

Autumn 2019

wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

Page 02 - A Word from the Chair - a few words from Chair James Heal

Page 03 - Jubilee Pond - a case study in community involvement by Robert Howell

Page 07 - Soil - the wondrous stuff beneath our feet - article by Tricia Moxey

Page 10 - Year of the moth - article by Tim Harris

Page 14 - Bird report - summary of birds seen this summer by James Heale

Page 20 - A fairer forest - article by Gill James

Page 23 - A Rare visitor - a magical sighting by Christian Moss

Page 25 - Spider field trip on Wanstead Flats, July 2019 by James Heale

Page 29 - Leaves - a poem by Elsie N Brady

Page 31 - Practical work - why not get your hands dirty and join our band of workers

Page 33 - Wanstead Flats - a little east end oasis that keeps on giving by Bob Vaughan

Page 36 - Events diary

Page 37 - Useful links

Page 38 - and finally - a rescue in Stratford



a word from the chair

Wanstead Flats is under threat. I do not usually indulge in alarmist language, but I really believe this statement to be true.

The proposal to hold a major music festival (c50,000 people) on the Flats has passed its first stage or two, with the Epping Forest & Commons Committee of the City of London Corporation recently voting in favour of it. But there are still several hurdles for this bad idea to overcome before it becomes a reality.

The Wren Group has publicly opposed this proposal as we feel this rich mosaic of grassland, scrub, water, and woodland is unsuitable as a venue for such a major event. Hopefully the contents of this newsletter will provide some evidence of just some of the many

reasons why we should celebrate and protect the incredible biodiversity of this site at the same time as sharing it with local communities who use it for walking, relaxing, running, playing football etc.

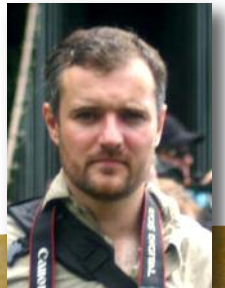
We are currently in the midst of Autumn bird migration and it really is no exaggeration to say that Wanstead Flats (specifically, even more so than Wanstead Park) is the BEST site for passage passerine (perching bird) migration in the London recording area. The summer bird summary provides more details, but, briefly, on the 24th August Wanstead Flats was host to six Pied Flycatchers (a record for us locally and more than any other location in London) and on the 29th August, we had 12 Wheatears, seven Common Redstarts, and six Whinchats amongst other fantastic birds. To put this into context, not only was this a better number of sightings of these migrant birds than any other site in London, in fact, our top three days for passage migrants are better than any other London location's best day.

Local butterfly and moth enthusiasts have recorded an astonishing 325 species

this year alone. A spider expert recently described Wanstead Flats as 'truly astonishing' in its ability to play host to locally and nationally scarce spiders. The list could go on and on. Wanstead Flats is not any old collection of football pitches or a bland park that can only serve a utility function; it is an absolute gem of biodiversity in an urban metropolis and worth valuing and respecting in its own right.

We believe that Wanstead Flats is worth protecting and we hope you do too. If you are on social media, please consider sharing photos and stories of the ways you enjoy the Flats and maybe include the hashtag #savewansteadflats and be part of a movement that seems to be energising local politicians, the media, and community groups.

James Heale
Chair Wren Group



Nature is like air, water, health and well being

..... it belongs to everyone and is not anyone's to sell or to make a profit.
To be a custodian of nature is a privilege not a business

jubilee pond

a case study in community involvement by Robert Howell

What is now known as the Jubilee Pond is situated on Wanstead Flats (now Wanstead Heath) at the junction of Lake House and Dames Roads. The site has been known by locals as the Fairground Flats for a number of years and there are references to fairs first taking place here in the 19th Century. In Arthur Morrison's *Tales of the Mean Streets*, published in 1895, he states that 'There is no other fair like Whit Monday's on Wanstead Flats'. The Corporation of the City of London is charged with the custodianship of Epping Forest, of which Wanstead Heath is part, under an 1878 Act of Parliament.

Originally known as Leyton Pond, it was transformed into a model yacht pond in the early 20th century. Work was started in 1907 and the completed pond officially opened on the 30th May 1908. One of the principal reasons for creating the pond was to provide work for the unemployed of West Ham. This was perhaps the first example of local community involvement.



One of the earliest pictures of the then Leyton Pond back in 1897 - also known as the Model Yacht Pond or Dames Road Pond; until 2002 stone edged and steep sided, thus having no shallows. It was used for much of the time up to the 1960's for model boating - hence its popular name - but subsequently the pond fell into a state of disrepair, did not retain water and become more of an eyesore than an amenity.

The pond thrived as a model yacht pond until the 1980s when water levels dramatically reduced. An effort to de-silt the pond revealed that the concrete lining had suffered damage and it was no longer able to hold water. By this stage the pond had become covered in rubbish including dumped shopping trolleys. Local attempts to repair the lining were looked upon unfavorably by the City

of London and it was at this point that a local initiative was taken. Initial discussions in a nearby pub resulted in a group of local residents agreeing to form a pressure group that would make a formal approach in 1997 to the City asking for the situation to be addressed. This disparate group became the Lakehouse Lake Project (LLP). Local opinion was canvassed and a petition of over 1,000 signatures was presented to the City urging action.

The City agreed to take action and there followed a period of intense activity including displays and open days being held in local schools. The community was asked to express their preference as to whether the pond should be rebuilt as a model yacht pond, a conservation pond or a compromise of something that was almost a combination of the two. The overwhelming consensus was for the pond to be designed as a conservation pond.

The pond was to consist of three islands, a peninsular and a pond-dipping area. A significant addition was that a borehole would be dug equipped with an electric pump that would ensure consistent water levels. The design of the pond was guided by the need to provide a conducive environment for the wide variety of wildlife and flora that was already established in the vicinity, as well as the hope that new species would be attracted to the area.

At this point the role of the LLP changed from being a pressure group to working as partners with the City. The pond was to be lined with puddled clay; a method used extensively throughout the British Isles in the 19th century construction of the canal network. Work started in 2002 and the pond was officially opened on the 12th July 2003.

The pond appeared 'naked' at first as it had always been the intention that planting was to be minimal and that indigenous species would be given the opportunity to establish themselves naturally. Again, the local community was heavily involved in the planting that did take place, working alongside and under the direction of staff from Epping Forest.

Within a matter of months of the official opening the water level dropped dramatically and it was realised that the lining had failed. This was a tremendous blow to everyone who had been involved in the construction of the pond. Whilst attempts were made to maintain a sustainable water level it was clear that something radical had to be done.

Despite the disappointment, experienced locals (mainly through the LLP) continued to be involved in pond activities, carrying out water quality surveys, pond dips and litter picks. Pond dips with local schools were also



Another view of the Model Yacht Pond in 1907. Newly planted London Plane trees can be seen in protective wooden cages - they now completely obscure this view of Dames Road.

organized. Newsletters were produced on a regular basis and 'Fun Days' were held to continue the dissemination and keep the community informed.



After the pond was found to leak, the puddle clay lining was removed and contractors Kingcombe Aquacare were tasked with the complete relining of the pond. Pic by Bob Gibbons FRPS

As part of the preparations for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games it was proposed that the Fairground Flats should be used as a muster point for police who were responsible for the security of the games. Local opinion was divided as to whether this was acceptable and there were strongly opposing views. It was at this point that the LLP proved to be an invaluable conduit between the City, the police and the community. The LLP took the stance that, whatever individuals thought of the desirability of the games taking place and the siting of the muster point, there was no appreciable risk to the pond. This was based on a number of criteria, including an environmental impact report produced by English Nature.

It was announced by Epping Forest that the rental paid by the police for the site was to be spent on a local improvement. There followed an intense period of activity by the LLP and locals petitioning for the rebuilding of the pond. In this they were successful.



The first phase of the project was the relining of the pond. This operation was carried out in two stages. First, water was transferred from the northern to the southern end of the pond and a dam built so that work could start on that area. On completion the water was pumped back and similar work done on the remaining section. This meant that fish and other aquatic life could be saved.

Having secured the finance, planning was put in place. It was agreed that the puddled clay lining should be removed and, essentially starting again, that this should be replaced by a rubberized lining. The local community was heavily involved at all stages of the project through the LLP. Representatives were invited to attend and contribute to all the planning and progress meetings. This involvement meant that any news and developments could be disseminated locally and any concerns reported back to the City before small concerns became major issues. An example of this is that the new plans included

introducing a system of underground drainage across the Fairground Flats to drain back into the pond. Members of the WREN Group expressed concern that the drains extended into a marshy area which would impact on the birdlife and damp-loving flora. A meeting was arranged on site between representatives of the WREN Group and the contractors and the matter was resolved to everyone's satisfaction in under an hour. In a major project such as this the need for rapid and frequent communication cannot be over-emphasised.

The project involved many improvements in addition to the lining, including a path around the pond, cycle racks and a pond dipping platform. The project itself caused little disruption and was completed with extreme professionalism. Picnic tables and benches were also put in place.



Local group the Lakehouse Lake Project were involved from the beginning and assisted with community liaison and communications, which was invaluable as the site was shut to the public for the duration of the relining phase. Pic by Bob Gibbons FRPS

There followed a nervous period of monitoring the water level but it became apparent that the level was remaining stable and water extracted from the borehole was well within the limits imposed by the license given by Thames Water. It was agreed that there should be

minimal planting although this included many hours work by both Epping Forest staff and volunteers. Despite some serious setbacks the story of the Jubilee Pond is one of success.

The pond is now a pleasant place to visit and is much more visited than previously. Wild flowers and plants are now reestablishing themselves and a far greater variety of established birdlife is now in evidence.



As soon as the relining work was completed, the site re-opened and the second, landscaping phase started. This was an opportunity for the Lakehouse Lake Project, Epping Forest Centenary Trust and other volunteers to get involved with landscaping and planting to help kick start the plant regeneration.

“We’re glad to have been so involved and to have influenced the project from beginning to end, from design drawings to site meetings.”

Lakehouse Chair, Dennis Stone

As the purpose of this short paper is to emphasis community involvement it would seem iniquitous to name individuals. However, no story of the Jubilee Pond would be complete without reference to the dedication and many hours given to the pond by Dave Salt and Fred Wanless. Without Dave’s perseverance and commitment, it is doubtful that the Jubilee Pond would exist as it does today. Fred’s knowledge, shown in the publication of his three works on the flora of Wanstead Flats and Bush Wood, gave the LLP academic credence and respect.

Robert Howell September 2019



soil

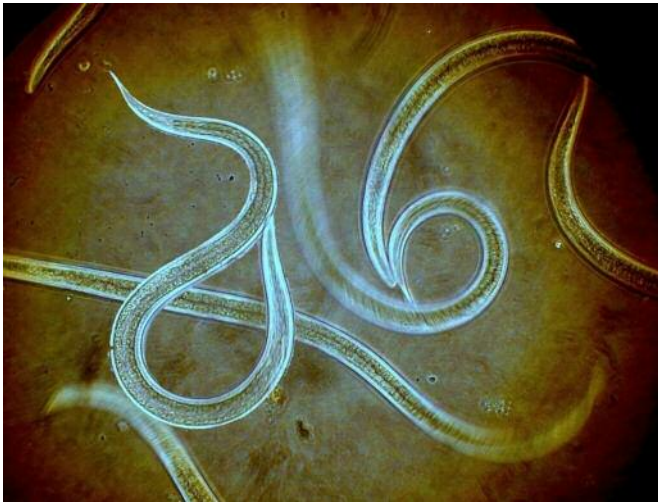
the wondrous stuff beneath our feet

Hidden out of sight, the soil beneath our feet is one of the most important features of our planet. Within it lies a secret world that is vital for the existence of life as it provides the medium in which plants grow thus providing us and other creatures with food.

Local naturalist and expert **Tricia Moxey** argues the case for not taking what's beneath our feet for granted.



Soils are incredibly biologically diverse habitats, full of organic matter and myriads of living creatures. Soils help to prevent floods as they store large amounts of water per hectare and they contain approximately 75% of the land-based carbon pool, which is three times more than the amount found within living plants and animals.



Steinernema scapterisci insect-parasitic nematode in the juvenile phase can infect and kill insects such as grasshoppers - pic from Wikipedia

This thin crust is made up of three main components: minerals, organic matter and living organisms. The bulky mineral portion consists of fine particles derived mainly from the underlying geological strata which has weathered over time. Feeding and anchoring roots of plants penetrate through it absorbing essential water

and minerals. The organic matter or humus is derived from decomposing material.

The living organisms include visible creatures such as moles, ants, earthworms, snails, slugs, millipedes, spiders, woodlice, fly larvae and beetles, nematodes and spring-tails. However, it is the invisible ones which outnumber all others. In one tablespoon of soil there are more than six billion different organisms including fungi, bacteria and miniscule animals and 99% of these have yet to be identified! Molecular fingerprinting is being used to find out more about the specific and interconnecting roles of these organisms.

Petrichor is the word which describes the smell of the volatile chemicals released by these micro-organisms as soon as rainwater reaches them after a dry spell and they become more active.

Most living organism are found in the top layers of the soil where the decomposing layer of organic matter made up of dead plant material, decomposing animals and dung provides a rich source of food for the many detritivores which feast on this rotting material breaking it down to release nutrients back into the soil to be taken up by the green plants as they grow.

In healthy soils, the thriving mass of animal life within this layer of organic matter will provide rich pickings for birds such as blackbirds, thrushes, starlings, rooks, lapwings, curlews and other wading birds. Hedgehogs too depend on finding food from within this layer. An attentive robin as you tend your garden is a sure sign

that your soil fauna is helping to meet the needs of this species! I have watched overwintering flocks of gulls dance on the grass on parts of Wanstead Flats as the pattering of their feet encourages invertebrates to the surface. They are then greedily consumed.



Chafer grubs are the larvae of large, flying beetles. There are several species, collectively known as chafers. The grubs live in the soil, feeding on plant roots.
- pic from Wikipedia

Much of the countryside of England has been cultivated for millennia and as it can take up to 1,000 years for just 1cm of topsoil to develop the soils over much of wooded parts of Epping Forest are unique and are of considerable interest to soil scientists. Throughout the past centuries, the Forest's majestic ancient trees have been supported by many different species of fungi which make up the wood-wide web. This is an interconnecting system of fine mycelial tubes along which pass signals as well as nutrients and water between the trees and other vegetation. This invisible network is vulnerable to

damage by compaction by vehicle tyres or by pounding feet along pathways. The retention of a deep un-trampled decomposing layer on the woodland floor benefits not just these fungi but all the other organisms living within it.



Earthworms are the underground gardeners - they enrich the soil with their castings, or the soil that has gone through their bodies. They eat only rotten plant and animal matter. - pic from Wikipedia

The soils found in the more open parts of the Forest such as Chingford Plain or Wanstead Flats have been disturbed by cultivation, fire and different management regimes in the past 200 years. The organic layer of the soil in these open areas is much thinner, more likely to dry out and suffers from wide fluctuations in temperature. The organisms found in such locations are ones that are adapted to cope with these conditions which may include grazing and or trampling. The grass and scrub vegetation growing on such sites will be supported

by a different range of fungi to those found within the wooded areas and most of them do not produce visible above ground fruiting bodies. Even so, a handful of healthy grassland soil may contain as much as 50 kilometres of invisible fungal mycelium! Trampling will cause damage to vegetation and creatures living within it and result in compaction of the soil. Too much pressure will cause loss of habitable space within it and with reduced porosity, water drains less freely. This can lead to oxygen deficiency within it, which in turn has a profound impact on vegetation as well as the animal life within it.

The impact of compaction on soil organisms will vary: young earthworms tend to live nearer the surface and are more likely to be squashed, soil dwelling beetle and fly larvae may be unable to wriggle through compacted soils. Certain butterfly and moth caterpillars need to pupate in the upper layers of the soil and if this is compacted, caterpillars may struggle to dig their way into the ground and then push their way out as they emerge as adults.

Epping Forest has been well used by visitors for many years, but the increasing numbers are adding to the immense pressures on its varied habitats. The issues of dealing with soil compaction in areas with high visitor numbers is only one aspect of managing the Forest and should be included in the next management plan.

Fantastic facts about soil

- ❑ Most of the food you eat, material for the clothes you wear and timber for the house you live in is produced by using soil
- ❑ It takes more than 500 years to produce an inch of soil
- ❑ There are more microorganisms in a tablespoon of soil than there are people on Earth
- ❑ There can be 10 miles of fungi in a teaspoon of forest soil
- ❑ Soils store and filter our fresh water
- ❑ When you walk in the forest you are being carried by thousands of bugs in the soil
- ❑ Soil is the home of a quarter of the world's living creatures
- ❑ Soil consists of 45% minerals, 25% water, 25% air and 5% organic material from plants and animals
- ❑ Soil is a natural filter for water

University of Sheffield 'Soil Secret Agents'
www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssa

year of the moth

article and pics by Tim Harris

At the start of the year, a group of us set ourselves the challenge of finding 300 species of moths and butterflies (collectively grouped in the Lepidoptera) in the local area. There were no fixed boundaries for the 'local area' but with regular moth-trappers in Grosvenor Road, Overton Drive and Belgrave Road, we felt anywhere on Wanstead Flats, in Wanstead Park or the gardens of Leytonstone, Forest Gate, Wanstead, and Manor Park could count. As it has turned out, the vast majority of records come from our back gardens.



It has proved to be the best year on record, locally, with 301 species of moths and 27 butterflies at the time of writing (29 September). About 20 of the moths have not been recorded previously in the local area, although some expected species have clearly suffered as a result of the fire damage on the Flats last year. Here are brief profiles of a selection of 15 species.



Burnished Brass *Diachrysis chrysitis*

Burnished Brass *Diachrysis chrysitis*

This two-generation moth is on the wing in June and July, then again in August and September. The adults feed at Honeysuckle, buddleias, Red Valerian and other flowers, while the caterpillars feed on the leaves of Common Nettle, White Dead-nettle, and Spear Thistle. The only local record was at the Belgrave Road light-trap in early September.

Chequered Grass-veneer *Catoptria falsella* (main pic)
Apparently a denizen of moss-covered roofs of outbuildings, this is one of the most beautiful of the 'grass-veneers'. I recorded eight in my Belgrave garden between late June and early September.



Coronet *Craniophora ligustri*

Coronet *Craniophora ligustri*

Previously unrecorded in our area, remarkably there were three in early July. Tom Casey attracted single individuals on 7th and 10th and there was one at Belgrave Road on 9th. Described as 'local' in its distribution, the caterpillar foodplants are Ash, Alder,



Cypress Pug *Eupithecia phoeniceata*

and Hazel, so surely there's no reason why it shouldn't be a regular. Let's hope so.

Cypress Pug *Eupithecia phoeniceata*

Another new moth on the block, Paul Mead attracted one to his Grosvenor Road trap on 30 August and there was one in Belgrave Road the following night.



Gold Triangle *Hypsopygia costalis*

Gold Triangle *Hypsopygia costalis*

The caterpillars of this small moth, with its lovely combination of purple and orange, apparently feed on stored clover and hay, thatch, and squirrels' dreys; we don't have any hatch, but there's plenty of hay at the riding school and lots of dreys.

Maiden's Blush *Cyclophora punctaria*

The Victorians came up with some quaint names for moths, and this is one of the best. It is strongly linked with oaks because its caterpillars eat their leaves. This is another moth with two generations each summer, from April to early July and from mid-July to late September. The first of the year was at one of the Overton Drive light-traps on 22 April, but the second generation was better represented, with four moths seen between 23-27 August.



Oak Processionary *Thaumetopoea praeceps*

The first record of this 'nuisance' species was in Cornwall in 1983. Then, in 2006, larvae were discovered in London and it was felt that rather than being migrants from the Continent, these had been introduced accidentally. There is an eradication programme locally, but clearly it hasn't been totally successful – two turned up at the Belgrave Road light-trap in August.



Orange Sallow *Xanthia citrigo*

With their orange, yellow, and pink hues, the sallows are a gorgeous group. This Orange Sallow was recorded in August. It is strongly linked with lime trees.



Peppered Moth *Biston betularia*

Moths will usually rest on a surface with matching colour. This light-form individual was on the white paint on my kitchen wall. The dark form, *carbonaria*, became dominant in smoke-polluted urban areas in years gone by, but I've never seen one.



Riband Wave *Idaea aversata*

This is one of the commonest moths in our area, and 2019 was a particularly good year. The first record was on 31 May and there were regular visits to light-traps in our area through June, July, and August. Food plants include docks, bedstraws, Dandelions, and Wood Aven.



Ruby Tiger *Phragmatobia fuliginosa*

This is a thickset moth of woodland, heaths, and gardens. It flies by night and day, its caterpillars feeding on many plants we have in our area, including Broom, ragworts, and plaintains. Despite this, it is not especially common in our area, with seven coming to the Belgrave Road light-traps at the end of July, and a second-generation individual appearing in early September.



Small Blood-vein *Scopula imitaria*

This sandy-brown moth in Belgrave Road on 1 July was apparently the first record for our area. Its caterpillars are thought to feed on a variety of plants, including Honeysuckle and Garden Privet.

Small Ranunculus *Hecatera dysodea*

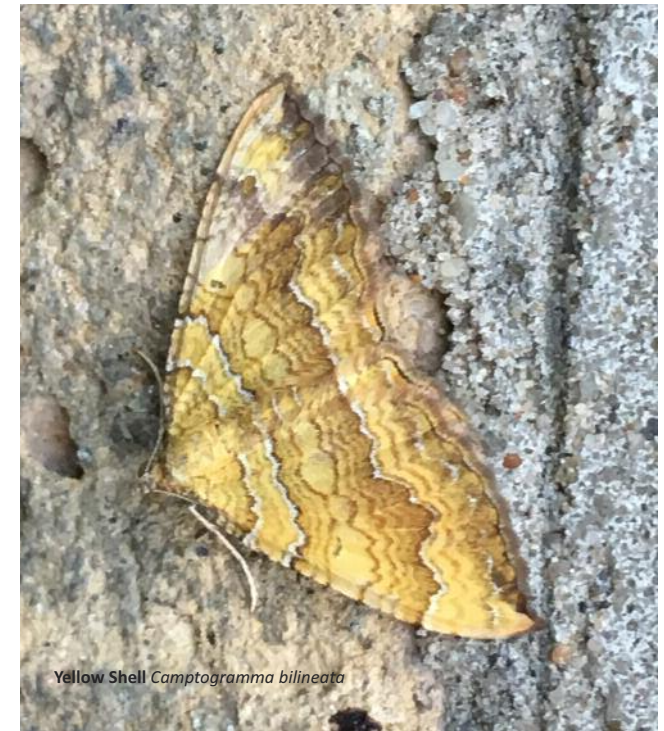
Formerly a widespread moth, this beauty had virtually disappeared from the UK by 1914, with a handful of records up to 1939. It reappeared in 1997 and has since become re-established in the South-East. Its caterpillars

feed on the ripening seeds of White Campion and Red Campion. One appeared in the Belgrave Road light-trap on 31 August, then Tom Casey had one at Overton Drive two nights later. Here to stay? I hope so.



Small Elephant Hawkmoth *Deilephila porcellus*

One of our most spectacular moths, this hawkmoth favours open habitats with plants such as Rosebay Willowherb and bedstraws. I suspect that Wanstead Flats is an important site for it.



Yellow Shell *Camptogramma bilineata*

Cleavers, bedstraws, docks, sorrels, and Dandelion are listed among a long list of larval foodplants, so it's no surprise that this is a common local species. At dusk, adults feed on the nectar of Creeping Thistle. It's a very distinctive moth, but comes in several different colour forms, which can cause ID headaches!

Article and pics by Tim Harris



bird report

Summary of birds seen during the summer by James Heale

A summer bird report would be very lean indeed if it was not for the fact that the traditional 'summer' month of August happens to coincide with the beginning of autumn migration for birds.

So this is really a report in two halves and we will start with the true summer months of June and July before we get into the early stages of autumn migration.



Early summer and breeding bird update

It has been a mixed year for our breeding birds. We know that Lesser Whitethroat bred around Long Wood, but think we only had three territories due, most likely, to loss of habitat. There were a few concentrated areas of the patch where there seemed to be a lot of young Common Whitethroats with our first newly fledged birds on 5 June. Chiffchaff territories appear to have been down on normal; Willow Warbler almost certainly didn't breed locally this year.

Reed Warbler showings were strong with a pair on the Roding (5 June) and two singing birds on the Shoulder of Mutton.

Our Meadow Pipits were seen carrying food on 9 June in the Brooms, but this species still seems to be hanging on by a thread as a breeding species; we had four territories earlier in the year. Similarly, our iconic Skylarks - although still singing - did not display any evidence of having bred successfully this year.

Little Owls have been seen on numerous occasions, although we are not sure whether they have bred successfully this year and we sadly also found a predated corpse. Our small colony of House Martins

were seen over their usual colony on Aldersbrook Estate and up to 33 birds were seen by the end of the breeding season, with around 12 birds staying on into September after the main departure.



Little Owl - Nick Croft

Great Crested Grebe bred on Perch Pond but sadly we don't believe any of the chicks made it to fledging.

House Sparrows seem to be doing very well in the small number of colonies in the area with over 100 birds seen around Jubilee. Goldfinch and Greenfinch numbers both broke records this year; interestingly, they may actually be beneficiaries of the new growth in the fire-damaged parts of the Flats. But Reed Bunting, like Willow Warbler, sadly seem to have been lost as a breeding species (whether permanently or temporarily, only time will tell).

The first Common Tern for the year was seen on 8 June (400 metres east of Wanstead Park). But the first on the Patch (taking it strictly by the birders' definition) was a month later with a very obliging bird that perched up for Nick Croft on Shoulder of Mutton on 8 July and probably the same bird was seen fishing on the Basin the next day. Nick also saw a young bird later in August.



Common Tern - Nick Croft

We had at least two different Yellow-legged Gulls at slightly different stages of maturity and present on numerous days, normally to be found loafing with the other large gulls on the pitches. The first one to appear was on 8 July.

The first returning Black-headed Gull, and first juvenile gull of the season, was seen on 1 July. For those impressed by juvenile gull plumages, Black-headed Gull

youngsters are among the most pleasing to the eye. My second favourite juvenile gull is the Lesser Black-backed Gull and we got some of these lovely dark chocolate birds back on 19 July.



Yellow-legged Gull - Tony Brown

The first returning Common Gulls always arrive slightly later than the Black-headed Gulls, and we got the first ones back on 15 July, with numbers only really picking up later in the autumn. Later in the season Nick also picked up a lovely juvenile Mediterranean Gull on Heronry that almost caused a twitch before it flew off (first for the year) on 30 August.

Hobby seemed to have a successful year on the Patch and we believe that two birds fledged successfully from the breeding pair that were seen frequently through the

summer (one of which I was thrilled to add to my garden list in Leytonstone).

Bullfinch have been seen on several occasions around the Old Sewage Works with four birds seen on 11 June, although they were very difficult to pin down and I seem to be going through a second year in a row without seeing or hearing any.

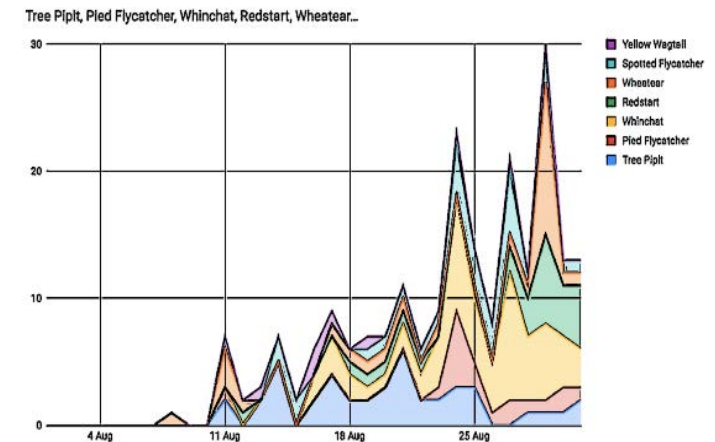
Our first Common Sandpiper for the year appeared on Alex on 27 July - found by Tony B with a Green Sandpiper found by Rob S on Heronry on the 14th August.

August and Autumn Migration

August happened with a bang. Most (but not all) of the birders stopped taking pictures of invertebrates and raised their eyes to treetops and skies again as autumn migration began. However, bird migration doesn't follow neat calendar dates and autumn migration seemed to take off properly on 11 August. Chart 1 shows some of our core passage migratory bird sightings stacked up across August, reaching a zenith on 29 August when we had 12 Wheatears, seven Common Redstarts, and six Whinchats amongst other things.

The spring had been dreadful for Willow Warbler and we did not seem to have any sticking around as regular

singers (as already mentioned), but the passage migrating birds started to appear from the first day of August. In fact, Willow Warbler were seen on 21 of the days in August with individual bird high counts of seven on four separate days.



1 August also produced our first Garden Warbler since 25 June (a pretty narrow gap between 'end of spring' and 'beginning of August', I am sure you will note, and one which most likely reflects outlier birds).

And if Swallows make a summer, then surely their departure marks the end of summer? If so, we started seeing southward-bound birds on the move from 2 August (although the major flow may well not have started yet). We don't have breeding Swallows anymore, but even the numbers of passage birds seen were down by around 60%.

Our shortest-staying summer breeders are, of course, Swifts. Checking my own records, they were a constant feature this summer from 6 May until 3 August. On the weekend of 3-4 August, they were screaming around above my house and parts of the patch. The following weekend, like Keyser Soze (I'm afraid you either get this 90's film reference, or you don't), they were gone. Actually, 'gone' may not be strictly correct as we have still been picking up passage birds moving through, and the last ones seen were only a day off our 'latest' record and watched by Nick C from the Old Sewage Works on 1 September. Although the number of days these birds were seen was normal, we believe the numbers of resident breeders were down by up to 70% on previous years.



Wood Warbler - Nick Croft

For the first year ever, we recorded Wood Warbler in both spring and 'autumn', both in a similar location in Long Wood, with the autumn bird found by Nick on 7

August. This was the first Wood Warbler recorded in the autumn across London.

Before I continue with a list of some of our early autumn passerine passage migration, it is worth remembering that not all birds from the tropics got here entirely of their own steam. Nick found this Budgie on 1 August (someone presumably left a window open while cleaning out the aviary or bird cage).



Budgerigar - Nick Croft

The movements of many of the breeding birds and passage birds already mentioned are part of the seasonal patch cycles that we observe and monitor, but if I had to name seven species of passerines that most typify the spring and autumn migratory passage expectations of local birders, it would be: Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, Common Redstart, Spotted

Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher, and Yellow Wagtail. There should probably be an honourable mention for the late-arriving Ring Ouzel. As mentioned already, we also get big cluster movements of many other species (everything from Wood Pigeon to Willow Warbler, and Starlings to Swallows).

Amongst this set of core passage birds, Wheatear, as usual, kicked things off with the first returning autumn bird on 8 August, found by Nick C. Since then, numbers have mostly been lower than usual. The peak day on 29 August with 12 birds was exceptional as the second most productive day this August saw just three.



Pied Flycatcher - James Heale

As already mentioned, 11 August felt like the day that autumn migration really started; Tony B found Pied Flycatcher in Motorcycle Wood in the SSSI, which only Bob V was quick enough to twitch successfully. But the rest of us need not have worried. There were to be plenty to go around. 2018 was the only year in my five

years of birding locally that Pied Flycatcher failed to feature on my year list, so I was extra keen to secure one this year. Luckily, it turned out to be a record year for them. Pied Flycatchers were recorded on each day from 23-31 August, with 24th seeing a total of six birds, doubling our previous day record.



Spotted Flycatcher - James Heale

Spotted Flycatchers are often the dead certs of the autumn migration period, but, unlike their slightly scarcer Pied cousins, 2019 hasn't been fabulous for them. Nevertheless, this species was recorded on 16 out of the 21 last days of August with a peak of five birds on 27 August.

The first autumn Whinchat appeared on 16 August, and, since then, were recorded every single day through the rest of the month with a high count of ten birds on 27 August.

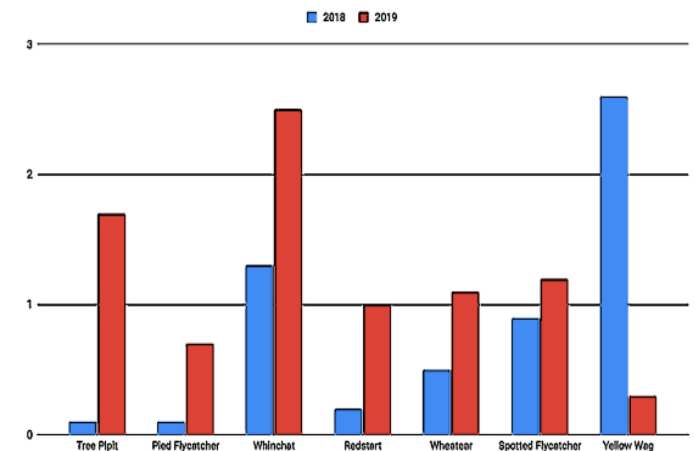


Whinchat - James Heale

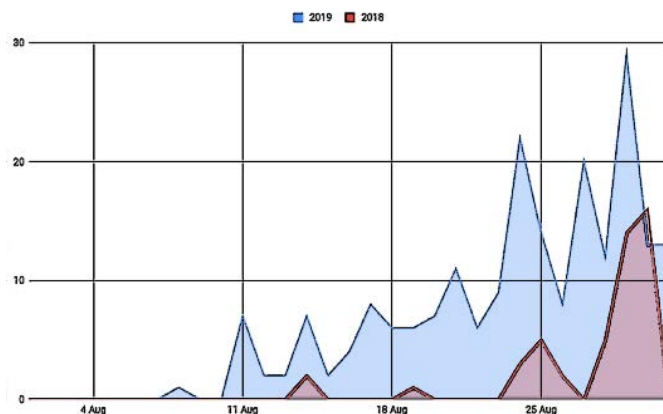
It was a record-breaking season for Tree Pipit. Last year I had the only Tree Pipit of the autumn; a single bird calling low over my head near Long Wood. This year we had a short but tremendous run of sightings, also with record numbers of birds and mostly seen perching, sometimes circling, and flying up and down from ground to tree. From the first sighting on 11th August until the end of the month, there were actually only three days when Tree Pipit were not seen at all, and we have had up to six birds in a day.

The passage migrant that has been most disappointing is Yellow Wagtail; normally one of our strongest performers with double figures of fly-overs common in the autumn days. Indeed, as of writing this, I have still yet to see or hear a single one on the patch this year. And so now is a good time to study 'Chart 2' which shows just how low the numbers of Yellow Wagtail have

been compared to last year. 2018 and 2019 is perhaps not a fair comparison as our most devoted patch watcher was around a lot less last year, so I have tried to iron this inconsistency out by plotting the average number of birds seen divided by the number of days the patch was actually watched. This shows both how good 2019 has been overall, but how poor it was for Yellow Wagtail.



To plot a year-on-year comparison slightly differently, 'Chart 3' shows the total number of core passage migrant birds recorded per day with Yellow Wagtail removed (so, Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Pipit, Whinchat, Redstart, Wheatear). Some of the long flat red lines for 2018 show some of the days when nobody was out recording, but the relative size of the peaks compared to blue 2019, again shows what a good year it has been.



This now leads me to make another conclusion, not about the year, but about the location. On 29 August, Wanstead Flats had double the number of Spotted Flycatcher of any other site in the London Recording Area, it had 50% more Pied Flycatcher than any other location, 12 times as many Wheatear, seven times as many Common Redstart, and 50% more Whinchat. 29 August may have been a good day for Wanstead Flats, but we had more of those migrant species on our first, second, and third best days than any other London site had on their best day.

Wanstead Flats surely remains the pre-eminent location for passage migration in London

This is just one of many reasons why holding a summer music festival on this site is such a poorly considered

idea (and indeed one of many reasons why the Wren Group continues to campaign vigorously against such an event taking place).



Common Redstart - James Heale

Other August birds of note included a pair of fly-over Greenshank on Wednesday 14th from Nick C. Nick was



Female Mandarin - Nick Croft

one of a very select few who had ever seen Greenshank from the Patch. That was soon to change quite dramatically, but that is a story for September and will be in the next Newsletter.

On a number of days through August, from 14th onwards, a female Mandarin was present on both Jubilee and Heronry (we are assuming it is the same bird). The first returning Water Rail for the autumn appeared in Wanstead Park on 25th August. And a Great [White] Egret flew over Wanstead Flats on 27th August.


Tantalisingly, there are always the 'ones that get away', such as a possible Nightingale on 21st August on the Flats, but that's birding for you!

Report by James Heale



Join James and other birders on the excellent multi-author blog 'Wanstead Birding' at

<http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.com>



Picture by Andrew Spencer

a fairer forest

article by Gill James

Those of us who live in the south of Epping Forest may not be aware of the issues facing the Forest as a whole. We may care about local issues such as a possible large-scale music event on the Flats, or the state of the lakes in Wanstead Park, but are we aware of the concerns of other voluntary groups in the north of our Forest?

A number of shared concerns about Epping Forest have come to light through the medium of the Epping Forest Consultative Committee. This Committee, set up in 2017, comprises 16 varied local voluntary groups. It meets every couple of months to hear about and discuss Forest issues. The groups involved vary from horse-riders and runners to residents' associations and conservation groups and represent, together, over 26,000 members. Serious questions are now being asked about funding.

The Wren Group has kick-started the discussion by asking “how do you put a value on a forest?”

The idea of ‘**Natural Capital**’ emerged at the Rio Conference in 2012. It is a way of calculating the value of **ecosystem services** in monetary terms by looking at factors such as geology, soil, water, biodiversity, climate regulation, carbon sequestration, natural flood defence, carbon storage, pollination of crops, health benefits, inspiration from wildlife, and recreation.

This idea was adopted in the **UK Government’s 25 Year**

Plan to Improve the Environment called **A Green Future**, published in January 2018, stating that ‘natural capital’ is a tool to help us make key choices and long-term decisions, and that all local authorities and large landowners should be producing their own natural capital accounts. This was made more urgent when **a national climate emergency** was declared by the UK Parliament in May 2019. However, since then Government business has been overwhelmed by Brexit uncertainties.



Epping - described by the Lord Mayor of London in 2016 as the ‘jewel in the capital’s crown’. Picture Ambresbury Banks - pic by Tony Morrison

Some large landowners such as the Forestry Commission and a few local authorities, such as Sheffield and Barnet in north London, have done their own natural capital accounts, with fascinating results. For example, Sheffield found that for every £1 spent on public parks, society receives £34 worth of benefits, many of which arise from

their contribution to physical and mental wellbeing. Barnet found that there were **over 10.5 million visits** are made to its green spaces each year with an estimated value of over **£41m annually**. The Forestry Commission calculates its natural capital value as £22.99 billion per annum (2017-18), calculated on carbon sequestration, recreation, and timber sales.

Epping Forest: What is it worth?

It is **London’s largest open space and cultural landscape**, described as ‘A jewel in the capital’s crown’ by the Lord Mayor in 2016, comprising 2,500 hectares (6,000 acres) of mainly ancient broadleaved woodland, a site of international biological significance (two-thirds of its area is made up of sites of special scientific interest (SSSI). It is also a Cultural Landscape, which contains many elements: ancient wood-pasture, lakes, bogs and relict heathlands, a network of ancient green lanes offering tranquillity and semi-naturalness and dark skies.

The Importance of Trees: Epping Forest covers c.1% of total English woodland, with over 1 million trees, including 50,000 ancient trees. **Trees are important carbon storers, air-quality improvers and climate controllers:** they keep us cooler in hot weather. During record temperatures in June and July 2018, Epping Forest remained up to 2 degrees C below the surrounding urban temperature.

Overall, an estimated 1.3 billion kg of air pollutants were removed by woodlands, plants, grasslands and other UK vegetation in 2015. Trees in particular provide a wide range of services and account for most of the volume of air pollutants absorbed by natural vegetation in the UK. Epping Forest removed 11,342 kg of pollution in 2015.

Trees are important to us and we need more

The Committee on Climate Change has said that in the UK, 1.5 billion trees would be needed by 2050 to help achieve zero net carbon. Michael Gove, the environment secretary, has promised a national campaign of tree planting, with pledges of funding for 10 million new rural trees and 130,000 urban trees by 2022. Even Redbridge Council, in partnership with Trees for Cities, is set to plant over 15,000 trees through community projects.

The Forest offers **inspiration from wildlife**, with important varied habitats for flora and fauna with high biodiversity, more than 500 rare insect species, including significant pollinators, with important leisure and sporting recreation facilities. Significantly, it has **highly populated urban areas nearby**, with two visitor centres, two heritage buildings and 52 car parks.

The Forest is a healthy life promoter: The Office for National Statistics online interactive map allows users to find out how much air pollution is removed by vegetation in their area, and how this is valued in avoided health damage costs. In West Essex, £17.6 healthcare costs per person were saved in one year. In Waltham Forest and Redbridge, £13.99 healthcare costs per person were saved in one year.



Research shows that spending time among trees has favourable effects on our body systems, but there is evidence that simply seeing trees can confer beneficial neuronal and physiological changes. Patients recovering from surgery have shorter post-operative stays and need fewer potent analgesics if their room has a window overlooking trees. Picture Warren Wood by Tony Morrison

So how much *is* Epping Forest worth?

It is three times larger than Barnet's open spaces. Its habitat is much richer being mainly broadleaved woodland. Based on a simple comparison with London Borough of Barnet's natural capital figures,

Epping Forest's natural capital value = £1.8 billion x 3 = £5.4 billion - minimum!

BUT....The Forest is beset by problems:

Local groups have identified the following forest-wide problems:

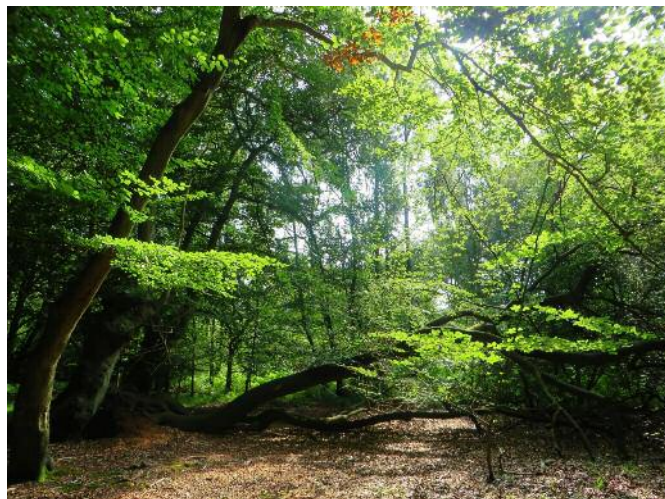
Habitats are damaged by increasing public use: Growing traffic and air pollution is degrading the Forest. Habitat protection is fundamental. There is an overriding need for more investment.

The Forest needs increased revenue for capital works both short-term and long-term.

New infrastructure is needed for visitor centres, toilets, replacement vehicles, and repairs to buildings and paths, especially at over-used honeypot areas.

More staff are needed at visitor centres and heritage buildings, to manage and maintain educational resources, and to deal with increasing public pressure and an increasing workload from development pressures. More visible keepers and staff are needed to maintain

and protect habitats, to maintain trees and lakes, tracks, paths and bridleways, to deal with fly-tipping, and to support volunteers and charities.



*Epping's woodland has proven health benefits and is equally accessible to everyone - shouldn't it receive the same kind of funding as say a concert hall ?
Picture Epping beech trees by Andrew Spencer*

What is the current investment from the City of London?

The Corporation funds the day-to-day management of the gardens, churchyards and green spaces in the City and protects and manages, by charitable trust, almost **11,000 acres** of open space across London including Epping Forest, Hampstead Heath, Burnham Beeches and West Ham Park, known as the 'Open Spaces'. Epping Forest is the greatest part of the 'Open Spaces'. Epping Forest, 'London's great Forest', is a registered charity managed by the **City of London Corporation** which acts as conservator, as enjoined by The Epping Forest Act 1878.

In June 2019 the Superintendent reported that the **City's grant to Epping Forest was £6.3 million. Deductions:** Administration costs of approximately £1 million are deducted from this, plus the City Surveyor's 20-year Building Maintenance Programme, covering property work, car park and path maintenance.

The net Forest remaining budget for 2018-19 was c. **£2.746 million. Over the past 10 years, there has been a 36% decline in City support!**

Growing pressures on the City:

The City's latest Financial Review indicates that there will be a further decline in funding for the Forest leading to a so-called '**efficiency drive**'.

Funding for the Forest will rely less on the City's grant and more on other funding schemes, such as the Stewardship Grant, on good business management, and on the work of volunteers. The proposed large-scale music event on Wanstead Flats is one such fund-raising scheme.

This is because of growing pressures on the City Cash and City Fund budget from, for example, the Government Funding Review, Brexit uncertainties, and major capital projects.

These major capital projects costing £2.4bn include the relocation of the food markets to Barking, the relocation of the Museum of London to Spitalfields (£332 million, with the City contributing £192 million) and the hugely

expensive construction of a massive new concert hall on the old Museum of London site.

Is the average Londoner more likely to benefit from a visit to a concert hall or from a visit to one of our open spaces? Surely London's open spaces deserve more investment?

Invest to maintain a Healthy Forest

The City is generous in its funding to Open Spaces and we appreciate this unique gift. But Epping Forest gives exceptional value to London and deserves greater financial recognition. In order to meet modern pressures, it needs **more funding, not less!**

In order to help with ever-increasing costs, the members of the Epping Forest Consultative Committee will be asked to agree to this proposal:

Identify key funding shortfalls. Recognise the shortfall in City support for Epping Forest in relation to its other capital projects and request that City Cash raises the grant for the management of the Forest accordingly.

Article by Gill James



a rare visitor

article and pic by Christian Moss

On Saturday the 14th September I found a very unusual butterfly in my Wanstead garden.

At first glance I thought it was a Holly Blue but on closer inspection I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a stunning looking male Long tailed Blue.

I ran inside to grab my camera and just prayed that on my return it was still around. The butterfly gods were shining on me as it did stay briefly so I could get some record shots before it flew off.

Rob Smith from Cambridgeshire and Essex Butterfly Conservation has confirmed that this is the only local sighting so far this year. An individual was recorded last year in Hornchurch.

Experts believe rising temperatures are behind the Long-tailed Blue influx, with sightings of the butterfly coming in from Cornwall right across to Kent, as far north as Suffolk and even into Surrey – where the Long-tailed Blue hasn't been seen since 1990.

Typically, only a handful of these exotic migrants from the Mediterranean reach the UK each summer, but this is the third time in six years that the butterfly has arrived in vastly increased numbers, and 2019 looks set to surpass the previous peaks witnessed in 2013 and 2015.

The Long-tailed Blue has previously been considered a very rare visitor to the UK, despite being abundant across southern Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia.



Macaroeris nidicolens (a jumping spider) [big black reflective eyes] - pic by Mick Massie

spider field trip

Wanstead Flats - July 2019

David Carr has conducted several spider surveys on Wanstead Flats over the past few years and has made some great discoveries. These finds meant Wren Group was keen to partner with the London Natural History Society to share some of our star species more broadly.

Local naturalist and chair of the Wren Group James Heale reports on a recent field trip together with David.



The date had been agreed for some time and our main concern as the day got nearer was the recent record-breaking heat. It turned out to be one of the wettest days of the summer and this undoubtedly meant that finding and identifying spiders would be harder.

However, a small, committed group turned up on the day and none of us regretted it. The rain mostly abated in the late morning and, using David's trusted searching techniques (bush-beating and sweep-netting), we found several interesting and noteworthy finds; although many of the spiders below would require microscopic examination for absolute certainty. Whilst formal recording will not step beyond the genus unless clear and certain, apart from where specimens were collected for examination, for the purpose of this article we have tried to pin-point species to the best of David's lengthy field experience.

The genus we perhaps had highest hopes for was *Philodromus*. David has confirmed finds of national scarcities, *P. buxi* and *P. rufus*, from his previous visits. This trip was more about the *Anyphaena* species but we still came across several specimens ranging between three likely species (all would require microscopic inspection for absolute conformation, but we can be pretty confident that David's beating techniques - especially of young oaks - found...), *Philodromus albidus*

(a female missing some legs), several *Philodromus cespitum* (females), and a likely *Philodromus praedatus* (also a female).



Anyphaena sp [pale spider with thick, spiny black hairs] - pic by Mick Massie

David found at least two different *Anyphaena* species, in the SSSI (acid grassland) and across Centre Road, in the scrubby, grass 'Broom fields' that are home to Wanstead's small breeding Skylark population (even on this wet July day, we were accompanied on our survey by Skylark and Meadow Pipit song). *Anyphaena accentua* is common in the UK, and David found at least one immature specimen. He has previously found *A. sabina* on the Flats and, on this occasion, believes we may have found a couple of specimens of either *A. numida* or *A. sabina*. Both species are rare. *A. numida* was first found only three years ago and less than ten specimens have been formally identified in the UK (*A. sabina* is only marginally less scarce with 13 known finds). These two

scarce species require microscopic examination to determine, but David knows the spiders we found will be one of the two; he is attempting to rear one of the spiders to identify it to species level, and we plan to hold another field trip in the Autumn when there is greater chance of finding a fully mature specimen of *A. numida* for easier identification as well as connecting with some of the rarer *Philodromus* species mentioned above.

Two very different spiders in the same family as the *Philodromus* genus, were a lovely small, hairy spider, the nationally scarce *Thanatus striatus*, and the far more common, *Tibellus oblongus*, found in the SSSI. Strictly speaking, we cannot be scientifically certain it was not the very similar *Tibellus maritimus* (which is mainly found in sandy, coastal areas), but David was pretty sure it was the more common inland species.



Thanatus striatus [pale fluffy spider]- pic by Mick Massie



Macaroeris nidicolens (a jumping spider) [big black reflective eyes] - pic by Mick Massie

We were also really pleased to come across *Macaroeris nidicolens* a jumping spider found in the SSSI. First found in the UK in 2002 and only in the South East. It is apparently common in the Mediterranean, but uncommon in the North of Europe with less than 50 specimens officially recorded in the UK and described as 'rare and restricted to the Thames corridor' although is increasingly being found locally (*I recently found one on my front door*).

The *Heliophanus* jumping spider we found in the SSSI could have been one of a couple of options: *H. flavipes*, or *H. cupreus*. We found another specimen later in the walk and over the road and got to appreciate the wonderfully dark, almost turquoise sheen.

Enoplognatha ovata and *E. latimana* are almost indistinguishable, but can come in a variety of colour

forms, sometimes with nail-varnish-like carmine or crimson jagged stripes which give them the former its name, Common Candy-striped Spider. We found a slightly plainer version in the SSSI, but when studied closely (or viewed in Mick's excellent macro photographs), even the plain form is intricately marked.

Xysticus cristatus, the Common Crab Spider, was also found in SSSI feeding on an interesting wasp. Tony Madgwick identified the wasp as Slender-bodied Digger Wasp (*Crabro cribarius*), which, we believe, may not have been formally recorded before in the local area.



Argiope bruennichi (male Wasp Spider) [downward facing from grass blades]- pic by Mick Massie

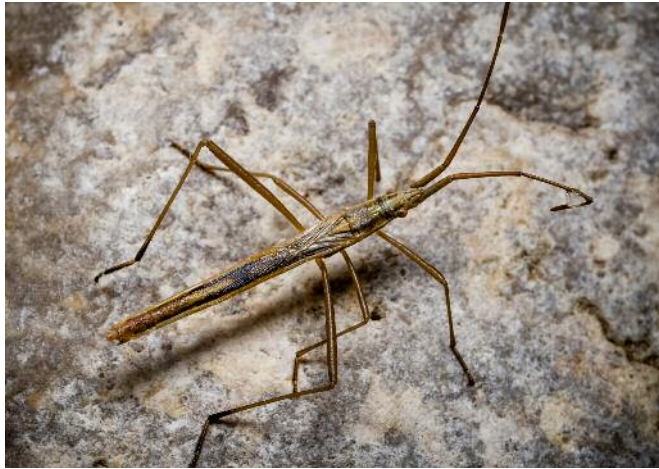
Whilst not as scarce as some of the other finds mentioned above, we were all pleased when David netted the distinctive female Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*). He found several more in the scrubby margins of the Broom Fields, close to Centre Road, although none were yet fully grown. Later on, he handed a couple of us a spider he had just potted with a wry smile and asked us to guess what it was. It turned out the diminutive thing was a fully grown male Wasp Spider. Not only was it a fraction of the size of the fully grown females, but it didn't even have the distinctive wasp-like horizontal markings.



Linyphia triangularis - common to the area but a new species for my personal list

Another surprise for me personally was when David explained that a relatively large, well marked, and elongated spider was a type of money spider! *Linyphia triangularis* may be pretty common (in fact it has been described as pretty much ubiquitous at this time of year)

but for an arachno-newbie like me it was yet another new species for my personal list; the specimen found was an immature female.



Chorosoma schillingi (a rhopalid hemipteran) [stick-like insect] - pic by Mick Massie

To complete the list of finds on a single visit, we also saw nursery web spider, *Pisaura mirabilis*, the flower crab spider,

Misumena vatia, several garden orb web spiders (*Araneus diamedatus*) and the orb spider, *Zygiella x-notata*.

Clearly our main focus was on spiders, but we also noted some other invertebrates of interest, including several fascinating hemipterans or true bugs. Bishop's Mitre Shieldbug (*Aelia acuminata*) seemed to be everywhere in the damp grass and after a few sweeps of David's net there were often double figures of them along with bush crickets and grasshoppers. Other shieldbugs included the wonderfully marked Brassica Shieldbug (*Eurydema oleracea*), and one of the tortoise shieldbugs, *Eurygaster testudinaria*. The hemipteran highlight, however, was undoubtedly the wonderfully elongated rhopalid (which looked very much like a small stick insect),

Chorosoma schillingi. The last time Mick saw one of these was ten years ago, also on Wanstead Flats, so it may be that Wanstead is a good place for this interesting insect within the London recording area.

There were a few hoverflies around and other flies despite the wet, an interesting large ichneumon, and even a few soggy butterflies and moths, including Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*), Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*), and Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*).

Article by James Heale

Wonderful photography by Mick Massie

then & now

In each edition of the Wren newsletter we will be showing you a picture of an area in the Wren catchment taken around 100 years ago and how it looks today. Just for fun have a guess where this picture was taken (answer to follow). If you would like to see a particular area in this slot why not get in touch and we will see what we can do.





Leaves

by Elsie N. Brady

How silently they tumble down
And come to rest upon the ground
To lay a carpet, rich and rare,
Beneath the trees without a care,
Content to sleep, their work well done,
Colors gleaming in the sun.
At other times, they wildly fly
Until they nearly reach the sky.
Twisting, turning through the air
Till all the trees stand stark and bare.
Exhausted, drop to earth below
To wait, like children, for the snow.



Epping
Forest

Registered Charity

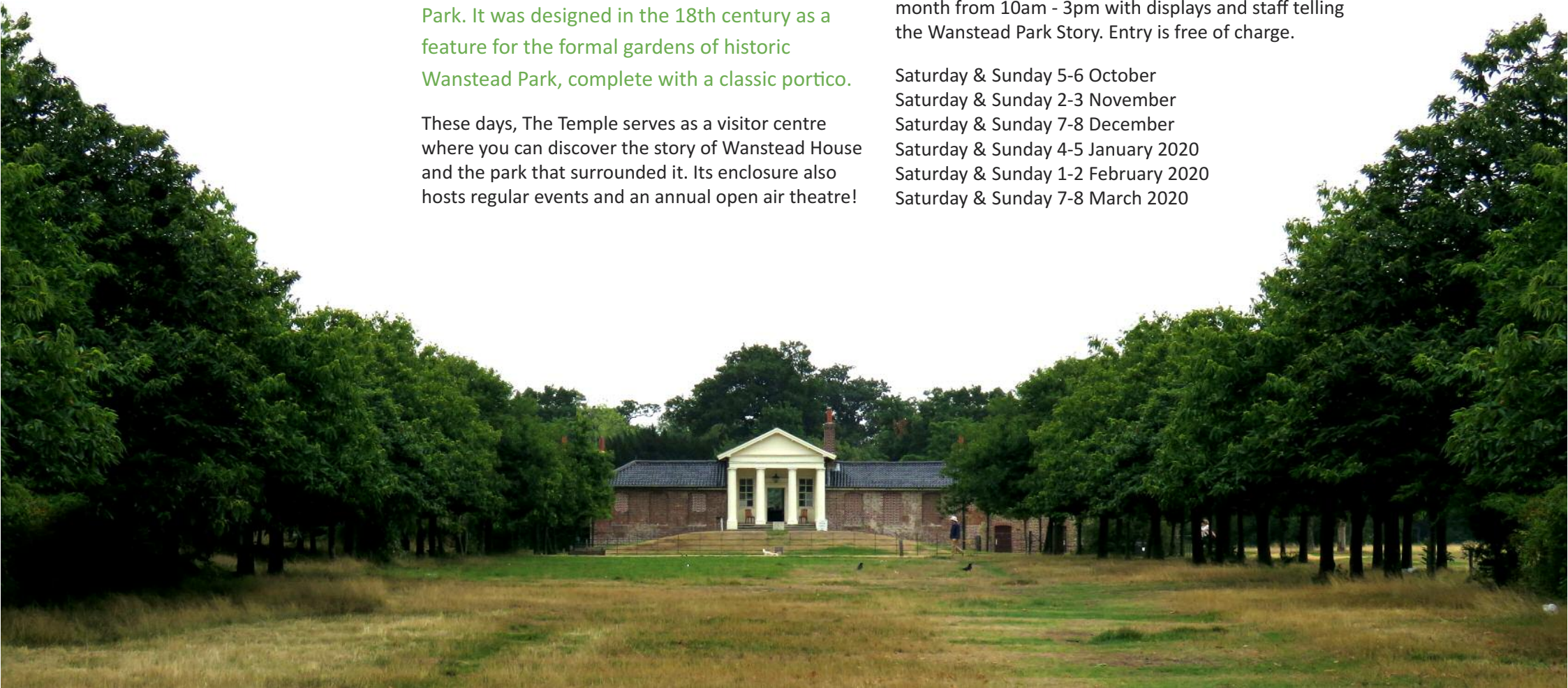
the temple

The Temple is situated in the middle of Wanstead Park. It was designed in the 18th century as a feature for the formal gardens of historic Wanstead Park, complete with a classic portico.

These days, The Temple serves as a visitor centre where you can discover the story of Wanstead House and the park that surrounded it. Its enclosure also hosts regular events and an annual open air theatre!

The Temple is open on every first weekend in the month from 10am - 3pm with displays and staff telling the Wanstead Park Story. Entry is free of charge.

Saturday & Sunday 5-6 October
Saturday & Sunday 2-3 November
Saturday & Sunday 7-8 December
Saturday & Sunday 4-5 January 2020
Saturday & Sunday 1-2 February 2020
Saturday & Sunday 7-8 March 2020





practical work

Wren's practical conservation work takes place in the winter from October to March.

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.

Habitat management has been a key Wren Group activity for many years. We have a large selection of hand tools, and a tool shed to the rear of the Keepers' cottages in Wanstead Park. It is here we meet for most of our activities.

Traditionally we met one Sunday a month for a couple of hours, but we have been able to up the work rate considerably since about 2014 when we started mid week practical work as well. So from the beginning of October through the start of the nesting season in early March we meet mid week as well as the first Sunday. Many hundreds of hours of volunteer time have been delivered in this way.

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.



There is a core group of perhaps 8-10 volunteers most weeks, and we have been able to build up a regular set of activities to help the Corporation, both in the park and on Wanstead Flats. About once a year we meet with a member of the management team of the Forest, have a walk around and agree some key priorities for the coming season. These have gradually shifted over the years but our core responsibilities are;

- ❑ Chalet Wood, the bluebell wood, in the park – keeping it clear of scrub, edging the paths
- ❑ The exchange lands (or old sewage works) down by the River Roding a very diverse habitat excellent for butterflies, birds, grass snakes, mammals and other species
- ❑ Key bits of maintenance that require hand tools that are too fiddly for the paid teams with their power tools – keeping the edge of the Ornamental Waters clear of alder and other nuisance species; keeping paths clear and open; small scale habitat management.

Recently we have been on the Flats assisting the Corporation with some work after the great July 2018 fire, and there will be further work on this over the winter 2019-20.



So why not some and join us. All tools and gloves are provided, as is basic training in health and safety about the forest. It is an excellent way to keep fit, and we work in virtually all weathers. You do not have to commit to anything – just turn up if you fancy it on the day. And also you see Epping Forest in such a detailed way, sometimes on hands and knees, so it is a wonderful way to come to appreciate this stunning environment on our doorstep.

Peter Williams
Practical work lead
wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com



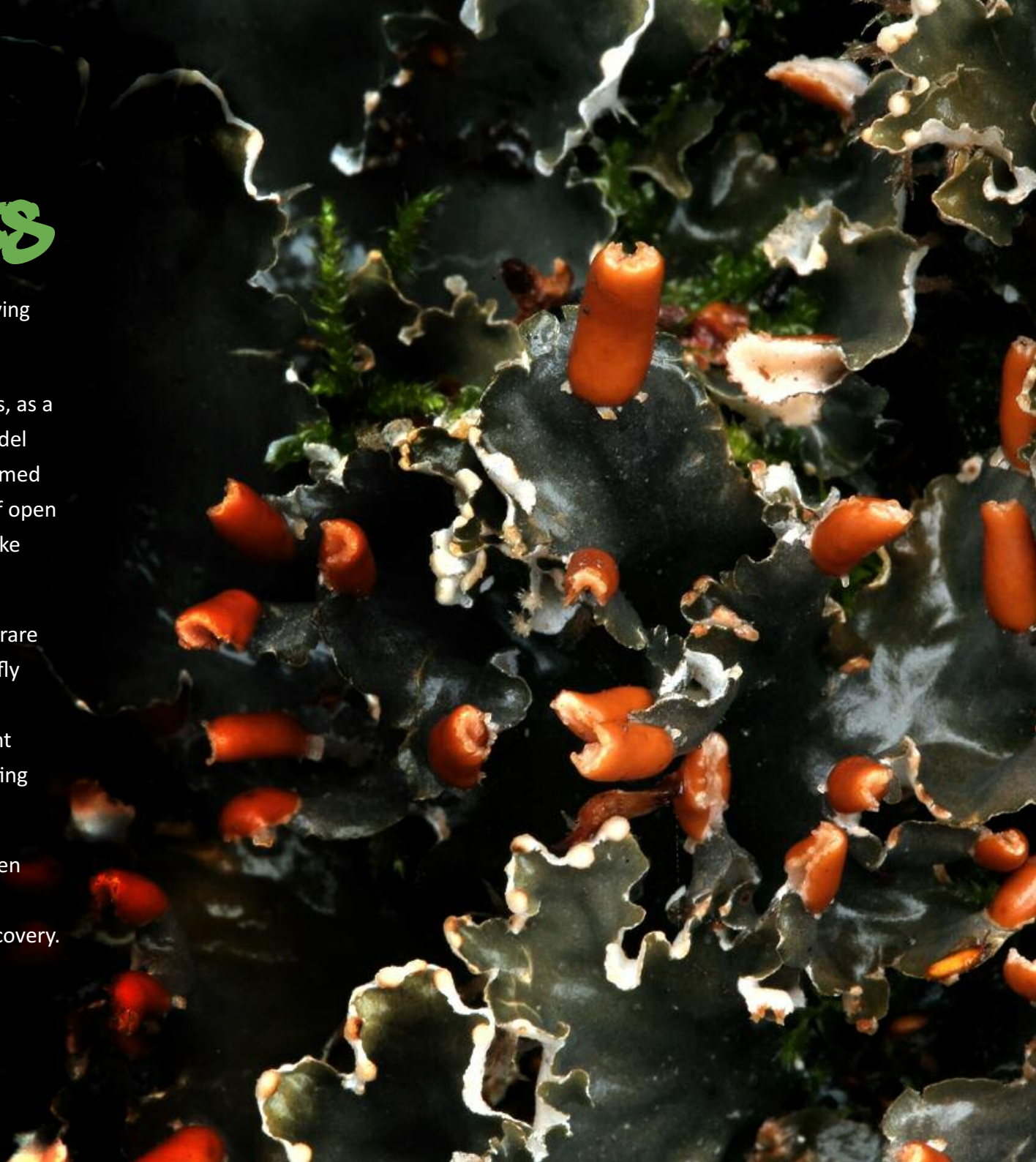
Wanstead flats

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 2018 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
First published December 18





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.

then & now

Were you right ?

Wanstead Flats model yacht pond in 1914 and the Jubilee Pond as it is today. The London Plane trees newley planted in 1914 now completely obscure Dames Road houses and shops.



events diary

Sun 6th Oct - Wren Practical Work. Chalet wood clearing bramble for bluebells. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Thurs 10th Oct - Wren Practical Work. Clear alder from banks of Ornamentals. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sun 13th Oct – 10.30am, Centre Rd Car Park. Spider Fieldwork (autumn edition) with David Carr. James Heale will support this and will flag to LNHS members.

Thur 17th Oct - Wren Practical Work. Clear alder from banks of Ornamentals. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sun 20th Oct - Autumn in Gernon Bushes. An opportunity to discover the autumn harvest of fruits, seeds and fungi in this nature reserve with guides Tricia Moxey and Reserve Warden Brian McGhie. 10:30 – 12:30. Meet at the entrance to the reserve in Garnon Mead, Coopersale, CM16 7RN. Turn off B181 Epping to North Weald Rd into Coopersale Common Lane and then left into Garnon Mead beyond railway bridge. Grid Ref: TL477031

Thur 24th Oct - Wren Practical Work. Top of the Glade; oak seedlings. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Thurs 31st Oct - Wren Practical Work. Chestnut Avenue pruning work at the lake end. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sat 2nd Nov - Fungi walk and talk led by Tricia Moxey. 10am Bush Wood - meet on path that connects Bushwood (Rd) with Belgrave Rd.

Sun 3rd Nov - Wren Practical Work. Opposite Chalet Wood; clearance for bluebells. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Thurs 7th Nov - Wren Practical Work. Clear alder from banks Ornamentals near overflow sluice MEET STABLES. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sun 10th Nov - A visit to the Deer Sanctuary - Learn about its history and management and meet the residents, with Mick Collins. 10:30 – 12:30 Meet: Genesis Slade Car Park, off Coppice Row (B172), Theydon Bois. Grid ref: TQ 438997
www.walthamsoft.com/foef/walks.htm

Thu 14th Nov - Wren Practical Work. Clear alder from banks Ornamentals near overflow sluice. Meet at stables. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Thur 21st Nov - Wren Practical Work. Empress Ave; clear bramble runners grassland; meet stables. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Fri 22nd Nov - Friends of Wanstead Parklands Quiz Nite with compere Tricia Moxey. 7.30pm for 8.00pm start. Wanstead and

Snaresbrook Cricket Club, 1 Overton Drive, Wanstead, E11 2LW. Members £5 non-members £6. Please book a table (8) with Gill James Tel 020 8989 4898 email gilljames@btinternet.com

Thur 28th Nov - Wren Practical Work. Opposite Chalet Wood; bramble clearance for bluebells. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sun 1st Dec - Wren Practical Work. Chalet wood clearing bramble for bluebells – adj triangle. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Thur 5th Dec - Wren Practical Work. Chalet wood bramble clearance for bluebells – adj triangle. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sun 8th Dec - Wanstead Park Christmas Walk. Come and enjoy this part of the Forest for a pre-Christmas celebratory walk led by naturalist Judy Adams. Suitable for families. Mince pies and mulled wine available at the end. 10:30 – 12:30. Meet at the entrance to the Park on Warren Road, Wanstead (E11 2LS). Grid Ref: TQ414876

Thur 12th Dec - Wren Practical Work. Chalet wood bramble clearance for bluebells – further along by camps. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Thur 19th Dec - Wren Practical Work. Chalet wood clearing bramble for bluebells NE corner. All sessions start 10am and end by about 12.30. Meet Temple car park. Leader Peter Williams 07716 034 164

Sun Dec 22nd - 'The Spirit of Christmas' 11am-2.30pm at the Temple, Wanstead Park. A drop-in event run by Friends of Wanstead Parklands: drama, poetry, live music, crafts, children's stories and of course food and drink.

Note: Events are subject to change and confirmation. Please look out for email updates or check the Wren Facebook page for updates

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/>

Wild Wanstead - greening up the local area

www.wildwanstead.org

National

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

British Naturalists Association

<http://www.bna-naturalists.org>

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

Field Studies Council (FSC)

<https://www.field-studies-council.org>

London Natural History Society

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

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

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

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

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

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

.... and finally

On 19 August, civil servant Saira Afzal was surprised to see a Willow Warbler on the pavement outside her Stratford office. Worried that someone might step on it, she took it inside to check on its health. The bird didn't seem to be injured and - when released - it briefly flew around the office, although it did allow her to recapture it. Saira took it outside again, released it in a bush and as far as she knows it eventually flew. We will

probably never know why the bird was grounded, but it had probably flown into one of the large glass windows of the office block and been stunned. Hopefully it's now on its way back to Africa. Thanks, Saira!



Litter kills

People's rubbish doesn't look nice and spoils the enjoyment of our green spaces for everyone. But aside from its environmental impact, flytips and other litter also pose a real hazard to wildlife.

If you see a flytip or excess litter on Epping Forest land please report it. Call 020 8532 1010 (24 hours) or mail epping.forest@cityoflondon.gov.uk

