

Autumn 2017

wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

- Page 02 - A Word from the Chair - Tim Harris with a few words
- Page 03 - Wild Flowers by the Roadside - Article by Paul Ferris
- Page 07 - Getting Your Hands Dirty - practical work with Peter Williams
- Page 08 - Breakfast with the Birds - article by local resident Elisa Brady
- Page 10 - Trees in a Landscape - Second photographic exhibition at the Temple
- Page 11 - Bug Life - Pictures and commentary by Rose Stephens
- Page 13 - Downe South - Walk and Talk with Peter Aylmer
- Page 15 - Walking in London by Peter Aylmer - Book review by Kathy Baker
- Page 27 - Early Autumn Bird Report by Tim Harris
- Page 20 - Wanstead Nature Club - Update by Rebecca Wynn
- Page 21 - Lee Valley - Walk and Talk by Jackie Morrison
- Page 24 - Country Rambles - Tales of walks in our area when it was countryside
- Page 26 - One for sorrow, two for joy - Magpie by Tony Morrison
- Page 30 - The Magpie - Poem by Rebecca Kate Summers
- Page 31 - August Bank Holiday in the Park - History by Tony Morrison
- Page 33 - The Night Shift - Moth Report by Tim Harris
- Page 36 - Events Diary
- Page 37 - Useful links
- Page 38 - Autumn with Tricia Moxey



a word from the chair

The popular view of fungi is probably that they contribute to a nice mushroom omelette from time to time. And some are pretty to look at. While both statements are true, fungi are probably one of the easiest of the biological kingdoms to justify (as if we had the right to justify anything).

Without the interactions of fungi with the roots of plants, 90 percent of the latter would not be able to obtain all the nutrients they need. We would not have flower-rich meadows or woodlands. And without their role as recyclers supreme, a suffocating layer of plant refuse would cover the soil. All supposedly 'higher' forms of life depend on fungi.

I was recently asked to write a short article on the fungi of the City of London Cemetery and turned to Paul Ferris's excellent *Wanstead Wildlife* website as part of my research. Although I'm not aware of any serious survey work on the cemetery's fungi, Paul (along with local expert Tricia Moxey and others) has accumulated a list of about 100 species there. Significantly, in the cemetery we know of ten different types of 'CHEG' fungi, those that thrive on 'waxcap grasslands' – areas of short, regularly mown grass that have not been artificially fertilized. This is an endangered habitat in the UK! In October 2015, one of Tricia's walks for the Wren Group almost by accident stumbled across one of these areas. Everyone was amazed by the kaleidoscopic hues on show – scarlet, orange, yellow, violet, green, black and beige toadstools, 'clubs' and 'fingers'. So how about organising some survey work in the CoL Cemetery? How many other species could we find? Maybe we could register it as our local waxcap grassland!

This episode once again demonstrates

the wealth of biodiversity in our area. At the time of writing 2017 has proved to be memorable locally. David Carr's thorough studies have uncovered 79 different kinds of spider on Wanstead Flats this year, with some autumn arachnids yet to appear. James Heal has photographed in excess of 50 different plant galls species. A total of 27 different butterflies appears to be a record for a single year, and we are only a few short of the record number moths seen in a calendar year – more than 300 and counting.

With so many depressing stories related to the state of our planet, it's nice to have some good news from 'home'. Let's record it, and conserve it.

Tim Harris
Chair Wren Group



autumn trees

The autumn colours are in full swing now, so if you wanted a good reason to dust off your camera and take it for a walk then this is it.

In response to the shorter days, the leaves of the deciduous trees are now changing colour from green to golden brown, yellow or red. It's one last dramatic show as they begin to shut down for their winter sleep.

The trigger for this beautiful display is the reduced number of daylight hours. In response to the reduced light the pipework, which connects the leaves to the trees, is sealed off. With no more nutrients flowing to the leaf the chlorophyll breaks down and the autumn colours shine through.

Early morning and late afternoon is usually the best time to

photograph the autumn colours. When the sun is low in the sky you'll see the light shining through the full width of the trees, plus you'll get some fantastic shadows. As a general rule it's best to photograph outdoors when your shadow is longer than you are. But regardless of the time of day, being outside, walking in the autumn sunshine, photographing these beautiful colours is hard to beat.

When you have captured that magic moment - why not join in the Wren Photo Exhibition. Remember pictures need to be of good resolution so that we can enlarge them for display (see page 10 for more details)

Tony Morrison (editor)
email - wreeditor@talktalk.net



wild flowers by the roadside

(and other not-so-wild places)

On the way to a favourite local wildlife area, perhaps Wanstead Park or Flats, or Bush Wood or a local park – it's surprisingly easy in the enthusiasm to get there to overlook all the wildlife you may be passing on the way.

Take a look at the often overlooked with local naturalist Paul Ferris



It is sad that, apart from a relatively few exceptional local places, we don't experience the wealth of – for example – wild flowers that can sometimes be seen in visits elsewhere. I'm thinking perhaps particularly in how devoid almost all of Epping Forest is of quantities of wild flowers, and this includes even Wanstead Park and other nearby Forest areas. The reasons for this are many, and I won't go into the negative ones that I have expressed to individuals and mention from time to time on my website, and which I believe could be improved with better local management and care.



Pineapple Mayweed - picture by Paul Ferris

No, the idea of this article is to once again try to give a little idea of what there is actually around us – despite the odds! On the way to that park, the road-sides and the front-walls of gardens harbour a variety of plants, either spontaneously occurring or escaping from adjacent front gardens. Those at the

base of front walls or otherwise on the pavements do suffer from periodic weed-killing sprays courtesy of our councils, and without this management it's fair to admit that things could get out of hand. But some of the plants to be found there are remarkably resilient and persist in coming back from seed or otherwise. Some species even seem to thrive on the wear and tear – or foot-pounding – that they experience, and Pineapple Weed *Matricaria matricarioides* is a good example of this. This low-growing member of the daisy family grows typically in the cracks between paving stones or similar environments, and possibly because it has a flower devoid of petals might not be seen to be so attractive. But pick a flower-head and smell it, and there is the pineapple – if the shape of the head isn't pineapple enough. Just a thought – maybe we shall be losing quantities of this species locally soon, as paving stones are increasingly giving way to a tarmac surface. Even the bare earth around street-trees is being replaced with what is known as permeable paving, a form of aggregate material that allows moisture to the base of the trees. On the other hand,



Herb Robert - picture by Paul Ferris



Black Medick - picture by Paul Ferris

in Wanstead many tree-surrounds have been taken into care and flowers planted and tended. At first this was in the form of guerilla gardening but is now countenanced by the council. One drawback from a botanical point of view might be that many of the plants to be found there are not native to the area and may give a false impression of what should (?) be around. Looks nice, though.



Yellow Corydalis, Capel Road - picture by Paul Ferris



Mind Your Own Business - picture by Paul Ferris

But back to naturally and accidentally occurring roadside plants. If I step outside of my front garden in Capel Road, adjacent to Wanstead Flats, I can immediately find one of my (many) favourite plants – Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*, which was the first plant I ever identified. The provenance of this specimen may well have been as a descendent from many, many years ago when I found a white form on a bridge over the Liffey in Dublin, and which



Trailing Bellflower - picture by Paul Ferris

somehow got transported to my garden. Also in the crumbling mortar of my old front wall grows Ivy-leaved Toadflax (main picture), *Cymbalaria muralis*. The provenance of this – locally and in Britain generally – is said to have been at North Ockendon. What is now Stubbers Adventure Centre was the



Hart's Tongue - Capel Road - picture by Paul Ferris

home from 1580-1627 of botanist William Coys, who established one of the earliest plant collections recorded in England, and which included Ivy-leaved Toadflax – a Mediterranean plant. This is now found throughout many parts of Britain. Similarly growing from cracks in the mortar, Yellow Corydalis *Corydalis lutea* is often found, its bright yellow flowers first appearing early in the year and flowering well into summer, as well as Trailing Bellflower *Campanula poscharskyana* – a very attractive member of the Campanula family and certainly often deliberately introduced into gardens before it makes its way outside. At the base of my front-garden wall is Mind-your-own-business *Soleirolia soleirolii*, with flowers so insignificant and tiny what you see is just a mass



Black Spleenwort - picture by Paul Ferris

of very small leaves. Much more obvious – although not a large plant, Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris* is common – it's seeds providing a clue to its common name. A casual walk along the road in early July showed all of those species plus the following: Broad-leaved Willowherb, Common Chickweed, Black Medick, Bramble, Smooth Sow-thistle and the familiar grass, Wall Barley.



Wall Rue, Capel Road - picture by Paul Ferris

On a particular wall along the road there is a selection of ferns. The species are the fairly common hereabouts Hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium*, Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* and Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*. These houses face north, and are therefore shaded from much of the Sun, which may help the development of ferns. Apart perhaps for Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, ferns are not common anywhere locally, so it is quite remarkable that in this one spot all of these are growing together, and I have no reason to believe that they were deliberately introduced to that wall. Nearby there is yet another fern species, Polypody *Polypodium vulgare* which is growing on top of the wall of the Golden Fleece pub.

“Road-sides and the front-walls of gardens harbour a variety of plants, either spontaneously occurring or escaping from adjacent front gardens”.

Continuing towards the Manor Park end of Capel Road, Pellitory-of-the-wall *Parietaria judaica* begins to make a distinct appearance. This species has been increasing during recent years, perhaps helped by a lessening of the pavement plant-poisoning routine nowadays. The long wall between Whitta Road and Gladding Road has the opportunity to harbour a selection of species and this includes even a specimen of Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster* sp., which has persisted for a couple of years despite the occasional weed-killer sprays. On the way to Wanstead Park in August, right in the kerb of Wanstead Park Avenue, I spotted an unusual-looking plant. I thought sedge,



Three-cornered Leek - Wanstead Meadow - picture by Paul Ferris

and that it proved to be, but a somewhat extravagant-looking one. I had found it once before locally, not that far away – but a few years – and by Alexandra Lake. Lake-sides are a more usual habitat for this plant, Pale Galingale *Cyperus eragrostis*. It does help that in this case Redbridge Council had not poisoned the road-sides too frequently – although a day later they did!

Some of the plants have – as already mentioned – escaped from planting in front gardens. Some find their way from the back gardens, usually aided by humans eager to dispose of perhaps more rampant ones. An excellent example of this has begun to appear not only occasionally at the house- side of the road, but even on the Wanstead Flats side. This is Three-cornered Leek *Allium triquetrum*, a white, attractive and somewhat bluebell-like flower, but with triangular stems. This highly invasive species is a menace, and is a serious pest in Cornwall and Devon where it is superseding even the native Wild Onion – a species we don't really have locally. Once invading a garden it is almost impossible to eradicate, resilient to weed-killers and leaving small reproducing bulbils

if you try to dig or pull it up. Alternatively, also on the Flats but originating probably from houses, is a large patch of Sweet Violet *Viola odorata* – not so invasive and a nice sight, and smell. There is a big patch of that on the banks of Manor Park station, by the way. I say is – but the major renovation works that are taking place there might mean that they will not persist. A nice Hart's-tongue fern is growing out of the brickwork on the south side of the station, though – and that could hang on!



Sweet Violet - picture by Paul Ferris

It would be quite easy to go on listing all of the wildflowers that may be found in the streets, and there are certainly a lot more that are very commonly found. But to do so would become boring and unnecessary. Better to just have a look for yourself next time you are walking along on the way to the park – or the shops. Possibly when your on the way to the bus or train roadside wildflowers are best avoided. They could make you late for work.



Article and pics by Paul Ferris

getting your hands dirty



Wren's practical conservation work takes place in the winter from October to March, first Sunday of the month, and midweek most Thursdays 10-12.30.



We carry out a variety of tasks including clearing scrub; keeping paths open; and various pieces of work requested by the City of London where they do not have the resources or where their machines cannot go. Some tasks suit an approach with hand tools, and keen volunteers. For example we are clearing alder re-growth on the banks of the Ornamental Waters in Wanstead Park.



Wren has built up a good reputation with the City and we are trusted to get on with key tasks. One of our main achievements over recent years has been to extend the area in Chalet Wood where the bluebells show, perhaps by 30% over 15 years. We have also laid timber edgings to delineate the paths in the bluebells to reduce trampling. This winter we hope to get the City to supply us with some larger logs to make this even more effective.



You need no particular expertise or strength to join us as we can adapt work to all levels. We supply tools and gloves. We just need some basic enthusiasm and a willingness to get a bit muddy. It is a great way to keep fit, get some fresh air and meet other Wren Group members.



To join the group contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07947 819472 or e-mail wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com

A small yellow and blue bird, possibly a Great Tit, is perched on a black wire bird feeder. The feeder contains several large, round, orange and white seed balls. The bird is facing left, looking towards the seed balls. The background is a dark, out-of-focus green, suggesting a garden setting.

breakfast with the birds

Article by Elisa Brady, Wanstead resident

I started feeding the garden birds one summer with bird seed and mixed nuts into plastic hanging bird feeders. The little birds turned up in good numbers. It was the resident Robin and mainly a flock of Great Tits and a few Blue Tits that would gather in the rose-hip bush that comes from next door's garden and overhangs into my garden. It was from this bush that extends about 6 feet across that I had hung my two bird feeders. After a while watching them feed I noticed how civilised they were. Having taken some seeds they would fly up to the top of the bush and then work their way down in an orderly queue, seemingly taking turns and going back for more.

Things changed when the squirrels turned up. At first they are so cute and lovely to watch, very sweet eating with their paws, but they have a huge appetite and it wasn't long before they moved from clearing up dropped food below the feeders, to emptying the bird feeders.



Blue tit feeding - dawn and dusk are the key times of day to ensure there is food available, especially during these colder months.

I discovered the cheap plastic variety could easily be gnawed by the squirrels. Sometimes the bottom of the feeder was missing and seeds were all over the floor. Another day the top was destroyed and barely hanging. A few times the entire thing was just on the floor, where they have pushed it off the branch. I came up with a plan, I decided to extend the feeding area and bought more robust metal bird feeders and cable ties, but also a squirrel feeder and some peanuts for them too. We have brick columns between the fence panels every 6 feet. These make a great platform for feeding, so a couple in either direction got topped with a handful of peanuts.

Civility resumed, the squirrels were happy with their nuts and the birds were happy with their seeds and suet pellets.

After a while I noticed new visitors in the garden, attracted by the nuts on the brick columns. Larger birds came, Magpies, Jays and Wood Pigeons became regulars collecting nuts and returning frequently. Patiently waiting on the adjoining apple tree if it was busy. The Wood Pigeons like to take their time and the squirrels are not so patient. Cue a bit of wing slapping to squirrel antics. I got a couple more larger feeders to hang on the branches of the apple tree and the plum tree extending the feeding area further.

A carabiner clip is very convenient for clipping the feeders onto branches and taking them down again for cleaning. I use a bird friendly cleaning spray and rinse it off weekly. Once a month, the containers go in the dishwasher. The rose-hip bush and its seed/sunflower/suet/mealworm feeders are the main draw for small birds. It's interesting to see their preferences when you put out a selection of food. Surprisingly bird seed are the least favourite. Also noticed the squirrel proof cages are less popular with the birds. I have seen Blackcaps, Nuthatches, Goldfinches, Long-tailed Tits, Blue Tits, Great Tits, House Sparrows, Chaffinches, Starlings, Blackbirds, woodpeckers and Robins. Numbers increase through the autumn and winter as migrants come from Europe and our countryside to our towns and cities. Apparently it's warmer here and they know the British are fond bird feeders. Whether I'm in the garden or in the kitchen looking out it's lovely to see so much life surviving out there and watching them having fun too.

Article by Elisa Brady
Pics by Tony Morrison



It's winter – and for those regular and more lasting readers of this newsletter you know that means my reminding you all that it's time to look to our feathered friends and extend to them a helping hand during the colder months.

I know many of you regularly feed garden birds but it is good to supplement their birds' diet with extra food in the winter. This can be a real life-saver in harsh weather. What benefits the birds also benefits us with the addition of beautiful wild creatures and hours of entertainment.

People have fed birds for many years simply for their own pleasure, but there is more to it than that. The massive loss of habitat in the wider countryside has meant that birds have retreated back to where there is still food - surviving hedgerows, nature reserves and privately owned wildlife friendly areas – of which gardens form the major part.

There is also an important knock-on effect for the organic gardener – birds will get used to searching for food in your garden and will search for greenfly, caterpillars and snails during the rest of the year.

Bird Feeding Tips

- ☐ Provide fresh clean water every day
- ☐ Give kitchen scraps like cheese, cooked potato and bread.
- ☐ Clear up uneaten food at the end of the day as it could attract rats.
- ☐ Avoid giving salted nuts and only give peanuts from a good supplier.
- ☐ Clean feeding areas regularly to prevent any disease.

For more detailed information on how to feed our feathered friends look online or go to

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/makeahomeforwildlife/advice/helpingbirds/feeding/>



trees in a landscape

Second photographic exhibition at the temple

The Wren Group 'Wanstead 1,000' photo exhibition at the Temple proved very popular. The entries were first class and it was very hard to choose 21 photos which show the wonderful range of flora and fauna in the Wanstead area.

As we are so talented we are going to do it again! Entries are invited from members of the Wren Group and also the Friends of Wanstead Parklands.

This time the exhibition theme will be **TREES**. Not just stand-alone mature trees in all their beauty, but trees as part of the eco system: trees exhibiting the birds, insects and fungi which depend on them, trees in their different seasons, details of tree structure such as bark and leaves, trees and how people interact or use them, and trees as one part of the whole landscape. The area covered should be Wanstead Parklands and also Epping Forest.

Unfortunately pictures taken on a phone cannot be accepted as they do not enlarge well, so please use a camera and take as high quality images as possible.

All entries chosen for the exhibition will receive an enlarged copy of their photograph. Closing date for entries: **Tuesday October 31st**

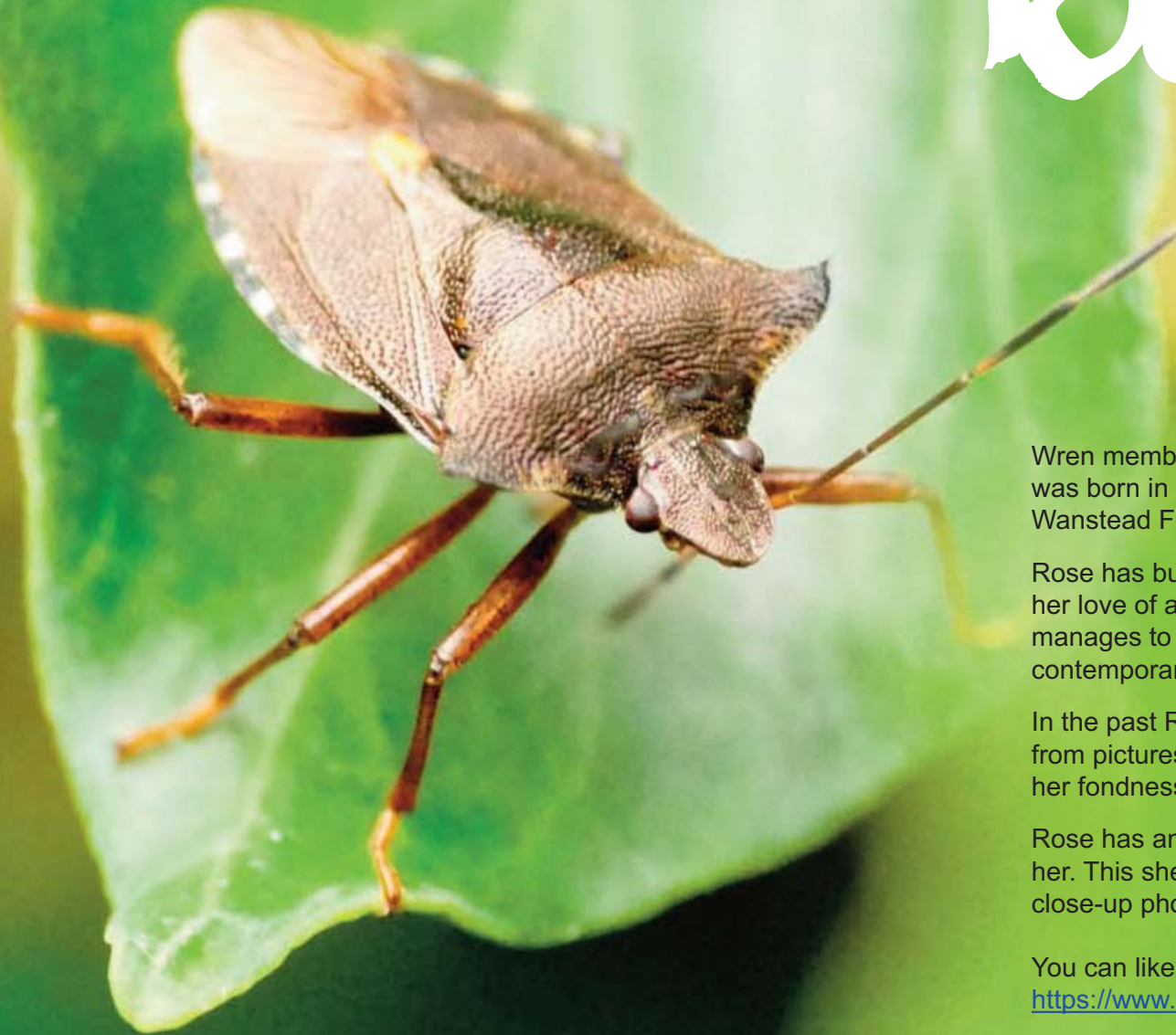
Please submit entries to Tony Morrison: wreneditor@talktalk.net

If you send in large files can you please send me one picture at a time. Also, can you send me a separate email telling me what you have sent so that i know that i have received them. I will always acknowledge your email if i receive one.

We also ask that people sending in their pictures agree to the Wren Group using them for publicity and reproduction.

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.

You can like Rose's work on her Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/TheNatureofWansteadFlats>



*Have a look for the Ivy Bee (*Colettes hederae*) which is on Ivy on Wanstead Flats and Manor Park Cemetery at the moment, this bee seems to be spreading quite quickly and has only been here since 2001.*

Ichneumon wasp on Ivy, Wanstead Flats



Red Admirals were flying in September, especially around the Ivy on Wanstead Flats.

*Nature is forever adaptable - Here an *Araneus diadematus* Spider makes its home in a clothes peg*



Hornet on Ivy flower, Wanstead Flats

These robberflies have such great camouflage. I think this one had just caught a morsel and was otherwise engaged. It was low down in the grass on Wanstead Flats.



downe south

Our new series of nature rambles is now well under way, taking Wren members to some of London's great places for wildlife. This summer, we've been exploring south London, writes walk leader Peter Aylmer.



Charles Darwin: HMS *Beagle*, Galapagos finches, hence the theory of evolution. It's a nice clean line to arguably the greatest creation of the Victorian mind, but also a myth. Much of Darwin's conclusive research took place, not on an archipelago off the Ecuadorian coast, but in the meadows and valleys surrounding his home, Down House.



On Downe Bank

And you can still walk amongst them. They're on London's southern fringe now, though were solidly in rural Kent when he first moved there in 1842. From our part of the world, it's perfectly feasible to get to the village of Downe by public transport – there are buses from the stations at Orpington and Bromley, if a tad infrequent – but our nature ramble, on a hot sultry day in early July, started from nearby Farnborough.

From its pretty churchyard we walked first through the High Elms country park. Crossing farmland beyond, we had an unexpected view of distant

London, before a sharp dip into a downland hanger – this is chalk country, just like southern Sussex – and, on the rise above it, Darwin's 'orchis bank', or Downe Bank as it is known today.

It was on this very patch of coppice and sheep-grazed grassland that Darwin would gain an understanding, in literally microscopic detail, of how insects pollinate plants, and hence co-evolve with them. So unspoilt it remains that he could still do so: in other words, some latter-day Darwin could reconstruct his theories by close observation across this 12 acres of outer London.



Summer wildlife on Downe Bank

For us, it was a privilege to be able to walk slowly and with light touch amongst the orchids and grasses, moths and butterflies, bees and leafhoppers whose ancestors many generations ago had passed beneath the great naturalist's eye.

Down House is a mile from Downe Bank, with the village in between. We didn't have time to go inside



Back garden of Down House

the house – it's very much worthwhile if you have the time – but we did peek in its back garden, which is crowded with plants descended from those Darwin cultivated in his still-extant greenhouse, and stroll through the adjacent meadow whose soil he once improved. We looked along the Sandwalk, a little fir-lined path that gave him time to think some of the most revolutionary thoughts that any scientist has ever had, and had a glimpse of another nature reserve, the rough grassland above the West Kent golf course.

Our August walk – a near-record 15 walkers – couldn't match that for historic import, but proved no less fascinating. We got ourselves to Bexley, again close to the London/Kent border, and took off to Joyden's Wood and the water-meadows of the River Cray; two very varied habitats for the price of one.

August is a good time to visit that ancient woodland as it's one of the best places in London to see

heather at its purple-blooming best, in a little clearing at the centre of the wood. Nearby is a relic of the Faesten Dic, an earthwork dug by the Saxons of Kent to protect themselves from the dispossessed of newly-derelict Londinium; an early anti-gentrification device, if you will.



August heather in Joyden's Wood

We came down to the five-arched bridge on the River Cray, a popular place for picnics and we happily joined in. This stretch of the Cray has escaped the



In the water-meadows of the Cray

pressure it has suffered elsewhere, and switching banks after lunch, we found ourselves in a hidden willow-flanked meadow that no-one else seemed to know. Beyond, a couple of little reed-choked ponds were humming with insect life,

and even as suburbia came closer, we were treated to an afternoon display of sunflowers on our way back home.

Walk and Talk by Peter Aylmer



Nature Ramble dates

Wednesday 18 October and Thursday 7 December. Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Just turn up, no need to book. Bring a snack, drink and Oyster or Freedom Pass. Back about 4.30.

walking in london

Park, Heath and Waterside

Book by Peter Aylmer - Review by Kathy Baker

The Wren Group's very own 'Nature Ramble' leader Peter Aylmer has written a book on his popular rambles around the London area. Wren members have contributed greatly to checking out the routes - which include Wanstead Flats and Park - and have helped with the photography too.

This new addition to the London walking book market, combines Peter Aylmer's practical experience of the walks included, with a thematic approach to different forms of wildlife to which each walk gives access.

Here, Wren committee member and keen walker, Kathy Baker reviews Peter's new book *Walking in London - Park, Heath and Waterside*

Publisher: Cicerone (ISBN: 978 1 85284 813 2) £12.95

<https://www.cicerone.co.uk/product/detail.cfm/book/813/title/walking-in-london#.WdYd1mhSxEY>

Peter emphasises that half of London is open space, making it one of the greenest cities on the planet. It is also a city of eight million people and also eight million trees; *'Its people speak 300 languages, while in its skies, the cries of 300 bird species may be heard'*. The purpose of the book is for us the reader, the walker and the wildlife enthusiast *'to invert (our) view of London - to see it not as a city for human, but as a range of habitats for wildlife - and this is incontrovertibly best done on foot*

Walking in London presents the detail of 25 walks organised in four geographical areas of London: East: Essex to the Lea; North: Lea to the Brent; West: Brent to the Wandle; and South: East of the Wandle. The guide explores some of the best known tourist highlights en route such as the Royal Parks (Walk 10) and Hampstead Heath (Walk 11) but also the lesser known areas of Enfield Chase such as Whitewebbs Wood and Trent County Park (Walk 7) and Selsdon Woods in Croydon.(Walk 21).

“This book should certainly be the first crucial item in our kit as we set off to enjoy the natural riches of walking in London’s green spaces! ”.

Each walk outline with its briefing notes on the highlights that will be on view is also accompanied by a description of a wildlife species that will be found in each case. Examples include the Black Poplar tree in Dagenham (Walk 2), the Eurasian Coot on the Regent’s Canal (Walk 8), the Fallow Deer in Bushy Park (Walk 16), and the Greater Yellow-Rattle on Farthing Down and Happy Valley (Walk 20). Almost every walk includes a visit to a nature reserve.

The four sections of walks are preceded by an introduction that has two functions. The first is to provide background on the geology of London and the history of its green spaces. We discover for example, that London is built on impermeable clays to the south and north- west, and gravel toppings appear throughout. Each of these, combined with the flow of London’s numerous rivers, give rise to different habitats, and contribute to a diversity of wildlife that is apparent still today.



Despite the increasing population of London from the 19th Century, with railways *'enabling new suburbs to be carved out of green fields, woods and market gardens...open space survives by a mixture of private benevolence, public planning... and the often very active and direct role that Londoners themselves have played'*. Peter gives further information on how the city’s open spaces came to be preserved, and what we can do as walkers to ensure that this green legacy survives for future generations.

The second function of the introduction is to cover practical issues related to embarking on these walks around London.

These include guidance on the best times of the year to go, getting around on public transport and what kinds of equipment and other items to take. Specific information on refreshments is included in each walk section.

Peter Aylmer’s book is very well written; it is primarily written to be used as a walking guide but it is an interesting and informative read in itself, and it a useful London reference book even if it is never used as a practical walking resource. The background sections on the parks and other green spaces are succinct but give people a relevant insight into the history of where they are walking, or an idea for a future visit to that place to find out more. The book is a pleasure to read and peruse, with its consistency of layout, the clarity of its guidance and the beauty of its variety of maps and photographs.

And its value added to the existing London walk book market? As you would expect, this is a well researched book. I have been on at least two of the walks included, as part of the Wren Walking Group involved in testing and amending the walk details ahead of publication, and other Wren members will have been on more. It also draws on other well established walks, including the Capital Ring. However, Peter puts his own stamp on the walks in his book in the way that he links walking with green spaces and their history, with other sites of historical and cultural importance and with different kinds of wildlife. It is a practical yet rich resource for a range of walkers (many of the walks give longer and shorter distance options) which people will find very valuable.

Kathy Baker
(Wren committee member)



late summer bird report

“June and July are two of the quietest months of the year for birds, but there is always room for a surprise or two”.

”

report by Tim Harris



Common Tern, Wanstead Park - pic by Tony Morrison

The Exodus Begins

Sally Hammond heard the summer's only Cuckoo in Wanstead Park on 10 June, and Tony Brown found a Little Ringed Plover by Alexandra Lake on 25th.



An adult Common Tern at Jubilee Pond. Pic by Tony Brown

A female or young Common Redstart on Wanstead Flats on 2 July was an odd record, and was the Common Sandpiper at Perch on 8th a failed breeder from elsewhere? Autumn's first returning Wheatear was on the Flats on 20 July, and a Swallow flew over ten days later. Red Kites were seen on two dates in July, and single Common Terns were seen at the Shoulder of Mutton and Jubilee ponds in late July and early August.

Otherwise, this period was mainly about breeding birds. Probably most popular were the Green



A juvenile Black-headed Gull at Jubilee Pond. Pic by Tony Brown

Woodpecker nestlings being fed in a hole near Shoulder of Mutton in late June. The Cetti's Warbler continued to sing until 6 June in the Old Sewage Works but there was no evidence of it finding a mate, let alone breeding. Three calling Nuthatches in Wanstead Park later in the month were almost certainly a family group, and two Reed Warblers



A Garden Warbler on Wanstead Flats in August. Pic by Tony Brown

sang in the reeds around Shoulder of Mutton on a couple of dates in July. Chiffchaff and Lesser Whitethroat families were seen. Increasing numbers of Black-headed Gulls in the area included some juveniles, indications of breeding success at their coastal colonies.

In contrast, August is always an exciting month, as the autumn exodus of southbound migrants begins.



Skylark on Wanstead Flats in August. Pic by Nick Croft

Some birds use our area as a feeding station for a few days; others don't even stop but fly straight through. For example, there was a massive clear-out of Swifts at the end of July and the start of August, with 300-400 zooming east on 5 August. That date, birders counted at least 15 Willow Warblers, two Garden Warblers, 24 Common Whitethroats and a Yellow Wagtail on the Flats.

There was a summer peak count of 14 Skylarks. A week later, a Common Sandpiper was at Alex and on

13 August there was another female or young Common Redstart and two Spotted Flycatchers on the Flats, while two Yellow Wagtails flew over. Two more Spotted Flycatchers were hawking insects on the Flats on 19th, and on the same day a Wheatear stopped off on its way south and six Yellow Wagtails flew over.

At the end of the month Rob Sheldon found three Little Owls on one branch in one of the copses on the Flats – the first positive evidence of breeding in recent times. A Green Sandpiper touched down briefly by Jubilee Pond just as a Wren Group walk was looking for dragonflies there on 27th. Such moments of serendipity are always memorable. Around this time Bob Vaughan counted no less than 12 Spotted Flycatchers on the Flats, but the peak count of Whinchats was just three. A handful of Tree Pipits and Wheatears and maybe a dozen Yellow Wagtails



Several Whinchats were spotted on Wanstead Flats - Pic by Nick Croft

passed through on migration in late August and early September. James found the autumn's only Pied Flycatcher, on 28 August. It was not a great autumn for Common Redstarts, but a particularly showy first-



September showed returning of winter duck in Wanstead Park with 62 Gadwall and 8 Teal on the September waterbird count - Gadwall pic by Tim Harris

winter male late in September was a star bird. The waterbird count on 11 September produced evidence of returning winter duck in Wanstead Park: 62 Gadwall and eight Teal. These were joined later in the month by Wigeon – 10 on 29th and 24 by 2 October. Jono counted 53 Egyptian Geese on the Flats at the end of September; there has been a dramatic upsurge in numbers this year and this is a site record. The first Water Rail of autumn was watched feeding in the open on the west side of Shoulder of Mutton pond on the waterbird count of 8 October. For lariphiles, two Yellow-legged Gulls were

seen fairly regularly in late September and early October.



Woodlark - Pic by Nick Croft

Late September and October is the time for visible migration. Some 150+ Swallows were counted over the flats on 24 September, a female Ring Ouzel was seen briefly there two days later, the first Redwing of autumn was picked out on a Leyton Flats vis-mig watch by Stuart Fisher, and on 4 October 36 Chaffinches and seven Lesser Redpolls flew west across Wanstead Flats. Two days later the Lesser Redpoll fly-over count increased to around 20 and eight Stonechats were distributed over the Flats that day – a record count for recent years. Siskins were back in Wanstead Park in early October.

Report by Tim Harris



Wanstead nature club

The other day, I asked my son what he wanted for his fourth birthday. A magical leaf adventure, he said. Of course there were lots of other things he requested - mainly Lego related - but I like his sentiment. Autumn is the perfect time for a magical leaf adventures.

Already the horse chestnut trees are losing their leaves and a bounty of conkers are falling to the pavements, ready to be seized by little fingers. Oak trees are losing acorns and the squirrels are looking busier.

Given that – it seems appropriate that next Wanstead Park Children's Nature Club will be focusing on trees and their leaves – and the leaf crunching wonderful possibilities they give us in autumn.

It seems a whole world away from our summer Nature club where we found crickets in the long grass on a baking summer day and it will be great to discover how the sessile oak we searched for mini-beasts around is faring the new season. Will we find acorns around it or will the squirrels have beaten us?

The club will be held on Sunday 29th October between 1pm - 2.30pm - and is aimed at children between 2-7 years old. We will meet at the Temple, Wanstead Park at 12.45pm and the cost is £3.50 per child.

There will be an autumnal nature trail and crafts and stories celebrating the season. We hope to see you and your children there!

Report by Rebecca Wynn



lee valley walk

Walk and Talk by Jackie Morrison

On a sunny September 25th seven Wren members set out to explore the ever-changing historic and natural landscapes of the Lee Valley. All enjoyed an easy interesting walk with coffee, comfort stops and friendly companions.



From Bromley by Bow we walked to nearby Three Mills, an unexpected oasis of historic mills set beside the River Lee and Lee Navigation.



The Wrens walking the Lee Valley last September

Heading down its cobbled ramp, we took the towpath northward. Across the water we saw that old polluted industrial land at Sugar House Lane was being transformed to provide a new community of 1,200



White Mallow - pic by Jackie Morrison

homes, a 350 bed hotel, creative businesses and riverside access. Ikea are the developers but, thankfully, houses will not come in a self-assembly flat pack!

We passed below the busy Bow flyover, with dereliction to one side, the Olympic Park to the other. But the towpath is a haven colonised by nature. Among the many plants we identified were colourful cornflower, chicory, poppy, toadflax, tansy, hops and dead-nettle, but one stumped us...since verified by Tricia Moxey as white mallow. Coot and moorhens swam the canal. Cormorants and wagtails perched on roofs.

Canals were dug for barges to transport the heavy cargoes that fuelled the booming industries of the 18th and 19th centuries. We passed "Ducketts Cut", constructed in 1830 to improve the canal route to London via the Regents Canal. To recoup his costs Duckett charged a shilling per ton of cargo. These were the motorways, by-passes and tolls of yesteryear.



Canals were the motorways of the 18th and 19th century. Built by hand even today they need much maintenance to keep them navigable - picture shows a dredger at Old Ford - pic by Jackie Morrison

At Old Ford we watched a dredger use the lock. Walking below four huge pipes, we considered the thought that these carried waste from all the toilets of

North East London to Beckton sewage treatment works.



Pipes carrying waste from North-East London to Beckton Sewage Works. The route now known as the Greenway - pic by Jackie Morrison

Atop is the euphemistically rebranded "Greenway". Further on we saw that former industrial lands are being reused for waterside living, leisure and creative business. New apartments had sprouted along our route, in the landmark Bryant and May factory of



Pipes carrying waste from North East London to Beckton Sewage Works. The route now known as the Greenway - pic by Jackie Morrison

“match girl’s strike” fame and where Percy Dalton’s peanut factory once stood and Lesney’s matchbox toys were made. A survival, however, is Forman’s Salmon factory, now in striking new premises.



The re-use of houseboats, barges and old buildings - pic by Jackie Morrison

The many houseboats, old buildings occupied by small temporary and alternative uses against a backdrop of strident graffiti were a social and political commentary on contemporary times.

At the hipster Crate Brewery, which exemplifies this new culture, we stopped for lunch.



Once industrial buildings now offering a more ‘hipster’ culture - pic by Jackie Morrison

Walking onward, a greener landscape unfolded. We called by at the Middlesex Filter Beds Reserve. The beds were a great Victorian “invention” that sorted one of London’s greatest problems, cholera, by filtering water to make it healthy to drink. Redundant since 1969, the site now provides different habitats for nature set within reminders of its unique heritage.

Finally at Clapton, where the Lee Navigation and River meet, we savoured unexpected semi-rural tranquillity and enjoyed watching a line of swans glide by. We finished by walking back across the park between towering Victorian Plane trees to afternoon replenishment at one of Clapton upcoming cafes.

Yes, both the River Lee towpath and Clapton, are surprisingly well worth a visit!

Article and pics by Jackie Morrison



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.



country rambles

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.



Route 13

From Barkingside trams, Fencepiece Road, Hainault Road, Chigwell Village, Vicarage Lane, Chigwell Road, Grange Hill. (61 miles)

One of the most delightful walks in the neighbourhood of Ilford is that now described. Chigwell is a typical English Village with a typical Essex church, and with a fine old inn. It is a place of which poets might sing, a place of quiet and peaceful repose, where the birds warble in the pure, free air, and where everybody knows everybody else.



Chigwell Hill and St. Mary's Church around the time of Tasker's rambles

It affords some splendid views of hills and vales, across which the wind sighs in summer and whistles or howls in winter; often when Ilford is wrapt in mist and gloom Chigwell is bathed in sunshine. It is a lovely spot, and was described by Dickens as "the greatest place in the world." From the tram terminus at Barkingside proceed along the High Street to Fullwell Hatch, and up Fencepiece Road to the top of Grange Hill as in Route 12. Crossing the road leading to Chigwell Row, continue-down Hainault Road

(formerly called Horn Lane) past the "Bald Hind" Hotel which 5 or 6 years ago was an old-fashioned country inn with a thatched roof. The cottage just beyond it was once a keeper's lodge also with a thatched roof, and in front of it stood one of the gates of Hainault Forest. Descending the lane, away to the left across the valley of the Roding lie - spread out in a fine panorama on the opposite slope Woodford Wells, Buckhurst Hill and Loughton. The effect is particularly fine when the sun is shining on these places. Almost at the bottom of the road is Chigwell Station (return day ticket from Ilford - 6d.) from which point some people may perhaps prefer to commence this ramble instead of taking the 40 minutes' walk from the trams. At the end of the road turn to the right (to the left takes to Woodford and Wanstead) towards the village which is soon reached.

St. Mary's Church has been much rebuilt, but the S. door is



The King's Head Public House - Chigwell

Norman, while the perpendicular windows are modern. Its timber spire is similar to many others in various parts of Essex, and it is approached under a fine avenue of yew trees. Close by is Chigwell Grammar School, founded by



Chigwell Post Office and Radleys around the time of Tasker's rambles

Archbishop Harsnet in 1629, with his coat of arms over the door. Opposite the church is the "King's Head" with its four gables, and chimneys set at an angle; an inn which carries us back to the Stuarts at least, if not to Henry VIII., and which has been made historic by Dickens in "Barnaby Rudge" under the name of the "Maypole"; it is one of the best specimens of its kind. From its mounting blocks it is said that Queen Elizabeth mounted on her horse after staying a night at the inn. On each side of the sign is the bust of Charles I. The inn is a favourite resort all the year round for pedestrians and travellers, and in the summer tea in the gardens at the back is a function not to be hurried over if one would enjoy the beautiful surroundings. It is sometimes known as "Bashams." At the end of the village street the road forks, that to the left goes on to Abridge (2 ½ miles), Passingford Bridge, and Ongar, but follow that to the right which leads up to Chigwell Row via Vicarage Lane in about a mile. To the left of the top of the lane are the Recreation Ground and Chigwell Row, but the nearest way to Ilford is to the right along Manor Road to Grange Hill Station, as described in Route 15. The distance from Ilford Station along the route described and back again is 12 miles.

one for sorrow, two for joy

Research and pics by Tony Morrison

Magpies are the birds that everyone loves to hate. It is difficult to find anyone who has a good word to say about these handsome rogues: in many peoples' eyes, magpies are the avian equivalents of the football hooligan. Once regarded with superstitious awe, today the unfortunate magpie has become an object of hate.

Magpies are often maligned as pests, but they're actually quite interesting birds that are usually overlooked for both their beauty and their intelligence.



Part of the problem with magpies, and the reason for their current unpopularity, is their huge increase in numbers over the last 30 years. Numbers have tripled, and they now occur commonly in areas where they were once absent. There are a number of reasons for this. One of the most significant has been the decline in traditional gamekeeping. Modern keepers are more concerned with rearing and releasing pheasants than controlling so-called vermin, so magpies are allowed to flourish in areas where once they would have been shot.



Magpies occur throughout the British Isles, but are absent from the Highlands, and almost all the Scottish Islands. Magpies were absent from Ireland until the end of the 17th century. There are now an estimated 320,000 territories there. Magpie over Wanstead Park

Historical confirmation of this fact comes from Simon Holloway, author of *The Historical Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*. A century ago, the magpie "endured systematic and concerted

persecution at the hands of many people that resulted in a dramatic reduction of the population in Britain. The reduction in numbers was so severe that late 19th century writers were contemplating its extinction in some areas."

Surprisingly, the car, rather than the gamekeeper, may well be the real reason behind the magpie's recent population explosion. Until relatively recently, numbers were probably kept in check by lack of food during the winter and early spring. (During the winter months the magpie's diet is mainly a mixture of vegetable matter and invertebrates.) The increase in the number of cars on the roads has led to a corresponding increase in wildlife road casualties, something the scavenging magpie appreciates. It is this new abundance of food that has allowed magpie numbers to grow so quickly.

Magpies and Superstition

Another reason for the apparent dislike of the magpie is superstition. Of all wild birds, it is probably the magpie that is most associated with bird superstitions. However, most superstitions regarding magpies are based around just one bird. Throughout Britain it is thought to be unlucky to see a lone magpie and there are a number of beliefs about what you should do to prevent bad luck.

In most parts of the UK people will salute a single magpie and say "Good morning Mr Magpie. How is your lady wife today?" By acknowledging the magpie in this way you are showing him proper respect in the hope that he will not pass bad fortune on to you. By referring to the magpie's wife you are also

implying that there are two magpies, which bring joy rather than sorrow according to the popular rhyme.

In Yorkshire magpies are associated with witchcraft and you should make a sign of the cross to ward off evil. And in Scotland a single magpie seen near the

The rhyme has its origins in superstitions connected with magpies, considered a bird of ill omen in some cultures, and in Britain, at least as far back as the early sixteenth century. The rhyme was first recorded around 1780 in a note in John Brand's Observations on Popular Antiquities on Lincolnshire with the lyric:

One for sorrow,
Two for mirth,
Three for a funeral
And four for birth

One of the earliest versions to extend this was published, with variations, in Michael Aislabie Denham's Proverbs and Popular Saying of the Seasons (London, 1846)

One for sorrow,
Two for mirth
Three for a funeral,
Four for birth
Five for heaven
Six for hell
Seven for the devil, his own self

On occasion, jackdaws, crows, and other Corvidae are associated with the rhyme, particularly in America where magpies are less common.

window of a house is a sign of impending death, possibly because magpies are believed to carry a drop of the devil's blood on their tongues or in another legend because magpies were the only bird that didn't sing or comfort Jesus when he was crucified.

Other things you can do to prevent the bad luck a lone magpie may bring include doffing your hat, spitting three times over your shoulder or even flapping your arms like wings and cawing to imitate the magpie's missing mate!

As the well known rhyme "One for sorrow, Two for joy, Three for a girl, Four for a boy, Five for silver, Six for gold, Seven for a secret never to be told." shows it is only seeing a lone magpie that brings bad luck and groups of magpies are said to predict the future. There are many different versions of this rhyme with some counting as high as 20 birds.

Like many other birds, magpies mate for life and this may be the inspiration for this rhyme. In some parts of the world magpies are not associated with bad luck at all. In Korea a popular magpie superstition has people believing that that the magpie can foretell when they will have visitors in the future. In China it is thought that the magpie's song will bring happiness and good luck and in some parts of China the magpie is considered a sacred bird.

Although it is not known why magpies have become associated with bad luck magpies are members of the crow family and like all crows are attracted to shiny objects and have the reputation of stealing jewellery. Rossini wrote a tragicomic opera entitled *La Gazza Ladra* (The Thieving Magpie) about a

French girl accused of theft who is tried, convicted and executed. Later the true culprit is revealed to be a magpie and in remorse the town organises an annual 'Mass Of The Magpies' to pray for the girl's soul.

Another reason for humans disliking magpies is that during breeding season they will sometimes supplement their diet of grubs, berries and carrion with eggs and baby birds. They have also been known to kill small pets such as guinea pigs. Studies have shown that magpies raiding nests have no effect on the populations of songbirds or game birds.

Six interesting facts about magpies

1. Magpies Don't Like Shiny Things - They're Scared of Them

Magpies have a reputation as thieves out to steal your shiny jewellery or take ornaments from your garden, but new research shows that flashy objects probably repel magpies. The myth seems to have built up without much science to back it up, but the truth could actually be useful.

Magpies are capable of wrecking crops by digging for grain, berries and other food, so along with other bird-scaring measures, placing shiny materials in fields might deter magpies and keep crops safe from being upturned and trampled.

2. Magpies Will Eat Almost Anything, Including Bird Eggs and Chicks

While their natural diet is quite broad — including insects, small rodents, grain and berries — magpies have been known to steal other birds' eggs, and even young chicks.



The Magpie is a cosmopolitan bird, its range extending from Portugal to Korea. It also occurs in North Africa.

In addition, magpies have adapted rather well to suburban living, so they'll often eat leftover food scraps. But it's better to provide them with proper bird food to ensure they don't eat anything poisonous.

3. Magpies Are Closely Related To Crows, Jays and Ravens

Though they may look quite a bit different at first glance, magpies belong to the bird family Corvidae, a group that includes crows, ravens, rooks, jackdaws and jays, as well as lesser recognized members

like treepies, choughs and nutcrackers.

As such, magpies are among the most intelligent family of birds recognised by modern science.

4. Magpies Recognize Themselves in Mirrors

European magpies have demonstrated the remarkable ability to recognize their own reflections in mirrors, something that was once thought to be a defining characteristic belonging only to humans. This might not sound that amazing, but out of countless species tested, only four ape species, bottlenose dolphins and Asian elephants have demonstrated this ability.



It takes a pair of magpies around 40 days to build their large, domed nest. A typical magpie clutch is six eggs. Only the female magpie incubates the eggs - it takes 24 days for them to hatch. Young magpies leave the nest around 27 days after hatching.

Scientists tested the magpies by placing a coloured mark on their necks - which did not hurt or cause skin irritation. Then when placed in a cage with

several mirrors, the birds were filmed scratching at their necks after looking at their reflections. With all other controls in place, this could only mean that magpies had recognized themselves in the mirrors. And not just that, the birds had differentiated between their normal physical state and their now-marked plumage.

For a really nerdy aside: Scientists believe that self-awareness in birds and certain mammals may be an example of convergent evolution, in which unrelated species evolve particular characteristics through different means. Another example of convergent evolution, and perhaps one of the best, is our very own set of camera eyes.

5. What Is A Group Of Magpies Called?

There are several names given to a group of magpies, but perhaps the most descriptive is “a parliament.” The birds have earned this title from often appearing in large groups in the spring, looking stately and cawing at each other.

6. To The End Of The Tail

A final fascinating fact relates to one of the defining features of a magpie. While they share some similarities with their corvid family, the magpies possess an extremely long tail. In fact, a magpie's tail is often roughly the same length as its entire body.

Why magpies have such long tails remains up for debate, but it may provide magpies with the ability to make swift turns while in the air. This would allow the birds to evade larger predators and make up for rather average flying abilities.

Walking down the street, your morning routine is interrupted by a flash of black and white wings, settling down on the street in front of you is a largish blackbird with a few white spots -- a magpie! Not wanting to ruin what could be a great day, you tip your hat and say, "Good morning Mr. Magpie. How is your lady wife today?" Congratulations - you've just warded off bad luck by saluting a magpie.

Saluting Magpies

Seems little strange, doesn't it, that saluting a bird could ward off bad luck? Yet in many parts of the United Kingdom spying a single magpie is considered an omen of bad fortune and saluting it is a way of showing the proper respect in hope that the magpie won't pass on some of the misfortune that follows it.

As magpies usually mate for life seeing one on its own is as sign of sorrow because it's lost it's mate, whereas if you see two it's is a sign of joy as it's with it's mate. This is why when you see a single magpie you ask after it's wife, thus suggesting it has a mate and is in fact happy - hence the rhyme one for sorrow , two for joy!

The Magpie

by Rebecca Kate Summers

I'll sit upon your rooftop
And cast my glittering gaze
Across your feeble landscape
That's lost in winter haze

I find your fears amusing
Superstitions make me smile
Count to seven, tip your hat
When I your thoughts beguile

I steal things that glimmer
Rings and keys and foil
I glide above your heads by day
While laughing at your toil

The swallow does not fly like me
The nightingale cannot match
The robin, dull by comparison
The sparrow easy to catch

I boast my blackened feathers
A blue-green shimmer to gleam
My obsidian eyes are priceless
The white of my breast like cream

Magpie on Wanstead Flats by Tony Morrison



august bank holiday in the park

An extract from the East Ham Echo, 5th August 1904:

Reading of the many thousands that flocked from West Ham and East Ham to the seaside, one would almost think for the moment that the districts were empty on Bank Holiday. But anyone who was out and about recognised that this was not the case. Despite the fact that the Great Eastern Railway carried 121,371 passengers to suburban stations, and the London and Tilbury, 40,000 to Southend, there were droves of people all over the district who were holiday-making close to home. The opening of the new line of municipal electric tram cars to Wanstead Flats saw every car packed; in fact, Monday must have made Mr. Blain's heart glad. Every recreation ground had its teeming multitudes, but the great thing seemed to be a visit to Wanstead Park.

With light fleecy clouds overhead which travelled slowly across the sky and veiled the face of the sun from time to time - with a soft wind blowing from the south, and rustling the trees in the groves, Wanstead Park on Monday was a glorious place for a holiday, and some thousands of people caught time by the forelock and revelled for hours in the beauties of that fine playground.



By ten o'clock the number of people in the park was not large, but after that time they arrived in hundreds. Tram after tram, at intervals of about three minutes, came gliding up from East Ham and Manor Park, and deposited loads of happy holiday-makers at the entrance of Wanstead Park Avenue. These people were augmented by the large number who walked to the park from Forest Gate, Leytonstone, Wanstead and Ilford, so that by mid-day, Wanstead Park was pleasantly full.



Wanstead Park 1904

The crowd - although a large one - was good-tempered and good-mannered. It was drawn from that strata of society who believe that, after all, enjoyment is not to be found in drinking and street singing. There in the quiet nooks beneath the trees, by the waterside, where the white and golden water-lilies swayed gently to and fro by the action of the breeze, in the glade, which commands a view of the lake beneath, could be seen groups of men, women and children enjoying the peacefulness of the scene.

Of course, the great attraction for the more boisterous of the children was paddling in the lake. Tiddlers had a lively day on Monday; the mere sight of one led to quite a commotion, and sometimes to a capture. And when this desirable end was



Wanstead Park 1928

brought about, the marmalade or pickle jar was requisitioned and tiddler was borne away to scenes anew. But when the tiddler refused to be beguiled, a forward movement was made on the small frogs - many of which were carried away in pickle bottles and delight to meet a speedy death in the dry and unsexuctive realm known as dad's garden, in order to complete a small boy's holiday.

Bank Holidays began with an Act of Parliament in 1871. There were four holidays and two 'Common Law' holidays (Good Friday and Christmas Day). Other days have been added since. The August Bank Holiday occurred on the first Monday of the month until 1971 since when it falls on the last Monday in August

When the sun had passed its meridian, and begun to throw shadows to the west, you could come across groups seated beneath the umbrageous foliage of the trees, and revelling in all the delights of a picnic. But some of those picnic baskets must have been terribly heavy if the sweat poured down father's face, and his ejaculatory expressions count for aught.

But there - ginger beer is enclosed in very heavy bottles. But when the cloth was spread and 'dad' had wiped his brow for the last time, all thought of the trouble departed. Then comes mother's turn, and - but who has not known the joys of a picnic in his or her youth?



Wanstead Park at the turn of the last century

In the ornamental water, where the angler is not allowed to play his seductive art, a crowd gathers to watch the movements of a shoal of small roach. They are "on the feed" as the anglers put it, and fight valiantly for the small pieces of bread which have been thrown in for the ducks. Their small tails stir to life the otherwise placid face of the waters, and the crowd on the bank hazards conjectures as to the species of the fish. But suddenly there is a whirr, and from the sedges on the opposite side of the pool, half flies, half swims, a coot, and seizes the pieces of bread nearest mid-stream. Back again goes the half-terrified bird - gay in its summer plumage - and a minute afterwards it can be seen sharing its prize with its more sombre mate.

These are but a few of the quiet amusements which helped to make the Bank Holidays a pleasant one for the many thousands who visited Wanstead Park.

Researched by Tony Morrison (*pics belong to author but he didn't actually take them*)



Butterflies and moths form an order of flying insects called the Lepidoptera. More than 180,000 species have been described worldwide, about 10 percent of these being butterflies. Doubtless, many more are as yet undiscovered – and doubtless many others face extinction. Butterflies get all the good press because they are easily seen during the day, are often colourful and are recognised as important pollinators. On the other hand, the public perception of moths is as nuisance pests that munch their way through the contents of the wardrobe.



the night shift

Report and pics by Tim Harris

Unseen and unappreciated, the vast majority of the UK's 2,500 moth species actually play an invaluable role in the natural world. As well as sustaining our bat populations and those of many birds, most moths are also pollinators. They also satisfy a naturalist's sense of wonder because each species has its own, unique life cycle, some of which are quite unexpected. Since the larval stage of a moth's lifecycle – the caterpillar – has specific dietary needs, moth diversity reflects an area's plant diversity.

There are more species of day flying moths in our area than there are of butterflies, but the even more numerous workers on the night shift are generally seen only if they fly in through a window on a sultry July night – or if you fire up a light-trap to attract them. Locally, several of us run light-traps with the aim of noting the moths that visit. At the time of writing, 296 moth species have been seen (and 27 butterflies as well) this



Green Silver-lines (*Pseudoips prasinana*)

year since a Winter Moth visited Tom Casey's trap on 17 February, and 2017 looks set to be the best year ever. Not all of these have been night-fliers; there have been plenty of diurnal species as well. Here are a few of this year's stars.

Green Silver-lines (*Pseudoips prasinana*)

The perfectly camouflaged adults fly from May to July. Eggs are laid on the leaves of oaks, Silver Birch, Sweet Chestnut and other broadleaved trees, which provide the caterpillars with the food they need to grow and eventually metamorphose into pupae. The latter overwinter in a boat-shaped cocoon under a leaf or in a crevice in bark.

Lime Hawkmoth (*Mimas tiliae*) (main picture)

This is one of the UK's most dramatic moths, beautifully marked and with wings 8cm across. Adults are on the wing from May to early July, and this one visited my light-trap on 12 May. Caterpillars feed on the leaves of limes and Silver Birches, but the adults never eat.



Burnet Companion (*Euclidia glyphica*)

Burnet Companion (*Euclidia glyphica*)

This and Mother Shipton are the two most striking day flying moths to be found in our rough grassland areas,

Wanstead Flats and the Old Sewage Works. Adults fly by day from mid-May to early July, but the caterpillars feed at night on clovers, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Tufted Vetch and Black Medick. I cheated with this one: I photographed it in the Olympic Park in May.



Bird-cherry Ermine (*Yponomeuta evonymella*)

Bird-cherry Ermine (*Yponomeuta evonymella*)

This is considered a pest in areas where its caterpillars feed in large numbers in huge draping webs on Bird Cherry trees. Although the webbing sometimes covers entire trees, which lose much of their foliage, the trees are not killed. This 'micro' moth is not especially common in our area, but can be seen in small numbers from June to September.

Black Arches (*Lymantria monacha*)

Eggs are laid singly or in pairs in crevices in oaks and Hornbeam – the food-plants of the caterpillars which emerge in April. Adults fly in July and August, sometimes being attracted to light and sometimes seen resting on tree trunks by day. Its status is described as 'local' and we record it most years in the Wanstead area, but only in small numbers.

Small Magpie (*Anania hortulata*)

Common Nettle and Black Horehound are two of the plants needed by Small Magpie's caterpillars. We certainly have plenty of nettles locally, but this moth isn't abundant. Adults are sometimes disturbed in the daytime and are attracted to light at night between June and August.



Old Lady (*Mormo maura*)

Old Lady (*Mormo maura*)

Adults feed on aphid honeydew and sap oozing from trees. Females lay eggs in late summer, and the caterpillars that emerge spend the autumn and winter near the ground, feeding by night and hiding in leaf-litter during the day. In spring they pupate in a cocoon behind bark, among Ivy, in cracks in walls or in loose earth.

Silver-Y (*Autographa gamma*)

A clear, metallic silver Y-mark distinguishes this migrant, which reaches our shores from southern Europe or North Africa every year. Millions arrive in 'invasion years'. The newly arrived moths nectar on knapweeds and Buddleia. They breed, and the caterpillars feed on clovers, nettles and many other plants.



Silver-Y (*Autographa gamma*)

Dusky Thorn (*Ennomos fuscantaria*)

The eggs of this crinkly-winged beauty, which rests with its wings closed, are laid on the leaves of Ash trees in autumn, and caterpillars emerge in spring to feed on the leaves until they are ready to pupate. The adults are sometimes attracted to light in the late summer. Otherwise, they are rarely seen. This individual visited on 12 August.



Brimstone (*Opisthograptis luteolata*)

Brimstone (*Opisthograptis luteolata*)

Not to be confused with the butterfly of the same name – which also breeds in our area – this very bright moth has two or three generations each year. This year has been a bumper, with the first coming to the light-trap at the start of April, and up to a dozen in attendance on some nights. Caterpillars feed on the leaves of Blackthorn and hawthorns.

Small Purple and Gold (*Pyrausta aurata*)

This is one of our commonest micro-moths – and one of the most beautiful. It is also one of the most visible, flying in sunshine and resting on the leaves of mints, which are the food-plants of its larvae. The Aquatic Mint around Shoulder of Mutton Pond (where this photo was taken) is a good place to look.



Mother of Pearl (*Pleuroptya ruralis*)

Mother of Pearl (*Pleuroptya ruralis*)

The pearl-like sheen is distinctive. Although classified as a 'micro', this moth isn't small at all! It is often disturbed during the day - especially near nettle beds, because Common Nettle is the main food of its caterpillars.



Report and pics by Tim Harris

events diary

October

Thurs 12th Oct: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. We will be clearing alder and other less desirable plants from beside the Ornamentals. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Wed 18th Oct - Nature Ramble Each month, walk leader and guidebook author Peter Aylmer will take you to one of London's great natural glories - a nature reserve, woodland, heath, site of special scientific interest or similar. Expect around six miles of easy walking and at least one cafe along the way.

Meet: 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Just turn up - no need to book. Bring a snack, drink and Oyster or Freedom Pass. Back about 4. Contact Peter Aylmer 07884 235784 or mail peteraylmer@hotmail

Thurs 19th Oct: Practical work. Meet: The Temple, Wanstead Park 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Sun 22 Oct: Walk and Talk. The Friends of Wanstead Parklands are leading a walk around Wanstead Park. A part of the Epping Forest Walking Festival. Meet: 11:00 (around 2 hours) at the Quaker Meeting House, Bush Road, E11.

This, the last in this year's series of five walks, is part of the Epping Forest Walking Festival. The route will take participants on a leisurely stroll around the western side of the park, comprising Bush Wood and Wanstead Flats. The walk will point out vestiges of seventeenth and eighteenth century landscaping and the site of a Roman road. We may also spot some interesting fungi! The walks are free, but donations to the group are welcome. As paths may be muddy, suitable footwear is advised.

Thurs 26th Oct: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Sun 29 Oct: Fungi Walk in the south of the Forest. A part of the Epping Forest Walking Festival. Meet: 10:30 at the Quaker Meeting House, Bush Road, E11. A free two-hour walk examining the local fungi in the Bush Wood area lead by local naturalist Tricia Moxey. Easy terrain. To suit all members of the family.

Sun 29 Oct: Nature Club. The club is aimed at children between 2-7 years old. Meet: 12:45pm - 2.30pm at The Temple, Wanstead Park. The cost is £3.50 per child. It seems a whole world away from our summer Nature club where we found crickets in the long grass on a baking summer day and it will be great to discover how the sessile oak we searched for mini-beasts around is faring in the new season. Will we find acorns around it or will the squirrels have beaten us? There will be an autumnal nature trail and crafts and stories celebrating the season. We hope to see you and your children there!

Tues 31st Oct: closing date for photo exhibition 'Trees in the Landscape' entries (see article in newsletter)

November

Thurs 2nd Nov: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Sun 5th Nov: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Thurs 9th Nov: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Sun 12th Nov: Waterbird Count. Meet: 10am at the Tea Hut, Wanstead Park. Walk around the lakes of Wanstead Park counting the waterbirds, especially the migrants, as a part of the nationwide BTO count. No experience necessary. Organised by the The WREN Group - free to all. Contact Tim Harris tharris0457@gmail.com

Sun 19th Nov: "Birds of Wanstead", talk by Nick Croft. Meet: The Temple, Wanstead Park at 1pm. An illustrated talk by top local birder and expert photographer Nick Croft. Enjoy Nick's expertise and learn what a great area this is for birding. Cost £3.00, to go towards the Wren Group and Park improvements. As space at the Temple is limited, please book your place beforehand with Gill: gilljames@btinternet.com and then pay on the door.

Thurs 23rd Nov: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Sun 26th Nov: Walk and Talk from the Temple 12pm, followed by 1pm 'Trees in the Landscape' photographic exhibition launch with refreshments

Thurs 30th Nov: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

December

Sun 3rd Dec: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Wed 6th Dec: Talk by Peter Aylmer on his new London Nature Walks book

Meet: Wanstead Golf Club at 7:30pm. Contact Peter Aylmer 07884 235784 or mail peteraylmer@hotmail

Thurs 7th Dec: Nature Ramble Each month, walk leader and guidebook author Peter Aylmer will take you to one of London's great natural glories - a nature reserve, woodland, heath, site of special scientific interest or similar. Expect around six miles of easy walking and at least one cafe along the way.

Meet: 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Just turn up - no need to book. Bring a snack, drink and Oyster or Freedom Pass. Back about 4. Contact Peter Aylmer 07884 235784 or mail peteraylmer@hotmail

Thurs 7th Dec: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Thurs 14th Dec: Practical work. Meet: The Temple 10am. All tools and gloves provided. Finish soon after 12. Contact Peter Williams 020 8555 1358 or 07716 034164 on the morning

Sun 10 Dec: Waterbird Count. Meet: 10am at the Tea Hut, Wanstead Park. Walk around the lakes of Wanstead Park counting the waterbirds, especially the migrants, as a part of the nationwide BTO count. No experience necessary. Free, organised by the The WREN Group. Contact Tim Harris tharris0457@gmail.com

Please check events on our website or Facebook page beforehand.



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>

London Natural History Society
<http://www.lnhs.org.uk/>



*Parasol Mushroom
by Tony Morrison*

and finally

Autumn is the time when the fruiting bodies of many fungi appear. They are sensitive to changes in temperature and rainfall and records indicate that they may be appearing earlier or later than in previous years. Ones to look out for include the Fly Agaric, Brown Birch Boletus, Puff Balls and the Stink Horn but of course there are many others too!

Some species of tree are noted for their vivid coloured leaves in the autumn. These include varieties of Cherries and Maples which often have red

leaves as does the Hawthorn. Birch, Poplars and Hornbeam fade to various shades of yellow and leaves Beech become a glorious deep gold before turning brown. The leaves of our native Oaks turn a russet brown. Brown shrivelled leaves may remain on the twigs of young Oaks, Beeches or Hornbeams throughout the winter and act as a leafy frost resistant overcoat, keeping the tender twigs a little warmer!

Tricia Moxey

now & then

Were you right ?

Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate at the turn of the last century

The Flats can clearly be seen to our left with the leafy villas of Capel Road in the distance. On sunny days trams would terminate here packed with City people looking for the fresh air and open spaces of Wanstead Flats and Epping Forest beyond - so much so that additional stopping points at the end of Capel and Forest Roads were provided to cope with the rush.

