



Spring 2022

Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

Early morning mist at Hollow Ponds - pic by Tony Morrison

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a word from the chair

This is an important year for the Wren Group. We celebrate our 50th Anniversary! We plan to hold a number of activities throughout the year to help celebrate (we have already got off to a good start) including a special celebration in the Autumn. We do hope you will join us.

I am reminded of the quotation by the American Anthropologist, Margaret Mead:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Half a century ago, a group of thoughtful and committed citizens gathered together to form the Wren Group to help protect and promote the wildlife of the southern part of Epping Forest. Some of those founding members are still with members of the Group, including our President, Richard Oakman.

I don't want to overstate the importance of our group, but there is something wonderful about a group of local people coming together to protect the environment around them. Just think of all the activities, the surveys, the practical work, the walks, the talks, the community days, children's events that have been held over the last fifty years?! Events like a recent walk around St Mary's Churchyard on 5th March (trip report included in this newsletter), one of our 'hidden gems', where we teamed up with the lay parishioners of the church to learn about the history, the management, and the wildlife of the churchyard.

There are many worrying things happening in the world right now, but I feel at least some hope when I breathe in fresh air, take in the wonders of nature, and gather with my fellow Wren Group members to enjoy the wonderful wildlife and natural world that we have right on our doorstep. Please do join in, this year in particular, and get involved with some of our activities. Also keep an eye out for more written and spoken celebrations of the history of the Wren Group.

Wren Group members are passionate about the health of our local area. Imagine if there were similar groups in every community! Well, if there were, they might just change the world.

James Heal
Chair of Wren Group



I give you air

Breath

Wren annual general meeting

Before I turn back to 2021, I want to start by acknowledging that this year, 2022, is our 50th anniversary. We have already got off to a busy start to the year with activities to help us celebrate this milestone, and we plan to do many more, including a celebration event in person later in the year. At the AGM, we heard from our President, Richard Oakman, about the formation of the group half a century ago. We hope to hear more about that as we move towards our celebratory event later in the year.

Review of 2021

If 2020 was the year of the pandemic and living with radical change, then 2021 felt like a year of continuation and adaptation to a new normal. Lockdowns continued and abated and the Wren Group ventured back into the world of outdoor physical meetings. Our first foray outdoors was a botanical walk and invertebrate-finding techniques showcase both in June, then a summer butterfly walk in July, a bat walk led by Francis Castro in September, we joined The Pastures site (which has recently been spared being developed) for an Open Day,

there was a River Roding engagement day in October, Tricia led a fungi walk in October, but we also continued with occasional online talks (and expect that we will from time-to-time in the future as well).

There has been fantastic participation by Wren members in volunteering activities through the year.

With numbers getting back up for socially distanced practical work, but also for some especially public awareness raising work. Helping people to understand the importance of the cattle in Wanstead Park, and helping to educate about the purpose of the skylark fencing has been of great value to engage with the wider community and continue our advocacy and protection of wildlife including the ground nesting birds on the Flats. Tim Harris spoke at the AGM about the success of the fencing and the fact that we had breeding success from the Skylark population despite sadly losing Meadow Pipit as a breeding bird.

Many of us continued looking for and recording wildlife. 2021 turned out to be a record breaking year for the number of bird species found - a phenomenal 143 on Wanstead Flats and Wanstead Park alone. There were plenty of highlights, with two of the best birds found by our very own Wren Committee member, Mary Holden:

our first ever Iceland Gull during the winter and then our first Black-necked Grebe for forty years - also in full summer plumage - one of the most striking water birds I know of. We found a number of new invertebrates for the local area last year. Highlights for me included finding the first Snakefly for the local area, identifying rare spiders found locally, and being shown my ever Amethyst Deceiver fungi.

We have started 2022 well having held some activities already with several more planned. We are taking a trip outside of our recording area to visit Hainault Forest with Francis on 9 April, and a Skylark walk on 7 May. So please do keep an eye out on our website or social media pages for more information.

I would like to extend a huge vote of thanks to my fellow committee members for all their work: organising practical work and activities, working with the City of London and other groups, Producing our newsletter, our website, and our social media pages and groups, sorting out membership and finances, taking minutes at the meetings and so much more.

James Heal
Chair Wren Group



Wren Committee 2022



*Richard Oakman
President*



*James Heal
Chair*



*Simon Raper
Treasurer*



*Peter Williams
Works Co-ordinator*



*June Nicholson
Committee Member*



*Gill James
Secretary*



*Alan James
Committee Member*



*Tim Harris
Committee Member*



*Mirza Rashid
Committee Member*



*Moira Duhig
Committee Member*



*Mary Holden
Membership, Social
Media*



*Jackie Morrison
Committee Member*



*Bob Vaughan
Wren Website*



*Tony Morrison
Wren Newsletter*



*Marion Lobo
Committee Member*



*Tony Madgwick
Committee Member*

*"In my lifetime I've witnessed a terrible decline.
In yours, you could and should witness a
wonderful recovery."*

*Sir David Attenborough, COP26
Patron of the Wren Group*



skylark season is here

If you get up very early from April to August, and go out on to Wanstead Flats, the Skylark is likely to be the most prominent bird you will hear, starting even before the sun rises. But this could be a thing of the past if we're not careful.

The most comprehensive assessment yet of the state of nature in the UK, [State of Nature Report](#), has found that the area occupied by more than 6,500 species has shrunk by 5 per cent since 1970. Much of this is due to human activity.

In our area, many creatures that were once a regular sight are becoming scarce. The Wren Wildlife Group, London Wildlife Trust and Wild Wanstead have identified a number species under threat of extinction on our patch that could all disappear locally unless we act to save them - including the skylark.

We're lucky enough still to have several pairs of Skylarks in the unmown grass on Wanstead Flats. While it's fantastic that they still nest here, they do face problems of disturbance. If people stray off the main paths or let their dogs run into the long grass during the breeding season (from the end of March to the end of August) they may disturb nesting birds. Disturbance can cause birds to abandon their nests and any young birds may flee, get lost and end up starving to death.

We are in danger of losing the last few of this critically endangered species. They have already been lost to Leyton Flats.

Last year Epping Forest staff, helped by Wren volunteers, installed temporary fencing to help protect the skylark nesting area. Here Gill James gives an update on what's happening this year.



Storm Eunice arrived on the Flats on the 18th February, just the day after the Thursday morning Wren Group Practical work team spent a couple of rainy hours mending the holes in the fence caused by normal winter wear and tear in preparation for this year's nesting season.

The storm roared across the Flats with wind speeds of up to 70 miles per hour. Wren Group volunteers nobly went back the following week dreading the worst but the wind was able to pass through the permeable fencing so fortunately damage was not great.



Members of the Wren group will be also be patrolling the area to explain the importance of not disturbing the birds during the breeding season to ramblers and dog walkers.

Skylark Watch Sign-Up

An amazing 40 people signed up to the Skylark Watchers rota this spring. This is a great way of introducing people to the Wren Group if they haven't already joined. Volunteers started their shifts in the week beginning

March 14th, once the gaps in the fencing which were opened up for winter walking had been closed up by the Epping Forest team. The skylarks had been busy lifting our spirits with their song flights for a few weeks already but the start date was postponed as there was some delay in the delivery of new signage.

Epping Forest staff did an excellent job of erecting the fencing, which is unobtrusive but keeps people and dogs from the 'core' nesting areas. Hopefully this will increase the number of young birds fledged - and help build the only significant lark population in inner London.

Tim Harris

Our resident birders are optimistic about the increased number of birds but it is hard to count such small birds. So there has been an organised count, which ironically works a bit like a game drive but without the guns. Watch this space for the results!

What do the Skylark Watch volunteers do?

Volunteers are there in a mainly educational role once the gaps in the fence are closed. They wear yellow Wren

Group high viz jackets, stroll around the fence, and talk to interested people. A fortnight's regular patrolling should be sufficient until users have got used to the new situation. Dog walkers in particular might need to have explained what the fencing is for so volunteers may encourage them to take their dogs elsewhere on the Flats and keep their dogs on leads near the site so as not to disturb birds foraging in the area. They are not police and stay away from any confrontation.

Last year there was a lot of support from the general public who were delighted to hear that Wanstead Flats was so special and even keen ornithologists and photographers turned up to see this rarity. There was virtually no trouble and no deliberate vandalism.



In the absence of arable fields locally, skylarks construct their nests on the ground in areas of unmown grass; they also feed on areas of mown grass, such as football pitches. Pic by Tim Harris

A Word about Skylarks

Skylarks arrived from Europe originally and were here in great numbers until a two thirds population decline over the last 30 years, mainly caused by changes of countryside arable farming practice such as changes to the crop sowing seasons and increased use of herbicides. Our Wanstead Flats breeding population is the nearest to Central London and has declined from about 10 singing males 10 years ago to about 2-3 pairs now. The introduction of fencing last year lessens disturbance from dogs and walkers and we think has improved numbers.

The birds nest in grass 30-50cm high and have 2-3 broods a year March- August. The nests are very shallow and hard to find. Eggs hatch after 8 days and in 12-13 days are out of the nest. The other ground nesting bird which might be present is the meadow pipit.

Skylark vulnerability

There are many possible natural predators, such as rats, crows, foxes, kestrels, weasels and even gulls & snails, who like the calcium in the shells. The foxes and rats etc will find their way through the bottom of the fencing and have their established runways and are best ignored.

The nearby model aircraft site is licenced and has been there over 100 years. There are not many flyers there these days. Sometimes the model aircraft fly over the nesting area or even land in it so the owners have to come and get them. They do their best not to disturb.

The skylarks feed on both the long grass and also the short mown grass on their site.



‘At least three male Skylarks held territory on Wanstead Flats last spring, and at least two pairs bred. We know this because birds were seen carrying faecal sacs away from nest-sites. We also know that at least two young (and possibly four) fledged and were seen flying with the adults late in the season. This may not have happened without the fencing, because although one of the nest-sites was outside of the fenced area (you can take a horse to water, and all that!), the reduced disturbance for feeding birds as well as those on the nest would have been an important factor.

Presently, there are at least 10 birds on site, and up to five singing males. We'll be trying to build a clearer picture throughout this spring.

This is great news and we'd particularly like to thank you for helping support this project by not entering the temporarily fenced area during the breeding season.'

Tim Harris



epping forest

a call for renewed vision and investment

Epping Forest is the largest open space in the London area at just over 6,000 acres, stretching from Manor Park in East London to just north of Epping in Essex.

The ancient Forest has always been a vital escape for East and North Londoners, people living in Essex and visitors from further afield. The importance of this has been highlighted by the pandemic and our growing awareness of the need for natural outdoor spaces. However, the Forest is currently facing the greatest challenges it has faced since it was protected by the Epping Forest Act of 1878 – increases in visitor numbers, high pollution levels and climate change are all impacting on its precious ecology - at the same time as

the City Corporation has been pushing through budget cuts.

Peter Lewis is the new Chief Executive for Epping Forest Heritage Trust (EFHT). The EFHT is a charity based organisation, largely run by volunteers, aiming to promote access, understanding and interest in Epping Forest through awareness and conservation programmes. They work with a variety of adults and young people including schools, special needs groups, Scouting organisations, volunteer groups, community groups. They also work closely with the Corporation of London - the owners and custodians of the forest.

Here Peter lays out the need for a renewed vision and investment in the forest by all users and stakeholders.

Over the last two years many of us have relied on green spaces to maintain our physical and mental health and wellbeing during the most difficult of times. Many of those green places exist in London and on our borders because of the vision and resources of the City of London Corporation over 140 years ago.



An invite to Queen Victoria's ceremonial visit to the forest on Saturday May 6 1882, accompanied by her son Arthur, Duke of Connaught and daughter Louise. At the ceremony she dedicated Epping Forest to "the use and enjoyment of my people for all time".

It was estimated by The Times that half a million people came out on the day to cheer her arrival. Her dedication of the forest came after a successful campaign to save the forest for public use, culminating in the Epping Forest Act of 1878 and the City of London's role as conservator of the forest today.

At that time the City showed huge foresight and philanthropy in purchasing the 6,000 acres of the ancient Epping Forest to help keep the city, and Londoners, fit and healthy as the city expanded and became more polluted. Epping Forest was of huge importance to Londoners then, and throughout the last 140 years, but also really demonstrated its value during the pandemic, providing people with respite from the incredible demands of their jobs, as well as an escape from their homes and screens.

The increase in visitor numbers to all parts of Epping Forest proved a huge challenge for those spaces, for their wildlife and heritage, and for the teams managing them, impacted by greater footfall, traffic and rubbish sadly left behind. But they came through. Epping Forest remains a hugely important ancient Forest, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation, with Iron Age camps and 1,000 year old trees continuing to demonstrate their resilience (although they are now threatened) and beauty.

“Forests are a fundamental part of the planet’s recovery. They are the best technology the planet has for locking away carbon. And they are centres of biodiversity. The wilder and more diverse the Forests are the better they are at locking away carbon dioxide.”

Sir David Attenborough

Now that we are, I hope, reaching towards the end of the pandemic, and those wondrous open spaces have demonstrated their value many times over, politicians must not forget them. Indeed facing the challenges of climate change, loss of biodiversity, the health and wellbeing of Londoners and maintaining London as a truly world City, now is the time politicians to once again

be bold and visionary about the vital green spaces they either manage or have an influence over.

In relation to Epping Forest politicians play a variety of roles.

For City of London politicians, who own and manage the Forest, it would not just be a waste, but a dreadful mistake, if we return to the 40% budget cuts imposed on Epping Forest over the last 10 years; a cut of 19% in just the last year. Now is the time not just to protect and conserve the Forest, not just to retain the budgets allocated to maintaining it, but it is a time to genuinely grow budgets, expand the “Buffer lands” that surround the Forest, and plant and manage them in a truly sustainable way that is good for Londoners, good for biodiversity and good for the planet for years and years to come.



In these uncertain times, maintaining a connection with the natural world has become more important than ever to ensure we're taking good care of our health and wellbeing.

Just as their political predecessors raised their heads in Victorian times with the purchase of green spaces in and around London, today's City politicians should

demonstrate the visionary boldness of old. I ask them to embrace and invest more in Epping Forest now, and for generations to come.

For local authority politicians, many of whom are currently up for election, the challenge is different. They, and the residents of their local authority areas – Newham, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Epping Forest District Council – enjoy the benefit of a fantastic ancient Forest on their doorstep, managed, and mostly funded by, the City of London Corporation. However local councillors still have an important role to play in protecting and preserving the Forest. Local Councils have important planning and transport powers, statutory roles in relation to tackling pollution and climate change and a vital role in promoting the health and wellbeing of their residents.

And public polling suggests strong support for protecting the Forest and reducing pollution. More than three quarters of Londoners think tackling pollution should be a priority. Two thirds of people around the UK think protecting and enhancing green spaces should be a higher priority and have more money spent on it.

But polling data doesn't tell the whole story. So at Epping Forest Heritage Trust we decided to ask people why they #LoveEppingForest. And we have had some fabulous and moving [responses](#) but we would really like more.

Inspired by the stories we have heard so far, and our love for the Forest, we launched a campaign [Epping Forest - For everyone to love](#) to try to ensure that local politicians are aware of the strength of local feeling towards the Forest, and the importance of keeping it close to their hearts in all their decision-making.

So as we approach the local elections in May we are asking all sitting councillors and candidates to sign up to four simple promises to demonstrate their love for the Forest. These promises cover action on climate change and pollution (Epping Forest is a lung of East London after all!) as well as improving sustainable and accessible transport to the Forest, and sensitivity in exercising their planning duties.

“We all understand more than ever the importance of the Epping Forest to the people of London and Essex, as well as the Forest’s importance in terms of biodiversity, heritage and climate change. As we come out of the pandemic, we call on the Corporation to follow the visionary example of their predecessors and invest now in the future of the Forest for the good of us all, and for the good of our planet.”

*Peter Lewis
Chief Executive at Epping Forest Trust*

We'd like to hear as many voices as possible during this time – all sharing love for the Forest. So we want to hear your stories, see your pictures and videos, and for you to share them with your networks and those vying to

represent us. We'd like you to ask your local candidates to support the campaign.

If you want to let your local candidates know how much you #LoveEppingForest you can do so on social media using that hashtag. Or if you prefer you can email us at loveeppingforest@efht.org.uk You will also find a downloadable poster to display in your window and materials to send to candidates on our [website](#).

I think Epping Forest is for everyone to love. I hope you do to.

Peter Lewis
Chief Executive at Epping Forest Trust



Peter Lewis joined Epping Forest Heritage Trust as its first Chief Executive at the end of November 2021. He has previously run a number of membership organisations including London Cycling Campaign and the Chartered Institute of Fundraising, as well as worked for the Mayor of London. He is a Trustee of the Centre for London and a Director of Mike's Table CIC.

On joining Peter said “It is an honour, but also a great responsibility, to join EFHT at such a challenging time for this fantastic ancient Forest. I look forward to working with everyone who cares about the Forest to protect and preserve it for generations to come.

bird report

2021 ended with our record highest number of bird species we have ever recorded on the Patch:143. December saw 76 for the month. 2022 started much like 2021 with 78 species in January (the same as Jan 2021), but February was not aided by the cold snap we had in '21 and so we recorded a pretty paltry 71 species for the month compared with the outrageously high score of 85 for the same month last year. As February came to a close, the total number of birds recorded on the patch for 2022 is 79.



January 1st is always a special day on the patch as the local birders go out and year-tick Robin and Mallard. This year the team managed to compile 61 species on day one of the year (which compared with 69 on the first day of the previous year).

Highlights

I don't think it would be unfair to say that this winter has been rather dull in terms of birds of interest.

I flushed a male Yellowhammer from the Brooms on 3 Jan. It flew up, circled around me calling and flew off East not to be seen again. That was probably the best bird of the month, partly because January didn't see many spectacular birds, and partly because we haven't had a Yellowhammer in January for a very long time.



Red-crested Pochard - JH Jonathan Lethbridge



Lesser Black-backed Gull - pic by Tim Harris

Rob Sheldon found our seventh Red-crested Pochard on Heronry on 16 December; a female. Sean T found a drake Mandarin on Shoulder of Mutton on 12 Jan. This is the fourth record in a 12 month period which matches the number seen over the previous decade.

The best of the rest included:

- ☐ Louis and Gosia had Short-eared Owl over the Flats on 10 Jan.
- ☐ Simon had the only Treecreeper we have had since November also on 10 Jan in Bush Wood.
- ☐ Also a good winter for Firecrest with 10 records across three locations and at least three birds on 13 Jan; a pair in Reservoir Wood and a single bird in the Dell.
- ☐ The only Red Kite of the period was on 2 December.
- ☐ The only year tick made in February was on the last day of the month - a flyover Shelduck from Nick, and our first since May of the previous year.

Duck numbers

I am pleased to report that some of our duck numbers seem to have recovered slightly from the atrociously low numbers the previous winter (we suspect this was due to local issues - likely to do with the water rather than any more sinister macro trends). Whilst nowhere near the peak of a few years ago, Gadwall numbers this winter reached high counts in November (133 peak) and December (126 peak).



Shoveler - pic by Tim Harris

The numbers dropped in the new year with the peak so far being 31. Last winter, our peak Gadwall count was 42. Further:

- ☐ November last year also saw the peak count for Shoveler (60) which compared with 28 last winter. This year so far our high count for Shoveler was 45 on 31 Jan.
- ☐ Teal numbers are pretty consistent with last year, with high counts in the twenties.
- ☐ Pochard high count for the three winter months was also the same for this year and last: 7.

- Tufted Duck high counts this winter and last both saw highs in the forties.
- Note that we have not had any confirmed reports of Wigeon locally so far this winter.

Other trends and records of note

Rather than comprehensive review of the data across species, I have attempted below to take a small sample where observations or comparisons can be made. I will leave the fuller species review data until the bird report (I have just started work on 2021 and believe Nick may be doing something for 2020):



Stonechat - pic by Mary Holden

Skylark

It appears that our local Skylark population may have benefitted from the added protection of the fenced breeding areas last year. Across the three winter months, we had 54 recorded bird days and an average count of 3.5 birds compared with 2 during the same period last year. Our Skylark high-count of 7-8 birds this winter

compares with a high of 5 last year. So, the data aren't robust enough to draw too many conclusions, but at least the trend appears to be in the right direction. [Edit: a walk-over in March revealed 11 birds]



Meadow Pipit - pic by Tim Harris

Meadow Pipit

Meadow Pipit counts were also up a bit on last year with average counts of 7 (versus 4 last winter) and a high count of 25 (cf 18 last year), but counting Mipits is always a tricky business and so we have to be careful reading too much into these data. We will wait and see whether we get persistent singers and breeding success following the sad desertion of this species as a breeding bird last year for the first time.

Cetti's Warbler

This winter we have nine records of the singing male on the Roding (none from in the Park). This seems to be very similar to the previous year. Let's hope we get breeding success.

Siskin and Lesser Redpoll

Our winter flock around the tea hut and Perch Pond in the park was back again this winter with a high count possibly in the sixties. As previous years, we have regularly recorded a Lesser Redpoll flock in the SSSI, but the new addition this winter has been a regular flock of Lesser Redpoll (high count of 17) in the alders around Perch Pond with the Siskin.



Song Thrush - pic by Mary Holden

Woodcock

Partly thanks to the evening diligence of Nick, we have had a likely record of 18 bird days for Woodcock in 2022 by the end of Feb. The regular haunt of the Roding to watch the crepuscular flyover has been reported early in Jan but somewhat overtaken by a regularly seen bird or birds in the SSSI.

Report by James Heal



nature's calendar

A large flock of birds, likely geese or swans, is captured in flight against a clear, bright blue sky. The birds are arranged in a loose V-formation, with some leading and others following. Their dark silhouettes contrast sharply with the light blue background. The birds are in various stages of wing beats, creating a sense of movement and grace.

Like so many other readers of the Wren newsletter I look forward to regular articles by our own local expert Naturalist Tricia Moxey. She never fails to teach me something new at every read. Tricia also helpfully explains and provides sources so that even a layperson like myself can get some kind of understanding and explore further. This season is no exception as Tricia gives us a taster of the study of seasonal changes on our natural world or phenology as it is known.

Hunter gatherers would have known about phenology - awaiting the return of migratory birds as a much needed food source.

As the days lengthen and temperature rise plants and animals become more active and we take delight in seeing the first Brimstone butterfly, finding frog spawn in a pond, or hearing a Chiffchaff. Analysing such observations contributes to the science of phenology, a term coined around 1849 by the Belgian botanist Charles Morren. However for hundreds of years communities had recognised and recorded the rhythms changing seasons, arranging their activities to celebrate new growth, harvesting, feasting and the storing food for leaner times.



Birds know all about phenology - they know instinctively when there will be an abundance of insects and time their breeding accordingly. Blackbird pic by Tony Morrison

In the UK such records date back to 1736 when Robert Marsham, began noting seasonal events such as flowering of spring flowers or the arrival of swallows. Since then, records from other naturalists have been incorporated into a global network of information about the impact of

our rapidly changing climate and its effect on crops, tree growth and reproductive success or failure of many plant species, especially those that inhabit very specific habitats such mountain tops or the Arctic Circle.

Phenology is the observation of seasonal changes in plants and animals from year to year - when cherry trees bloom, when a robin builds its nest, when leaves turn color in the autumn and when birds migrate - and their timing and relationship with weather and climate. Phenology is a key component of life on earth. Many birds time their nesting so that eggs hatch when insects are available to feed nestlings.

Professor Tim Sparks, a research biologist at the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, has established a scheme that is compatible with the historic records and international monitoring. This is a link to more about phenology. <https://www.rmets.org/node/475862>

Such climate shifts are not new and surviving species obviously adapted to past changes. However, the

present scenario of rapid change coupled with habitat loss, pollution and fragmented populations of vulnerable species is of great concern. Naturalists are noting those species that are vulnerable and considering how to help save them from extinction. Many countries have established seed banks that can freeze seeds which can be thawed and germinated at some future date to restart new plant communities. Sadly, trying to save animals from extinction is less straightforward.



The UK's growing season is extending - spring flowers and buds are appearing a month earlier and autumn leaf tinting and leaf fall are happening later.

The UK's growing season is extending, with spring flowers appearing a month earlier compared to the average between 1735-1986. This has an impact on those who suffer from hay fever and late spring frosts can cause damage to tender shoots. Autumnal events- such as leaf tinting and leaf fall are happening later. Within the heat islands of urban areas more people mow their lawns in winter as grass keeps growing with more days above 6°C. Warmer winters suit Mistletoe which is expanding its range too. Naturalists are spotting more continental species of insects breeding in the UK.



Climate change leading to such things as extended growing seasons, hotter summers, warmer days in winter, changes in rainfall etc - can lead to an ecological mismatch and a possible increase in extinction risks or much reduced breeding. If days are too warm in winter will hedgehogs stop hibernating and will there be enough food for them to eat when they awake early ?

Ecologists are trying to unravel what triggers the phenology of individual species. Are the cues just environmental? It is temperature or day length or something else such as the built-in annual cycle? What is the impact of reduced cold spells in winter on different species? If seeds need chilling to break dormancy, what happens when winters are frost free, do any germinate? Flower bud initiation in some species may require periods of low temperatures, with no flowers so no seeds.

Ecological mismatch can increase extinction risks or much reduced breeding success – tender shoots are ideal for caterpillar predation, but does this new growth coincide with the time of hatching of nestlings which need good supplies of such insect protein for survival.

If the days are too warm in winter do hedgehogs stop hibernating and are there sufficient

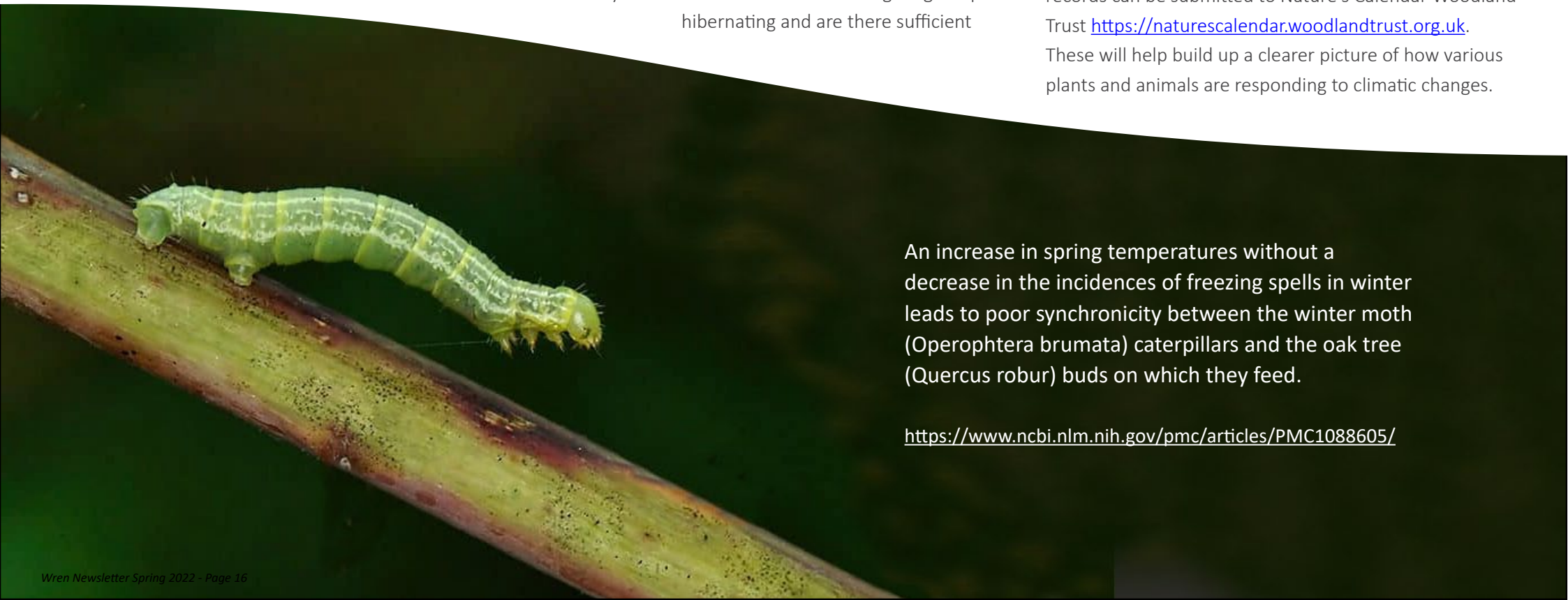
invertebrates for them to eat? Does early laid frogspawn produce more froglets?

I can recommend that you read Trevor Beebee's publication. *Climate Change and British Wildlife* published by British Wildlife Bloomsbury in 2018 for further information.

Article by Tricia Moxey



Keeping a watchful eye on natural happenings in your own garden or local park is a fascinating activity and your own records can be submitted to Nature's Calendar Woodland Trust <https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk>. These will help build up a clearer picture of how various plants and animals are responding to climatic changes.



An increase in spring temperatures without a decrease in the incidences of freezing spells in winter leads to poor synchronicity between the winter moth (*Operophtera brumata*) caterpillars and the oak tree (*Quercus robur*) buds on which they feed.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1088605/>

st. mary's the virgin

The last Wren field trip this season was to St. Mary the Virgin Church in Wanstead (see 'Hidden Gems' following article). In view of this it seemed appropriate to re-publish a short article on the history of the church - first published in Wren newsletter June 2015.

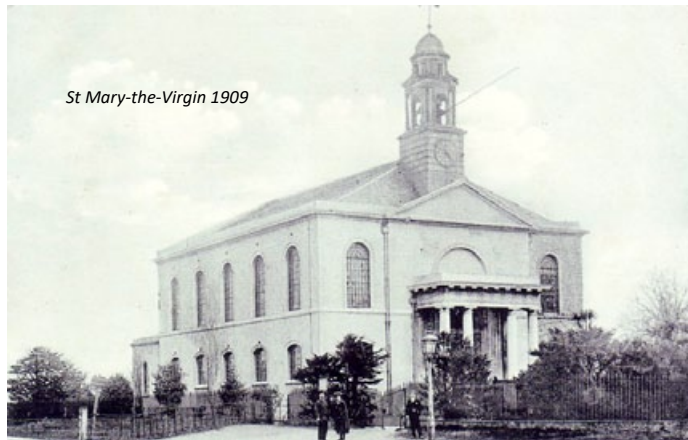
The church is considered to be the finest example of a small Georgian church in the Diocese. It is English Heritage Grade I listed.

The first church on the site was built probably about 1200 A.D. and was sited some 70 feet south of the present building. The first Rector known was in 1207 A.D.



Royalty, including Queen Elizabeth I, were frequent visitors to the church, which was rebuilt in the 16th Century and enlarged early in the 18th Century. The artist J.W.M. Turner, then about 14 years old, painted a water-colour of the old church, and a copy is in the church.

The present church was built at the instigation of the Rector, Dr Samuel Glasse, very soon after his arrival in the parish (1786). The site was given by Sir James Tylney-Long, who also provided a large share of the cost of the building, some £9,000. The church was designed by the architect Thomas Hardwick and consecrated by the Bishop of London on June 24th, 1790.



The building is of Grecian style, and is entered via a high porch with four columns. Hardwick was much influenced by Indigo Jones (St Paul, Covent Garden) and Wren (St James, Piccadilly) and by Gibb's St Martin-in-the-Fields. The seating is in high box pews, all having doors with locks- but since the abolition of pew rents, the keys have not been used. There is a gallery round three sides.

The church was young enough to escape 'modernising' by the Victorians and so remains almost exactly as built - the only major alteration being carried out at its centenary when the front two pews were modified to form inward facing stalls for the choir, who, up to that time, had been accommodated in the gallery beside the organ.



A much appreciated feature of the church is its excellent lighting, both by large, clear windows by day, and by unobtrusive electric light by night. The elegant pulpit has unusual supports for its canopy, being in the shape of two palm trees. This is a token of the Childs family's connection with the East India Company. An interesting feature of the church is the wrought iron railing with gate, taking the place of the chancel screen, or rood screen. A similar railing forms the altar rail.

The sumptuous monument, by John Nost, on the South side of the chancel was transferred from the old church, and commemorates Sir Josiah Child, who died in 1699. Sir Josiah was a merchant banker and Governor of the East India Company. The Child monument is matched on the

North side by a private pew which was probably used by members of the Tylney-Long family, Child's descendants.

The organ in the West end of the gallery was originally supplied in 1847, with 15 stops and built by Hill. It has since been twice reconstructed, first in 1923 by Spurdon-Rutt and increased to 27 stops, and finally by Robert Slater & Son in 1974 and now has 31 stops.



At the East end of the gallery are the only two stained-glass windows dating from 1790. On the North are the Arms of George III, and on the south, those of Sir James Tylney-Long, who was heir to Sir Josiah Childs' grandson.

There are two small memorials on the stairs which were transferred from the old church. The extensive vaults beneath the nave are not open to the public.

A slab on the site of the sanctuary of the old church, in the present graveyard, commemorates a former Rector of Wanstead, Dr. James Pound, a personal friend of Sir Isaac Newton. His nephew James Bradley, curate in the parish, became Astronomer Royal.

The church, working with Wild Wanstead and Redbridge Council, have developed the graveyard into a biodiversity oasis.

Nearby is a memorial to the Wilton family in the form of a Watcher's Box, from which watch was kept to forestall body snatchers. Joseph Wilton was a founder member of The Royal Academy, a sculptor of national repute. Restoration of the memorial was jointly funded by The Royal Academy and the Heritage of London Trust in 1992. The memorial is said to resemble the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Also can be found is the grave of Thomas Turpin, possibly an uncle of the notorious Dick.

The old, dead yew tree, standing on the highest spot, is said to be over 1,000 years old, and to have supplied material for bows for the Battle of Agincourt.

Just beyond the East end of the church, there is a monument to Vice-Admiral Robert Plampin, who had the misfortune to arrive too late for the Battle of Trafalgar.

St Marys is open every Saturday morning and visitors are always welcome. The churchyard is open daily too!

First published in Wren newsletter June 2015 courtesy of St.Mary's adapted from their 2013 Strategic Assessment.

Pics by Richard Arnopp and Tony Morrison.



hidden gems

Field Meeting – Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Wanstead
Saturday 5 March 2022

We met in the grounds of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Wanstead for our first Hidden Gems Field Meeting. Despite the cold searching winds and short bursts of light rain, over 25 people turned up to explore the churchyard, its wildlife and its history.



Introduced by the WREN Chair, James Heal, we were welcomed to the Church and its grounds by James Paterson, the Lay Vice Chair. We then began a slow anticlockwise walk around the churchyard. First spot was the mixed flock of Great Tits and Blue Tits moving through the Ivy entwined around the trees. A Goldcrest sang thinly, but remained hidden from view. A pair of Collared Doves overflowed and a male Dunnock song-staked his territory nearby. Gulls wheeled overhead, stimulating a discussion about the challenges of identifying gulls in flight (Common and Black-headed in this case). A distant Green Woodpecker teased us from across the neighbouring Golf Course.

As we eagerly scanned the surrounding greenery for other birds, James Heal talked about the significance of the several mature Yew trees on the site. Yews were originally sacred in pagan practice but the red heart of the tree and its white sap were absorbed into Christian practice to symbolise the blood and body of Christ. With the absence of any new sightings, we turned our attention to plants and invertebrates. There was some discussion of the type of Periwinkle growing at the boundaries and we marvelled at the profusion of patches of Snowdrops (just going over) and Primrose, *Scilla* sp. (Glory of the Snow) and the promise of Daffodils and Crocuses to come. Later we found Cyclamen and the leaves of Lords and Ladies.

This was followed by a discussion of the standing tree trunk south east of the Church entrance. Tony Madgwick

explained how in the previous year, this tree had been standing and was a huge “bee hotel” within which at least five species of solitary bee had been nesting in the Spring of 2021, with leks of male *Osmia bicornis* the dominant presence.



Tree stumps, always something for all to see - and right showing the wood boring beetle exit holes

However, the stump has now been felled following safety concerns, and laid to the ground as a feature. This meant we could explore the range of wood-boring beetle emergence holes, seeing that many of these were plugged with mud or fine grains of sand where solitary

bees had made their gallery nests. Divided into sealed cells, the larvae of Spring emerging bees hatch and consume the pollen before overwintering as cocooned adults. Some of the larger exit holes have been used by Leafcutter Bees (*Megachile* spp.) and showed signs of predation by woodpeckers. Here, the entrances had been widened with beaks to access the outermost nest cells. Most aerial nesting bees have a strategy to protect against predation and parasitism, first laying eggs deep in the galleries that develop into females, before switching to male eggs. This means that the males are first to emerge in the Spring (something to watch for over the coming weeks) and are also the first to be consumed by predators, protecting the females for reproduction while ensuring enough males survive for lekking.



On to lichens. Of course, with so many different and complex surfaces present in a churchyard, there were plenty of examples for our lichenologist, Bob Vaughn, to show. For example, there was the sulphur-green powdery effect of *Psilolechia lucida* on some of the shaded gravestones to the east, looking at a distance like daubs of luminous paint. Other distinctive lichens could be found on the sun exposed gravestones. *Caloplaca*



A splash of bright green lichen, *Psilolechia lucida* found on some of the gravestones to the east - looking from a distance like daubs of luminous paint

flavescens has orange-yellow edges, often with a paler inner layer and clusters of fruiting bodies appearing as round orange blobs in the centre. The flatter surfaces of some of the tombs were covered in different types of lichen, with the dark cracked surface of *Verrucaria nigrescens* often covering large areas.



Caloplaca flavescens lichen

Moving on, we were treated to a flyover by a Peregrine Falcon, a calling Coal Tit and a singing Chaffinch (all three being regular if infrequent occurrences in our area). As we moved into the more wooded area of the western half, our attention turned to the trees and the invertebrates within. James Paterson explained the demise of the Ash trees on the site, killed off by Ash dieback and existing as no more than stumps and yet providing bat roosts, food for saprophytic wildlife, and a couple of Archery longbows! Phil Ryan explained how the churchyard was maintained by the efforts of the Gardening Club and how mindful they are of maintaining the balance between keeping the churchyard accessible and the needs of a wildlife habitat.



More lichens on gravestones and tombs - *Verrucaria nigrescens*

James Heal and Tony Madgwick spent time demonstrating the range of invertebrate life that could be found among the branches of the Yews, mostly spiders and an ichneumon, and under the leaves and tangled vines of Ivy (numerous small flies, Lacewings, true bugs, small snails and more spiders). This helped to explain the feeding activities of the many small insectivorous birds as



The Holly Leaf Miner (*Phytomyza cf ilicis*)

they move through the branches and leaves in search of food. This prompted some discussion of just how many of these small insects needed to be eaten by the birds to stay alive, and the importance of a good covering of Ivy as a source of food and shelter for so many different species. Many of the leaves of the Holly trees had the characteristic mines associated with a fly larva, the Holly Leaf Miner (*Phytomyza cf ilicis*). Holly leaves are very



tough and the female flies are only able to lay their eggs in the soft tissue of new leaves developing in the Spring. The larvae develop slowly in the stem, only moving into the leaf in January of the following year to create the mines we can see now.

To round off our event, we were treated to an illustrated history of the church from James Paterson, including sight of copies of paintings and sketches of the church by J W Turner (the originals can be seen in the Tate Museum).

Even on a cold and damp Spring afternoon, the rich diversity of life and the historical nature of the site provided ample fascination for the day's activity and encouragement for future visits to see how Spring and Summer reveal their hidden secrets. Watch this space for announcements about future guided visits!

Article by Tony Madgwick



Some examples of the many spiders seen. Left, a juvenile male Neriene peltata (a money spider); top right, a juvenile Anyphaena sp. (a buzzing spider); middle right, a juvenile Philodromus sp. (a running spider); bottom right, the minuscule female Platnickina tincta (a comb footed spider).

"an unloved flower"

In 1911 poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox said in her poem, *The Weed*, "A weed is but an unloved flower!" All plants were once wild and weedy. The ones humans favoured were nurtured, bred and coveted; they were chosen, and they were loved. The ancestors of our most loved plants were wild, all beginning life as weeds until their value was discovered and their breeding and cultivation began.

It is how we view and judge these things that we define what is and isn't a weed.

The Dandelion is typically thought of as a weed. Maybe we need to really get to know a weed before you can love and appreciate it.

Dandelion Facts

- ❑ Dandelions are not weeds
- ❑ A Dandelion seed can travel up to 5 miles before it lands
- ❑ Every part of a Dandelion is edible
- ❑ One cup of Dandelion greens = 535% of your daily recommended vitamin K
- ❑ One cup of Dandelion greens = 112% of vitamin A

Up until 1800's Dandelions were seen as extremely beneficial. People would remove grass to plant them.

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 leaving wilder areas in your garden, such as patches of dandelions in your lawn or nettles near your compost heap, to see who comes to visit?



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.



A misty forest scene with two people and a dog walking away from the camera on a path. The trees are bare and the ground is covered in dry grass and fallen leaves. The overall atmosphere is serene and quiet.

epping forest

in need of some TLC

Wanstead Park and the Flats have been attracting record numbers of people over recent years - Many discovering the area for the first time during the pandemic period.

The increase in visitor numbers proved a huge challenge for those our green spaces - their wildlife, heritage and for the people managing them - impacted by greater footfall, traffic and rubbish sadly left behind.

Here Redbridge Councillor Paul Donovan argues that it's 'pay back time' and our open spaces need some TLC from the custodians of the forest - the City of London need to stump up some cash for Epping Forest

There have recently been many positive developments in the park, including, the successful introduction of the long horn cows grazing, the area opened up to cycling, new sign posts and the exciting Thames 21 developments along the Roding.

More developments are on the way with proposals for the park to get some Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) funding via Redbridge Council that will enable more work to be done around improving accesses to the park and the area around the exchange lands.

Things seems things have come a long way over the past 20 years

At the turn of the century, the custodians of the park, the City of London Corporation (CLC), seemed less willing to engage with the local population.

I was part of a group called the Wanstead Park Community Project (WPCP), the forerunner to the Friends of Wanstead Park (FWP). The group was made up of historians, archaeologists, environmentalists, journalists and film makers.

Much of the work was about bringing the past and present life of the park to public notice. Film maker Stuart Monro was a driving force in setting up WPCP. Stuart also made a number of DVDs about different aspects of the park. Some of these are still on sale at various places around Wanstead.

There was also a booklet about the park. Sadly, Stuart

died in 2017 but his work was taken forward.

The WPCP and then the FWP took forward concerns over things like the state of the lakes in the park. The park was put on English Heritage's at risk register in 2009, due to the state of the lakes. It remains on that register today.

But things have been moving forward, with some of the developments mentioned earlier.

There has been the excellent ongoing work of the Wren Group, whose members are regularly doing voluntary work around the park.

Volunteers helped with the introduction of the cows, effectively watching over the cattle, whilst informing the public about what was going on.



There has been ongoing work carried out to the green spaces and rivers on our patch by volunteers, including of course much of the Epping Forest Trust - but what of the Corporation of London itself? Picture shows volunteers litter picking on Wanstead Flats

There has also been the work on the Flats, with the area fenced off for skylark protection. Wren volunteers have played a role here in informing the public.

The management of Epping Forest are showing a welcome willingness to embrace the principals of rewilding.



Picture shows some of the Wren practical work team who regularly carry out works to Wanstead Park, Wanstead Flats and the river Roding.

All of that said, there is a growing concern that a whole number of stakeholders from the volunteers of the Wren Group and FWP to Redbridge Council and Thames 21 seem to be contributing in different ways but what about the Corporation of London itself?

Recently, the Environment Agency were insisting that statutory works needed doing in the form of a flood prevention plan for the park. Some £10 million was committed for the work before that need was reduced down to nearer the thousands so what happened to the rest of it?

That funding if totally committed to the park could see much of the Park Plan brought to fruition.

Neither, it would seem are the funding shortages limited

to Wanstead Park. The Epping Forest Heritage Trust (EPHT) has called on the City of London Corporation to “invest more in protecting and conserving the forest for people to enjoy now and for generations to come.” The EFHT highlight a 19% cut (£1.66 Million) in the budget for the [Epping] forest from the previous year (2020/21). There has been a 40% cut in the budget over the past 10 years.



London was struck by heavy rain last summer that saw parts of Wanstead Park made impassable. Extra funding is essential for tree, path and pond maintenance in our local green spaces and rivers if they are to continue to be enjoyed. Picture by Paul Donovan.

“Extra funding is essential for tree, path and pond maintenance, as well as vital for habitat management to protect the Forest’s biodiversity,” said Peter Lewis, chief executive officer of the EFHT. “We all understand more than ever the importance of the Epping Forest to the people of London and Essex, as well as the Forest’s importance in terms of biodiversity, heritage and climate change. As we come out of the pandemic, we call on the Corporation to follow the visionary example of their predecessors and invest now in the future of the Forest for the good of us all, and for the good of our planet.”

There is certainly a growing need to invest in the biodiversity of the area. One of the pluses of the pandemic period was the numbers that came out to different parts of Epping Forest and other open spaces. These spaces played a vital role in maintaining so many people’s mental health. But they need proper care and attention to increase the biodiversity for this and future generations.

Let’s hope the City of London Corporation heed these words. It is a very rich organisation, which surely could afford to put a bit more into this vital ecological infrastructure stretching from East London out into Essex. It is a much-loved space, which just needs a bit more cash put in to help develop all its fantastic potential for the present and future generations.

Article by Paul Donovan



See Paul’s unique take on the issues of the day on his blog: paulfdonovan.blogspot.com

Nature is like air, water, health and well-being
it belongs to everyone and is not anyone’s to sell or exploit.
To be custodians of nature is a privilege not a business.



The Wonder of Spring

I am tall and slender with a very bright head

I can live by the roadside or in a bed

Wherever I appear it is a fresh time of year

We are the kings and queens of spring

We are the hope for better things

I can live in your house in water

Or bring happiness to your daughter

I am cheerful you do not need to fuss

We are solitary each one of us

Our fascination is wild and strong

Mother Nature puts us where we belong

We go together with wild bird song

Here and there and everywhere

You will spot our elegant pretty glow

Huddling close together tightly as we grow

Have you guessed who we are yet?

Together we are the freshness of the morning dew

We are the first specimen of spring

Behold the wild daffodil, bringing joy to everything.

Jan Briggs

March 2022

Jennifer Charter

5th March 1943 - 6th February 2022

Jennifer Charter, a Wren Group member from an era of the group which feels quite distant now, passed away in the early hours of the morning on 6th February 2022, at the age of 78.

Few present members of the group will remember her now; perhaps a few ex-group members may be added to those. Those that do will include Richard Oakman – our present President (of the Wren Group, not...), Tricia Moxey – who still gives talks to the group, Gill James – the group's secretary, Susan Winch-Furness, Peter and Valerie Saunders – who have moved to distant Clacton, and there will be a few others.

Jennifer was, probably back in the late 70's when I met her through our both being in the group, a well-known and respected member of the group, and indeed around Aldersbrook where she lived and in Wanstead Park where she would frequently be walking her whippets. She said that she often allowed her dogs to choose the route, which would then lead her into unexpected places and unexpected wildlife.

The wildlife of Wanstead Park was then – except perhaps for some historic studies by such notables as Gulielma Lister – relatively little studied or recorded. The Wren Group itself was – considering the amount of time it has been in existence – relatively in its infancy. Much of its association (then primarily with Wanstead Park itself) was with practical issues, such as bramble clearing and keeping paths and ditches clear and the like. The Conservators of the Forest – and indeed any other than locals – paid little attention

to what went on there, at least compared to the more northerly reaches of the Forest.

So people like Jennifer – who would pass on her observations to me – Pete Saunders, Richard Oakman, Colin Plant, Richard Baker, Ted Godden and just a handful of others – now mostly moved or passed away – were the 'eyes' on the Park's wildlife.



Each of these, had particular roles – self chosen, not imposed. Pete Saunders would almost daily walk around the Park, keeping his eye out for problems of management, mis-management, vandalism or creatures in trouble. He was good at spotting individual species – particularly birds.

Richard Oakman would visit the Park, and acted as a Group representative, lead walks, introduced speakers at club meetings. Colin Plant was something of a specialist, with a great knowledge of wildlife and compiling a number of publications about those. Richard Baker was, like myself, a beginner in the identification of species – beginning with birds, going on to learn about plants and, particularly as far as Richard is concerned, about fungi, and then other wildlife. Ted Godden was a gentleman; respected in his general knowledge and appreciation of the area's wildlife and history, and offering 'nuggets' of information when out on walks. All of these – including of course Jennifer – would pass on wildlife records to me when I began to compile a primitive database – a card index system – for the Group. I always maintained that we couldn't conserve much if we didn't know what we had.

And the other – and indeed more original – side of the Group's activities was the practical work. This was actively engaged in by Jeff Bosher, who energetically put such a lot of effort and time into work in the Park, assisted by Pete, myself and others. Jennifer's whippets sometimes helped with the digging. Whether Jennifer did...

Regarding the whippets, it was Jennifer that introduced me to these beautiful creatures. When the Aldersbrook Exchange Lands were being opened up to the public, she and I used to walk the dogs there, sometimes accompanied by Ted Godden. I felt that it might be nice to name areas of what we knew as the Old Sewage Works (to Jennifer, sewerage works) after Ted, and I did try Godden's Field for that open area as you come in through the stable/allotment gates, to the right. It didn't catch on, sadly, and neither did Sadie's Wood, which is the strip of woodland bordering that to the south, adjacent to the Bridle Path. The name was for the fact that little whippet Sadie and I used to have a regular route through a corner of the wood – with her treading in

my very footsteps to avoid the dreaded whippet-stinging nettles. Indeed, many of the desire-line paths through the whole Exchange Lands that exist now were probably first trod by Jennifer, me, Sadie, Charlie....

And – as yet another aside – the naming of things (places) is a delicate matter. Those deliberate ones didn't catch on (but Sadie's Wood, Godden's Field – come on!), but on the other hand Florrie's Hill did; it's on the maps. It was a bit accidental: Pete Saunders always knew the gate at the top as 'Florrie's Gate', so I thought if that is Florrie's Gate, then this hill will go on my self-drawn recording map as Florrie's Hill. And I deliberately named that bit of woodland to the south of Perch Pond 'Aldersbrook Wood' to see what would happen. Certainly that's how it is known nowadays by the London Borough of Redbridge. Quite a few areas on the Flats have become known by the names I gave them on my 80's recording maps.

As for the wildlife records, back then, there were no mobile phones to text instant messages of sightings – let alone 'apps'. What there was were the telephone when you got home, word of mouth and regular Wren Group meetings to exchange information and ideas. And a newsletter, typed out single-finger-Tippex-style on a typewriter, which was usually 4 or perhaps 5 or 6 pages in length, collated, stapled, enveloped, addressed and either hand-delivered or posted to the members. No email or e-newsletter – and not often even in any colour, just black-and white or greyscale. Early on it was reproduced on a 'spirit duplicator'. Was that the same thing as the 'Gestetner' that we bought? And – think on it – hardly anyone had a camera, let alone a digital one with a lens the size of a respectable cannon, or built into a convenient mobile phone.

Thinking back – which is what we do when someone dies – 'birders', or 'twitchers' were rare around here then, and naturalists virtually unknown. When Richard Baker and I

would wander through the Park or across the Flats on a 'bird watching' expedition, with binoculars, we would get stares. We rarely used cameras, because the disappointment of getting a 36-roll of Ilford film returned from the developers with just a few blurred photos of a Wood Pigeon to show for it was an expensive disappointment.



Jennifer and her dogs Sadie and Charlie on the Plain, Wanstead Park

Jennifer used to draw the pictures. She was a pretty good artist, and when early digital cameras became available to us (Fuji MX 1700, 1.5MP, 3x zoom) she took some nice photos of the Park – not so much the wildlife, just the atmosphere. She tried to produce some Christmas calenders for the Wren Group, but was admonished by an over-sensitive Conservators' dictum that any such photography had to be licensed. There were deterrents in those days. Talking of stares – such as when Richard and I were seen with binoculars – I remember the puzzled looks that Jennifer and I got when using our first digital cameras! Once I was buzzed by the police helicopter on Wanstead Flats, as I bent down to examine a moss or something.

Jennifer wrote some nice little articles for the Group's newsletter. They weren't technical or scientific, just easily read pieces which reflected her simple observation of a swan walking across Aldersbrook Road, or the bluebells in Chalet Wood. She also contributed regular 'Wildlife Diary' articles to St Gabriel's Parish Church magazine. This often led to annoyance (she was easily annoyed) because the editor would invariably – and usually, unnecessarily, in my view – edit her words, even to the extent that – for example – a Little Grebe would become a small grebe. It's one of the reasons why when we wrote the name of a bird, plant or animal, we would capitalise the initial letters. Otherwise a Dabchick may well have become a newly-hatched dab.

But Jennifer wasn't only interested in wildlife – an interest inherited from her mum – she had a range of interests inherited more likely from her dad, too. Early on when I met her she told me that at school she was ridiculed by her teacher, when discussing the Solar System, because Pluto was a dog. Jennifer knew better.

When I first met her and she invited me for a cuppa in her home in Northumberland Avenue, I was somewhat dismayed to find that the house that she lived in was one of the oldest – and possibly biggest – in Northumberland Avenue, right by Wanstead Park. As we approached, just visible behind one of the two great holly trees in the front garden (recognise it?), an upstairs curtain twitched back into place. Very Hitchcockian. Her mum wasn't one for having visitors, but once I had met her and was accepted I found her to be an intelligent, although somewhat reclusive, woman, with her own natural knowledge of the wildlife around. Jennifer inherited this.

The garden was a wonder. Very overgrown in parts, and with its own stable-block. What lived in there even Jennifer and Mrs. Charter did not know. Or perhaps care to find out. But the garden was a haven for wildlife, and Jennifer had made

it more so, in a haphazard let's-use-this-old kitchen-sink way. Plus an elaborate bird-feeder. The bird feeder continued to attract a range of species, including such as Coal Tits and Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers which the up-and-coming birders of the area would have perceived to be rare during some periods. Jennifer invited me round to observe some mammals that were making use of the bird-feeders fall-out. Bearing in mind that Jennifer had whippets and later greyhounds, and a cat – all good mammal-hunters – it was a pleasure to see Field Mice at our feet amongst the tipsy-topsy flower pots. These were observed by the whippets with resignation; they couldn't catch them, and were told-off if they attempted to.

In the garden, too, were a variety of water-containing vessels – including the aforesaid kitchen sink(s). Each of these provided an alternative universe for micro and macro creatures, including, of course, frogs, toads and newts. In fact the newts in particular also used the house itself as both a winter refuge and a highway between the garden and their holiday/breeding summer quarters in Wanstead Park. I would not have been surprised if there wasn't a bat roost in the roof, but this was never proved. There were certainly hornet's nests in the outbuildings, and they were allowed to do their thing.

I mentioned Jennifer's other interests, touching on astronomy. She became interested – through me – in the idea of amateur radio, and I encouraged her to study for the Radio Amateur Examination (RAE) which would gain her a license to potentially speak to fellow 'hams' throughout the world. She studied at Barking College, passed her examinations, and gained her internationally recognised callsign – 2E1FZC (the C-for-Charlie part was chosen because at the time she had a big whippet called Charlie.) Although from her home she mostly spoke to me and one or two local Amateurs in the Ilford area, she (2E1FZC), I (GOLLE)

and Martin (GOKCD) would occasionally go aboard HMS Belfast – as members of the Royal Naval Amateur Radio Club – and put out CQ (general call) calls from the Belfast. The responses were usually overwhelming. Every ham in the world, it seems, wanted to contact 'Golf Bravo Two Royal Navy' (GB2RN – it's callsign), a warship in London, and to speak to a YL (Young Lady – or at least female) was an extra bonus. So Jennifer's voice was not only heard around Wanstead, but around the world.



Jennifer in Victorian costume

Martin – through us – also became a member of the Wren Group for a while. He liked 'yellow flowers', and was great photographer. Sometimes quite apparently differing interests overlap – or you can encourage people to take an interest. That's what the Wren Group was partly about.

More in line with the Wren Group, Jennifer would usually assist me in setting up a display for the Group at a fete in Wanstead Park, or – as used to happen – the Open Day at the City of London Cemetery. She was good at arranging the wares, and making little 'identify the bird' puzzles to

encourage children – and adults – to perhaps learn more about the local wildlife.

She would accompany us on Group guided walks around Wanstead Park, which of course she knew very well, and on Wren Group walks further afield, perhaps to Essex reserves or the coast or the Chilterns, but eventually leg-trouble hindered those more distant or longer walks. Then it was just keeping going by taking the dogs out, but still spotting wildlife things that others may so easily have missed. I would get reports from her of 'an interesting' plant that she had spotted, and I would then check it out, and sometimes identify it as something I had overlooked, or simply not seen. Or a moth would land on her window or come into the house, and I'd get a report on that. All stuff to add to the database of records of the wildlife of the area – for potential 'Conservation'.

Eventually, though, mobility problems inhibited Jennifer's ability to get out much, but she would still supply reports of bird or moth activity around house or garden. Once you can't get out so much – from my own experience – your face and place tends to become forgotten, and people's memories fade.

The Wren Wildlife and Conservation Group, as it is now titled, has been through a quite long history of ups and downs – sometimes it has held on just by the continued input and support of people like Jennifer. Today, it seems, it is a thriving group with enthusiastic members providing a valuable service – not only to the wildlife and ecology of the area, but in its own way to the community itself. It seemed to me that Jennifer's death might be a good time to reflect not only on her, but on the Wren Group – its history, and some memories of past members.

Paul Ferris, 12th February, 2022



.... don't forget

During the spring and early summer breeding season, there are millions more hungry mouths to feed. Nesting parents will have to work hard to feed their young, while maintaining their own energy levels.

It can still be pretty parky out there and under lockdown, with fewer visitors, food may be hard to come by for our birds - so please 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.



Long Tailed Tit in Capel Road garden - pic by Tony Morrison

then & now

Were you right ?

Flooding in the area is nothing new. The image shows Empress Avenue at the turn of the last century and how it looks today. The Aldersbrook Estate was built in the Roding valley and parts on what used to be watercress beds so were prone to flooding. Note the first row of houses are post war those shown on the older picture suffered bomb damage during WWII.



We may be living under lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic, but outside nature carries on and winter has well and truly arrived. Maintaining a connection with nature is more important than ever if you are stuck indoors for most of the day.

Our opportunities to engage with nature may be fewer during the pandemic but there are still a number of things we can do to stay connected to nature, look after our wellbeing, and keep safe.

Instead of our usual 'Links Page' we will be maintaining a list of online resources and ideas to help keep us all engaged with nature.

links

Ten ways to connect with nature without leaving your home this spring

www.positive.news/lifestyle/10-ways-to-connect-with-nature-without-leaving-your-home-this-spring/?fbclid=IwAR2tI3IRSudyYpn9c_IF5YySy8bOksS-56TSXmkpr1CyGEbngbpoVGVRnfk

Enjoying nature from your home or garden is good for your mental health

www.richmond.gov.uk/council/news/partner_comment_spot/new_blog_enjoying_nature_mental_health

#VitaminN: How to enjoy nature under lockdown

www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52216267

Wildlife Watch - downloadable spotting sheets

www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/spotting-sheets

Home birds: how to spot 20 of the most common species from your window, walk or garden

www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/16/home-birds-how-to-spot-20-of-the-most-common-species-from-your-window-walk-or-garden

How to avoid people and stay in touch with nature during lockdown

www.scotsman.com/news/environment/how-avoid-people-and-stay-touch-nature-during-lockdown-2521708

Watching the birdies is a chance to connect with nature – and each other – during lockdown

www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/lifestyle/1252432/watching-the-birdies-is-a-chance-to-connect-with-nature-and-each-other-during-lockdown/

In the coronavirus lockdown, open a window and see nature at its most thrilling

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/in-the-coronavirus-lockdown-open-a-window-and-see-nature-at-its-most-thrilling-6jr8cwqcd>

