

summer 2014

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a word from the chair

‘Engagement’ is one of those 21st-century buzzwords whose true value has been devalued by overuse. But at its heart is a vital idea for a group like ours.

For many years the Wren Group has been trying to improve the local environment for nature. We are firm believers that a healthier, more diverse, natural environment enhances

the quality of life of people who experience it. But we’re not the only ones: lots of groups locally would like to improve those patches of green called Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats and the built-up areas around them. And recently we’ve been engaging with a few of them.

Each group has its own priorities, but there is more that unites us than doesn’t and it is important that we work together when it really counts.

In the last few months the Wren Group has worked with the Bushwood Area Residents’ Association, the Friends of Wanstead Parklands, the Lakehouse Lake Project and tidyourflats, among others. Plans are afoot to assist the WI and Woodcraft Folk in a scheme they have for the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on Wanstead Flats. And we also hope to involve local scouts in some

practical work projects. This is real engagement.

Of course, most people aren’t members of any of these groups and we also need to engage with them. For that reason there was recently a joint Wren-tidyourflats stall at Woodgrange Market in Forest Gate. I was struck by the number of people who spoke to us on that wet Saturday morning on subjects ranging from the fortunes of our Skylarks to the Nature Club, and from what was healthy and unhealthy food for ducks to the perennial issue of litter. It was great talking to people we don’t usually come across, and I can’t wait to do it again. Watch out for news of this and other activities.

Tim Harris
Chair of the Wren Group



“ The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. ”

At the risk of sounding a bit arty – I believe that this proverb says as much about people as it does trees.

If a child is taught to understand and care about nature then I believe he or she is likely to grow to be a better person for it. The proverb also implies that it’s never too late to learn.

Involving and encouraging others, both young and older, to care about their environment is to plant a seed whereby they may grow more a part of where

they live - caring more for it and others living there.

As Tim mentioned in his introduction above – the Wren Group is trying hard to engage more with local groups and people in caring about where they live. We now have a regular presence at local markets and events. We have a lively Facebook page as well as a website, and you can even follow us on Twitter. However, probably the best way of spreading the word is through you. If you are not a Wren member - why not join? If you are a member why not tell your friends? Please take a look and

‘like’ our facebook page – by following us you will be kept up-to-date with what’s happening. And please tell your friends to like us.

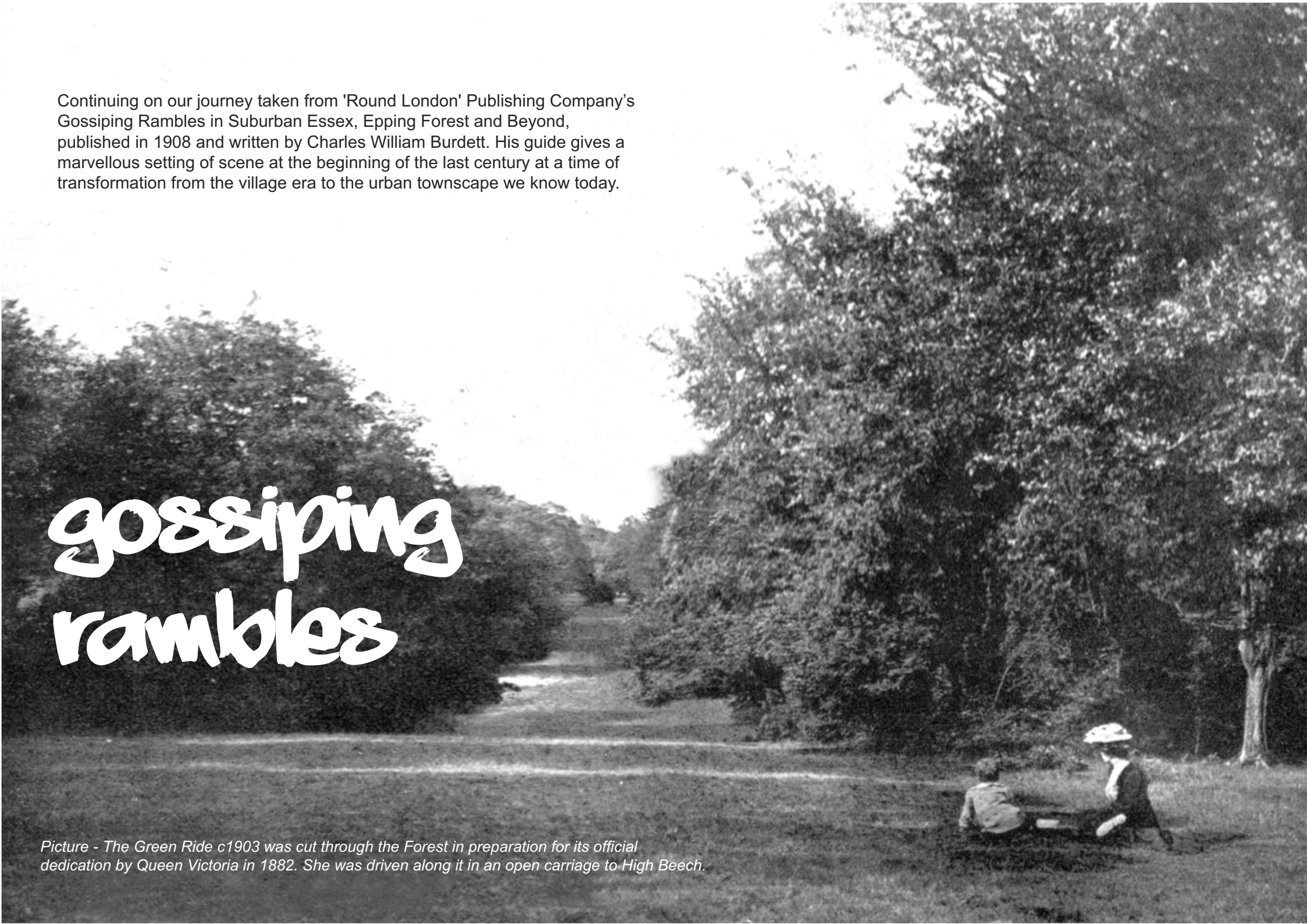
Lastly, remember this is your newsletter and cannot be produced without your support so if you have any news, views or stories please send them to me at wreneditor@talktalk.net

Joining details, previous newsletters and much more can now be found on the Wren website at <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk>

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.

gossiping rambles

Picture - The Green Ride c1903 was cut through the Forest in preparation for its official dedication by Queen Victoria in 1882. She was driven along it in an open carriage to High Beech.



Mr. Keeper Butt

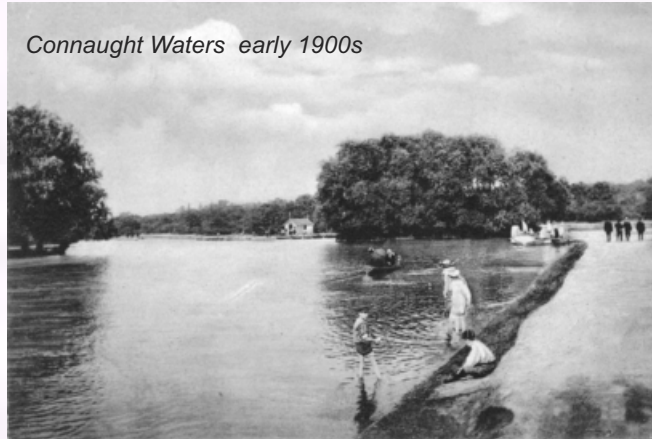
On leaving Connaught Waters we enter the plain again and are fortunate enough to drop across Keeper Butt, who has lived in the Forest thirty-two years. His bright eyes are as keen as ever, his form erect, his step strong and vigorous. To use the old familiar phrase, "What he doesn't know about Epping Forest isn't worth knowing"; and his vast store of information is always at the disposal of all who care to ask for it. He well remembers the time when Ching-ford Plain was covered with waving corn, and has many a story to tell of the fight for an open forest.

"Now, Mr. Butt, which do you consider the prettiest walk from here to High Beech ? "

"Ah, that's rather a difficult question to answer! But

I can direct you by a way which wants some beating ! This is it. Go straight across to the far corner of the plain, take the little path you will find there. This leads you in a few yards into the Green The Green Ride, by the Cuckoo Pits, across Almhouse Ride, etc. Plain then across Fairmead

Connaught Waters early 1900s



Bottom straight into High Beech. You will find this road to be one of the finest in the forest."

"Many thanks. Your old dog does not go far away from you ! "

"Not he, he's as cunning as a fox, and knows the forest as well as I do. And he can smell a poacher a mile off."

"You get poachers in the forest still ? "

"Oh yes, but they're mostly after the rabbits. But my old dog soon roots them out.

"So we pass on our way, Mr. Butt's dog being evidently of the opinion that we do not belong to the poaching fraternity, as he simply gives a quiet sniff at our calves and lies down contentedly to await his master's next move.



Children playing on Chingford Lane near the bottom of Friday Hill. Circa 1907



Forest Horseman sledging logs - a common sight at the time of Burdett's walks

The Green Ride, etc.

Presently we enter upon the Green Ride, which truly deserves its name (there are several leafy roads through the forest at various points, all known as Green Rides, which fact tends to confuse the visitor, but as they are several miles apart the confusion is more apparent than real). Lofty trees line the road on either side, and presently taking a sharp curve to the right the road is covered with a rich springy greensward, exceedingly pleasant to walk upon and to contemplate.

There is a solemn beauty in forest pathways which fills the contemplative mind with a species of awe. The overhanging branches of the trees, and the dim mysterious recesses of their inner depths, the peculiar stillness which yet seems audible with

other than human voices, the faint nameless odours of new vegetable life thrusting its way through the decaying dust of the centuries, all speak to the soul of man in majestic undertones, like the sound of far-away music. Every few yards brings before the charmed vision some new vista of leafy enchantment, scores of birds fly in twittering alarm from the open spaces, or flit silently from tree to tree; the fungi emits curious scents which mingle with those of the fern and the Hawthorne, and that sweet, subtle odour of cows, impossible to define, but quite unmistakable. For there are cows here and there in the forest which stray along their own well-defined pathways, following the tinkling bell of their gentle leader, a

watch out for

At the height of summer there are a number of flowers which catch the eye. One in particular is the white Ox-eye daisy, which is frequently seen alongside roads. It is often included in wild flower mixtures. Red Poppies naturally grow in disturbed ground, but additional plantings have been made this year as a reminder of the start of WWI.

wise old beast which plods steadily along in search of the sweet herbage or the juicy plant. Yet so great is the extent of the forest that we may wander about in it for days without coming across any of these patient animals. They are not very numerous, and belong to certain people who own



farms on the edge of the forest, or apparently in it, possessions dating from time immemorial. We cross Almshouse Plain, which is in itself a thing of beauty and affords many a spot suitable for pencil or camera, and take shelter for a few minutes under a spreading tree while a rain-storm passes over head. This lasts only for a very brief time, and when the sun again shines forth the scene looks like fairyland, glittering sprays of diamonds hang pendulous from the edges of every leafy twig and



*High Beech
Church of Holy Innocents 1919*



High Beech - Kings Oak Inn 1910

branch, the grass sparkles with iridescent splendour; the air is filled with a new sweetness.

High Beech

We cross Fairmead Bottom and ascend the hill until we reach the glorious elevation called High Beech. High Beech 343 feet above sea level. The name of this locality is variously spelt as High Beech and High Beach, it is also known as the Hill Wood. There is a solemn grandeur beneath the spreading branches of these beech trees which seems to exist nowhere else in the forest. Their massive trunks spread on high, with wide reaches of limb and leaf, resemble the aisles of a cathedral. To the right hand, the left, all around they stand like silent sentinels; guarding the secrets of the wood. The floor is thickly carpeted with the "mast" which has fallen in thick brown layers, there is little or no grass to be seen; for the beech trees almost always kill the undergrowth, and stand in their own majestic solitudes, their smooth boles reflecting

the soft quivering light which beams through the lofty splendour of the overhanging foliage. One is awed by the silent solemnity of the scene. While we stand with bared heads as though in a cathedral, we hear a sweet sound of bells, subdued, but beautiful. This proceeds from High Beech Church near at hand, reminding us of the light of time. As the hour rings out from the belfry we take a farewell look around the "dim cathedral aisles" of the beeches and guided by the sound of the clock make our way to the church, pausing on arrival to admire its pretty little lych gate, its neat "God's acre," well cared for and very beautifully situated, in which the quiet dead are sleeping.

Loughton Camp

From this spot we proceed to the King's Oak and refresh the inner man, afterwards turning to the right over Mount Pleasant until we reach the broad new Epping Road, which we cross at almost right



Ambresbury Banks c1900s

Watch out for

Another member of the Carrot family is the deadly poisonous Hemlock, which has livid purple blotches on its stems. As it produces lots of seeds it is now a frequently seen plant along roadside verges.

angles. We are looking for Loughton Camp and a walk along the green pathway soon conducts us to this most interesting relic of ancient times. Popular tradition associates this place with the memory of Queen Boadicea, whose statue has been placed on Westminster Bridge. Antiquaries are very divided in their opinions on the point, but all authorities are agreed that the remains are very ancient, and go back to pre-Roman times. Masses of earth have been thrown up in regularly shaped entrenchments, now densely covered with pollard, hornbeam, beech, and oak trees. The extent of the site of the camp is about twelve acres, and it occupied a commanding position on a promontory projection commanding splendidly the approach from Laughton by way of Debden Slade, which is a marshy opening, lying one hundred feet below.

The Camp was explored in 1881-2, by a number of gentlemen under the guidance of General Pitt-Rivers. The result of their investigations was to place beyond a doubt the fact of the high antiquity of the embankments, as when the original floor level was reached, many flint chips similar to those used by the early Britons were found, as also

pieces of pottery, etc., "sufficient to identify the camp as pre-Roman and probably of a very early period." (Gen. Pitt-Rivers).

Watch out for

Other members of the daisy family in flower at this time of year including the spiky purple headed Spear Thistle and the yellow flowered Ragwort, Hawkbits and Hawkweeds.

A good deal of sentimental writing has been done with reference to the famous queen before mentioned, but that she was ever connected with either Loughton Camp or Ambresbury Banks (another ancient British encampment in the Forest, which is described in our next ramble) there is not sufficient evidence to show. Be that as it may, she was a great and valiant son!, and her name is deservedly perpetuated. Her kingdom torn from her by cunning and treachery, her daughters outraged by the cruel Roman soldiers before her very eyes, her own body scourged and beaten with rods, she still preserved an indomitable spirit, which knew no fear and which caused her to die for the sake of home and country.

The poet Cowper has some stirring lines on the subject:--

*"When the British warrior Queen,
Bleeding from the Roman rods,*

*Sought, with an indignant mien,
Counsel of her country's gods;*

*"Sage beneath the spreading oak,
Sat the Druid, hoary chief;
Every burning word he spoke
Full of rage, and full of grief:*

*"Princess! if our aged eyes
Weep upon thy matchless wrongs,
'Tis because resentment ties
All the terrors of our tongues.*

*"Rome shall perish - write that word
In the blood that she has spilt;
Perish, hopeless and abhorr'd
Deep in ruin as in guilt!
"Regions Caesar never knew,
Thy posterity shall sway,
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they.'*

"Such the bard's prophetic words -

*She with all a monarch's pride,
Felt them in her bosom glow;
Rushed to battle, fought and died:
Dying, hurled them at the foe.*

*"Ruffians, pitiless as proud,
Heaven awards the vengeance due,
Empire is on us bestowed,
Shame and ruin wait for you.' "*

But Boadicea's wrongs may not longer detain us. We follow the path to the right hand across Debden's Slade (a corruption of Deadman's Slade), where hundreds of children have spent many



Children playing at Loughton Camp - c1900s

happy hours under the genial care of Sir William Treloar, Lord Mayor of London, and ascend the hill at the far end. This is a stiff climb, but the resulting view is worth it. Laughton and further eastern parts of Essex lies before us in a glorious panorama, which repays all our exertion. From here we make our way by St. Mark's Lane to Laughton Station en route for the City, having spent a most happy time in Epping Forest; determined to see still more of it.

Researched by Tony Morrison



rosemary stephens

simply a natural artist

Wren member Rose Stephens is a self-taught naturalist and artist who was born in Newham and still lives there in Forest Gate, close to Wanstead Flats.

Rose has built up a collection of artwork using various mediums. Through her love of all things to do with nature and her passion for art, she manages to produce work that is original and different to her contemporaries. Her love of nature shines through in her work and one of Rosemary's first pieces was of a Canadian goose and a Coot which she loves to watch on Wanstead Flats.



Rosemary Stephens - reflecting in a mirror she created from debris collected from the banks of the Thames



Rosemary first picked up a paintbrush back in 2012 painting from photographs of animals and nature - particularly those found on her beloved Wanstead Flats. The next stage of her art was varying the colours from the photographs, trying to capture her subjects' essence rather than just what they looked like. Now she creates abstract paintings with vibrant colours without a guide or model.

“I have discovered a new style of creativity recently ... It's about picking up a pencil without a clear picture in my mind of what I want to draw and making it up as I go along, like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. I draw a line and work from that.”

Rose has not looked back since she first picked up a paintbrush. She is a very prolific artist churning out work on a daily basis. Her persistence and talent has enabled her to create an amazing portfolio of art. She has exhibited her work in America and Germany and has also had images published in a colouring book. More recently Rose has completed a solo exhibition in Bow and another show at CoffeE7 in Forest Gate.



<http://www.greaterlondonnationalpark.org.uk/rose-stephens-nature-wanstead-flats/>

<http://wansteadvillagedirectory.com/Features/painting-the-flats.html>

discovery

Every now and then someone comes along that makes you think about just how lucky we all are to have Wanstead Flats on our doorstep. One such person is new Wren member Barry Chapman who has discovered - or should I say re-discovered - the area. In Barry's own words and pictures.

During Easter 2012 I stepped onto Wanstead Flats after almost 20 years on from my previous visit. Then I had trekked across the Flats on a cold winter's day, which left me with an image of a bleak wasteland which had not much to offer. Oh, how wrong was I!

Kestrel goalkeeper on Wanstead Flats



Since that sunny Easter, I have discovered that this little oasis in a desert of urban expanse has an

abundance of nature. Boasting over one hundred different varieties of birds, and copious numbers of insects and other fauna, it gives pleasure to both experienced naturalists and others like me who can just about tell the difference between a Robin and a Sparrow.

The first bird I noticed on my regular visits to the flats was the Skylark. I say noticed, it was the beautiful sound they make that drew my attention to them, these birds were normally seen high above me, before they hurtle down back to their nests hidden in the broom. Earlier this year I had the pleasure to find out more about these birds by joining a group on one of Wren Chairman Tim Harris's "Skylark Walks".

Do Not Give Us Our Daily Bread!

One of the most frequently visited spots on the Flats is Alexandra Lake. I love going to see the ducks, geese and coots, especially around early May when they have their young in tow. Initially, I took along bread to feed the birds, innocently unaware of the damage this can do to them. I no longer feed them, as I have seen the poor condition some of the waterfowl are in, Canada Geese especially, with the problem called 'Angel Wing'. Also the population of these birds is artificially high due to their dependency on bread and regular feeding impedes their migration habits.

Two of my favourite waterfowl are the Egyptian Geese, whose markings look like they are wearing some type of superhero mask and the Tufted Duck, which look like they have an 80's pony hairstyle, except they always look cool and fashionable.

This spring I have been fortunate to see Pochards,

Little Grebes, Shovelers and a couple of Grey Herons, normally perched on a log looking for an opportunity to feed.



Blackcap

Small birds

Migrating birds, which pass through on their way to summer and winter destinations, are the source of much excitement to the birders on the Flats. Normally a sighting of the first Whitethroat or a Whinchat of the season send the twitter feeds into overdrive.

This spring I have managed to see such variety of

birds as Garden Warblers, Dunnocks, Reed Buntings and amazingly a Red Kite. Never in my wildest imagination did I expect to see such a magnificent creature high above me on the Flats. I must admit that my favourite is still the Kestrel, as this bird more than any other has made me want to learn more about birds, especially those which I hope not to take for granted that frequent "my patch".

Tweets are not just for the birds

If, like me, you wish to learn more or you are already experienced about birds upon the flats, I have listed below some links which will give you a greater insight into what draws people to this part of Epping Forest.

Social media is helping birding reach out to a vast number of people, with instant sightings mentioned and it's easy to find out what is happening on your local bird "patch".

Our local experts can be found on twitter [@wansteadbirding](https://twitter.com/wansteadbirding), these guys report on sightings literally 24/7 all year round and are the best resource as to what you can see on the Flats. Other notable twitter accounts which have mentioned

our patch are [@urbanbirder](https://twitter.com/urbanbirder) which is the account of David Lindo, broadcaster and writer, who has appeared on "Countryfile". If you go to this link you can read about his visit to the flats back in March of this year. <http://urbanitybirder.blogspot.co.uk>



Another twitter account you should pay a visit to is that of Gideon Knight [@earlywombirder](https://twitter.com/earlywombirder) -

<http://earlywombirder.blogspot.co.uk> This 14-year-old award winning photographer has written about his visits to the flats this spring. I would highly recommend a visit also to his website to view his amazing wildlife photos.

www.gideonknightphotography.zenfolio.com/

I hope that you will be inspired to see what birds are visiting your garden, maybe even take your camera or a pair of binoculars across to the flats and spend a short while to wonder at these glorious creatures. I'd be interested to see or hear of any of your bird moments, or answer any of your questions on finding out more about birding on twitter. Please email me on

bazchaps@icloud.com.

Happy Birding and tweeting
Barry Chapman



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.



bluebell

Almost half the global population of these lovely wild flowers can be found in this country, so there are plenty of places to soak up their beauty and scent. What's more, their presence often indicates you're walking through ancient woodland. One great show locally is in Chalet Wood in Wanstead Park.

But this show didn't happen without a little bit of help. The Wren Group has been working on this wood for years to improve this show. Earlier in December the group got together to clear the area of brambles and line pathways with timber logs to give our little floral friends a chance to bloom again in the spring. From all of us couch potatoes - a big thank you to everyone who helped our little floral friends put on such a great show this year.



There is a superstition that anyone who walks in a ring of bluebells would be subject to 'fairy enchantment'. Also that bluebells rang to summon fairies. However it would be extremely unlucky for a human to hear a bluebell! On a more positive note, some believed that if you wore a wreath made of these flowers you could only speak the truth.

Or optimistically, if you could turn one of the flowers inside out without any break or tear, you would win the heart of the one you love!

To join the group that carry out practical works such as that in Chalet Wood contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or e-mail wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com



invertebrates in spring

Orange-tip butterfly by Paul Ferris

Report and pictures by Paul Ferris

April started to show an increase in the variety and number of insects and other invertebrates to be found in the garden. On April 1st there were bumblebees such as the **Red-tailed Bumblebee** *Bombus lapidarius*, and a fly which mimics a bumblebee - the **Bee Fly** *Bombylius major*. There were **Comma** and **Peacock** butterflies, and hoverflies including the **Epistrophe** species. There were spiders such as *Araniella cucurbitina* – sometimes called the **Cucumber Green Orb-weaver**, a **Long-jawed Orb-weaver** *Tetragnatha* sp. and the crab spider *Misumena vatia* – a master of colour-disguise and hunting. Later in the month Rose Stephens and I noticed a **Small Tortoiseshell butterfly** seemingly suspended from a buttercup flower on Wanstead Flats.



Closer inspection – very much closer – showed that what appeared to be part of the yellow flower was in fact a *Misumena* that had captured the butterfly. A **Speckled Wood butterfly** was in the garden on the 5th April, and this species is still around in the garden and in other places as I write this in the latter part of May. There was a **Holly Blue** in the garden on 8th May, and on the 9th another creature that I enjoy seeing in the Spring, the **Hairy-legged flower Bee** *Anthophora plumipes*. Apart from the hairy legs, the male has noticeable cream markings on its face, with grey and brown hairs over its body, whilst the female is all-black. Both dart around the early Spring flowers, and around each other. They are not very big bees, but their long proboscis is quite noticeable. Another bee on that day was *Bombus hypnorum*, the **Tree Bee** – a relatively recent colonist.



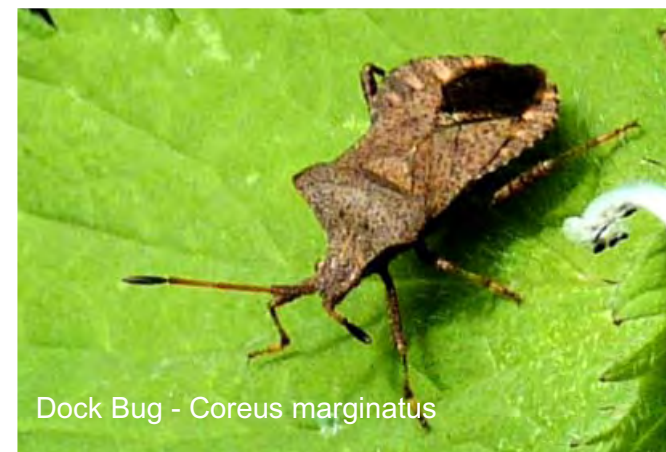
Tree Bee

It was beginning to get quite busy with the invertebrates now. In the garden pond the **Great Diving Beetle** was having periodic rushing-around activity, at one time attacking and consuming an unfortunate snail that had fallen in. An **Orange Tip**

butterfly appeared on 22nd May, and a first **Azure Damselfly** *Coenagrion puella* on 23rd. That was bit unusual, because the first damselfly species that I usually see is the **Large Red Damselfly**, *Pyrhosoma nymphula*, but that didn't appear until the 27th.

As was the case last year, by the beginning of May, although both Tim Harris in Belgrave Road and myself – in Capel Road – had been putting out our moth traps whenever the weather seemed favourable, the catches had been poor. On 24th April I checked the trap in the morning to find only a few specimens, but one outstanding one – a female **Emperor Moth**. I put egg-boxes in the trap so that the moths have something to cling to (if they wish), or to hide up in and have a snooze. The Emperor, however, was busy making use of the egg boxes by laying eggs. These were about a millimetre across, and looked a bit like acorns, although a greenish colour. I left her to it, and only extracted her and the egg box with eggs when they were quite separate. I let the moth go free in the vegetation in the garden, and put the eggs into a container to decide what to do with them.

As far as the moth-trapping is concerned, I try to put the trap out every other night – the gap being so that the moths don't get too stressed, and neither do I. However, it is often the case that the weather is simply not good enough, either too cold or too wet – possibly too windy. On the morning of 5th May, I had just one moth in the trap, a **Brimstone**, and two sitting around outside it. One was a **Nut Tree Tussock** – an attractive moth - and the other was my first ever **Small Phoenix**. Later in the day, and presumably not connected to the light trap because it was at the front of the house, was a **Small Dusty Wave**.



Dock Bug - *Coreus marginatus*

It really is so difficult to decide what to mention in these invertebrate reports. Almost each day something new for the year appears, or something that I haven't seen before and haven't had reported before. There is always an anticipation in checking the moth trap, and increasingly – sad to say – sometimes a sense of relief that I don't have too much of a trawl through a busy haul. I find it more pleasurable to go out for a walk with a camera and just see what can be spotted on the way. Such an expedition was on 30th April when Kathy Hartnett and I walked across part of Wanstead Flats on a fine day. We encountered an **Angle Shades** moth by Centre Road, a **Small Copper butterfly** (the first of the season) nearby, the **Cardinal Beetle** *Pyrochroa serraticornis* and the **Malachite Beetle** *Malachius bipustulatus*. There were also quite a few **Harlequin ladybirds** – not a few of which were (as male and female) enjoying the warm weather!

On 5th May Rose spotted four **Green Hairstreak butterflies** on Wanstead Flats, and when I went to look for them the following day, I saw seven. This species was first seen in the area only last year, and yet on some days later in the month was the

most common butterfly on the Flats, and quite widespread.



On the 14th May Rose and I walked along the Bridle Path, which runs along the outside of the perimeter fence of the City of London Cemetery. As we began we saw the first **Common Blue damselflies** of the year, by Alexandra Lake. As we neared the Alders Brook, we began to notice lacewings in the vegetation, with a bluer-tinge than the green ones commonly seen in houses. These were ***Chrysopa perla***, distinctive because of its colour and the black markings on its head. In the same vicinity could be seen lots of **Dock Bugs** *Coreus marginatus*. Just around the corner – close by the brook where it disappears under the railway line – the first of this year's **Common Blue butterflies** and a **Cardinal Beetle**. We spotted a **Scorpion-Fly** and then a small day-flying moth which I at first mistakenly assumed was one of the common ***Pyrausta aurata*** species that was flying by now. Luckily, I took a photograph and from that could see that it wasn't *Pyrausta* at all but a **Small Yellow Underwing**, a species I haven't heard of in

this area before. Further along, by the Roding, very, very, tiny **Dark Bush Crickets** and the first of the year of another of my favourites: the beautiful **Banded Demoiselle**. which is a damselfly. The first of these that we saw was a female, which is an iridescent green colour, and then the male, which is a wonderful blue with a dark band on its wing.

Our walk was full of spotting things, trying to photograph some of them and sights and sounds. Many of these (perhaps not including so much of the sounds!) were invertebrate creatures. We could just as well have been on a safari hunting big game to photograph; our game was decidedly smaller, but still a joy to find and see.

Watch out for

If you're in the Park around August time Small Red-eyed Damselflies will put in an appearance, as well as Common Darter and Emperor dragonflies. Meadow Brown and Gatekeepers butterflies will be everywhere there is long grass.

I shall finish with the moths again, and go back to 25th April. Early in the morning I opened the moth trap to find a big and new moth to me – but one I recognised straight away. It was an Emperor – or rather an Empress, for she was laying eggs! Now I always put egg boxes in the trap for the moths to nestle into, if they wish, so of course they served

her eggs well. Once she had finished and had separated from them I carefully release her into vegetation in the garden and looked to the eggs. There were approximately eighty of them, something like a millimetre across and looking a bit like acorns.

On 13th May I looked at the eggs, which I'd carefully put into a container, and they were hatching; tiny jet black caterpillars, maybe 2mm long. They must've been doubled-up inside those 1mm eggs to be that size as they came out. I've fed them bramble leaves, ensured they've had light, a bit of sunshine (but not so that they cooked) and cleared out their frass. They are eating machines, stripping the leaves in an incredibly short time. A month from laying, they are now 15mm long and have orange spots along their sides. Five have died so far, and at present there are 78. I am not sure how long it will be before they pupate, but I do know that they will be quite big by then and even after that will be two to three years before they are ready to fly. Although not a full-time job – caring for them does take time.

I hope that in a future invertebrate report that I can report that they've pupated, and in a distant future report that they've flown away. But they could outlive me!

Article and Pics by
Paul Ferris



american mink

The American Mink (*Neovison vison*) is non-native semi-aquatic carnivore that is a member of the Mustelid family. They became established in Britain having escaped from fur farms in the 1950s and 1960s, and now breed across most of the country. There are estimated to be at least 110,000 in Britain.

Mink farms had been established in the UK from the 1920s, and expansion of the industry resumed after WWII. At its peak in the 1950s, there were 400 known fur farms in the UK. Mink were first confirmed to be breeding in the wild in 1956 and by December 1967 wild mink were present in over half the counties of England and Wales and in much of lowland Scotland. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, makes it an offence to release mink or allow them to escape into the wild.

The American Mink is one of the few mammals to mate in spring whilst possessing a short delay before the occurrence of implantation. This delayed implantation allows pregnant mink to keep track of environmental conditions and select an ideal time and place for parturition.

The gestation period lasts from 40–75 days, with actual embryonic development taking place after 30–32 days, thus indicating delayed implantation can last from eight to 45 days. The young are born either in April or June, with litters consisting of four kits on average although litters of up to 16 have been recorded.

As with most non-native species, Mink have had a serious impact on our native wildlife, there is

strong correlative evidence that mink are responsible for the drastic decline of water voles in the UK. Mink are extremely adaptable opportunist predators and can exploit a wide range of mammals, birds and fish. They can affect prey species which do not form an essential part of their diet, while remaining unaffected by a decline of the prey population as they can switch back to alternative prey. The sexes live apart and occupy individual linear territories, typically 1.5–2km in length. In freshwaters, watercourses with plenty of bank-side tree cover are preferred and it would appear that the extensive watercourse system found in Wanstead Park is ideal habitat. Mink have been recorded in the park for several years and are occasionally seen patrolling the margins of the lakes by bemused fisherman.

The Forest Keepers are responsible for managing the numbers of Mink and operate a trapping programme in partnership with the Water for Wildlife Project, a partnership of The Wildlife Trusts, Environment Agency, Water Companies and other local partners, dedicated to providing a consistent, targeted approach to all types of wetland conservation. One of the main aims of the project is to bring Water Voles back to our streams and rivers, after twenty years of decline, and the successful control of Mink is integral to the projects success. Hopefully it will not be too long in the future before we once again see the Water Vole in the lakes and rivers of Epping Forest.

Jordan Thomas

Forest Keeper, Epping



a thoroughly good day out

Valentines Mansion by Kathy Baker

As a visitor, I was fascinated by the history of the house and grounds, tucked away in this quiet corner of modern day Ilford and enjoyed exploring the grounds. The cafe which is part of the walled garden and the small, but well-stocked shop are also worth a visit. Wren members should enjoy the mix of history, heritage, and natural beauty that Valentine Mansion and its grounds have to offer.

In 2000, Valentines Mansion in Ilford was restored with the help of Lottery Funds, and externally much was done to improve the structure and appearance of the mansion. Today, it offers visitors the chance to explore a wonderful Victorian-style kitchen and Georgian rooms, with views over surrounding parkland that includes an old English walled garden, a Victorian rose garden, a canal, some rococo grottoes and a dovecote.

Valentines Mansion, named after the land on which it was built, dates back to 1696, when the surrounding area was countryside, and the house would have been considered a rural retreat quite a few miles outside London. The present house was built around 1696-7 designed as a comfortable home for an upper class lady, Elizabeth Tillotson, the widow of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Although built in the Baroque era, at the same time as Chatsworth in Derbyshire and Petworth in



Valentines Mansion as it is today

Sussex, it is not grand or pretentious but is regarded as a modest building of quality. In spite of later changes much of the original panelling and joinery is still visible at Valentines. After Elizabeth Tillotson's death in 1702, the estate was bought by a London merchant and banker, George Finch as a country house for his family, and passed on to his son, William.



Valentines Mansion at the turn of the last century

The first real alterations to the house were made by Robert Surman, who purchased the mansion sometime in the 1720s. He enlarged and improved the house and gardens, including the addition of the two storey east bay of the house. Thirty years later Charles Raymond, a retired sea captain, purchased the estate and he continued reconstructing the house which today has the external appearance of an 18th century building. It is likely that the Orangery (later the Dairy and scullery spaces) was built at that time. The date 1769 can be seen with Raymond's family crest on the rainwater heads above three of the drainpipes.

Perhaps the greatest changes were made by Charles Welstead soon after he bought the estate in 1808. Pictures of the house from the late 18th century show a large porch on the south side of the house, but Welstead removed this, inserting a

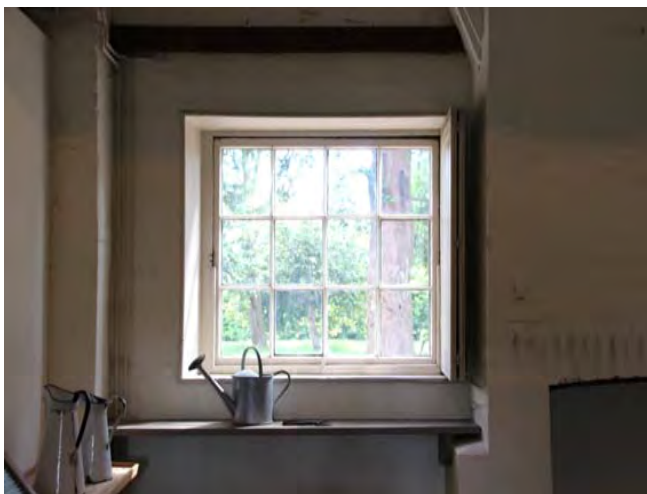
canopy and balcony, above and below the first floor centre window. He used the north side for his entrance, building the impressive colonnaded carriageway or porte cochere. The kitchen may be from this period.

Charles Holcombe, the next owner, seems to have been largely content with the structure of the house, possibly installing the new kitchen range when his niece and her husband (Dr. and Mrs Sarah Ingleby) moved in at Valentines with their young family in 1860. Soon after inheriting the mansion when Holcombe died in 1870, they built a two storey extension, adding a room on the north-east.



The old gardener's cottage - nowadays a very nicely stocked cafe and coffee shop

In 1899, 47 acres of the grounds were sold by Mrs Ingleby to Ilford Urban District Council and were then opened as a public park. By 1912 the council had acquired the mansion and all the grounds



which are now used for many leisure activities, including county cricket matches and the Redbridge Town Show. However, the council left the building structurally as they found it.



Throughout the 20th century it was home to a hospital, health centre and lodging for wartime

refugees. Under the ownership of the council, the building was eventually allowed to be empty and deteriorate, largely due to lack of resources, until 2000. With the support of Lottery funds, the brickwork was re-pointed, window frames were repaired, the metal fire-escape was removed, and the roof was replaced, at a total cost of £310,000 paid by Redbridge Council. The porte cochere was carefully restored thanks to a special grant of £25,000 from English Heritage.



The many and varied trees growing on the estate have been increased with civic plantings by Ilford Mayors and other local dignitaries. Near the house are the 18th century ornamental features that survive within a formal garden setting and are of great historic value. The formal garden in Valentines Park has undergone extensive restoration during 2007- 2008 with the assistance of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Gardening group of the Friends of Valentines

Mansion continue to undertake restoration and maintenance work within the park.

Watch out for

Family groups of Skylarks may be feeding in the areas of long grass on Wanstead Flats come August. Also there will be Large, Small and Essex Skipper butterflies and – hopefully – Burnet Companion moths. From mid-month, more and more birds will be feeding in the elders and bramble bushes around Long Wood, in the SSSI and near Alexandra Lake. Look for Blackcaps, Garden Warblers, Lesser Whitethroats and thrushes. Near the end of the month Spotted Flycatchers will hawk for insects in the same area, and there may be a Common Redstart or two.

The results of this work are stunning with a beautiful house and grounds that provide a valuable heritage site for the local area. Since reopening to the public, Valentines Mansion has attracted over 72,000 visitors including local schools, guided tours and local families attending special events. Its regular hosting of Artists' Studios and programme of exhibitions and creative workshops are also recommended.

Article by Kathy Baker
Pics by Tony Morrison



A close-up photograph of a honeybee on a yellow flower. The bee is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right. Its body is covered in fine hairs, and its wings are partially spread. The flower it is on has many small, bright yellow petals. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

observations on the opening and closing of flowers

Article by Tricia Moxey

Flowers which require an animal pollinator are designed to attract the relevant creature when it is most active and this happens as part of the carefully choreographed reproductive strategy of the plant. Some plants flower in spring, others at the height of summer and a few during the winter months. The age of the plant, ambient temperature and day length are all factors which control when the flowers are produced.

A flower is a beautiful but complex structure and I would recommend using a magnifying glass to observe the details which vary according to the particular species.

The coloured petals open up to reveal the delicate reproductive structures of stamens and ovaries with a projecting stigma on top. Volatile perfumes lure pollinators to visit the mature flowers at just the right moment when the pollen grains are ready to be transferred to the receptive stigmas of another similar flower. A reward of nectar is produced when the appropriate pollinators are about.

It takes energy to create perfumes or nectar, so having a short but effective opening time is a cunning energy conservation measure!

These opening and closing processes are complex, but are linked to changes in the water pressure in cells at the base of the petals. Some flowers are open for a single day, others for a few days, but these may limit perfume and nectar production to a few short hours. In some species there is an internal clock, which regulates the precise time of day that their flowers open and close.

Carl Linnaeus, the 18th-Century Swedish botanist, observed this and used certain plants to determine the time accurately to within half an hour. He reported his findings in *Philosophica Botanica* in 1751 and described these plants as *Aequinoctales*, flowers which have fixed times for opening and closing which occur independently of the weather conditions.

You can plant a selection of such flowers in your own garden to amuse guests and make your own observations – here are some of the species which demonstrate the time!

Daylilies open at midnight and by 5.00am they are joined by Morning Glories. By 6.00am the purple flowers of catmint or cat nip start to open and they are followed an hour later by the tiny flowers of the Orange Hawkweed and Dandelion. At 9.00am Field Marigold and Gentians open, but the florets of Prickly Sowthistle close. The vivid orange and yellow California Poppy opens but the florets of Common Nippewort close up. As noon approaches, the flowers of Morning glory and

Jack-go-to-Bed-at-Noon both shut as pollination has happened and seed production will commence within hours.

Two hours later the red flowers of the arable weed Scarlet Pimpernel close, although they also close when clouds obscure the sun!



Buttercup - The shiny yellow petals are make the flower very visible. The stamens have a stalk supporting the anthers which are made up of pollen sacs. The pollen grains contain the male genetic material which will fertilise an egg within the green female ovaries in the centre of the flower.

Right on time, the flowers of the 'Four o'clock' plant open, but those of the Californian poppy close. An hour later the large flowers of the White Water Lily close.

At 6.00pm the yellow petals of the Evening primrose unfurl and two hours later the Daylilies and Dandelions close up.

However, do remember that these flowers will be working on GMT throughout the summer and enjoy trying to catch a glimpse of their insect visitors right on time!

Throughout the year the air we breathe with a mixture of pollen grains, shed by whatever plants are in reproductive mode. Most will come from wind pollinated plants: trees like Birch or Alder, or from Stinging Nettles and Docks, or the main culprits, grasses. Only a small amount will be pollen from insect pollinated plants.

Hay fever is a serious problem caused an allercic reaction to specific pollen grains, mostly those from grasses or other wind pollenated flowers. To guage the pollen count, air is drawn through a pollen trap and count of 50 pollen grains or less is considered low, and a count of 1,000 pollen grains or more is considered high. This provides the information for the Met Office to issue warnings about the daily pollen count. The pollen count is reduced in cloudy or wet conditions when pollen dispersal is less efficient.

The pollen of the following grasses are the main ones causing the allerci reaction: Sweet Vernal Grass, Foxtail Grasses, Meadow Grasses, False Oat Grass and Timothy Grass. These shed their pollen at specific times of the day and so the amount of pollen in the air will vary throughout the 24 hours. Knowing this may help those who suffer from hay fever to avoid the worst time of day!

The average size of a grass floret, as a single grass flower is called, is three-eighths of an inch. Dangling from an open grass flower are three

stamens and the open anthers give off as many as 20,000 pollen grains each. Two feathery pistils catch the airborne pollen grains and this leads to fertilisation and the production of seeds.



Hay fever is caused by an allergic reaction to specific pollen grains, mostly those from grasses or other wind-pollinated flowers.

Most of them shed pollen between 4 and 9am which is why hay fever sufferers often wake with a runny nose and watery eyes. Research is being carried out to monitor the time of the release of pollen from different grass species, especially those common in urban areas, to help those afflicted by hay fever. Some like Sweet Vernal Grass and Yorkshire Fog flower twice a day 5 – 10am and 5 – 7pm! During warmer winters some grasses are in flower all year round!



Article by Tricia Moxey

Watch out for

The tall pink spires of the Rose Bay Willow Herb often indicate areas of burnt ground as its fluffy seeds germinate on such areas of Wanstead or Leyton Flats.

Of course, the purple flowers on the Heather are a special delight on part of Wanstead Flats where this heathland plant is spreading as a result of conservation measures. 150 years ago, this species would have been much more widespread across the intensively grazed ancient common lands of the Greater London area, but changes in land use on most of them means that it is now a much rarer plant within the confines of the M25.

Brambles are now in flower, providing nectar and pollen to many insects. Brambles come in many different forms: some of which will produce small fruits, but others grow large juicy blackberries. Many of you will know a good spot to gather plump blackberries to enhance an apple pie or turn into jelly! Why not see how many different varieties you can find? The recent Springwatch Programmes have shown just how many creatures nest and feed in Bramble patches, but Brambles do tend to take

over, especially in a good growing season when they can grow several centimetres per day!

In Australia where European Brambles are an invasive plant, DNA profiling of the various forms is being carried out to find the most effective means of biological control. In the UK much of the time by conservation volunteers is spent on Bramble 'control'.

Of possible concern to those who like to produce their own sloe gin is the discovery that a number of Blackthorn bushes in the area are infected with a fungus which distorts the developing sloes. They become like an empty bag with no stone inside. The fungus is *Taphrina pruni*, a pathogen that causes the Pocket or Bladder Plum Gall, by producing chemicals which distort the developing fruit. The twigs on infected plants may also be deformed with small strap-shaped leaves. I have seen it too on some of the fruits on the ornamental plum trees in local streets.

It would be helpful to know how widespread this is in the Wanstead area as sloes are an important part of the winter food for birds such as Blackbirds, thrushes, Redwings, Fieldfares, Woodpigeons and mammals like Foxes and Woodmice.



Moor-Hens

Living by Bate's Pond
(Each spring and summer day)
Watched among reed and frond
The moor-hens prank and play

Watched them dip and dive
Watched them pass, re-pass
Spluttering over the water
As if it were made of glass

Watched them gallop the mud
Bobbin a ta

Listened at night for a cry
Striking the day like a stone;
The Kik! Kik! Of farewell
As they drifted south for the sun

Whose are the children, and who
Are the children who lived by the pond
Summer and spring each year-long
When the wild sun shone?
Thirsty the stream, and the dry;
Ah, and the house is gone.

By Charles Causley

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=122>

spring bird report

Report and pics by Nick Croft

After a winter that wasn't we had high hopes for a spring rush in March. It didn't materialise. Jubilee Pond looked worse than it did when it was a big hole and really not very inviting for waders, while Alex had no discernible shoreline that would encourage anything diminutive to potter about its margins. Angel looked great and even encouraged a couple of Little Grebe to take up residence among the Coots and Moorhens. The 'police scrape' had finally dried up and the flocks of Linnets had dispersed, leaving it to the Crows. The final winter thrush bade farewell by the end of the month, as did the gulls and most of the winter finches.



March Highlights

Curlew calling for Bob

Tim finally gets a local **Woodcock** and is very pleased

Pair of **Rooks**

Mealy Redpolls in the park

Sand Martins return on the 15th



Wheatear back on the 20th

26 singing **Chiffchaffs** on the 29th

First **Mandarin** for two years on 30th

Singing **Yellowhammer** on the 31st

Late **Water Rail** on the 30th

Stuart Fisher's **Firecrests** keep up appearances around Snaresbrook Courts



April

April certainly happened, but as for spring migration, well that might have just passed us by. The classic migrants never really got here, and if they did their numbers were way down on what we would have hoped, with just two **Redstart** days (both males); and 20+ **Wheatear** days, with the highest figure of just three being a poor showing compared with spring 2013; and just the one **Ring Ouzel**, albeit a rather showy one while it lasted. No Whinchats, Tree Pipits, Stonechats or grunting Sedge or Reed Warblers were reported. It was also a poor spring for **Willow Warblers** and there were fewer than 10 reports of **Yellow Wagtails**.

But there were highlights ...

Osprey on the 8th

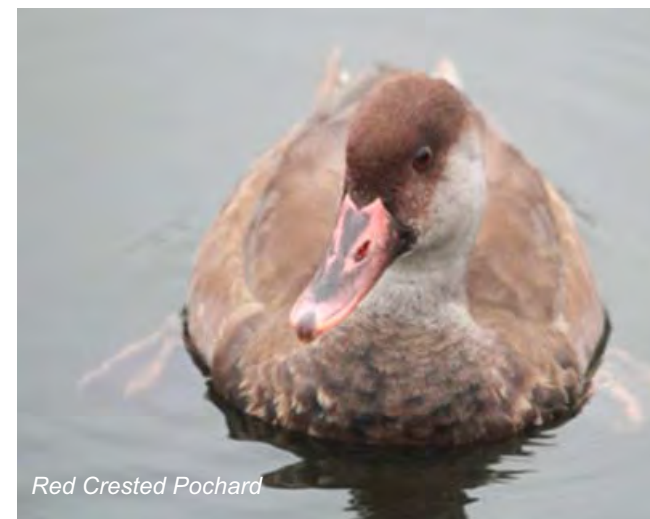
Common Redstart on the 9th

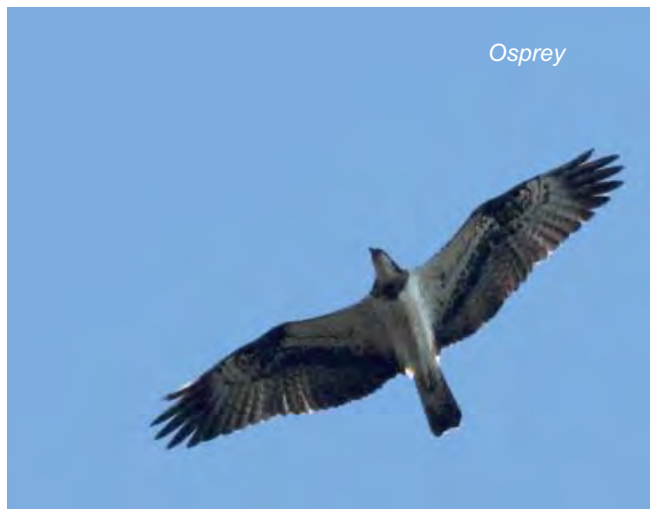
Lesser Whitethroat on the 9th: a week earlier than previous records and a contender for one of the earliest records for the UK. Eight birds were singing on the Flats, raising hopes that they would all stop singing and get down to the business of producing a little Lesser or two.

Ring Ouzel on the 10th and easily the most approachable bird we've had.

A pair of **Shelduck** on the 13th became a common occurrence as they did the rounds of all the ponds, and a record 6 were seen on the 27th

Another run of good days brought **Common Sandpiper** to the Alex on the 24th.





Osprey

The same day the second **Red Kite** of the season.

The first **Whimbrel** for two years, over Alex on a grimy 25th.

A rather smart looking **Red-crested Pochard** briefly graced the Ornamentals, also on the 25th, appropriately, earning Sally Hammond a gold star.



Fieldfare

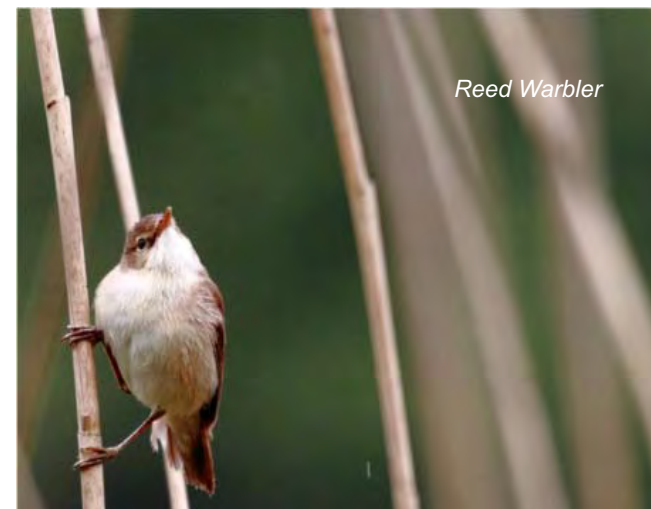
The first returning **Hobbies** (3) on the 26th.

The sole **Garden Warbler** pitched up in Motorcycle Wood (and is still there) on the 28th. Shy and hesitant at first, but later bashing out its melodious song from the depths of the copse

Latest ever **Fieldfare** on the 21st.

Oh, and a **Pheasant** reappeared in Wanstead Park.

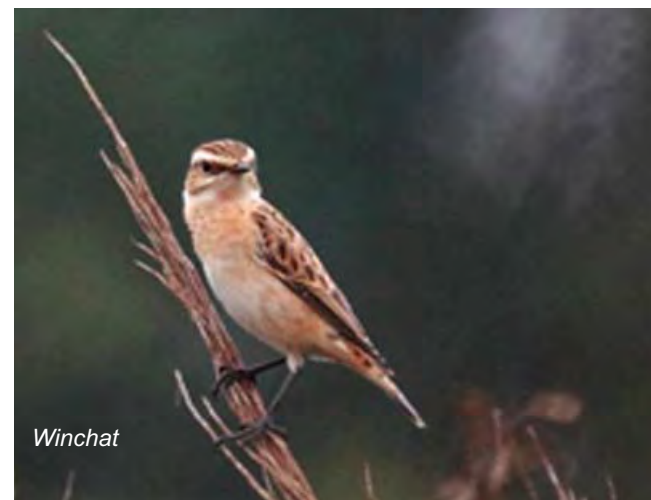
Curiously, Jubilee Pond became a creche for young large gulls with over 30 birds counted on a few occasions, mostly Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. Swallows trickled through on most days and a small movement of 40 Sand Martins was noted on the 18th. A few Buzzards graced our skies and the pair of Hobbies was back in the park by the end of the month. The female Kestrel, which showed signs of injury to the face, appeared to have recovered, but sightings of the male bird have been low. The Meadow Pipits may well have had one brood already - they are incredibly quick fledgers - but the larks seem content chasing each other around all day, turning up in different parts of the long grass. There is still a hard core of dog-walkers who ignore the signs aimed at them. House Sparrows, dozens of them, invaded the brooms again, doing whatever sparrows do in broom at this time of the year, but it does show that there is still a healthy-ish population surrounding the Flats, which is good.



Reed Warbler

May

The month started off where April hadn't quite finished with the late arrival of our last spring migrants; namely Whinchat, Tree Pipit, Reed and



Whinchat

Sedge Warblers, Common Tern, Cuckoo and Spotted Flycatcher. Then the weather got nicer and the birding worse, but that had changed again



Common Tern

by the end of the month and with it our birding luck changed big time. That change of luck will be what this spring will be remembered for. And that piece of good fortune came in (I would say shape, but few if any saw anything of the damn bird) the song of a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** on the 29th. A bird that fully deserves to have its name in bold, seeing as it was only the third London record. The improbability of it all was reflected in the national sightings webs: "most sensationally" said the Bird Guides site; and "more remarkably still" was how Rare Bird Alert described it in their respective weekly coverage.

Luckily for me I had heard a Blyth's up in Norfolk a couple of years back, and after quickly ruling out Marsh Warbler, I was left with BRW, but I hadn't had any conclusive views. That didn't improve when Dan turned up (luckily on holiday), or Bob (day-off) or Marco (retired) - though we did get to see it was an 'acro' with a greyer tinge to the back

than you'd expect on a Reed Warbler. Luckily, Stuart Fisher's interest had been roused by my texts and he made a slight detour on his way back from Canary Wharf. His broad grin when he arrived confirmed what we had thought. The news could be released.

As Tim had left his phone at home, I can only imagine the profanity that erupted from his lips on reading his messages on his return. My phone went into meltdown; a notorious one-day wonder and major blocker for many London listers, so a good number turned up, among them many a better birder than me to confirm our diagnosis. So our 200th species for Wanstead; it would have been better if it had showed a bit and we had some photographic evidence, but its song was sublime. A pretty decent recording of which, considering its proximity to Centre Road, can be heard here



Little Egret

http://www.birdbrainuk.com/BBUK/Blog/Entries/2014/5/30_Another_good_London_Bird.html



Tufted Duck

The other highlights

4 singing **Garden Warblers** on the patch (though we are now down to the one singer we have hopes of breeding birds)

Whinchats at last

Spotted Flycatcher (a great Jono find when he was not actually birding)

Cuckoo finally nailed with a flyover

A good **Red Kite** month with 7+ sightings

A one-day **Tree Pipit** (there will be more come the autumn)

Reedy is back on the Shoulder of Mutton; this year he's got company

Singing **Sedge Warbler** on the 13th

Willow Warbler still singing by Bush Wood

Report of a **Little Owl** by the Hollow Pond

Common Terns return

With migration all but over, it's only another 60-plus days till it gets interesting again. A few Swallows are still meandering north, House Martin numbers could be up (we should check, any volunteers?) and Sand Martins appeared around the Alex most days till the middle of the month. Swift numbers built up on the grimy days and fell back with sunny conditions. Apart from the one-day Tree Pipit, a few Yellow Wagtail passed



through on their way north; nationally their numbers are well down.

Our Lesser Whitethroats all but stopped singing, which is a good sign, while it looked like at least

two of the singing Garden Warblers may have had good cause to shut up. After the initial find of a singing Reed Warbler in a patch of gorse on Heronry, and another bird briefly seen in the company of Whitethroats in the Old Sewage Works, our Shoulder of Mutton bird returned mid-month and a presumed female joined him a few days later.

Watch out for

August! June and July are the pits, birding wise, in your local inner city patch, so it's time to look at other stuff, but then August arrives and the excitement really kicks in. Expect returning waders by the end of July, and Wheatears from mid-August. Then of course it gets manic: can't wait!

The first returning post-breeding Gadwall, both males, were back on Alex by the end of the month, and with up to 6 Pochard still making the rounds (2 females) there's still a chance we might get them breeding somewhere. Tufty numbers seem to be down, or is that because females are on eggs? While Egyptian Goose numbers rose to 6 on the Jubilee (including one youngster). The pair of Shelduck was still flying around at the end of the month. Not a good breeding success for the Mute Swans with numbers of cygnets well down.



Better news of the Great Crested Grebes, which have passed the mink test with the three young waterborne and growing fast. And by mid-June there was a Little Grebe chick on Angel - is this a first?

Do we have breeding Linnets nearby? A singing male on Jubilee and near-daily flyovers suggest they should at least try and maybe they have.

Confusion as well with the status of Reed Buntings, with birds still being present and a singing male.

Report and pictures by Nick Croft

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



wren rings london

We're lucky to have Wanstead Flats, an oasis of green amid the concrete of east London. Lucky, but not unique – as we in the Wren Group can find out over the next year.

Once a month, I'll be leading a short weekday walk around part of the 78 miles of the Capital Ring, a long-distance path that links many of the city's green spaces. We'll discover another of Newham's parks, then cut under the Thames by the Woolwich foot tunnel. South of the river, we'll find out why campaigners fought so hard to save Oxleas Wood from road developers, and further west, we can womble-spot on Wimbledon Common and seek out deer in Richmond Park.

London being London, there are plenty of less likely places where one might find the wild. In the north of the capital, the Ring has a stretch by the Grand Union Canal, and another along a disused rail track, with Highgate Wood in between. Finally, we head back towards Stratford by the River Lea.



As well as nature, much of London's history will reveal itself too, from the 'dinosaur park' at Crystal Palace to the dissolution of the monasteries under

Henry VIII, through the Victorian Great Exhibition and art deco Eltham Palace, right up to the present day and our own Olympic Park.

You can choose to do as much or as little of the whole walk as you please. I'll be dividing it up into chunks of six or seven miles or so, maybe some a bit shorter, perhaps some a bit longer – my fellow walkers can advise me on what suits them best (and the pace). An Oyster card or Freedom pass will help you get to start and end each time. Start times are planned so no-one has to leave home before 9.30, and even on the furthest-out stages we should be back before the main rush.

Other than that, there are few essentials. There will usually be refuelling points en route, but a bottle of water would be a good idea, and a couple of snacks too. If I get the logistics right, I'll end some stages at a decent London pub! Most of the Capital Ring is on surfaced paths, so good walking shoes or trainers will do, and something waterproof if the weather looks dicey (though an umbrella might be enough).

These are deliberately weekday walks, as there are so many activities at weekends, though I recognise this won't suit everybody. Days will vary, with the first two on a Thursday and a Tuesday.

So I hope you can join me. The newsletter will report on progress, and give dates of future stages – check these on the website too. Happy walking!



Stage one

Thursday 10 July

Meet 10.30am at Pudding Mill Lane station
To Cyprus DLR station, 5 miles

Stage two

Tuesday 12 August

Meet 10.30am at Cyprus DLR station (NB 101 bus from Wanstead goes to Cyprus DLR)
To either Eltham Common (6 miles) or Falconwood station (8 miles)

Peter Aylmer
Walk organiser

Contact Peter by e-mail
peteraylmer@hotmail.com



adopt a tree

It's hard to imagine that not so long ago much of the country was under water. Now we are approaching the height of summer, we stand a good chance of having a 'hosepipe ban'.

With climate change very much in the news we should perhaps expect more extremes in our weather. All the more reason we should appreciate the benefits that trees provide.

They put oxygen in the air and take out carbon dioxide. They create cooler micro-climates under their canopies. They create much needed shade, protecting us from harmful solar rays. They even help to clean the air by filtering out dust particles and pollutants, not to mention the desirable effect they have on softening the urban landscape.

Every year your local council plant young trees in

our streets to replace trees that have died or become diseased or damaged.

Unfortunately, hot dry summers can take their toll, especially so on young recently planted trees. Though your council will probably arrange for regular watering of new plantings, drought conditions will always kill a few trees. So this year why not adopt a tree?

If you have a young street tree outside or near your house or workplace, we are asking you to water it, please. You may notice a plastic pipe sticking out of the ground next to the tree, usually with a green cap on it. It would be great if you could pour water into the pipe and around the tree pit, whenever you can during the summer months. If you can water daily, or even once or twice a week with a bucketful it would really help the tree to survive and to become established. To save on precious water use old bath water or other recycled water such as that from the dishwasher or water butt.

Your local Council will of course continue to water it's newly planted trees as part of their regular maintenance programme but trees give us so much why not give a little back - every little helps.



Article by Tony Morrison



why you should love a tree

- ☐ Trees produce oxygen. Two mature trees will provide all the oxygen a family of four needs for life.
- ☐ Trees also act as giant filters that clean the air we breathe. Trees absorb pollutants and reduce dust levels.
- ☐ To produce its food, a tree absorbs and locks away carbon dioxide in the wood, roots and leaves. Carbon dioxide is a global warming "greenhouse" gas.
- ☐ Trees help cut noise pollution.
- ☐ Every summer sees more and more droughts in the London area. Trees help prevent water running straight down drains and out to sea. Underground water-holding aquifers are replenished with this slowing down of water runoff.
- ☐ Trees provide shade for car parking and help reduce skin cancer levels.
- ☐ Trees cool the air in built up areas by evaporating water from their leaves.
- ☐ Trees feed and shelter wildlife.
- ☐ Trees form "green corridors" connecting urban habitats with each other and with the countryside.
- ☐ Trees reduce wind speeds reducing heat loss in winter from buildings.
- ☐ In leafy streets, trees can increase property prices by up to 7% (Source, National Urban Forestry Unit).
- ☐ Research shows that a view of nearby trees improves concentration levels in schools and reduces stress level for adults at work.
- ☐ Trees provide us with timber and paper.

the bee-fly

Whilst walking through Wanstead Park a while back, I noticed what I thought was a bumblebee hovering over a flower. However, there was something 'different' about it. On closer inspection, it turned out to be a Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*). In other words, a fly, which resembled a bee. This was my first sighting of this delightful insect, which I have been fortunate to see on other occasions since.

Some facts about the Bee-fly : its body length is 10-12mm, excluding its proboscis, which adds about another 6mm. It has a brown, plump, furry, bee-like coat, with spindly legs, and has two wings (flies have two wings, whilst bees have four). Adults feed on nectar, and can be mistaken (as I originally discovered) for a small bumblebee. However, it differs from them in having a long, thin proboscis which protrudes in front of the fly, even when it is resting. The appearance of this long proboscis can wrongly alarm some people into thinking the insect might sting them, but the Bee-fly is harmless. Whilst probing a

flower for nectar, it gives the appearance that is hovering, but it actually uses its long front legs to steady itself by clinging to the flower. One not-so-nice fact which I've only recently discovered is that the larvae of the Bee-fly live parasitically in the nests of solitary bees and wasps. The Bee-fly is seen between March-June in many habitats, including gardens, and feeds on a wide range of low-growing flowers. It is common and widespread throughout Europe.

I have seen some Bee-flies in recent weeks (April 2014), this time on Wanstead Flats. One day I saw about six Bee-flies in close proximity to one another, investigating flowers near the Esso Garage along Aldersbrook Road. I mentioned this to Paul Ferris, and he thought it was uncommon to see such an amount of Bee-flies together.

So, next time you see a 'bumblebee', look closer, and you never know, it could turn out to be a Bee-fly!

Article and pic by Kathy Hartnett



gallery

2

4

1



5



3



6

1. The Grotto, Wanstead Park c1979 - David Webb
2. Kestrel on Wanstead Flats - Barry Chapman
3. Mute Swans - Kathy Hartnett
4. Robin by Barry Chapman
5. Greylags - Tony Morrison
6. Cormorant - Rosemary Stephens

Please e-mail your pictures to wrenditor@talktalk.net

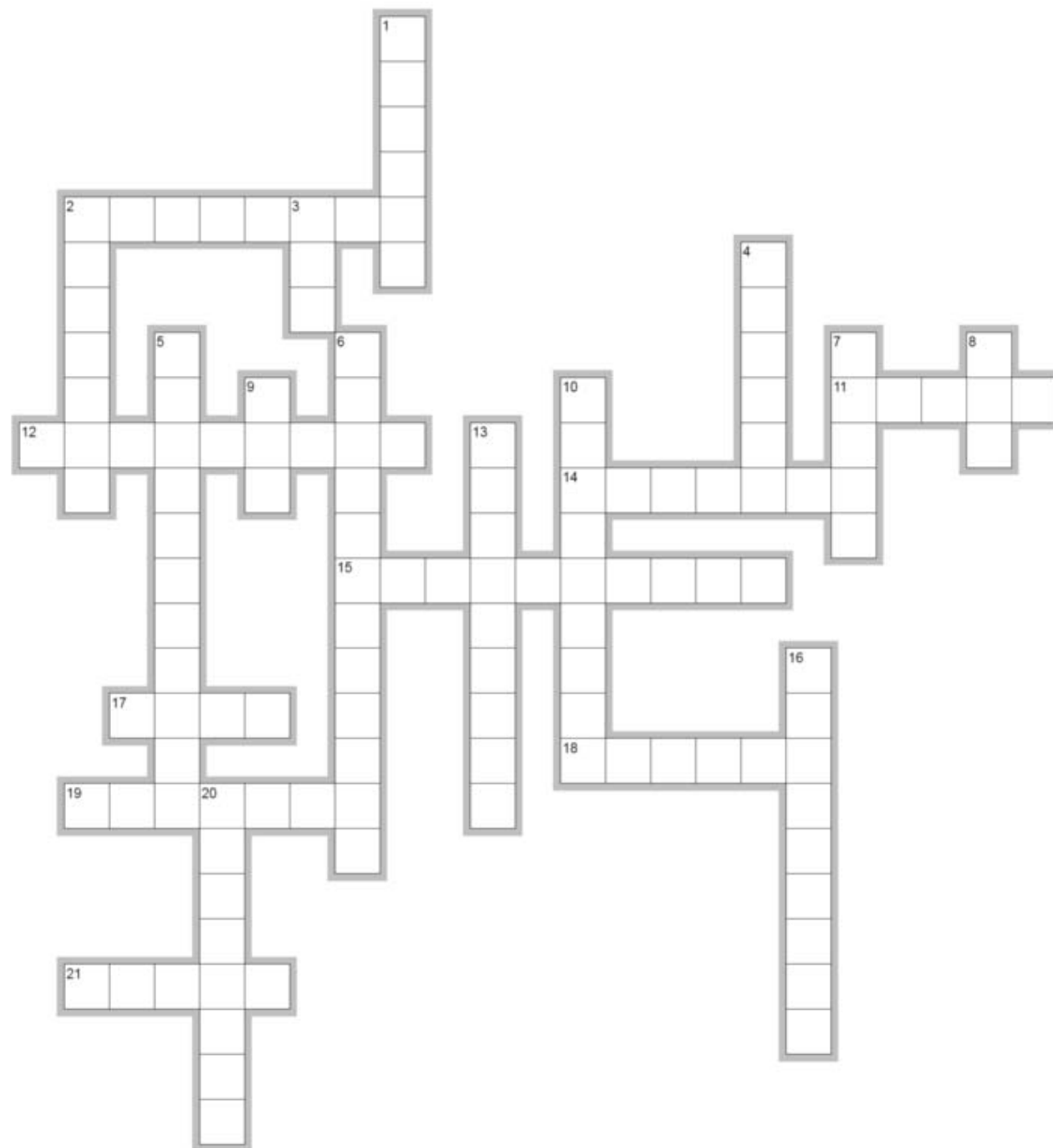
Wren crossword

ACROSS

- 2. ITS SEEDS SPIN LIKE HELICOPTERS WHEN THEY FALL FROM THIS TREE (8)
- 11. THESE BIRDS SOMETIMES COME ALL THE WAY FROM CANADA (5)
- 12. TIME GOES FAST FOR A MYTHICAL FIREBREATHER (9)
- 14. BABY FROG FOUND IN YOUR POND (7)
- 15. GREEN OR SPOTTED BIRD IS A BIT OF A HEAD BANGER (10)
- 17. CAN BE SEEN UP IN THE SKY, HAVING A LAUGH (4)
- 18. THIS LITTLE BIRD IS A BIT OF A HEAVY BREATHER (6)
- 19. HOME FOR A BUSY LITTLE BUZZER (7)
- 21. TINY MOUSE-LIKE PREDATOR NEEDS TAMING ACCORDING TO THE BARD (5)

DOWN

- 1. GOES AWAY IN THE WINTER BUT GROWS BACK IN THE SUMMER (6)
- 2. FROLIC IN THE CLOUDS (7)
- 3. A WISE OLD BIRD (3)
- 4. WHAT IS THE TALLEST AND THICKEST KIND OF GRASS (6)
- 5. THIS BIRD BLOWS A WIND WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN (11)
- 6. COWARDLY TOOL HITS A NAIL ON THE HEAD (12)
- 7. SORRY – LOOKS LIKE A HERON BUT THE R'S MISSING (5)
- 8. THIS TREE HAS FRUITS CALLED KEYS (3)
- 9. THIS INSECT IS A REGULAR LITTLE SOLDIER (3)
- 10. DRINK FROM A VERY CREAMY KIND OFF FLOWER (9)
- 13. SOMETHING A BIT LIKE A FROG SITS ON THIS (9)
- 16. THIS BIG CAT IS A REAL FLASHY DRESSER (9)
- 20. THIS SPIKY LITTLE FELLOW IS A BIT OF A PIG (8)



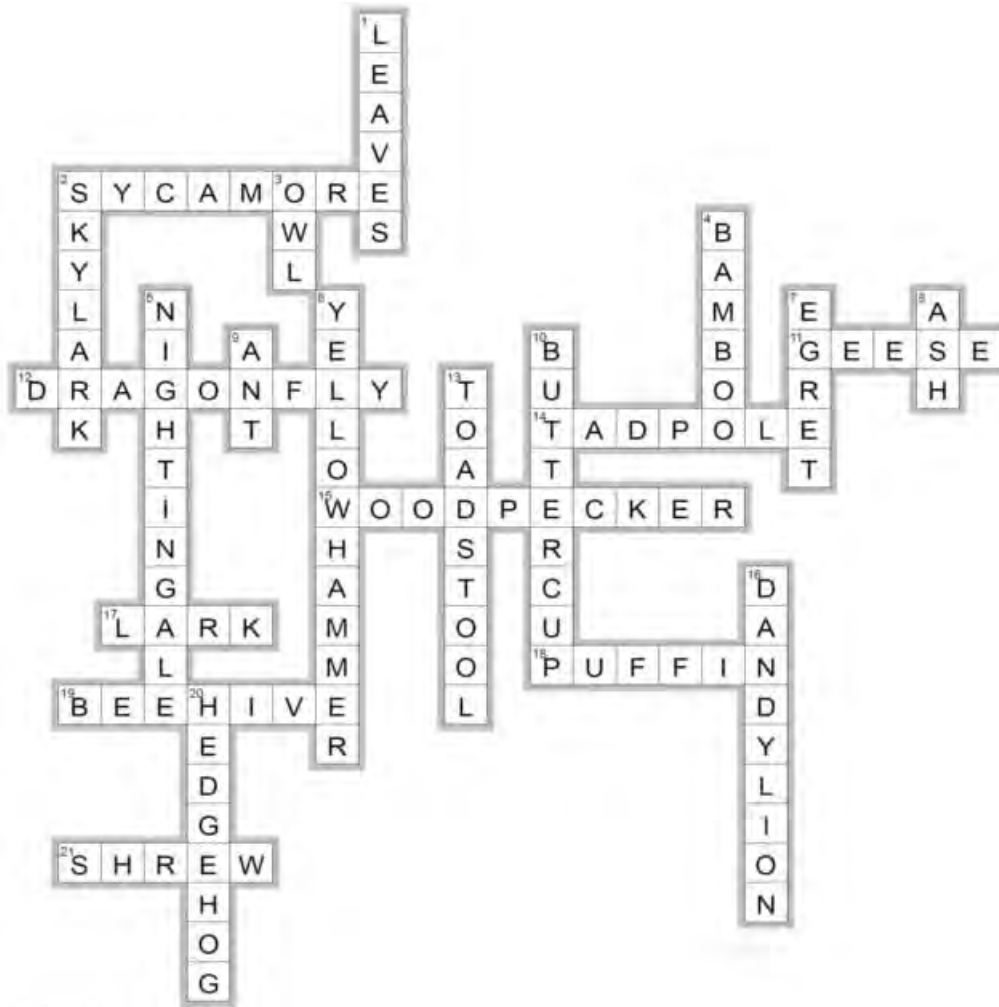
find the word

CAN YOU FIND THE HIDDEN WORDS?

ANT; BEEHIVE; OTTER; GLADE; WETLANDS;
YELLOWHAMMER; WOODPECKER; GREENERY;
TULIP; PARK; GARDEN; PLAIN; DEER; MOTH;
HEDGEHOG; COB; REED; ASH; EGRET;
ENVIRONMENT

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

teaser answers



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

events diary

July 2014

Thursday 10th July, 10:30am tbc
Midweek walk around the London ring route
Meet: at tbc
Leader: Peter Aylmer

Saturday 12th July
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 July
Nature walk in Wanstead Park, looking at
butterflies, dragonflies and flowers.
Meet: 10am by the tea hut

Thursday 31st July
Bat Walk in Wanstead Park.
Meet: 8:15pm by the tea hut.
Leader: Tim Harris

August 2014

Sunday 10th August
Nature walk on Wanstead Flats, looking at
butterflies, dragonflies and flowers.
Meet: 10:00am at Alexandra Lake car park

Tuesday 12th August
Midweek walk around the London ring route
Meet: 10:30am at tbc
Leader: Peter Aylmer

Saturday 16th August
Wanstead Nature Club for Children
Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats
Cost: £1.50 per child
Enquiries: 020 8989 4898
gilljames@btinternet.com

Sunday 17th August
Trees in the City of London Cemetery
Meet: 10:00am at gates of CoL Cemetery
Leader: Gill James

September 2014

Thursday 4th September
Bat Walk in Wanstead Park
Meet: 7:15pm by the tea hut
Leader: Tim Harris

Saturday 6th September
Wanstead Nature Club for Children
Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats
Cost: £1.50 per child
Enquiries: 020 8989 4898
gilljames@btinternet.com

October 2014

Saturday 11th October
Wanstead Nature Club for Children
Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats
Cost: £1.50 per child
Enquiries: 020 8989 4898
gilljames@btinternet.com

Sunday 12th October
'Awayday' trip to the Copped Hall Apple Day
Details tbc





links

Links

Got any links to go on this page ? Get in touch
wreneditor@talktalk.net

Wren links page <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/links/>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WrenOrg>

Twitter <https://twitter.com/wrenwildlife>

Local

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bushwood Area Residents' Association
<http://www.bara-leytonstone.org.uk/>
East London Nature
<http://www.eln.yorkshirefog.co.uk/>

East London Birders <http://www.elbf.co.uk/>

Friends of Epping Forest
<http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/index.htm>

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

Plenty of info here about walking in Essex -
including the forest <http://trailman.co.uk/>

National

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

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

BBC Weather <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/>

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

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

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

Natural England <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/>

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

and finally

A load of old rubbish for wildlife

Wren member Rosemary Stephens recently uploaded an all too familiar picture to our facebook page of a flytip on Wanstead Flats.



The idiots that leave their rubbish on other people's doorsteps probably feel that theirs is a victimless crime. It is not.

Last year The City of London authority (CofL) spent £49,825 on collecting and disposing of rubbish collected from Epping Forest. However, this figure does not include the very high cost of collecting and disposing of flytips and litter from roads and borders edging the forest. Neighbouring councils clear up this mess meaning that, if you are lucky enough to live on the boundaries of the forest, you directly pick up the bill in your local taxes. Moreover, rubbish is unsightly and dumped food attracts vermin and foxes. In short, rubbish

spoils the use and enjoyment of the flats and other open areas in our area for everyone.

If you see somebody fly-tipping please take note of as many details as you can but please don't put yourself at risk. Remember that these people aren't renowned for their smartness, and what they are doing is illegal so they are unlikely to take kindly to people observing them. Useful information includes:

- ☐ Description of the people (gender, clothes, hair colour, distinguishing features)
- ☐ Vehicle details (make, model, colour, registration, signs)
- ☐ What you saw being fly-tipped (how far away were you, did you have a good view?)
- ☐ When and where you saw it happen (date, time, weather conditions)

Through greater awareness and working together we can reduce litter and protect people, wildlife and our green spaces.

Aside from its environmental impact, flytips and other litter also pose a variety of hazards to wildlife. The plastic loops that hold cans of drinks together (6 pack holders) have been known to catch and kill diving birds when they end up in the ponds. Such problems can be easily avoided by simply cutting the loops with scissors before discarding them responsibly. Floating plastic bags also look like a tasty snack to many birds and

animals, but can kill if they are swallowed.

Hedgehogs can get their heads trapped inside plastic yogurt cartons, tin cans and polystyrene cups. Attracted inside by the leftovers, they are then unable to reverse out because of their rearward facing prickles. This can lead to a horrible death by starvation.



Litter is not a victimless crime - it costs local ratepayers, is unsightly, spoils the use and enjoyment of our greenspaces, is dangerous for those people having to clear it up and causes pain and suffering for local wildlife.

Broken glass can cut the feet of foxes and badgers, and unbroken bottles present a hazard to many small animals. Voles and mice crawl inside bottles to drink and then cannot climb back up the slippery sides. Lizards crawl inside bottles or cans to bask in their warm interiors or to find food. If they are unable to squeeze out again they can die of overheating.

Authorities are generally very good at picking up flytips when they see them on their rounds - often

long before they are reported by the public.

However, local authorities have limited resources, especially in the present squeeze, and can't be everywhere all of the time. Also, flytips left for any period cause problems and sadly attract more rubbish so it's important to deal with them as soon as possible. You can help by reporting any flytips you see when you are out and about. Most authorities will have a page on their website where you can report anti-social behaviour. All will now have a hotline and dedicated e-mail where you can make your report. Search your local authority website to find out more.

A quicker way of reporting environmental issues whilst you are on-the-move is by using a dedicated app on your smart phone. 'LoveCleanStreets' is a free smartphone app that enables people anywhere in the world to report environmental issues to their local

authority. The app can be used to report more than just flytips including: graffiti, fly posting, pot holes, broken paving slabs and abandoned vehicles.

On CofL managed property you can report fly tipping online, call 020 8532 1010 (24 hours), or email epping.forest@cityoflondon.gov.uk

There is a reward of up to £500 for evidence that leads to a successful prosecution in court.

Reports can be made with the app in less than forty seconds. Simply take a photo, add some brief details, and then send. The location is captured

automatically, and the local authority, including the CofL, is provided with all of the information it needs to deal with the problem.

Tony Morrison
Newsletter Editor



For more information or to download the app go to <http://www.lovecleanstreets.com/reports/home>

now & then

Were you right ?

Answer

Forest Gate, Woodgrange Rd opposite the Princess Alice pub at the turn of the last century and how it looks today.

