


Winter 2018

The logo features a stylized green leaf or bird-like shape on the left, composed of two curved segments. To its right, the word "wren" is written in a large, white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

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- The background of the page is a photograph of a vast, flat landscape, likely a marsh or coastal plain, covered in low-lying vegetation. A thick layer of mist or fog hangs over the ground, partially obscuring the details. In the distance, a few buildings are visible against a bright, hazy horizon where the sun is setting or rising, creating a warm, golden glow. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.
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a word from the chair



“Between 1970 and 2013, 56% of UK species declined ... of the nearly 8,000 species assessed using modern criteria, 15% are threatened with extinction ... this suggests that we are among the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Of the 218 countries assessed for ‘biodiversity intactness’, the UK is ranked 189, a consequence of centuries of industrialisation, urbanisation and overexploitation of our natural resources.”

These comments are taken from the *People’s Manifesto for Wildlife*, which was launched by Chris Packham last year.

The *Manifesto* deals with pesticides, the badger cull and fox-hunting, agriculture, marine conservation, the use of lead shot, wildlife crime, rewilding, and much more. Each and every one of these issues deserves the attention of those with the power to enact change. But those people and agencies will only do so if they are pushed by those who know and care – that’s us.

We are rightly proud of the natural diversity of our little part of East London, but the reality nationwide is pretty grim. I can’t make the point better than Chris himself: “It’s time to wake up. We must rouse ourselves from this complacent stupor, because we are presiding over an ecological apocalypse and precipitating a mass extinction in our own backyard. But, vitally, it’s not too late. There is

hope that we can hold to, and there is action we can take.”

On Wednesday 30 January, one of the authors of the *People’s Manifesto*, local birder Rob Sheldon, will be presenting the very serious challenges that we, our political leaders and the business community must face up to. Please try to get along to Wanstead Golf Club (7:30pm start) to listen to Rob’s message. It’s one we can’t afford to ignore.

Tim Harris
Wren Wildlife & conservation Group



Why gardens matter

When we pave over our gardens, the impact can reach much further than our own front door. The loss of plants and green spaces can have a profound impact on our wider environment, climate and wildlife. ,,,

In spite of this, more than a quarter of us have paved over our front gardens. Many local authorities encourage off-street parking, which offers easier access to clean and maintain streets and collect our rubbish; companies offer cheaper car insurance and residents find it easier to maintain a garden with no greenery.

Here, local naturalist Tricia Moxey discusses the merits of turning the grey into green.

As more and more people live in urban areas, access to green spaces is vital and for many the opportunity to have their own personal green space in the form of a garden is a real privilege. Greater London is a very green city with some 13,000 varied species living within its boundary. A report published in 2011 by the London Wildlife Trust mentions that there are 3.8 million garden plots associated with domestic properties covering some 37,900ha.*

Private gardens in the local area vary in size, with the larger gardens associated with the more affluent areas. A search on Google Maps shows clearly the concentrations of the larger gardens and how well connected they are too each other and nearby open spaces. This is important as there are greater opportunities for foraging by species such as hedgehogs if they can move from one area to another through gaps in walls.



A survey by the RHS found some alarming trends in the reduction of plants in front gardens. The situation is worse in London than the rest of the country where at least half of all front gardens are paved over. The North East is the only place in the UK that has reduced the number of completely paved gardens. We need to reverse this trend for the sake of the nation's health, for wildlife, to help combat pollution, reduce heat waves and to protect the UK's homes from flooding.

Nearly 1 in 4 UK front gardens are completely paved over

5 million front gardens have no plants growing in them

Three times as many front gardens are paved compared to ten years ago

Royal Horticultural Society Survey 2015

In recent years many front gardens have been paved over to accommodate parked cars. In Greater London it is estimated that 25% of garden land is at the front of properties. In many roads the removal of all vegetation and the paving over of front gardens has made a direct impact on the street scene. In contrast, well-maintained plantings in front gardens can make a major contribution to attractive streets and where such vegetation flourishes, there is an increased sense of civic pride, a greater enjoyment of the local environment as well as a degree of healthy competition between neighbours for the most flower-filled front garden!

In 2015 the RHS launched Greening Grey Britain which had a three-year target to transform 6,000 unloved grey spaces into thriving, planted up places. This highlighted what can be achieved with a concerted effort from many individuals with the help from local councils. The success

of this project has encouraged others to follow suit.

Having well-vegetated areas is not just about the appearance as it brings other benefits too. With the increasing amount of paving in urban streets, the heat from the higher summer temperatures is retained for longer each day and the non-porous surfaces lead to a greater risk of surface water flooding during periods of rainfall. As the temperatures rise, more trees and other vegetation will be required to counter the impact of these urban heat islands which will also help to reduce flood risk.

There is an urgent need to increase green spaces in our towns and cities by understanding how to select and use plants

Sue Biggs, RHS Director

Many studies show that having access to gardens encourages improved physical and mental health, gives opportunities for increased physical activity, develops better cognitive function in school children, aids faster healing from illness and enhances productivity in the workplace. Well-vegetated areas, including gardens, can improve air quality. Including suitable trees and shrubs,

climbers, green walls, planters and window boxes in front gardens will help to filter out some of the damaging pollutants from car exhausts, but in addition, there must be an overall reduction in the use of polluting vehicles.



Plants and shrubs provide shelter and food for a wide range of wildlife. Here is a Small Tortoiseshell on Little Lady Lavender

A surprising amount of wildlife can survive in urban areas and one way to encourage a greater range of species is to include a range of suitable plants and, where possible, install a pond, have a compost area, leave heaps of logs and mow the lawn less often! There is a great deal of advice to guide you in selecting which species are best suited to the local conditions and the space available. The experts at the Royal Horticultural Society have been carrying out research by observing which flowers are best suited to attract the pollinators, insects such as honeybees, bumblebees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths.

More recently, 23,000 individual specimens were sampled from the leaves and stems to see how

important garden plants are for the increasing the abundance of herbivores (plant-eaters), predators (animal-eaters), omnivores (plant and animal-eaters) and detritivores (organic matter-eaters or recyclers). This included caterpillars and aphids, thrips, ladybirds, true bugs, spiders, earwigs and springtails. Their recommendation for gardeners wanting to support plant-associated invertebrates is to select species native to the UK and include some of those that are native to the northern hemisphere. For greater variety you can include a few from the southern hemisphere, especially if they have large showy flowers. Obviously avoiding the use of pesticides allows the assorted invertebrates to thrive!



Japanese Anemone - One for the summer. By early to mid August, our white Japanese anemones are in full bloom. They line the rock wall, taking on more and more real estate with each passing year. They're considered non-invasive, but prolific bloomers.

Ideally the more densely your garden is planted, the greater the abundance of invertebrates of all kinds it will support. Having a rich variety of plants suits a range of invertebrates, which will feed ground-dwelling predators such as frogs, toads, hedgehogs or shrews. Night-flying

insects such as midges and moths will feed bats. Many birds eat invertebrates and for some species these are vital for rearing nestlings. The greater the range of plants, the greater the number of insects and then this should attract more birds as well!

At this time of the year, there are some hardy flowers in bloom and on warm sunny days a some insects may emerge. Various observations are made by people wandering around the district, but it is possible to make observations in the comfort of your own garden. Why not aim to make your garden really wildlife friendly in 2019 and then sit back and enjoy what moves in!

article by Tricia Moxey



Some useful websites:

Royal Horticultural Society: www.rhs.org.uk

Wanstead Community Gardeners who brighten up unloved spaces: www.wansteadcommunitygardeners.wordpress.com/about/

Wild Wanstead: www.wildwanstead.org

*Smith, C., Dawson, D., Archer, J., Davies, M., Frith, M., Hughes, E. and Massini, P., 2011. *From green to grey; observed changes in garden vegetation structure in London, 1998-2008*, London Wildlife Trust, Greenspace Published 2011, London Wildlife Trust.

robin

A familiar sight in our gardens at this time of year is the robin - in particular robins are one of the only UK birds to be heard singing in the garden on Christmas day.

Legend has it that the robin's red breast gives it a direct link to Christianity. In some legends, it was an all-brown bird until it was touched with the blood of Christ as he hung on the Cross, sometimes depicted as singing into his ear to alleviate the agony of his final moments. In another version, the robin is seen as trying to pluck out the nails or the thorns from the crown or trying to staunch the wound in Christ's side made by the legionary's lance. Yet another legend says that the robin scorched its breast in the fires of Purgatory, mercifully taking drops of water in its beak to the lips of the parched souls in torment.

Another (more likely) story is the association between the robin and the red-coated Victorian postmen nicknamed "robins" – this may sound too convenient to be true, but early Christmas cards depicted robins carrying letters in their beaks.



The robin is, without doubt, one of our favourite garden birds. It seems to trust us, staying close when we're in the garden and even taking food from our hands. Their melodious voices, along with their cheeky attitudes, have endeared robin redbreasts to the British public, and in 2015 the robin re-won the honour (of the nation's favourite) in a poll, beating off the blackbird, swift and barn owl.

The robin was not always so popular. In the past it was associated with death. One superstition was that if a "robin taps three times at the window of a home, then any sick person inside will soon die". One old rhyme warned against hunting them: the robin "brings death to the snarer by whom it is caught".

The silvery balm of robin song in the autumn is one of the great consolations of the silenced season or sounds like that to us. But for the robin it's fighting talk

Despite its cute appearance the robin is a pugnacious fellow. It is aggressively territorial and quick to drive away intruders fighting with its own kind and attacking other birds - robins will even attack a bundle of red feathers or their own reflection if they mistake it for another individual. Initial attacks between rival robins usually involve striking the opponent single blows with

feet and wings, or bowling it off a perch. But as fighting develops, both adversaries begin rolling over and over on the ground, before fluttering face to face while striking with legs then tumbling to the ground interlocked. Each robin then attempts to pin its rival to the ground. The victor rains blows down on the vanquished bird's head particularly around the eyes even blinding or killing it. The majority of fights last less than a minute before the loser (almost always the intruder) flees. But some encounters continue off and on for an hour or more and exceptionally over several days.



In 2014 the robin topped a poll of more than 200,000 people to choose the UK's first national bird. Ornithologist David Lindo - who launched the campaign - said the robin was "entwined into our national psyche" as a "Christmas card pin-up".

Robins hold their territories all year round, warning off intruders with song and males may hold the same territory throughout their lives.

It was thought that robins migrated but British robins are largely resident. They don't really disappear over the summer – they just become a bit less visible. When

food is more readily available during the summer, robins are more likely to forage out of sight in the woods rather than coming to your bird table in the garden. However some, mostly females, cross the Channel to spend the winter as far south as southern Spain and Portugal. At the same time there is an influx here of Continental robins from Scandinavia and Russia avoiding the severe northern winter.

In October a small number of British robins, "perhaps 5 per cent", leave the country each autumn to spend the winter in mainland Europe, mostly in northern France — although some have been spotted as far south as Spain and Portugal (the rest stick around to pose for our Christmas cards).

Behaviour changes around Christmas-time. Robins begin exploring other robins' territories seeking a mate. By mid-January the majority will be paired and the females stop singing. Male robins continue singing, declaring what has become a joint breeding territory. On occasions singing lasts into the night especially where there are street lights prominent. Detailed research shows that a few robins hold more than one territory simultaneously for up to six weeks. These are usually adult males moving up to a third of a mile between breeding and winter territories.

During the winter months, seeing evergreen trees and shrubs reminds us of the continuity of growth. It is probably for this reason that the long tradition of bringing evergreen branches into the home during the dark days at the turn of the year still survives; it helps to cheer us up!

evergreen

There are many legends which surround our native evergreens, the Yew, Holly and Ivy and these are well described by Richard Mabey in his 1996 publication *Flora Britannica*.

The leaves of evergreens are by their very nature tough and leathery, lasting for more than one season before turning yellow and dropping off. Their chemical makeup makes them less palatable than deciduous plants, so they are avoided by many herbivores, both big and small. Cattle, sheep and deer will eat Holly leaves and so do a few invertebrates. However, Holly and Ivy berries and the red arils on Yew are eaten by a number of birds and the nectar-rich flowers of Ivy provide valuable fuel for autumnal insects such as bees, wasps, moths and flies.

All green plants need sunlight, water and carbon dioxide for photosynthesis. When the ground temperature falls below freezing, water cannot be taken into the roots. To overcome this problem, deciduous trees lose their leaves and become dormant during the cold winter months, but many evergreens can continue to make food via photosynthesis even at low light levels provided the ground remains unfrozen. They too shut down in periods of intense cold.

The Holly is native to western and southern Europe. It is a pioneer species that can recolonise clearings, but it also thrives under shade, growing slowly into a tree 10 m tall. It often forms an impenetrable understory in Oak or Beech woodlands and there are good examples of this in parts of Epping Forest.



The leaves on the lower limbs have three to five sharp spines on each side, pointing in alternative directions, while leaves of the upper branches lack spines. Such tough leaves take several years to rot down once they have fallen from the tree.

The Holly is dioecious, either growing as male or female plants; the females will produce the familiar bear berries, usually red, but sometimes yellow. Each fruit contains three or four seeds, which are spread by passing through the digestive system of the seed predator! They germinate two or three years later often beneath a perching post. Planted as a hedge, Holly forms a good stock proof barrier, providing some shelter from biting winter winds and also good nesting sites!



Holly berries are an important food for birds, but you wouldn't want to snack on them - the berries are toxic to humans, and can cause vomiting and diarrhoea. Not such a merry Christmas, then.

With the spread of the railway lines out of central London, it became fashionable to plant Holly or other evergreens in the front gardens of the larger houses. Sadly, as many of these front gardens are now given over to parking spaces for cars, such hedges have been removed, but where they do survive their visual importance is recognised and they have become a feature within conservation areas.

In folklore Holly's prickly leaves represent the crown of thorns that Jesus wore when he was crucified. The berries are the drops of blood that were shed by Jesus because of the thorns. In Scandinavia it is known as the Christ Thorn. In pagan times, Holly was thought to be a male plant and Ivy a female plant.

In addition to the dark green of the common Holly, a number of distinct varieties, some with variegated leaves, have been selected for planting in gardens or

in public parks and certain weeping forms were popular in cemeteries. The City of London Cemetery is an excellent place to see many of these forms. Many Holly leaves have a dark blotch on them. This is caused by a single tiny larva of the Holly leaf-miner *Phytomyza ilicis*, a small black fly. Some of the larvae are eaten by birds, including blue tits, which peck out the insect leaving a v-shaped tear on the leaf.



Hollies are divided into male and female specimens. ... Male flowers are loaded with pollen and often attract insects to the garden, while female flowers contain the egg that will produce seeds in the berry. Consequently, if your tree does not have berries at all, it is possible your tree is a male.

The female adult Holly leaf-miner flies lay her eggs on young holly leaves in June and July. The eggs hatch and the larvae crawl out feeding by making a tunnel and eating the leaf from the inside. Each larva carries on eating throughout the autumn and winter reaching a maximum size in March. It pupates

between March and May, but before pupating, the larva prepares a thin triangular area on the underside of the leaf. In late May and June, the insect presses against this thin area, and the adult fly emerges from the leaf, leaving an emergence hole about 1mm wide underneath the leaf.



Ivy is one of our most familiar plants, seen climbing up trees, walls, and along the ground, almost anywhere. It is a great provider of food and shelter for all kinds of animals, from butterflies to bats.

Holly flowers are the food plant of the Holly Blue butterfly, which has two or three broods a year. This butterfly passes the winter as a pupa in the ground and the adults emerge in April, mate and the females lay eggs on the unopened flower buds. The caterpillars eat the contents of the flower buds and they pupate at ground level before emerging in early August. The females of the second brood feed on Ivy flowers before descending to the ground to pupate in the autumn.

Ivy is a native evergreen climber, which frequently grows up tree trunks, holding fast by many adventitious roots, which stick firmly to the bark. It will also clamber up walls and fences and in gardens it can become something of a pest as it can spread along the ground too. Once it has reached a certain height, it will produce flowers on branches which have a tendency to form a bushy shape. Most healthy trees will shade out the Ivy growing up the trunk, but a thick cover of Ivy round a tree could be hiding a hollow trunk.

In folklore Ivy, being an evergreen plant, represents eternity, fidelity, and strong affectionate attachment, such as wedded love and friendship. The ivy plant is also a strong plant, which can grow in the hardest environment. Another association with Ivy is perennial life and immortality.

A thick tangle of Ivy provides shelter and food for many invertebrates including certain caterpillars, spiders and snails. For many birds such as wrens and

dunnocks there is shelter in cold weather, tasty food to be eaten and potential nest sites, too. If the clambering Ivy is in danger of overtopping a wall, keep it trimmed back as it can form a top-heavy leafy mop covered in autumnal flowers and then black berries. However, as it does produce irritating toxins do be careful when cutting it back.

Variegated forms of Ivy and Holly provide winter contrast in a garden, but both grow well and look their best where there is some sun.



Apart from the flesh on the berries the rest of the Yew contains taxines which are very toxic. This also applies to any mushrooms growing on or under the tree as there is the possibility they may take in the taxines.

The evergreen Yew can grow into a tree 20 m tall. The highly toxic, flat, dark green leaves are arranged spirally on the stem, but on many shoots they are twisted into two flat rows either side of the stem.

The Yew is very toxic. The oldest yew is known to be at least 3,000 years of age ... This aspect of death (mortality) played against its symbolic longevity (immortality) would add tremendous strength to its symbolism.

An understory shrub in deciduous woodlands, it is now becoming more frequent within Epping Forest as birds such as thrushes and blackbirds distribute the seeds. As individual Yew trees can reach a considerable age, it is often associated with ancient sacred sites and is frequently grown in churchyards and cemeteries.

Trees with fine needle-like leaves such as the pines, firs and spruces can survive snowy conditions as snow slides off their branches.

Article by Tricia Moxey



How you can help

Our gardens are a vital resource for wildlife, providing corridors of green space between open countryside, allowing species to move about. In fact, the UK's gardens provide more space for nature than all the National Nature Reserves put together. So why not try planting native

plants and trees to entice birds, mammals and invertebrates into your backyard? But think about planting more evergreens to provide food and shelter throughout those sparse months. Also consider delaying that autumn pruning to let those evergreens such as Ivy and Holly to come into berry and flower providing much needed food for our wildlife.

To find out more about encouraging wildlife into your garden, visit the Royal Horticultural Society's and Wildlife Trust's joint project 'Wild About Gardens' - there's plenty of facts and tips to get you started at <https://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk/>

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



Wanstead flats

A little East End oasis that keeps on giving

Many people know Wanstead Flats for its football pitches, as a place for going for a picnic in summer, flying a kite or model aeroplane or for just walking the dog. But the more informed will know just how remarkable this wonderful expanse of open space bounded by Aldersbrook Road, Capel Road, and Lake House Road really is.

Its patches of acid grassland and scrub are important for rare spiders and insects, populations of London-scarce butterfly species such as Green Hairstreak, Brown Argus, (not so) Common Blue, and Small Copper. And the most important Inner London breeding site for those special ground-nesting birds, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks.

Recently, Wren member Rose Stephens discovered a lichen which she hadn't seen before. Committee member Bob Vaughan immediately realised the importance of her discovery.



Late on 9th December I received a tweet from Rose Stephens about lichen she had found in Wanstead. I immediately realised it was a species of *Peltigera*, a foliose or leafy lichen that is usually found in Western areas of the country particularly damp coastal areas.

I was excited as I had never expected to hear of a local specimen. Her pictures suggested it was *Peltigera hymenina*, and a trawl through information at the British Lichen Society (BLS) suggested it was found in only one site in Essex. I contacted Rose for some details and she said she had found it on the pub side of Alexandra Lake, near a birch.



I managed to find it at my second attempt, with a little more specific information. The lichen forms a mat about 6 square feet, interspersed with moss and shaded by a small birch tree. The first photograph shows the deep green colour of the thallus, with white upturned edges and you can just see the simple rhizines (or “roots”) beneath. The ruler shows the scale, each “leaf” of the thallus being about 20 mm across, quite large for a lichen.

Peltigera is a genus of approximately 91 species of foliose lichens in the family Peltigeraceae. Commonly known as the dog lichen, lichens of *Peltigera* are often terricolous (growing on soil), but can also occur on moss, trees, rocks, and many other substrates in many parts of the world.

Although not rare, it is normally found in the west of the UK.

In more exposed areas there are a few upward pointing red-brown apothecia, which are the spore bearing structures. These are quite characteristic of *P. hymenina*, and together with the thickness and shape of the thallus nail the identification.



I contacted my lichen guru John Skinner, who is Secretary of the BLS., lichen recorder for Essex and leads excellent lichen walks for the London Natural History Society. He thought the lichen looked healthy and knew of only one other site for this species in London. To be clear *P. hymenina* isn't nationally rare, and there are a few sites in Essex, but having it growing so close to London city centre puts this lichen on a par with Skylarks and Meadow Pipits, if a little less mellifluous.



The area around Alexandra Lake is good for various fungi in the autumn and the ditch that runs from Alex in towards the football pitches is covered in terricolous lichens, mostly *Cladonia* of a few species, these are commonly known as pixie cups. Rather pretty example that keys out as *Cladonia humilis*.

All in all the habitats of Alexandra Lake are deserving of special conservation. Indeed, its unique set of sandy habitats rival the SSSI on the other side of the Flats.

Words and pics by Bob Vaughan



across the flats to epping

Angell Pond, overlooking Capel Road, in c1904. Note houses in the process of being built. Also, shops no longer there - possibly as a result of bomb damage during the Second World War.



The large open space on the edge of the southern extremity of Epping Forest is easily reached from either Forest Gate or Manor Park stations on the Great Eastern Railway, or Manor Park on the Midland Railway. It is now under the control of the Epping Forest Conservators, and, as a matter of fact, a pedestrian may walk from Rabbits Bridge at Manor Park, across the Flats, through Bush Wood, Snaresbrook, and so on right through the heart of the Forest itself until Epping and the Lower Forest are reached.

On the further side of the Flats is the beautiful City of London Cemetery, of very large extent.

In the eighteenth century an annual cattle market was held on Wanstead Flats in March and April but it was in the nineteenth century that Wanstead Flats came into its own as a place of recreation for East Enders. During the summer months people came in large numbers to enjoy donkey and pony races, and a variety of sports. What Hyde Park was to the West End, the Flats were to the East Londoner:

"Thousands on a Sunday evening swarmed over that open space, the largest crowd around the bandstand. The pond opposite Capel Road attracted several children and dogs. A young man was giving an account of his imprisonment and begged boys around to keep honest. We saw no single instance of roughness or disorder. About 9.00 p.m. the crowds began to disperse".

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



Angell Pond showing the bandstand in the distance. The Bandstand that stood beside the pond lost its popularity after the 2nd World War and was demolished in 1957. All that remains is a copse of trees planted in the bandstands heyday.

Immediately adjoining this is Wanstead Park, through which a short cut leads to Cranbrook Park, Ilford.... As further indicating the remarkably open nature of this particular part of Essex it may be stated that a reference to a map of the world will shew that a line drawn across Wanstead Flats in a north-easterly direction does not go through any large town or even village of any considerable size, but crosses the German Ocean and the North Sea until the pole is reached; which is the first land in a direct line after leaving the shores of England. This undoubtedly tends to keep the air of the district fresh and sweet. Electric cars from East Ham cross a corner of the Flats at Manor Park; the West Ham cars run for a short distance on the western edge, being linked up with the Leyton cars at Forest Road. This noble open space is the property of the people forever, and is the playground of thousands.

A few years ago this great plain was quite bare of trees or shrubs, except for one or two isolated clumps, and was very boggy in patches. But, thanks to the efforts of the Epping Forest Committee, its surface is now broken up by picturesque groups of trees and shrubs, relieving its

former monotony. Drainage has brought about a much better state of surface and good paths cross the Flats in many directions. Near us is a pond known as Angel Pond, the delight of scores of happy youngsters who sail craft upon it or try to capture the furtive minnow. Within a railed enclosure is the bandstand erected by the Corporation of West Ham whose borough boundaries extend for a short distance in a northerly direction. In the distance, on our left, we may descry the square tower of Leytonstone Church; facing us is a grassy slope, a mile away behind which we see Wanstead Church peeping above the tree tops near Bush Wood; the eye, sweeping round, sees the high trees of Wanstead Park over the tops of the houses of a small new residential estate, while on our extreme right the Flats extend across to Ilford Cemetery and to Manor Park. Their total circumference is between five and six miles, the width varying from about three-quarters of a mile to a mile and a half. Here cricket and football find many ardent supporters according to the different seasons; there are no jealous notices of 'please keep off the grass', or 'trespassers will be prosecuted'; the whole expanse is free to all at all times and seasons; here and there are beautifully verdant plots of grass, the home of certain lawn tennis clubs, where Dan Cupid often shoots a sly arrow at the moment when some fair maiden cries 'Love, fifteen', while her responsive swain doubtless thinks 'Love me' the better phrase.

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



Night Prowler

Skulking round the dustbins,
Flame red in dead of night,
Sharp-pricked ears, dark plume of tail –
Urban fox on the backstreet trail

by Jennifer Curry

look out for

Hints 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 Viburnums 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





don't forget

It's that time of year again to keep an eye out for our feathered friends.

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.

now & then

Were you right ?

Wanstead Park - Heronry Pond (Old Boating Lake) taken in 1913 and how it looks today. To the left of the old picture can be seen the 'Chalet' an elaborate refreshment building that was situated some yards to the west of the Temple. It is thought to have burned down in November 1948. This is now the site of Chalet Wood and the park's wonderful show of bluebells.



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

events diary

JANUARY

Thurs 17th - 2019 - Practical Work 10am-12noon
Meet at Aldersbrook stables gate, Empress Ave E12
We are working on the old sewage works site. Gloves and tools provided. It will be muddy!

Thurs 24th - 2019 Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Aldersbrook stables gate, Empress Ave E12
We are working on the old sewage works site. Gloves and tools provided. It will be muddy!

Sat 26th – Wanstead Park Nature Club : RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch in the Park
Children aged 3-7. Must be accompanied. Cost £3.50 per child
Meet at the Temple, Wanstead Park for birdy crafts followed by bird walk at Perch pond – 11.30am
Contact mjcbillingham@yahoo.co.uk

Sun 27th - 1pm-2.30pm - What the fire revealed: Archaeology on Wanstead Flats from World War Two and before. Repeat Walk and Talk by Dr Mark Gorman and Peter Williams, taking the 15th July 2018 fire as a starting point, and explore various remains on the Flats, and put them in context.
Meet at the Temple, Wanstead Park. Tickets £3.00, payable on the door.
As places limited, advanced booking required via pows.wanstead@gmail.com, stating number required.

Wed 30th - 7:30pm - Wren Group talk/event **Rob Sheldon** presentation on *The People's Manifesto for Wildlife*, Wanstead Golf Club, Overton Drive. Pay Bar.

Thurs 31st - 2019 Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Aldersbrook stables gate, Empress Ave E12
We are working on the old sewage works site. Gloves and tools provided. It will be muddy!

FEBRUARY

Sun 3rd - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park, not the stables gate.

Thurs 7th - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park.

Thurs 14th - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park

Sun 17th February. Waterbird Count. Lead Tim Harris
Meet Tea Hut, Wanstead Park 10.00 am

Thurs 21st - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park

Thurs 28th - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park

MARCH

Sun 3rd - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park, not the stables gate.

Thurs 7th - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park

Thurs 14th - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park

Wed 20th - Wren Group AGM - 7:30pm
Tricia Moxey will be giving a presentation on the wildlife of Epping Forest, and her vision for the future.
Venue: Wanstead Golf Club, Overton Drive, Pay Bar, Raffle

Thurs 21st - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park

Thurs 28th - Practical Work - 10am-12noon
Meet at Temple Wanstead Park



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/>

