Wildlife & Conservation Group

Winter 2015

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

a word from the chair

In September research was published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development that showed more than 40 per cent of employers surveyed in the UK have seen an increase in staff depression, anxiety and other mental health issues.

Just two months later, worryingly, the King's Fund warned that cuts to mental health funding are leading to a deterioration in the quality of mental health care and that in extreme cases, lives could be at risk.

OK, but what's that got to do with the Wren Group?

Well, actually, rather a lot. Many reports have been published in the last decade or more that make the link between engagement with the natural world and better mental health. These studies aren't the work of cranks. The *British Medical Journal* (2014:4) has recently summarised scores of such reports. And the Wren Group comes into the equation because we're one of the main ambassadors for the open spaces of our corner of East London: not just Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats but the rest of Epping Forest, the local cemeteries and other quiet corners. Time spent in these areas is time away from the rush of the high street, Westfield shopping centre, the London Underground and, dare I say it, the TV.

OK, I'm probably preaching to the converted, but the guardians of these open spaces also have a responsibility to ensure that they are fit for purpose. And that doesn't just mean they are not built on. It's one thing having a lake to look at, quite another to have ducks swimming on it and dragonflies hawking around the margins. And it's one thing to have an area of grassland to stroll through, quite another to have Skylarks overhead and butterflies nectaring on flowering plants.

I don't believe it's an exaggeration to say that for some people the *quality* of our open spaces could be the difference between life and death.

Tim Harris
Chair Wren Group

no trees were harmed .....

Welcome to the winter Wren newsletter. This is an online newsletter so we can make it as long as we like and have as many pictures as we want without a single tree being harmed. We can also afford to go 'off-piste' now and then to embrace interests on the periphery of the group's traditional subject of wildlife, such as walks, places to visit and local history etc. By doing this I hope that there will be a little something of interest to everyone. I also hope that we might get a wider audience and more people interested in what we do.

However, this is your newsletter and will not happen without your support so if you have any news, views or stories please send them in. Similarly, if you would like to see any changes in the newsletter either in the way it looks or the content please get in touch with me at editor@wrengroup.org.uk

Members often ask me for previous newsletters - these can now be found on the wren website at http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/about-us/newsletter/

bug life

Pictures and commentary by Rose Stephens

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 from her contemporaries. Her love of nature shines through in her work.

In the past Rose has used photographs as a basis for her work - painting from pictures taken in the area. More recently, she has started to express her fondness of all things natural solely in the media of photography.

Rose has an extraordinary eye for seeing the detail in the nature around her. This she has recently used to her advantage by taking up 'macro' or close-up photography.

Apion frumentarium (probably). The largest of the Apion weevils. I have seen this species before when out and about but normally the second I move towards it it drops down into grass. I found this one in a raised bed in Stratford High Street. In fact the raised bed was full of insects, wild plants and fungi, underlining the importance of these small natural spaces in our built-up and busy city. I believe that sometimes the fact that some of these beds are not really tended makes it all the better for wild flowers and insect life to flourish.

Ryparachromus vulgaris 21/10/15 Forest Gate Garden. These are very abundant bugs around the flats and surrounding areas. I find them quite striking to look at. I normally see them on wood or rotting wood and sometimes tend to see spiders near them mainly *Steatoda nobilis*, but others too. These bugs quite often are found in people's houses and can be cause for concern locally as people confuse them with cockroaches. These are ground bugs. They were recorded in the area of Forest Gate in 2008 by Paul Ferris, although the official records show the year

Ceraleptus lividus Wanstead Flats 01/10/15 (Slender-horned Leatherbug). I spotted this close to the ground on Yarrow, when walking on Wanstead Flats with Paul Ferris. This is the first time I have seen one although Tristan Bantock has found quite a few on the Flats in the past. The larvae feed on red and white clover and trefoils.

Lasioglossum calceatum 23/09/15 Wanstead Flats. This bee has a common name of Slender Mining Bee and is one that can still be seen in October. There seem to be quite a few of these locally. It is normally distinguished from others by its slender-looking abdomen and sometimes you can spot red on the abdomen too.

Birch Catkin Bug (*Kleidocerys resedae*) 11/11/15 Forest Gate garden. I see so many of these very small bugs inside and outside of my house since we have a road lined with birch trees, which these bugs are associated with. It is a common bug found in England Wales and Ireland.

Skylark on Wanstead Flats

autumn bird report

Report and pics by Nick Croft

The latest review (the fourth) of the status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man, and the first update since 2009, paints an increasingly bleak picture of avian life with 27% of all the UK's 244 bird species now of 'highest conservation concern' and placed on the assessment's Red List.

Wanstead Flats reflects this depressing story in microcosm. We've already lost Lesser Spotted Woodpecker as a breeding bird in the last few years, now two more species are looking increasingly vulnerable. So it's not what's been seen that makes the news this quarter, but what wasn't – namely our Skylarks!

With only four Skylarks recorded (to my knowledge), this has been the worst month for the larks since I have been birding here. I hope this is not the end game we have warned about, but it could be. I want to be very wrong on this.

Usually, at this time of the year, the birds move out of the grassland and on to the playing fields and the Fairground. If they are there I can't find them. Even when they are moulting and flightless we are likely to hear a burbling occasionally.

Clearly not enough is being done to protect them from the ever-increasing pressures of human interference, and certainly nothing has been done to encourage them to prosper. October saw some movement of Skylarks across our skies, with the three resident birds still seen moving around the Flats. Last year, however, there were at least eight.

I wrote this back at the end of September

"Alarmingly Skylark numbers were as low as three individuals, one a stubborn short-tailed bird that refused to call as it was flushed repeatedly in the effort to make it a whole lot more exciting. Then it did and became a whole lot less exciting. Things are not looking good for the ground-nesting birds here and it's not so much the day-walking dog owners, but the continual disturbance in the evenings and after sunset that could be finishing them off. It looks like the Corporation will have to do much more if this story is not going to end very badly."

September

Belatedly: a great month only missing one thing – any new species for the year. Which means we have a bit of catching up to do in the next few months. And yet autumn had started so promisingly with the Wryneck found at the end of August.

Wryneck.

That didn't last as it had hoofed it by the 3rd, so becoming the shortes-staying bird out of the four that have now graced our ant hills. Migration of summer visitors ground to a halt two-thirds of the way through the month with the occasional Spotted Flycatcher promising more, but not delivering. The figures show that when it happened it was still wonderful and on some days awe-inspiring – as when thousands of hirundines partied round our heads on one of the grimmest days of the month. Birds associated with winter soon took up the slack with Stonechats popping up towards the month's end. We thought it a poor month for Wheatear, but looking back over the years we have fooled ourselves into thinking times past were better.

Scores on the migration doors (bird-days):

	Sept '15	Aug '15	Sept '14	Aug '14	Sept '13
Whinchat:	79	79	60	22	80
Common Redstart:	34	52	7	22	7
Northern Wheatear:	17	24	15	25	9
Spotted Flycatcher:	94	60	30	49	33
Pied Flycatcher:	5	11	1	2	5
Yellow Wagtail:	55	56	77	37	33
Tree Pipit:	8	29	8	16	11
Siskin:	344	10+			
Swallow:	3–4000				
Wryneck:	1	1			1
Stonechat:	5	18			

The first Redwing was seen over Leyton by Stu on the 27th, just a day after Bob notched up the first Water Rail on the Roding, quickly followed by a second. The numbers of Siskin were astounding and you could imagine winter was here already, added to by small numbers of Redpoll late in the month.

The Hobbies had us fooled yet again by producing one offspring somewhere and keeping very hush-hush, which was about as good as it got on the

Chiffchaff.

raptor front, though a few Peregrines and Buzzards were recorded. The Little Owl gave up calling in the daytime by the 3rd and has returned to anonymity.

Red-crested Pochard.

Duck numbers were on the up, but with water levels so low in the park it doesn't look like records will be broken any time soon. Where would they all fit? No Red-crested Pochards this year, but there is still time, what we need for ducks is a good cold snap on the continent, which would probably supply us with a few interesting waders too.

Blackcap.

The summer warblers had all but departed by the end of the month, with just a few stop-off Chiffchaff and Blackcap to try and find, of course there was some unidentified individuals which became this year's what-ifs!

Ring Ouzel.

October

Top of those nuggets was Jono's calling (singular) Yellow-browed Warbler by the Ornamentals on the 11th, but not seen by him or anybody who turned up to look for it. With so many hitting Britain this autumn I thought it was an odds-on bet that one would turn up here eventually, indeed I thought I'd bagged one in a line of sycamore just up from the stables a week or so later, but I suspect it was a Coal Tit being pratty. I tried briefly to turn a Wren into a Dusky Warbler and later a young Common Buzzard into a Rough-legged, but even I could see I was not going to score on either of those.

Short-eared Owls are as common as muck this autumn too, with virtually everybody in London having one or more on their patch. We just amassed two on the 6th and 25th; there will no doubt be more.

Best bird for Bob was his first Woodlark, which did the decent thing and flew over our heads and called. He is regretting not making a more successful effort at locating his accro, which was edging its way around the edge of Jubilee, the lack of a brown wash on the flanks and its pale appearance put him in mind of a Blyth's Reed Warbler, which again considering the number of those recorded this year wouldn't have been at all surprising. Jono's regret was that Bob was standing with us when the Woodlark came over.

Only the three Ring Ouzels this autumn, and all single-day wonders. Not the massive movement of winter thrushes either, with just three day-counts of Redwing over 300, just the one smallish movement of Fieldfares and only one day of 20 Song Thrushes. Stonechats were here and there, but usually gone tomorrow.

As for the last of the summer's migrants: two

Firecrest.

Swallows on the 18th were the only record for the month – it would appear. Chiffchaff held on till the end of the month, but Blackcaps have not been seen since mid-October and are, if there are any, in someone's garden hogging the suet. A late Yellow Wagtail was recorded on the 14th, while a Rock Pipit appeared around Alex on the 26th (only the fourth record in the last five years, making it as rare as Wryneck).

Chaffinch

Stuart has his Firecrest back, and this is another bird that everyone else appears to be ticking off, apart from us - and we're ticked off about it. James did find 50+ Goldcrests in Bush Wood in a stalwart effort to find one of the stripy-headed buggers, but it looks like a lot more visits to Bush Wood will be required.

October is the month of viz-mig, when finches bound across the air space of an early morning. Sure enough there were a few days of good Chaffinch movement and several of Brambling, Stuart picking up the first on the 14th. It would appear there is a two-week window in which these birds are more likely, after which they become the thing of dreams. Redpoll numbers increased and they could seen or heard most day by the end of the month. I say Redpoll as they'll soon be grouped as one species again before long (due to their identical DNA) and I am not allowed to say I can tell the difference in calls, even though we are hearing distinct calls, though not the distinct sizes. Siskins are back in the park, where they should be, with up to 30+ birds wandering around the park alder time!

Little Egret

Records are broken again: with water levels dropping on Heronry, and likely to drop more: it's been a massacre of the innocents, the innocents in question being the fish. Record numbers of Cormorants have been gobbling up mouthfuls of fry, while up to 14 Little Egrets (plus one on the Roding) became the new record for the patch.

Records too in the world of ducks: 21 Wigeon on the 12th looked pretty unbeatable for this uncommon winter duck. High teens were seen all month, and then the record was mullered with 33 birds on the 31st, split between the Ornamentals and Shoulder of Mutton, with one outlier on Alex making 34 birds in total. Could numbers go through the roof like for Gadwall (climbing slowly through the 200s). The Basin has sadly been missing out so far with virtually nothing on it bar some Egyptian Geese, and it will certainly need to contribute if further records are to be broken. Wigeon, like Pochard, of which there have been very few, are early autumn birds for us so it will be interesting to see how long the numbers hold up!

Wigeon

Waders: 14 Lapwing, a possible Golden Plover, and a few Snipe. With no boggy bits I can't see that improving much soon. Finally that Mediterranean Gull, Valentino, came back. Now in his 16th year, apparently, I am still not sure if anyone has ever managed to find out where he was ringed. His name from now on is Lazy of Alex, because he does bugger all when he is here!

November

November was without doubt Bob's month. He was in the thick of it from start to finish, and if it hadn't been for us pesky upstarts he could have easily claimed everything good that was seen during the period – I pipped him to the Goldeneye on Alex, while Jono was the right side of the bush to snatch our long-awaited Firecrest from him. He was on hand to give expertise on the ID of my mystery Teal, scored with the original Goldeneye(s) over Bush Wood, and pulled the biggest rabbit out of the hat with his Caspian Gull on Jubilee. Well played, sir!

Drake Goldeneye

I predicted that given a change in the weather to a more frigid direction would make things happen and so it was with the duck and the gull. We could do with a bit more of that me thinks.

November has been mainly about ducks and gulls: an autumn high of 324 Gadwall in the park on 27th with Shoveler peaking at 43 the same day; Wigeon moved around, came and went, but reached a maximum for the month of 34 in the park on the 3rd with one on Alex, though that might have been eclipsed later in the month. Of course there was the Silver Teal on the 10th, which was mildly interesting, and plenty of normal Teal on the Ornamentals and Alex. Diving ducks are very much down as we are lacking any deep water.

Mistle Thrush

As for gulls, maxima for Black-headed and Common during the month, but not the really big numbers we can probably expect later this year or early next. Herring Gulls are starting to grow in strength, favouring the brickpit pitches and down by the Alex. Apart a few Great Black-backs passed through, while the Med stayed until the 16th, but with gulls scattered widely it is not always possible to find it. The 1st-winter Yellow-legged Gull, or another of that ilk, is still hanging about, but stands out less with the arrival of so many young Herring Gull.
A few Chiffchaff were seen during the period, but never in the same place, and a pair of Blackcaps is still loitering in the bushes by the Roding.

Goldcrest numbers recorded are lower than the number of birds that are actually present, and with the number of records of Firecrest in London it's not surprising that we finally got our birds back in Bush Wood. Stuart of course has had them for longer down at Snaresbrook.

The only wader movement was of one Snipe and a heard only Green Sandpiper, though Woodcock on the 22nd and 29th means our wintering birds are back.

Just the one Brambling, a handful of Redpolls and the occasional large party of Siskins in the park in addition to the small flock of Linnets around Jubilee, reported for the month, while with the thrushes you can have a good day or none at all. Redwings can be found in Bush Wood, feasting on the holly berries, and now both Song and Mistle Thrushes have started singing again.

It's got to be said, even now, there is always something of interest out there – just not the biggy we're hoping for.

Report and Pics
by Nick Croft

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

hunting for bears out the back

Article by Paul Ferris

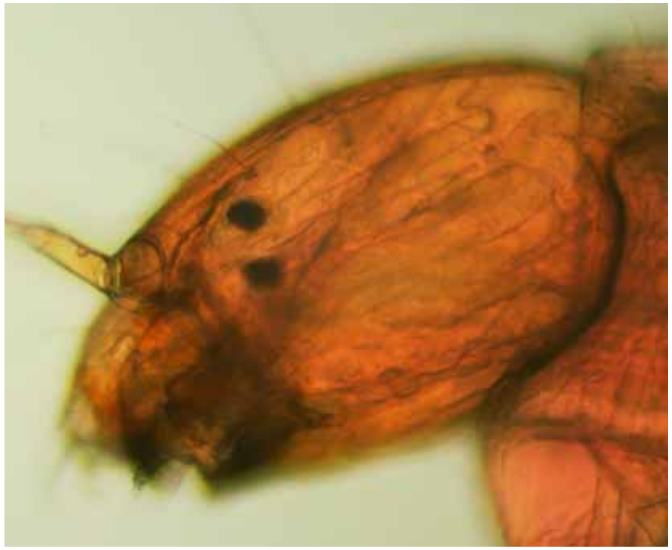
With the recent purchase of a specially designed camera that would fit a microscope, I brought my long-unused microscope out of its home. The camera was a reasonable price and reasonable quality, and I was eager to get back into a bit of microscopy. The microscope had been bought years ago from the Heron Optical Company in Brentwood.

Brachionus - *a rotifer*

Setting-up of the software for the camera and attachment to the microscope was straightforward. My first observations were of a leaf of a liverwort *Lunularia cruciata* from my front wall. Looking at the gemma cup - itself a small structure in the middle of the leaf - I was intrigued to see a small creature running about on it and disappearing beneath it. My photograph, taken using the camera software, does not clearly show what sort of creature it was, whether an insect or an arachnid for instance, but it was running about at some speed!

A tiny creature on a liverwort gemmae

The next samples were of water and detritus taken from an old washing-bowl that has lain at the bottom of the garden for some time. This source provided some readily-seen midge larvae – very active and even when caught in the field of view at



Head of a midge larva

lowest power almost filling the screen. Quite a scary-looking creature, this – something like one of the Martians in the film *Quatermass and the Pit*.

A colony of Carchesium – *which are protozoans*

Trailing through a sample on a slide and under a cover-slip, the first movements using my low power objective could easily be seen to be some ciliates in the form of *Vorticella* spp. These are bell-shaped animals which are usually attached to some surface (in this case some plant-material) by a long stalk. If the animal is disturbed the stalk will quickly retract, and then slowly uncoil later to reach its maximum length. The picture here may be a group of *Vorticella* – which are gregarious – but may also be an example of *Carchesium*, whose colonies are more like a tree, with a main trunk and branches.

Rotifer – these are sometimes known as wheel animicules

The *Vorticella* are part of a group of single-celled animal organisms sometimes referred to as Protozoa. Other creatures present were some rotifers, *Rotaria* spp. These are elongated creatures

with a body narrowing to a foot and with a head-part that seems to divide into two lobes, each with what appears to be a spinning wheel attached. These are not wheels at all, but a ring of tiny hair-like appendages known as cilia. These move in a wave-motion which gives the spinning appearance, and they serve to attract food into the animal and also to propel the animal forward. Because these cilia appeared to early microscopists as a wheel, the were called wheel animicules.

A creature from the garden pond was a specimen of what are often called *Daphnia*, which are small crustaceans. I don't have the experience to tell whether it was actually a member of the Family Daphniidae, as there are other families within this group.

Daphnia – *a crustacean.*

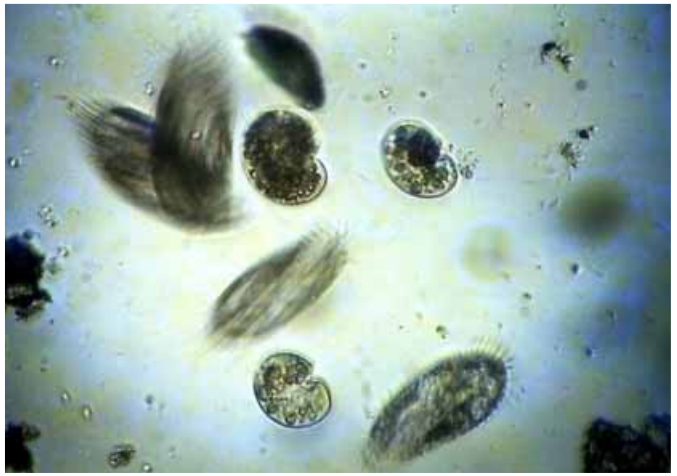
Another crustacean from the same source was an ostracod, also known as seed shrimps as they look rather like a seed. This one was easily visible with the naked eye, swimming rapidly about. Apparently there are many common genera of these, and they are difficult to identify even to a family, let alone to a genera.

Ostracod - a crustacean.

Another dirty-water-and-detritus sample from the garden provided quite a lot of fun, with some fast-moving and not-too-tiny (up to about 150 µm) *Stylonychia* scurrying around. These are a group of protozoans which have the hair-like structures cilia – already referred to – present. In this case the cilia are present on much of the creature's body. They are slightly flattened, and their overall shape is something like that of a woodlouse. They really do rush about, and it's difficult to catch one in the field of view.

Stylonychia – *a genus of ciliate.*

Also present in this sample were quite a few *Colpoda,* bean-shaped protozoans with the mouth situated in a cavity at one side. These are generally slower-moving creatures, but they can get into a spin! They are about two-thirds the size of the *Stylonychia*, measuring something like a 100 µm.



Colpoda – *protozoans - with Stylonychia scurrying about.*

Also present in the sample were examples of something more plant than animal, yet quite mobile. Numerous elongated organisms, usually green-tinted, moving in almost straight lines with a creeping motion, these were *Nitzschia* - members of a group of algae known as diatoms.

Nitzschia - *a diatom.*

So why was I searching for bears out the back?

It was tardigrades that I was looking for, known as ‘water bears’ from their appearance, and these are actually microscopic animals. One recommended way of finding these is to search in clumps of moss, which I had prepared. No ‘bears’, but a nice selection of *Brachionus*, another rotifer. These are very mobile animals, moving by complex retractile actions.

Thus far I have not found any bears in the garden, but have found a variety of organisms which – in the main – could be said to be easily overlooked.

The microscope is a Chinese-made one, with the code XSP-13, and the camera a Yuanj HD 5.0 MP, complete with viewing and editing software, costing £69 – also Chinese.

Paul Ferris
December 2015

Find out more about Paul and his work on his website
http://www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk

Brachionus - *a rotifer.*

non native plants

by Tricia Moxey

About 1,500 species of plant are considered to be native within the UK.

These are ones which recolonised the land as the conditions improved after the end of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago.

Holm Oak Quercus ilex - *few examples grew in this country before the end of the 16th century*

The formation of the English Channel about 8,000 years ago prevented any further natural northward movement of plants from Europe. Since then over 1,000 non-native plants have arrived to diversify the flora. They have arrived from Europe and elsewhere, often aided by human intervention.

Some reached here long ago and have become naturalised, sustaining small populations, and are not necessarily considered too much of a threat. Those which arrived in the UK before 1600 are termed archaeophytes. They include common arable weeds including Common Fumitory *Fumaria oficinalis*, Fat Hen *Chenopodium album* and Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis* which were introduced by early agriculturalists. Certain trees are non-native too.

Sweet Chestnuts *Castanea sativa* provided the Romans with nourishing food and there is uncertainty as to when exactly this species was planted either as individual trees or within coppices as it is a useful timber resource. However, scattered records suggest that this species was well-established by the 12th century in southern counties. It was used as an avenue tree in the last quarter of the 17th century and 350 year old survivors of these plantings can be seen on George Green, in Bush Wood and in Greenwich Park. The trees in the replacement avenue framing the Temple in Wanstead Park are but mere youngsters being less than 40 years old!

Sweet Chestnuts Castanea sativa.

Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* is another of these early introductions as it provides useful shelter belts in exposed or urban situations, but it does seed far too freely!

There are a few records of Evergreen or Holm Oak *Quercus ilex* being grown in this country before the end of the 16th century, but it was still something of a rarity a century later. There is one survivor in the garden at Fulham Palace, which was established by the enthusiastic botanist Bishop Compton who died in 1713. He bequeathed many of his special plants to Sir Richard Child for his gardens at Wanstead. Holm Oak acorns are spread by Jays and it is appearing locally, often growing close to Holly bushes. Only 42 herbivorous insects have been recorded as feeding on it whereas our native Oaks *Quercus robur* and *Q. petrea* can support almost 300 different species.

More recent introductions which arrived here after 1600 are termed neophytes. With the expansion of trade with Asia and North America, plant hunters found many wonderful new species to import into cultivation. As transportation techniques improved, more living specimens could be moved from one continent to another and today there are plants from the Far East, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and South America growing in our gardens and public spaces. Today, many public plantings are almost entirely of non-native species, but a few native 'wild' plants can appear if they are left untended!

Holm Oak acorns are spread by Jays. The tree is appearing locally, often growing next to Holly bushes.

Until recently there were no restrictions on this kind of trade, but a number of countries are now attempting to restrict the importation of non-native plants and animals to reduce the risks of disease and infestations, with some operating stricter biosecurity controls than others.

In their native lands most plants have a range of creatures that stop them spreading in an uncontrolled manner. These include seed-eating weevils, which reduce the quantity of viable seeds, and assorted caterpillars, which consume foliage and flowers. They may also get eaten by larger herbivores which are absent from the new habitat.

When a vigorous new species arrives somewhere

without these controlling organisms, it can spread rapidly and in some cases throttles the native vegetation. One example is Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* which was taken to the USA by early settlers and today is considered to be widespread pest. After rigorous testing, biological control with two European weevils *Galerucella pusilla* and *G. calmariensis* is now helping to reduce the problem. The European Bramble *Rubus fruticosa* is just one of 2,500 invasive species in Australia, attempts at eradication cost some A$40 million per annum.

Purple Loosestrife Lythrum salicaria - *taken to the USA by early settlers and today is considered to be widespread pest.*

These invasive species have the ability to spread, causing damage to the environment by disrupting the ecology of natural ecosystems, threating site biodiversity by displacing native plant and animal species, and can degrade unique biological resources. The GB Invasive Non-native Species Strategy, which was updated in August 2015, assesses the economic impact of dealing with these invasive non-native plants in the UK to be £1.7 billion per annum.

Spanish bluebells - Hyacinthoides hispanica.

Within the Wanstead area certain introduced species are giving cause for concern. The showy Spanish Bluebells *Hyacinthoides hispanica* are grown in gardens throughout much of the UK, and bees transfer pollen from these to our native bluebells, producing vigorous hybrids that can out-compete our native Bluebells *H. non-scripta*. Removing these hybrids has been attempted, but it is a time-consuming activity and is unlikely to make any real difference to the spread of the hybrid forms.

This summer saw a massive population explosion of Floating Pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* which spread rapidly around the perimeter of the Perch Pond. First recorded in the wild in Essex in 1990, it has been noted from a number of other sites round North London. A native plant in North and South America and parts of Africa, it is one of five aquatic plants banned from sale in the UK since April 2014. This plant produces such a dense mat that it reduces the amount of oxygen within the water, thus harming fish stocks and other aquatic life forms. As yet the triggers for this rapid expansion are not known, but changes in nutrient levels and warmer water temperatures must play a part. Small patches can be removed by hand, but larger infestations require attention from specialist contractors and the City of London are due to engage such contractors in 2016 to deal with this problem.

Floating Pennywort - Hydrocotyle ranunculoides.

The first record of New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii* was from Essex in 1927. Although it is not a weed species in its native lands, its ability to spread from small fragments of tissue has enabled it to spread rapidly and it is now known from over 2,000 sites in the UK. It favours small nutrient-rich ponds as it can be damaged by wave

action on larger bodies of water. Its stems can produce a 100% cover and as it stays green throughout the winter it can outgrow any native species - which die back in the colder months. At higher temperatures it grows rapidly. It seems to reduce the germination rates of native smaller aquatic species and may interfere with the breeding success of protected Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*. Using herbicides to deal with this problem plant will cause damage to other aquatic plants. It can be manually removed from open water sites and incinerated but this often leaves small fragments entwined amongst other plants, and these will readily spread. Some landowners have abandoned attempts to control it and are hoping that the more vigorous marginal plants may outcompete it in time.

Giant Hogweed - Heracleum mantegazzianum.

Sometimes reaching a height of 5 metres, Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* produces umbels of white flowers the size of a large dinner plate and a large plant can produce as many as 50,000 seeds! It was introduced as a garden plant in the 19th century and since then has spread along water courses over much of the country. There is an expanding colony on the banks of the River Roding in the Old Sewage Works and individual plants are appearing in the verges along the M11. It produces a toxic sap which causes photosensitivity in exposed skin so care is required to remove the plant by spraying from places where there is public access. The growing conditions in 2015 encouraged the native and much smaller Hogweed *H. spondylium* to grow well, but the Giant Hogweed is simply massive by comparison!

Our own native plants can sometimes become more widespread as a result of changes in the environment so they invade new habitats. Two plants formerly restricted to coastal areas are now found along roadsides where the roads have been sprayed with salt during icy conditions. These are the yellow-green Alexanders *Smyrnium olusatrum* and the Danish Scurvy Grass *Cochlearia danica*. The latter often forms a green fringe along the edge of the tarmac on most major roads between January and April. Both are now more widespread in the Wanstead area. Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* is also more widespread as it thrives on the increased nutrient levels found along roadsides and urban fringe grasslands where dogs roam.

Article by Tricia Moxey
Pics courtesy of Wiki

DEFRA is now running a consultation open until 28 February 2016 asking for comments about managing a long list of invasive plants and animals.

Do access this on line https://consult.defra.gov.uk/non-native-species/species-control-code This document gives useful information about the different species and of course you can make comments too.

Books which have appeared this year include: *Field Guide to Invasive Plants and Animals* by Olaf Booy, Max Wade and Helen Roy, published by Bloomsbury.

Alien Plants by Clive A. Stace and Michael J. Crawley, published by Collins as New Naturalist Library, Book 129.

In his *The Cabaret of Plants* Richard Mabey has provided a wide-ranging and readable account of a human interaction with plants throughout recorded history. Published by Profile Books.

Owen Johnson's volume *Arboretum,* with colour photographs of selected examples, explains the history of trees grown in this country and how they enrich our parks, gardens and the wider countryside. It is published by Whittet Books.

The New Sylva: A discourse of Forest and Orchard Trees for the 21st Century. Gabriel Hemery and Sarah Simblet. A sumptuous and weighty book to treasure for its superb line drawings and informative text. Bloomsbury.

country rambles

Ilford Broadway c1905

Avid readers of the Wren newsletter will know that we have been including transcripts from Charles William Burdett's wonderful book *Gossiping Rambles in Suburban Essex, Epping Forest and Beyond*, published in 1908.

Due to popular demand and because I enjoyed doing it so much I have been touring dusty old bookshops (with the help of Google) and have found another gem. Now well out of print, the *South Essex Recorder's Country Rambles around Ilford* was published in 1910, Its author Geo. E. Tasker recounts more rambles in our local area.

The guide describes in detail 26 walks of varying length, starting and ending at a railway station or a tram terminus (as they were) in or near Ilford in Essex. Walks include areas such as Ilford, Aldborough Hatch; Barkingside; Chadwell; Hainault Forest; Seven Kings as well as the more local Wanstead Park, Wanstead Flats, Valentines Park, Wanstead and Snaresbrook.

Although much of the book is outside of the Wren's catchment area, the guide gives a marvellous setting of the scene at the beginning of the last century, at a time of transformation from the village era to the urban townscape we know today.

I will be publishing one or two walks each season with photographs that I have found that would have been recognisable when Mr Tasker walked the area.

Thanks to Wren member Madeline Seviour for bringing this guide to my attention.

Route 1

From Ilford Station, Cranbrook Road, Horseshoes, Barkingside Recreation Ground, Gaysham Hall, field path to Hedgeman's Farm, farm road, Redbridge Lane, field path to Castle and The Drive. (5 to 6 miles).

Ilford Station - c1905.

Few walks in Ilford afford more pleasure than that along the Cranbrook Road, from its commencement at Ilford Station to its termination at Fullwell Hatch, Barkingside - a distance of 3 miles. The road is usually in good condition, and its air is at times decidedly bracing and invigorating beyond the town. The business end has, of course, lost its country - like aspect, but something of its former beauty can be seen in the splendid chestnut and other trees which still, happily, remain in the gardens of the private houses.

At the Wash is the little porter's lodge which stood behind the gates of old Cranbrook Hall (see Route 2). Many still living in Ilford can remember when there were only about half-a-dozen houses between the station and "Valentines." After passing the gates of the latter at the beginning of Emerson Road on the new Garden Suburb Estate and the entrance to the public park beyond, the road has fields on either side of it. The little wooded dell on the right is all that remains of Sparks Wood, which is marked on a map dated 1774 as being on both sides of the road. The white house a little farther along on the left is Gants Hill Cottage. Opposite is Cocklease Lane (see Route 5).

Ilford, Cranbrook Road c1905.

Then comes the Horseshoes hamlet, at the end of which is Little Gearies and the farm road and public path past Gaysham Hall. From here to Dr. Barnardo's Homes the road is very pretty and shady. Just past Great Gearies, with its cedar, is Barkingside Recreation Ground (12 acres), purchased in 1899; it was formerly part of

Valentines House.

Gaysham Hall farm and provided a much needed playground for the district. (A few yards farther on is the tram terminus.) Entering the gate, strike across the grass towards Holy Trinity Church and the Schools. The former was built in 1841 and contains a few modern stained glass windows; the tower was rebuilt only a few years ago. Opposite the church is the Vicarage. At the top of the road turn to the left along the farm road to Gaysham Hall (to the right leads to

Claybury fence path -see Route 2-and Tomswood Hill). At the end of the farm road the field path (or road) on the left takes back to Little Gearies in the Cranbrook Road, so follow the path to the right, which leads by the kitchen garden and lawn of the farm. The house, which is about 500 years old, contains some fine oak from Hainault Forest, and looks very picturesque with its white front and red roof. Here the path turns to the left along a hedge and through a “kissing gate,” past a cottage, round the corner to the right to another cottage (both belonging to Hedgeman ‘s Farm), to the road leading to the farm house. Turn to the left down the road, opposite the end of which is Redbridge lane with its smithy at the corner. The intersecting road leads. to Beehive on the left and to St. Swithin’s farm and Woodford Bridge on the right. A little way down Redbridge Lane, on the left, is a short field path leading to Beehive hamlet (Silver Street), and about five minutes beyond

Dr Barnardos, Barkingside early 1900s.

that is the field path, on the left, leading to the Castle and The Drive, which can now be followed (see Route 2).

now & then

In each edition of the Wren newletter 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.

the problem with heronry pond

Many people feel fiercely protective about Wanstead Park, and the lakes hold a central place in the regular visitor's affections. One lake is especially well loved: Heronry Pond. Toddlers are brought to feed the ducks there, school children and people walking to Wanstead Station pass it every day, dog walkers come to sit by it and enjoy a cup of tea at the Tea Hut, and nature lovers admire its wonderful water birds and – in summer - bats.

Article by Gill James

A quiet walk beside the lake, observing the trees and swans reflected in the water, soothes the soul and reduces melancholy - now a proven benefit in our stressed times, a cure for a very modern malady now made official with a name: Nature Deficit Disorder. The view from the Temple towards the Heronry must be the most stunning in the whole of East London.

Constructed between 1715 and 1745 by Sir Richard Child the lakes in Wanstead Park originally provided a vista for Wanstead House.

Heronry Pond is one of the surviving elements of a historic lake system which was the centrepiece of one of England's most significant gardens and which still gives the Park its unique character today. But the Heronry Pond is not without its problems. Over the years since they were constructed between 1715 and 1745 by Sir Richard Child, the Park's lakes have had recurring difficulties with water retention. Five lakes now survive from an initial nine. The Heronry Pond survives in more or less the same size and shape as it was originally, give or take an island or two; long ago when the Park looked much neater and tidier, it would have been visible as the focus of one of the vistas from the great House. It was constructed as part of a cascading chain of lakes utilising a natural valley running from west to east. The lakes were fed by the Holt Channel, an artificial stream that once flowed from Leyton Flats. Water should cascade down to the Heronry via channels from the Basin, which is now owned by Wanstead Golf Club, via the Shoulder of Mutton Pond.

Members of the West Ham Distress Committee visit the Heronry Pond in 1907.

Heronry Pond has undergone several changes over nearly 300 years. In the 1820s, after Wanstead House was demolished, the Park was let to tenants and the dam between Heronry and Perch was cut to provide extra grazing land so the lake was partly drained. Then in 1882 the dam was reinstated by the Corporation of London when it acquired the land. So the lake was restored to its

The water level in Heronry Pond is now exceptionally low and some parts of the lake have been reduced to a rich black silt.

Other lakes on the same water system in Wanstead Park are also at a very low level as can be seen here at the Grotto on Ornamental Waters.

full size again. In 1906-7 it was dug out to a uniform depth and relined with a concrete rim and base, using unemployed workers, to create a lake suitable for boating and bathing but also in an attempt to reduce leakage.

With the exceptional low water levels it is now possible to walk to what were once islands.

Leakage problems became acute after 1901, probably exacerbated by the laying of plumbing, drainage pipes and gas mains to the newly built Aldersbrook Estate. During World War Two the Lake took a direct hit from a V1 flying bomb which caused yet more damage.

In recent years the water level in the Lake has been kept up by water which is pumped from a borehole in the Park utilising an undergound aquifer. An abstraction licence is issued by the Environment Agency to the landowners, the City of London Open Spaces, and the current licence expires in March 2016.

The water level is now exceptionally low in Heronry Pond and the herons, little egrets and cormorants find fishing easy. Some parts of the lake have been reduced to rich black squidgy silt. Water level has been allowed to drop in order to repair two concrete panels on the face of the dam between Heronry Pond and Perch Pond. The 1975 Reservoirs Act requires landowners of "raised reservoirs" above a certain size to maintain the containing walls so as to prevent any flooding which might cause loss or damage. As the Wanstead Park lakes apparently fall within this category, the owner, the City of London, is obliged to fix them. We look forward to the completion of this work and water levels returning to normal.

Lower water levels have attracted an abundance of wading birds to the lakes at the expense of fish and amphibians.

Observant visitors to the Park will have noticed that the Ornamental Water also has very low water levels, and the Perch Pond is infested with an invasive weed called Floating Pennywort.

Other lakes within the park are also affected by low water levels, a problem further compounded by the infestation of the invasive weed Floating Pennywort.

Epping Forest, London's largest open space, which includes Wanstead Park, is a registered charity managed by the City of London. It has to make difficult and sometimes expensive decisions in a time of financial cutbacks. At the moment long-term plans are being developed by the City and other stakeholders to secure the park's future. A hydrology report making various suggestions concerning long-term solutions to the water retention problem in the lakes is currently being considered as part of this process. Here's hoping that some action will be taken in the shorter term to help the lakes, so that toddlers will be able to continue coming to feed the ducks and swans swimming in the Heronry Pond now, as well as for generations to come.

Article by Gill James

Pics by Tony Morrison

hedgehogs & hibernation

Like all animals,Hedgehogs need energy to carry out their normal functions. Energy, in their case, comes from beetles, slugs, worms and the other small creatures they consume in the course of a night's foraging.

In the summer, these invertebrates are plentiful and the Hedgehog has no difficulty in fuelling its system. But as the weather gets colder its food becomes scarcer, and the hedgehog is in danger of using up more energy in finding nourishment than it gains from eating it. The Hedgehog's strategy is to cut down on energy consumption as much as possible, until warmer weather renews its food supply.

Hedgehogs, unlike most mammals, lack the insulation of a warm fur coat. But keeping the body warm requires a lot of energy, so as it goes into hibernation the Hedgehog's temperature is allowed to drop from the normal 35°C to that of its surroundings: IO°C or less. If, however, the temperature gets dangerously close to freezing point, the Hedgehog's system switches on a low level of warmth to prevent it suffering frostbite or possibly freezing solid.

Other bodily functions such as digestion, growth and breathing are also reduced to a bare minimum. The heart-rate slows down to 20 beats a minute, and respiration is so much reduced that minutes may pass between breaths. All these changes mean that energy expenditure is reduced to about one fiftieth of normal - the minimum needed to stay alive.

Even to function at this very low level, the hedgehog needs a certain amount of energy. Its 'batteries' are the fat reserves it has been building up from the food it has eaten, particularly towards the end of summer. These fat reserves are of two kinds: white and brown. The white fat, which may comprise one-third a the Hedgehog's body weight at the start of hibernation, acts as a substitute for food in maintaining the Hedgehog's bodily functions.

Hibernating Hog.

As the winter months pass, it will gradually be exhausted.

The brown fat, stored in orange lobes around the shoulders, has a different function. When the Hedgehog needs to rouse from hibernation the brown fat is brought in to action to raise its temperature from a few degrees above freezing to the normal level of 35°. This process takes three to four hours, after which the Hedgehog can carry on with its normal activities.

So it's crucial for a hedgehog to eat enough food in the weeks before hibernation to store enough of both sorts of fat to last through the winter. Young Hedgehogs facing their first winter are particularly vulnerable; if they enter hibernation with a body weight less than about *450* grams they have little of surviving. Litters of babies born late in the summer are in even more danger, as they simply won't have time to eat enough food to build up their reserves. Up to a third of all Hedgehogs die during the winter; hibernation is a major challenge.

The Hedgehog's winter nest, known as a 'hibernaculum', is made of grass and especially of leaves, which are weatherproof and long-lasting. The Hedgehog brings leaves to the nesting site in its mouth, a few at a time. It makes a pile, adding new leaves to the centre; they are held in place by the surrounding support of twigs, brambles, brushwood etc. It then burrows inside and turns round and round, packing the leaves flat and ending up with a warm chamber with walls up to 10cm thick. The following winter the Hedgehog will make a new nest, even if the old one is still usable.

Hog emerging from hibernation.

Hibernation is not continuous; a hedgehog usually rouses for a short time every seven to 11 days, Its body temperature returns to normal, and it usually just remains alert inside its nest, although sometimes it may leave the nest and be active for several days or even move to another nest. We don't know why this happens; it doesn't benefit the hedgehog, since fat, and therefore energy, is consumed in the process of waking and going back into hibernation. Arousals seem to be spontaneous, but some may be due to outside factors such as flooding, disturbance of the nest by animals or humans, or unseasonably warm weather.

If you see a Hedgehog that you think is in trouble during the hibernation period and you are concerned for its safety, please call the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. They can be reached on 01584 890801 and will give you details of you nearest hedgehog carer. For more advice and information on Hedgehogs you could visit their website at www.britishhedgehods.org.uk

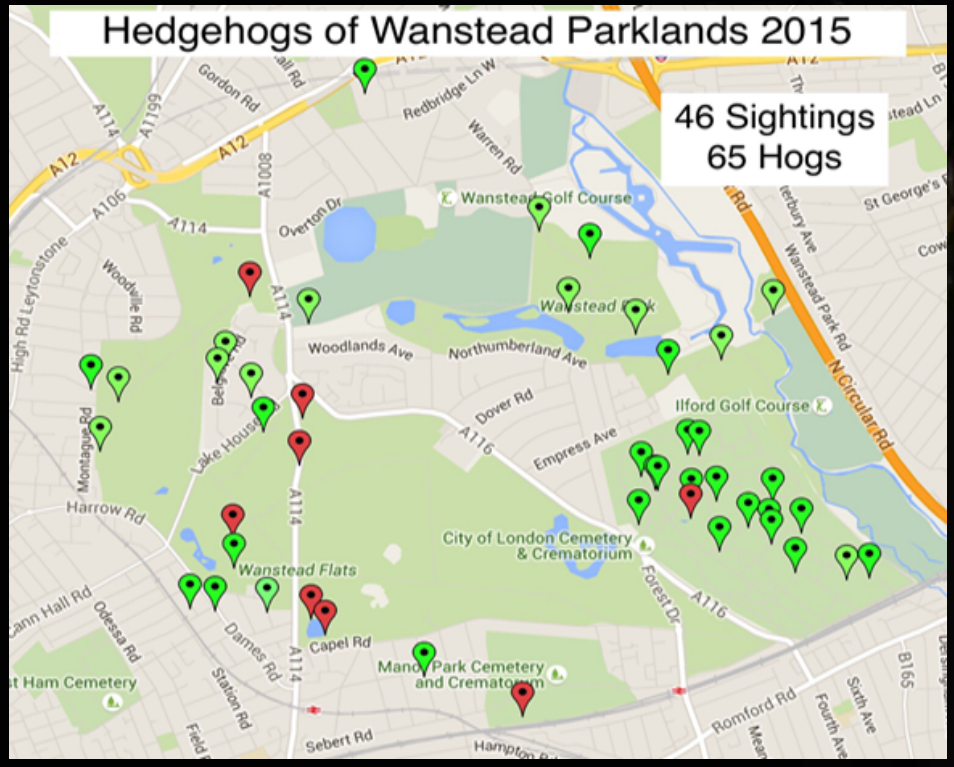
Article and pics by Barry Chapman

2015 - how we logged the hog

What an amazing project this has been. We asked Wren members and non-members alike to help us record their sightings of our local Hedgehog population. The total location sightings for the year amounted to 46, which totalled 65 hedgehogs that were seen in and around the Wanstead Parklands.

These statistics show that our hogs are doing well, especially in the City of London Cemetery, which gave us our largest number of recordings. More importantly our records show that the sightings you provided came from every corner of our area and we have a healthy figure to measure next years results.

Now that November is here, our Hogs should have gone into hibernation, but when they emerge in late March/early April we will be asking for your sightings once again. We can then tell by this time next year whether our Hogs are on the comeback rather than going into decline. Thanks to everyone who shared their sightings and to those who have shown such an interest in one of Britain's favourite mammal. Let's Log the Hog!



What to see in Winter

by Tricia Moxey

There is always a degree of uncertainty about the weather. Will the coming months bring high winds, crisp snow or just some long spells of overcast grey and rainy days when we will be slithering about in the muddy countryside? Being outside even for as little as 20 minutes a day is sufficient to bring health benefits so wrap up warm and get out there!

One of the great pleasures of being outside during the winter months is the chance to see frost on many of the fallen leaves, the dead stems of grasses or ferns. This tends to highlight their form and textures which might be so easily overlooked and thus, the seemingly ordinary is transformed into something magical!

An instructive activity is to make a note of flowers that are actually in flower at the turn of the year as many flowers are responding to the mildness of the current winter season. This list can include just the 'wild ones' or can include those found in gardens too! Comparisons year on year are interesting and of course there are some insects which will find them vital sources of nectar and pollen. There are several types of *Mahonia* which are in full flower at this time of the year and some of the winter flowering *Viburnum*s are sweetly scented too. Primroses and Sweet Violet are now in flower from late autumn through to spring and in addition you may well find Dandelions, Chickweed and Hogweed. What will be your score? More than 25 is a good one.

Towards the end of January the catkins on Hazel start to lengthen and once fully expanded, they shed their pollen grains which can then be blown about to be caught on the stigmas of the tiny red female flowers. As the days lengthen, the leaves of Honeysuckle start to grow to be followed by sprouting shoots on Elder bushes. Look out for the yellow flowers of Coltsfoot as they push through the barren ground of roadside verges or wasteland sites.

Those who feel the need to mow their lawns in winter may have continue to do so if the ground temperatures remain above 6°C for several days, but for many of us it is preferable to leave it slightly longer. This gives you the chance to notice that the uncollected leaves will disappear underground as various species of earthworm remain active, pulling different leaves into their burrows. Recent research using an infra-red webcam has revealed that the 25cm long Night Crawling Earthworm, *Lumbricus terrestris* shows a particular preference for the fallen leaves of Alder, Ash and Birch over non-native Eucalyptus, Sweet Chestnut and Sycamore. Interestingly in the 1880's Darwin came to similar conclusions without the help of webcams! You could conduct your own experiments to see which leaves are preferred – some worms apparently even like chocolate!

It is easy to overlook the smaller components of vegetation, but the bright green mosses are more obvious as many species produce their seed capsules on long stalks at this time of the year. The tops of walls, fallen logs, rockeries, lawns and the tops of flower pots are all good places to find these interesting plants.

The British Bryological Society has produced a downloadable guide to *Common Mosses and Liverworts of Town and Garden*. Check out the website to download your own copy!
www.britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk

View of Canary Wharf from Addington Hills

North and South

Throughout 2016, the Wren Group is helping me research my forthcoming book, working title *Walking Wild London* – and in the process, find out more about some of the other great wildlife hotspots of London.

We made a start at the end of 2015, with trips to Enfield Chase and the hills and woods of Croydon – two very different locations at either end of the capital. The first, once a mediaeval deer park, now has much open countryside and a pretty brook running through a valley; the second has plenty of sharp little climbs, one of the best views of London, and at the finish traverses chalk downland.

Wren walkers in Whitewebbs Wood.

On our way to Enfield Chase, we walked first through Whitewebbs wood, not too dissimilar to Epping Forest with its oak and Hornbeam trees, before joining the London Loop, a sort of M25 for walkers that runs through the outer London boroughs. This soon took us through farmland and down to the Salmon Brook, a tributary of the Lea; its little valley, today seen as the heart of the Chase, hides one away from the world outside. But the climb away led us to another good spot too, the Trent Country Park. In fact, as it is still afforested, this resembles the ancient hunting forest known to Henry VIII far more than the present-day farmland beside the brook, even though the country park is managed for recreation. That said, there's much a Tudor monarch wouldn't recognise, not least the Georgian mansion at its heart. We enjoyed distant views of the mansion down a steep forest ride. Although late October was not the season – though only by a couple of weeks – the park is a great place for butterflies such as the Gatekeeper and skippers.

It's not easy to think of East Croydon station as the start point of a nature walk, but that's where we found ourselves in early December. The houses soon finish though, and after barely a mile we're in the Addington Hills, one of London's best areas of heathland. From the 400ft-plus top, there's a fine view to the City and across east London.

Joining the London Loop again, the walk is then a succession of great spaces for nature, with the occasional bit of housing in between: the ornamental grounds of Heathfield, the woodland reserves of Bramley Bank and Littleheath Woods, and the National Trust-owned Selsdon Wood. Here we said goodbye to the London Loop to enjoy the meadow as well as woodland habitats that it offers. There was chalk under our feet now (or would have been, were it not for autumn's leaf carpet), and this manifested itself fuller as we crossed Haggler's Dean – nightshade and spindle berries on the hedgerow, plus old man's beard – which would have been a perfect little downland hanger (dry valley) if a golf course had not appropriated it. Not to moan too loudly: many other hangers nearby were gobbled up for commuter housing between the wars.

We finished through Frith Wood, just the Surrey side of the London boundary, before re-entering the

The City from Addington Hill.

capital at Hutchinson's Bank. This tiny patch of chalk scarp slope, though outwardly a bit scruffy, is one of London's best wildflower locations, particularly renowned for its early-summer orchids and herbs. And from here there was a tram ride back to East Croydon; what more could one ask.

Article and pics by Peter Aylmer

Lucky dip walk dates
Tuesday 5 January, Wednesday 10 February, Thursday 10 March
Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Just turn up, no need to book. Bring a sandwich, drink and Oyster or Freedom Pass.

Walks chosen at random from a selection. All are between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Check Wren Facebook page for updates.

Winter Fox

When Winter comes, we put back clocks,
Aware the days are short,
Yet outside, there's the Winter fox,
Who sees life as a sport!
To him, the days if short or long,
Are all that life provides,
That's why he keeps both fit and strong
And warm each time he hides...

But when he's on the prowl again,
His tootsies way too cold,
His courage strengthens now and then,
That's when he looks so bold...
'Just bring it on! ' he seems to say,
'I'll take it all, you'll see!
I'll simply live my life my way...
Be all that I can be! '

But as for me, I'll stay at home
And put the heating on,
For in the Winter, I'll not roam,
I'll wait until it's gone!
The Winter fox can run around,
Enjoying all that snow...
A far more pleasant time I've found
By simply saying, 'NO! '

Denis Martindale

urban foxes

the real picture

Few animals divide public option like the Red Fox, it has been both vilified in folklore and more recently in the media. Our understanding of how Foxes live among us has not benefitted from inflammatory tabloid headlines or the pronouncements of politicians in search of populist causes. The myths that surround the Red Fox have become fact to many people, this article will supply the facts from studies of this mammal and hopefully dispel the many untruths assigned to it.

Article by Barry Chapman
Main pic by Lawrie Brailey

Arrival

There has been a rapid spread of foxes into urban areas during the past 100 years, particularly in the south of England, where cities, like London, have encroached into more rural areas. Foxes prefer suburban areas, with large gardens where they can find shelter beneath shrubbery, sheds, and in other quiet areas, for example, alongside railway tracks or in parks and other open spaces.

Some people believe the fox population is increasing, but this is not the case. Fox populations are relatively stable and self-regulating according to the availability of habitat and food. Foxes excavate burrows, known as earths or dens, in those areas, particularly where there is dense vegetation.

Life and Death

Clearly, to some Foxes can be a nuisance at times, particularly during the mating season when their eerie screams can be heard at night or when male Foxes (dogs) fight with each other over territory or a female fox (vixen). The problem of fox noise is seasonal and lasts for just a couple of weeks.

The vixen only comes into heat once a year, as she approaches her oestrus (the period when her eggs are released from the ovary), the dog Fox stay close in attendance and follows her every move. The female is receptive for only three days and although successful mating last only seconds, if the dog does not dismount the pair can be 'locked' for up to an hour.

Pregnancy lasts for 53 days (10 less than a domestic dog) and the vixen may be assisted by other vixens who are barren, usually a sister or daughter. Cubs are usually born in late March and usually a litter consists of four or five cubs who will be born deaf and blind. The cubs first appear above ground when they are four weeks old, usually in late April or early May, they will have blues eyes and a brown coat as they begin life.

Dens become abandoned by June or July, when the cubs will begin to learn how to forage for food. By September, the cubs will be just about fully grown, and in late October the cubs leave the family, to set up their own territory, often nearby.

Foxes can live for about 12 to 15 years, but life expectancy in urban areas is much shorter and the average life of a London fox is 14 months. Over 50 percent die who are less than a year old and only three percent ever age to four to five years.

Around 50 per cent of the UK's Fox population is killed on the roads, I personally saw four dead Foxes, due to road deaths on the Aldersbrook side of Wanstead Flats earlier this year. 80 per cent of Fox cubs die before reaching sexual maturity and consequently, never breed.

I have also been told of Foxes being dug out with terriers by Alexandra Lake by three brave fellows, in fact Fox hunting in towns is far numerous than in rural areas. The average life expectancy of Only It is estimated the London population is around 10,000, this is believed to be a steady number, beaches of the high mortality rate. Some studies believe this figure is actually decreasing.

Food

Foxes are mainly nocturnal mammals and spend the hours of darkness hunting for, and scavenging food. Urban Foxes live off of a diet of birds, worms, small mammals, insects, fruit and refuse bags left out on the street, when they can get it. In city areas, discarded food (take-away food, household rubbish and pet food left out overnight) can make up more than half of a fox's daily diet. However, small pets, like rabbits and guinea pigs can be taken by Foxes.

They need to be securely housed to ensure Foxes cannot get access to them. Most wire pens are not robust enough to deter a determined Fox.

In London they do a good job of keeping rodent numbers down. If Foxes disappeared from the streets and parks of London overnight, it's likely we'd see an increase in the numbers of rats and house mice.

Some 86 percent of people like the animals, according to a poll for Channel 4 TV and a survey by Bristol University found that 10 percent of Londoners regularly feed them.

Cats and Dogs

One of the many myths about foxes is 'will they breed with my dog". The answer is no, dogs cannot hybridise with foxes. Foxes have 38 chromosomes, whilst dogs have 78, so the egg and sperm would not be compatible.

Another worry I hear from pet owners is that a fox may kill their dog/cat? Foxes generally avoid contact with dogs and cats. Foxes pose little danger to cats but, like any other dog, Foxes will chase cats. Generally, though, when faced with the claws and teeth of a cat, Foxes will back away, knowing they will probably suffer a serious injury in any fight. Foxes will scavenge the remains of dead cats, but actual evidence of them killing cats is actually extremely rare.

Cats and dogs vastly outnumber Foxes and they usually co-exist without any serious problems. But many fox cubs are killed each year by pet cats and dogs.

Dogs, certainly, are at little risk. There are no recent records of Foxes doing harm to man's best friend.

Dogs are generally not in any danger from Foxes at all, although very small dogs or young puppies may be slightly more at risk. So it is much more likely that your dog will attack the Fox, not the other way round. Records show that 250,000 people are bitten by pet dogs each year in Britain, yet only 10 incidents are recorded of fox attacks on humans.

Are they a pest?

To a keen gardener, faeces on the lawn, the smell of fox urine or digging in the herbaceous border are major crimes. Other people will grumble because a fox passing through the garden each night starts their dog barking. Several security companies curse urban Foxes for triggering their infra-red security alarms. Foxes will eat rats and mice, and unlike the old metal dustbins, wheelie bins rarely provide scraps for today's modern fox. Humans are the largest supplier of food to Foxes.

Britain has some of the highest-density fox populations in the world, according to Stephen Harris, professor of environmental sciences at Bristol. "Despite this, they cause remarkably few problems and the vast majority of householders like to see the Foxes in their garden."

Love them or loathe them, urban Foxes are going nowhere. Our best option, then, is to learn to live with them. There are plenty of ways to deter them from damaging our gardens and safeguarding our small pets. Meanwhile we should count ourselves luck that we have the privilege of watching this fascinating wild animal on our doorstep.

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Main photo by kind permission of Lawrie Brailey
www.lawriebrailey.co.uk

Other photos supplied by Barry Chapman (Wanstead Flats Womble)

Follow Barry on Facebook
https://www.facebook.com/bazchaps

The Wanstead

1000

There's no escaping the fact that we live in a very good place for nature. Just 20 minutes by tube from the City, courtesy of the Central Line, Wanstead has deer, Skylarks, 25 different kinds of butterflies, glorious spring bluebells and even a few orchids.

Our corner of London benefits from being at the southern apex of Epping Forest, with a mix of freshwater lakes, woodland and flower-rich heathland in Wanstead Park and on Wanstead Flats. And we also have hundreds of large, leafy gardens – in some cases so leafy that they are almost a continuation of the Forest itself.

Much of our wildlife is in the most unexpected places – between the headstones in the City of London Cemetery; along the wayleave behind Belgrave Road; in the churchyard of St John the Baptist in Leytonstone; and in the middle of the Green Man roundabout, to name just four. If you don't believe me, check out these places for yourself next spring, when flowers begin to bloom or, in the case of the cemetery, next autumn when the fungi appear.

We are fortunate to live here. But now the Wren Group is on a quest: to find out how many different kinds of plants, animals and fungi we have. Over the years, the area has been better surveyed than most, thanks to the efforts of people like Tricia Moxey, Paul Ferris and Colin Plant. For example, Paul's Wanstead Wildlife website states that almost 800 species of 'higher' plants have been found locally, mostly by him during his 1980s survey. That figure doesn't include mosses, let alone the lichens and fungi. Of course, things have changed since the 1980s, something that was demonstrated during our successful bio-blitz in June.

Citizen science

Building on the success of that bio-blitz (in which 280 people participated and which recorded almost 700 species), the Wren Group wants to enrol the help of local residents – a team of 'citizen scientists' – to discover 1,000 different plants and animals. Who knows, we may find even more! When local naturalist Rose Stephens visited Manor Park Cemetery last spring in search of insects to photograph, she was amazed by the variety she found. Most local people are probably only vaguely aware of the cemetery, yet its untended parts proved to be a wonderful nature reserve. Rose found a scarce but very beautiful little fly called *Mintho rufiventris*, as well as hoverflies, butterflies, beetles and 36 different kinds of bee. Similarly, when someone persuaded me to run a light-trap in my garden to attract moths, I had no idea that within four years I would have seen almost 400 different kinds, including second, third and ninth records for Essex. Other local naturalists have had similar experiences.

So why not join in? We will be coordinating sightings from the Forest Gate-Manor Park-Leytonstone-Wanstead-Snaresbrook area, including such wonderful sites as Wanstead and Leyton Flats, the City of London and Manor Park cemeteries, Wanstead Park, the grounds of Snaresbrook Court, Gilbert's Slade and all the churchyards, gardens and allotments in between.

Plans for the year

A few of the things we're planning for the Wanstead 1000 project:

- A spring garden watch – asking for sightings of bees, birds, bugs, butterflies and anything else living in your back garden
- A midsummer bio-blitz in Wanstead Park, with pond-dipping, walks and bat-detecting
- Botany evenings in spring and summer when we'll descend on flowery corners of our area to see what's growing
- A breeding bird survey in the City of London Cemetery and in Manor Park Cemetery

Look out for our regular email updates and check our website (wrengroup.org) and Facebook page (facebook.com/WrenOrg). We'll also tweet events @wrenwildlife

rainbow fungi

Tricia Moxey treated us to two local fungi walks in the autumn. Both were pretty amazing with a kaleidoscope of colour and a great range of sizes and forms. The Bush Wood walk on 27 September followed a tried-and-tested route and at least 20 species were found, including Sulphur Tuft, The Deceiver, Spindleshank, Purple Brittlegill, Blushing Amanita, Hairy Curtain-crust and several other species. A month later, Tricia led us into the City of London Cemetery, where we were a little less sure of what we would discover. We needn't have worried, because parts of the Cemetery had some lovely displays of yellow, orange, scarlet, mauve, beige, black and white. One particular surprise was a small group of Hairless Earth-tongues.

Photos: Tim Harris

Hairy Curtain-crust

Apricot Club

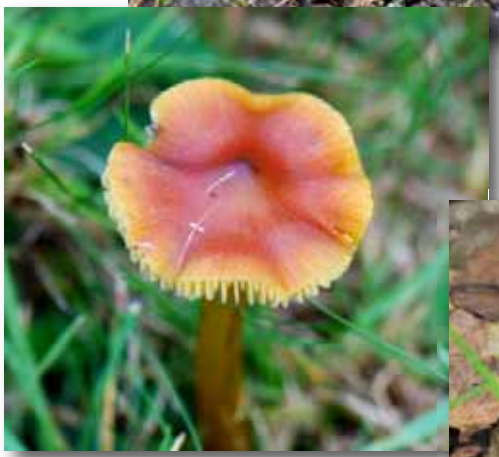
Spindleshank

Yellow Club

Bay Cup

Purple Brittlegill

Sulphur Tuft



Blackening Waxcap

Blushing Amanita

Red Waxcap

The Deceiver

Wanstead nature club

Report by Gill James

SEPTEMBER: THERE BE DRAGONS!

A fine morning, great for dragonflies ! Eleven children today. We made some fantastic model dragonflies, some with sycamore seedcases for wings and plantain heads for bodies. Dragonflies are champion fliers - they can even fly backwards and they are hard to catch as they zoom around so fast. They are also very special as they were flying 300 million years ago and some of them were a lot bigger than we see nowadays. We did see some big ones - probably Southern Hawkers - flying over Jubilee Pond but there was no way we could catch them for a better look.

We also had a look at the felt squares which Gill had previously laid around the Cat & Dog Pond. What would be underneath them? Frogs? Grass snakes? We looked under them with bated breath and saw...nothing! All in the day of a young naturalist!

OCTOBER: FUNGUS FORAY AND LEAF CROWNS

Thirteen children today . We had a good look at some big white toadstools called Shaggy Parasols (like little sunshades) and their fine roots. We compared them with tiny whitewash fungi like white paint on the underside of an old stick, and the familiar apple rot on an old brown soft fallen apple. These fungi do a good job rotting down dead stuff. Then we went for a walk and found loads of different kinds of fungi in Bush Wood, including some lovely red Fly Agarics under the little birch tree.

And we made leaf crowns! Just simple card crowns with stickyback tape on them so we could stick on some colourful autumn leaves. The leaves are losing their green stuff (chlorophyll) and falling off now that the sunlight is getting less and the ground is getting colder and the trees are getting ready for their winter rest.

We stuck on our crowns different shaped leaves such as oak, hawthorn, sycamore, bracken and beech and they looked lovely. We sat down under an oak tree and listened to a story about a man who understood the language of the woods.

NOVEMBER: WIGGLY WORMS

Fourteen children today. Ruby and Clem showed us the wormery that they had taken home in October. Ruby told us how they had put in worms and kept the soil damp and put grass cutting and leaves on top. The worms liked the grass cuttings best and a lot of the leaves disappeared too. We could see the tunnels that they had made in the sand. We looked at some worms and worked out which was the pointy end where they eat the leaves and saw the saddle in the middle where they keep their eggs. Then we went into the little wood in the rain and dug a hole. The

top layer was leaves and twigs. The next layer down was fine soil with worms in it which the worms had made. At the bottom of the hole was no worms or soil, only yellow sand and round pebbles from hundreds of thousands of years ago when it was sea.....

Then we came inside and made some clay worms to put on a big long collage of earth and leaves for our clay worms to pull down and eat. We stuck on pictures of predators like robins, blackbirds and moles which all like to eat the worms.

Now we know what is under our feet and how busy all those worms are making soil!

Report by

Gill James

The group meet at the changing rooms, Harrow Rd, Wanstead Flats, E11 3QD every month. Sessions are planned for Jan 9th, Feb 6th and Mch 12th.The group is run by Wren committee member Gill James and volunteers.

Why not come along with your child to have fun with others learning about our local nature – birds, plants, trees, butterflies, pondlife and insects etc. Only £1.50 a session. To find out more about the group orto register contact gilljames@btinternet.com

all change for climate

When you read this we will know the outcome of the Paris Summit on climate change (COP21) negotiations. The ultimate target, an agreement that will guarantee to limit global warming to 2C, may not have been achieved, but the UN is determined to pave the way for the world to be able to meet that target further down the line.

Climate change, says the Met Office, 'is a large-scale, long-term shift in the planet's weather patterns or average temperatures'. In the last century the world's average temperature has risen by nearly 1 degree C and, unless ways can be found to make significant reductions in fossil fuel use, will continue to rise.

Epping Forest, and other green spaces like it, are in the front line of the impacts of climate change. The City of London's recent consultation document, *Epping Forest - The next 10 years*, spelled out some of the consequences.

'During the last few years, summers have been notably wetter. Summer 2012 was just 6mm short of the wettest summer for 100 years. Of the six hottest years in the last hundred, five were in the decade between 2000 and 2010.'

For Epping Forest, these changes present major challenges, altering the balance and abundance of different species and threatening natural habitats. We are already seeing an increase in the incidence and severity of plant pests and diseases, as warmer and wetter winters encourage the spread of plant diseases and pests. In fact, Oak trees seem to be vulnerable to these changes already. In Wanstead Park and on Wanstead Flats we are also seeing an increase in non-native invasive species which a warmer climate will support.

It is predicted that the future climate will not be suitable for shallow-rooted Beech, a dominant tree species in Epping Forest, which could lead to the loss of the Forest's internationally recognised pollards. Furthermore, storms and rain-soaked soil will increase the risk of trees being uprooted or broken in strong winds. Wet soil in the forest would also restrict the use of machinery for habitat management.

Key habitats within the Forest may also be adversely affected. For example, higher summer temperatures could reduce oxygen levels, especially in small ponds, damaging these aquatic habitats. We have also seen plenty of evidence of algal blooms and invasive species in our local ponds. More frequent droughts would mean that small ponds could dry out.

Generally warmer, wetter weather in winter and autumn is likely to lead to increased grass growth throughout the year, favouring the dominant grasses at the expense of the scarcer, slower-growing flowering plants. And we know of the dangers of fires, which long spells of hot weather will increase. In the woodland areas changes in soil moisture may promote different tree species which might out-compete native Forest species, changing the character of the Forest as we know it now.

In response to these challenges, the City of London, in common with many environmental managers, has relatively few weapons in its armoury. It is implementing the Corporation Open Spaces Department's Sustainability Policy 'to ensure we consider the ecological, environmental and social impacts of activities on our open spaces and surrounding environment' as well as delivering a habitat management programme to restore and maintain habitats, making them more resilient to climate change. Finally, it has put in place a staff 'Green Team', responsible for regular sustainability audits.

Whatever the outcome of the Paris talks, climate change and its impact on the Forest is here to stay. To mitigate its worst effects we all need to take action, by becoming climate aware, educating ourselves about climate change and what can be done about it. Then we can make informed choices when it comes time to vote for the people making the big choices, as they are at Paris this week.

Article by Mark Gorman

definitely off piste

While birding and wildlife spotting was not our first reason for choosing India as a holiday destination, it certainly provided a fantastic variety of both alongside all the religious sites and beautiful architecture.

Driving to our hotel on our first day in Delhi we spotted Black Kites aplenty circling the city, we even saw a Black-headed Ibis flying alongside a busy road. Common Myna birds searched for titbits on our veranda whilst we ate our breakfast.

Moving on to Agra, we had an amazing view of the Taj Mahal from our hotel balcony, matched only by a Black Kite and Shikra who had decided to rest on the hotel terrace opposite our room.

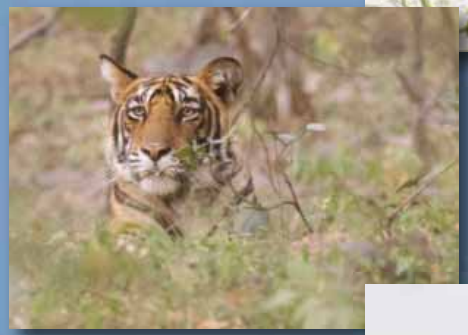
On to my favourite parts of the trip – Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary (Keoladeo National Park) , where we saw almost 100 species of birds in a morning and afternoon session, including my first Hoopoe and bee-eater. This was followed by four safari drives in Ranthambhore National Park. You cannot get a more exhilarating experience than this, seeing Tigers in the wild – and the birds weren't bad either!

There were Black Kites galore above the fort at Jodhpur. Apparently they are fed at around 4pm every afternoon. We watched them circling whilst laying by our hotel pool.

Finally Goa, a time for relaxation by the pool and beach after our sightseeing exertions of the previous fortnight. I got up early on the last morning to see what birds were around our small hotel complex – a Golden Oriole (another first) completed the set.

India is a truly amazing country, if you go you cannot help but see the wildlife too, it is always around you.

Photos and narrative by Anne-Marie White



January

Sun 3rd - Practical work. Meet Aldersbrook stables, (not the Temple) Empress Avenue E12. Time 10am – 12.30. Leader Peter Williams wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com

Tues 5th - Wren Group's Lucky Dip walks - between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Bring a snack lunch and drink, Oyster/Freedom Pass etc! Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Peter Aylmer on peteraylmer@hotmail.com or 07884 235784.

Thurs 7th: Bramble clearing in the Bluebell Wood. Meet 10.00am in the Wood near the Temple. Bring gloves and secateurs. Contact: Alan 020 8989 4898

Sat 9th - Wanstead Nature Club for Children. Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats - 10.00 a.m. Hedgehogs and Hibernating Creatures. Cost: £1.50 per child. Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Thurs 14th: Bramble clearing in the Bluebell Wood. Meet 10.00am in the Wood near the Temple. Bring gloves and secateurs. Contact: Alan 020 8989 4898

Sun 17th - Waterbird Count in Wanstead Park
Meet 10:00 a.m. by the tea hut in Wanstead Park. . Contact Tim Harris
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

February

Sat 6th - Wanstead Nature Club for Children. Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats - 10.00 a.m.. Cost: £1.50 per child. Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Sun 7th – Practical work. Meet Aldersbrook stables, (not the Temple) Empress Avenue E12. Time 10am – 12.30. Leader Peter Williams wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com

Wed 10th - Wren Group's Lucky Dip walks - between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Bring a snack lunch and drink, Oyster/Freedom Pass etc! Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Peter Aylmer on peteraylmer@hotmail.com or 07884 235784.

Thurs 11th: Bramble clearing in the Bluebell Wood. Meet 10.00am in the Wood near the Temple. Bring gloves and secateurs. Contact: Alan 020 8989 4898

Sun 14th – Trip to Two Tree Island (Essex Wildlife Trust reserve). Meet: Platform 2, West Ham Station – 09:00 a.m. for 09:13 train to Leigh-on-Sea. Contact Tim Harris
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Thurs 18h: Bramble clearing in the Bluebell Wood. Meet 10.00am in the Wood near the Temple. Bring gloves and secateurs. Contact: Alan 020 8989 4898

Sun 21st - Waterbird Count in Wanstead Park. Meet 10:00 a.m. by the tea hut in Wanstead Park. Contact Tim Harris tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Wed 24th – Friends of Wanstead Parklands AGM. Golf Club. 7.00pm. Wren stall
www.wansteadpark.org.uk

Thurs 25h: Bramble clearing in the Bluebell Wood. Meet 10.00am in the Wood near the Temple. Bring gloves and secateurs. Contact: Alan 020 8989 4898

March

Sun 6th – Practical work. Meet the Temple, Wanstead Park. Time 10am – 12.30

Thurs 10th - Wren Group's Lucky Dip walks - between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Bring a snack lunch and drink, Oyster/Freedom Pass etc! Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Peter Aylmer on peteraylmer@hotmail.com or 07884 235784.

Sat 12th - Wanstead Nature Club for Children. Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats - 10.00 a.m. Cost: £1.50 per child. Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Sun 13th - Waterbird Count in Wanstead Park. Meet 10:00 a.m. by the tea hut in Wanstead Park. Contact Tim Harris tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Wed 16th Annual General Meeting. Wanstead Golf Club, 7.30pm. Howard Vaughan will give a presentation on the amazing Rainham Marshes RSPB reserve. Contact Tim Harris
tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Wren events diary

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 Naturalists Association http://www.bna-naturalists.org/

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

UK 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 ....

Want a wildlife course: Wren can help!

The Wren Group has set aside £500 to help its members learn more about wildlife.

We've done this so that more people are knowledgeable about local flora and fauna – especially important as we launch the Wanstead 1000 project to identify as many species as we can during 2016.

Any paid-up Wren member can apply. We'll give up to £25 to help with the cost of a wildlife course. Go with a friend and we'll fund both of you (as long as you're both members).

All we ask is that the course is relevant to our local wildlife (Himalayan flora won't count!) and that you share your new-found knowledge with the Group – maybe a piece in the newsletter, or a spot on one of our walks.

To apply, just email Tim Harris at tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk with details of the course and its cost and we'll take it from there. There is no deadline, but when the £500 fund is used up, there will be no more in 2016.

Contacts for courses include:

Essex Field Club: http://www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/
Essex Wildlife Trust: http://www.essexwtrecords.org.uk/event/courses2016
Field Studies Council: http://www.field-studies-council.org/individuals-and-families.aspx

It's worth checking other wildlife groups and adult education colleges too.

now & then

Were you right ?

Bushwood Road at the turn of the last century and how it looks today. Note the maid cleaning the windows (top left) in the older pic.