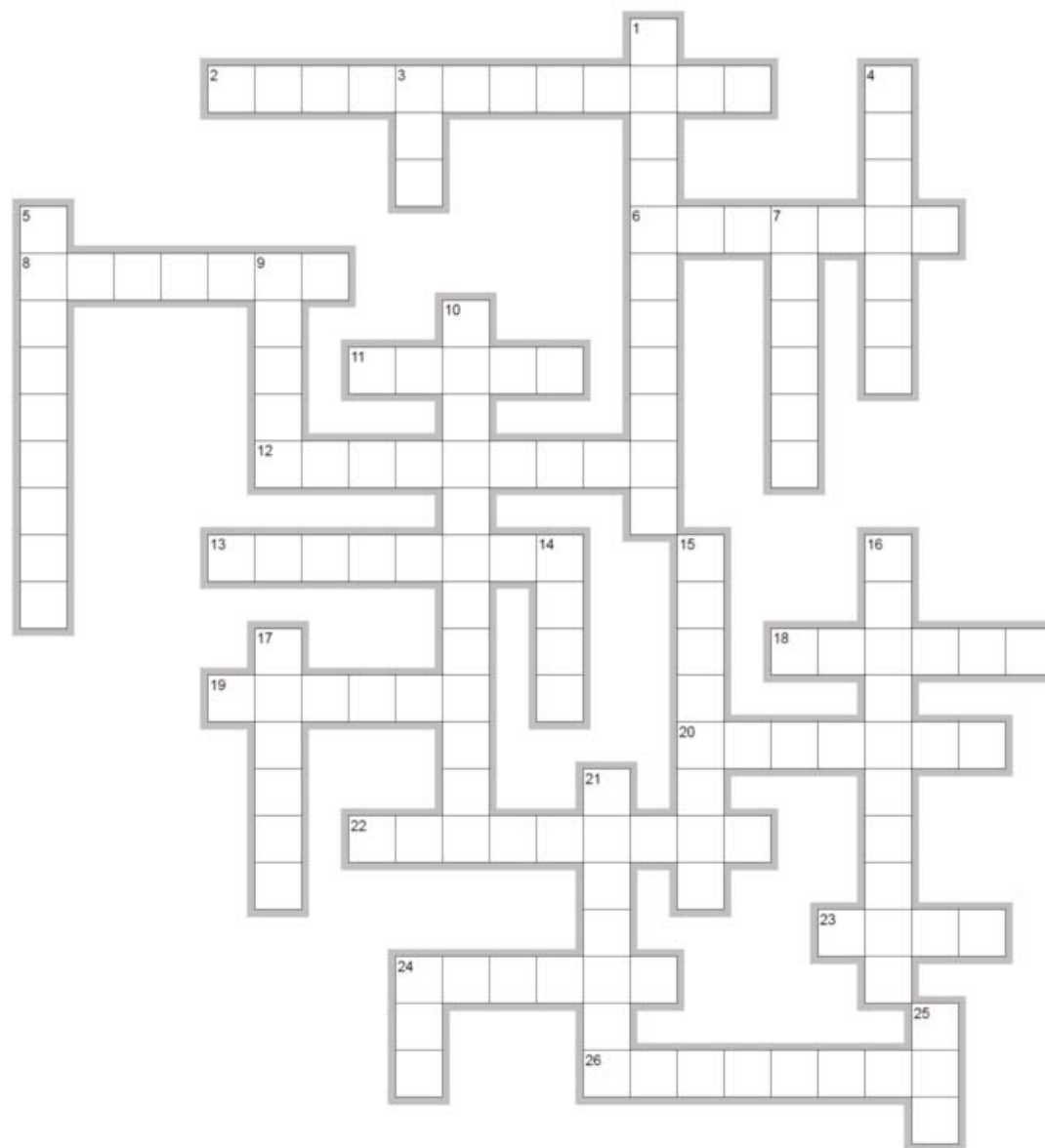
Wren crossword

ACROSS

2. THE VARIETY OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN A PARTICULAR PLACE (12)
6. BABY FROG FOUND IN YOUR POND (7)
8. THE MALE OF THIS HOOFED ANIMAL HAS A BLACK, SHINY NOSE AND ANTLERS (7)
11. GROWS DOWNWARDS INTO THE SOIL (5)
12. SOMETHING A BIT LIKE A FROG SITS ON THIS (9)
13. A LITTLE NUT CRUNCHER (8)
18. BLACK AND WHITE FACED MAMMAL (6)
19. WHO'S A PRETTY BOY THEN (6)
20. NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE – DIED OUT (7)
22. THIS BIG CAT IS A REAL FLASHY DRESSER (9)
23. THIS ANIMAL IS A REAL LOVEY (4)
24. FOUR LEAVES IF YOU ARE LUCKY (6)
26. ITS SEEDS SPIN LIKE HELICOPTERS WHEN THEY FALL FROM THIS TREE (8)

DOWN

1. THIS BIRD BLOWS A WIND WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN (11)
3. THIS PLANT GROWS UP THE TRUNKS OF TREES TO REACH THE SUN (3)
4. FROLIC IN THE CLOUDS (7)
5. ANGRY WILLIAM (9)
7. THIS LITTLE BIRD IS A BIT OF A HEAVY BREATHER (6)
9. SORRY – LOOKS LIKE A HERON BUT THE R'S MISSING (5)
10. AN AREA OF LAND IN WHICH ANIMALS AND PLANTS ARE PROTECTED (12)
14. CAN BE SEEN UP IN THE SKY PLAYING ABOUT (4)
15. THIS SPIKEY LITTLE FELLOW IS A BIT OF A PIG (8)
16. NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE – DIED OUT (7)
17. A FEATHERED FRIEND IS A BIT OF A COLLECTOR (6)
21. BLOOMING MARVELLOUS (7)
24. WHAT NAME IS GIVEN TO A MALE SWAN (3)
25. THIS CHICKEN'S A BIT OF A LADY (3)



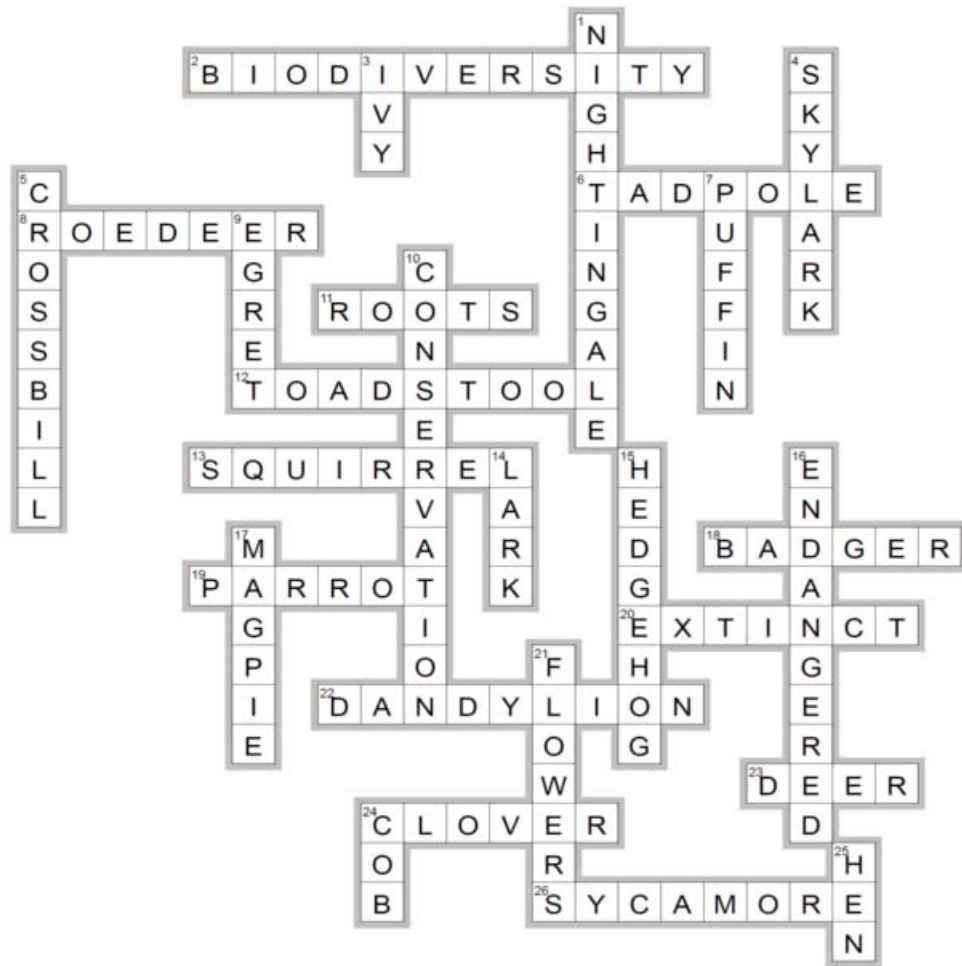
find the word

CAN YOU FIND THE HIDDEN WORDS?

BIODIVERSITY; EAGLE; POND; CARDINAL;
LEAFY; ACORN; NEST; EVERGREEN;
PRIMROSE; ELM; BLUEBELL; EGRET; DEER;
WATER; PEACOCK; FENCE; NATURALIST; RAT

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

teaser answers



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

events diary

April 2014

Wednesday 2nd April, 7.30pm

Annual General Meeting Roding Room, Wanstead House
with a presentation on the Wildlife of the Galapagos
Speaker: Dave Playford

Sunday 6th April, 8.30am

RSPB walk, Wanstead Flats
Meet: Jubilee Pond car park, Lake House Road

Tuesday 8th, 7.30pm

RSPB North-east London illustrated talk: The State of Nature:
What can we do?
Meet: Gwinnell Room, St Mary's Church, 207 High Road,
South Woodford E18 2PA.
Speaker: Martin Harper
Cost: £3 for RSPB and Wren members, £3.50 for non-
members (no charge for schoolchildren)
Enquiries: 020 8989 4746

Saturday 12th, 10am-noon

Wanstead Nature Club for Children
Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats
Cost: £1.50 per child
Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 gilljames@btinternet.com

Sunday 13th April, 10am

Waterbirds and migrants, Wanstead Park
Meet: by refreshment kiosk in Wanstead Park
Enquiries: 07505 482328 tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

May 2014

Sunday 11th, 11am

Litter pick
Meet: corner of Centre Rd and Capel Road

Tuesday 13th, 7.30pm

RSPB North-east London illustrated talk: A South American
Journey
Meet: Gwinnell Room, St Mary's Church, 207 High Road,
South Woodford E18 2PA.
Speaker: Richard Pople
Cost: £3 for RSPB and Wren members, £3.50 for non-
members (no charge for schoolchildren)
Enquiries: 020 8989 4746

Saturday 17th

'Awayday' to Lakenheath RSPB reserve
Details tbc

Saturday 17th, 10am-noon

Wanstead Nature Club for Children
Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats
Cost: £1.50 per child
Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 gilljames@btinternet.com

June 2014

Sunday 1st

Visit to Three Mills
Details tbc

Sunday 8th, 10am

Butterflies and flowers in Wanstead Park
Meet: by refreshment kiosk in Wanstead Park
Enquiries: 07505 482328 tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Thursday 12th, 7.15pm

Midsummer wildflowers walk
Meet: outside the riding stables in Empress Avenue
Leader: Tricia Moxey

Saturday 14th, 10am-noon

Wanstead Nature Club for Children
Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats
Cost: £1.50 per child
Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 gilljames@btinternet.com



and finally

The Wren Group has finally been dragged screaming and kicking into the hi-tech world of Facebook.

We're not really sure what we're doing yet but we've been reliably told that Facebook will help us keep in touch with our you our members, enable you all to keep in touch with each other and help ensure that you never miss another Wren activity.

Once you join the Wren Facebook site you will have access to what is called the 'wall'. The Facebook "wall" is where it all happens. This is where you write



comments on what you are up to or share photos and articles with your fellow members and friends. You'll also see what your friends are posting on their wall, and anyone on your friends list can come by and write a comment on your wall. So not only is the Facebook wall a great place to let everyone know what we've been up to, it is also a place where conversations and ideas are started.

If you are not a member of Facebook go to the link below and you will be asked to join. Just say yes and follow the directions.

Once you become a Facebook member or if you are already member please press the 'Like' button to join in and receive regular updates from the Wren Group. And don't forget to tell your friends and get them to join the Wren group.

Click here to join us on Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/WrenOrg>



now & then

Were you right ?

Answer

Wanstead High Street opposite the Cuckfield pub at the turn of the last century and how it looks today.

