

Summer 2021

wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

- Page 02 - A Word from the Chair - a few words from the chair James Heal
- Page 03 - Rewilding Points the Way Forward on Biodiversity by Cllr Paul Donovan
- Page 06 - Save the Forest - an historical look at the saving of Wanstead Flats by Mark Gorman
- Page 09 - Hedge your Edges - article by Tricia Moxey
- Page 12 - River Roding Walk - article by Paul Powlesland founder of the River Roding Trust
- Page 18 - Red Fox - Spell Poem by Robert Macfarlane
- Page 19 - A Note of Thanks from a Skylark by Robert Nurden
- Page 20 - Verderer - the Role of the modern day verderer by verderer Paul Morris
- Page 22 - Bird Report by James Heal
- Page 28 - Start at the Supermarket to Save British Wildlife - article by Susannah Knox
- Page 31 - How Clean is our River - article by Gill James
- Page 33 - Pastures New - an update on the future of the Pastures site in Leytonstone by Andrew Shields
- Page 35 - Daft Waders - River Roding work report by Alan James
- Page 36 - Weather - a take on our spring weather by Scott Whitehead
- Page 37 - Useful Links



a word from the chair

I know that for me and millions of others, the great outdoors has been a lifeline during the last year and more. I am not sure where my mental or physical health would have been had I not had the ability to go for walks and look at wildlife.

Through lockdowns, the ability to join the Wren, and other organisations', virtual field talks (or similar) has been another lifeline. But, as lockdowns ease, we now look forward as an organisation to the resumption of physical outdoor meetings (albeit most likely with some extra precautions taken).

So, a date for your diaries should be 26 June. We are tentatively dipping our toes back into the waters of physical meetings with a botanical-focused walk in Wanstead Park in the morning and then an afternoon activity where we will take a more entomological-focused walk and get to watch some experts and their

techniques for finding little creatures in the field. We have designed the walk so it will be less about all gathering around peering at something small and can be done safely at a bit of a distance.

This spring we experienced some extraordinary weather. May saw an enormous amount of rain (which will have taken its toll on some wildlife, including young birds) followed by some strong sun. Vegetation locally is incredibly lush at the moment, and, if you are anything like me, mixed grassy habitats, oak trees and scrub (just to take three examples) all contain their own hidden ecosystems of insects, spiders, and other invertebrates that are just too rich, diverse, and fascinating not to take a closer look at.

So, if you would like to learn how to look more closely and what you might be looking at, please do join us on 26 June.

Both Walks need to be booked on Ticketsource in order to keep a check on numbers and for contact tracing. Please do not just turn up!

10am - Wanstead Park (meet by Wren stand near the Tea Hut)

A botany-focused walk led by local naturalist, Tricia Moxey

FREE but please book to give us a sense of numbers: www.ticketsource.co.uk/wren-wildlife-conservation-group/t-mlnrz

2pm - Wanstead Park (meet by Wren stand near the Tea Hut)

An invertebrate-focused 'expert showcase' walk where we get to watch (from a safe distance) as experts show us what insects and other invertebrates can be found locally and the techniques that can be used to find and study them.

FREE but please book to give us a sense of numbers: www.ticketsource.co.uk/wren-wildlife-conservation-group/t-eeqkqd

As it is a weekend, some free parking should be found in the surrounding area. Please bring water, sun protection, and suitable footwear. Events will go ahead whatever the weather.

Walks are free of charge, open to all and intended to increase interest in the natural history of the Park.

Covid restrictions and precautions will be followed.

James Heal
Chair Wren Group



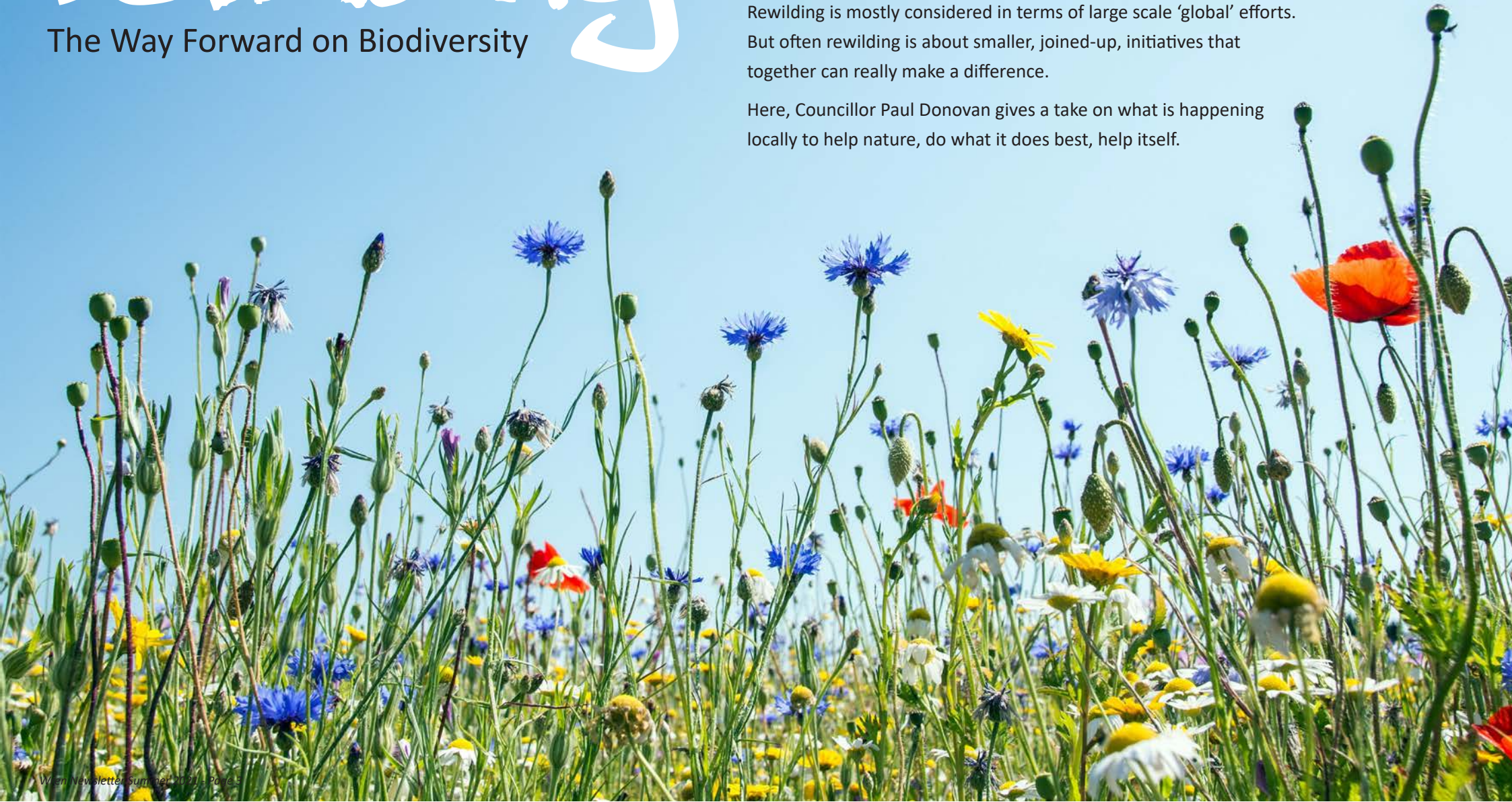
rewilding

The Way Forward on Biodiversity

Nature knows best when it comes to survival and self-governance. Rewilding is a progressive approach to conservation. It's about letting nature take care of itself, enabling natural processes to shape the land and sea, repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes. Then we should step back and let nature manage itself.

Rewilding is mostly considered in terms of large scale 'global' efforts. But often rewilding is about smaller, joined-up, initiatives that together can really make a difference.

Here, Councillor Paul Donovan gives a take on what is happening locally to help nature, do what it does best, help itself.



The rewilding movement has been growing over recent years, with estates like Knepp in Sussex, helping to trail blaze the way.

Rewilding is essentially about allowing nature to develop in its own way, rather than being constantly bent to the will of human beings.

At Knepp, areas have been allowed to run wild, bringing back species, such as the nightingale, turtle dove and purple emperor butterflies.

Long horn cattle, Tamworth pigs, Exmoor ponies and deer have been introduced, living in the wild rather than being husbanded in barns and via modern farming methods.



The City of London Corporation have brought back Long Horn cattle to Wanstead Park and other parts of the forest. Pic by Tony Morrison Chingford Plain

The beaver is in the process of being introduced to the area. In other parts of the country, beavers have been brought back, making a dramatic impact in terms of stopping flooding.

Rewilding is good news.

So it has been excellent to see some rewilding taking place in our own area. The City of London Corporation have brought back Long Horn cattle to Wanstead Park.

“Rewilding is about trusting the forces of nature to restore land and sea.”

Raquel Filgueiras - Rewilding Europe

Three Long Horn cows were brought back on an experimental basis last autumn – the experiment proved popular with the public, as well as providing a great way to cut back on some of the scrub.

More cattle are due for release in the park in August. It would be great to see this experiment extended to the Flats, where cows used to roam around for much of the year, up to the 1990s.

The enclosure of the area of the Flats to help nesting skylarks is another initiative that seeks to give a helping hand in the recovery of nature. This has been a very welcome development.

There has been a wild flower area planted on the Flats, near the City of London cemetery, where the temporary morgue stood, early last year. The flowers have begun to spring forth providing a blanket of colour on that part of the Flats.

There have been calls for the development of a similar wildflower area around the brick pit area, adjacent to Aldersbrook Road. This would be another welcome development.

The principles of rewilding are reflected in the idea of “No mow May,” whereby areas are left unmown for that month. It is incredible what comes up by way of wildflowers with this approach, benefiting animal, bird and insect life.



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. This makes Wanstead Flats – the only breeding population of Skylarks in inner London – even more important.

Not mowing and not using pesticides is something that should be far more widely adopted by local authorities. It should be a no brainer, increasing diversity, whilst saving money.

The Grow Zone model used in Redbridge, whereby areas are allowed to run wild of the season is similar to the no mow approach.

There are Grow Zones on Christchurch and George Greens in Wanstead, as well as in Roding Valley Park – at the Elmcroft Avenue entrance.



Areas in the Grow Zones, which are all in Wanstead, are only mown once a year in late summer or early autumn to allow the grass and wildflowers to grow and increase biodiversity.

These are all encouraging efforts to rewild our local area but much more needs to be done. The default position really should be that all public spaces are considered for wilding before any other options comes up for examination.

Grow Zones are good for bird and insect life, so really need to be encouraged. There is a job of communication work though to be done with the public, who if they are not aware of the methodology behind the approach may just think the council cannot be bothered to cut the grass.

There are other exciting ideas in the pipeline such as the development of reed bed and wetland areas in Wanstead Park. Who knows, maybe even beavers one day?

Redbridge Council is bringing forward new initiatives on biodiversity and to combat climate change.

Rewilding helps increase biodiversity, as well as combatting climate change – it is an excellent development that needs encouragement wherever, it can be made to prosper. Let's hope the early shoots being seen around this part of London can be extended, so that the biodiversity of the area can really be improved. Things are beginning to change the question, as always, is why not faster?

Cllr Paul Donovan



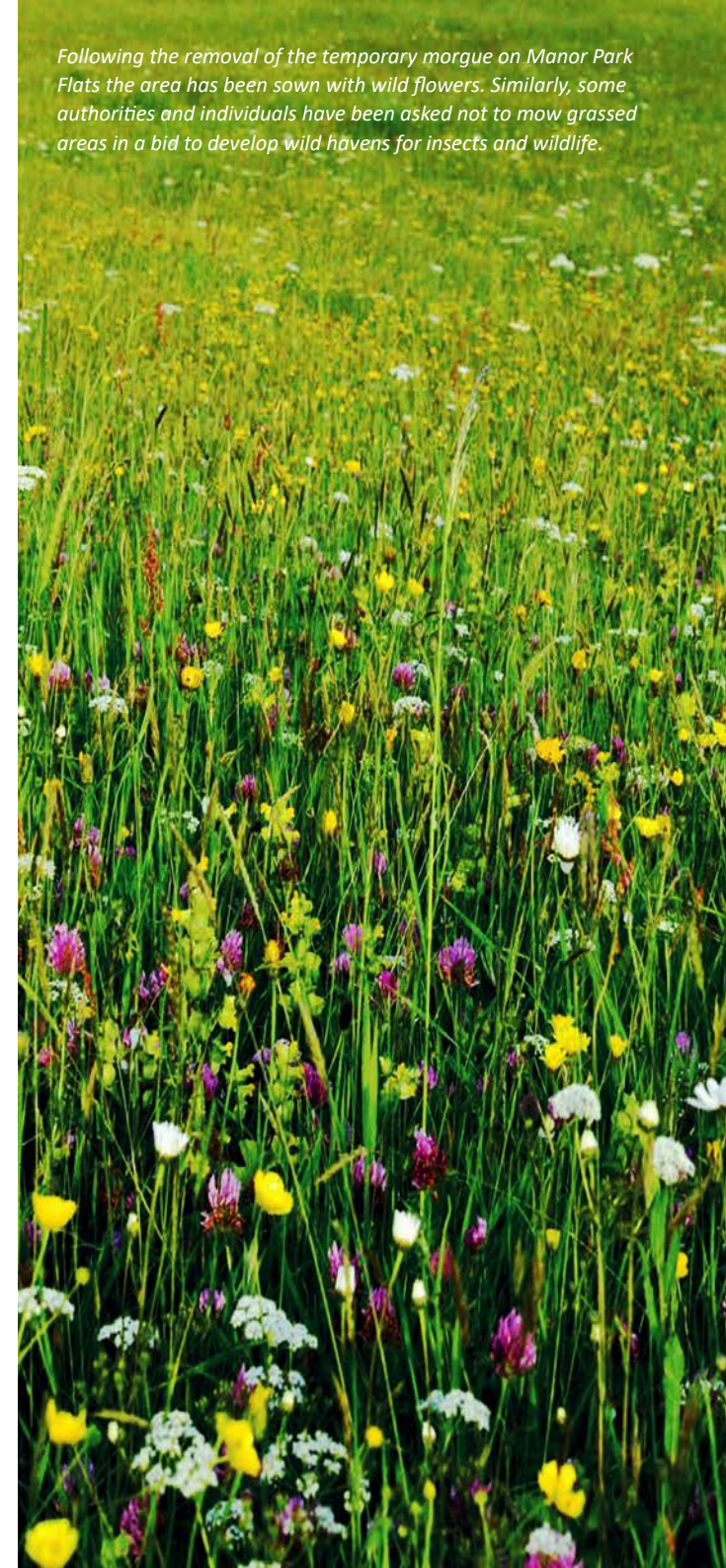
Read More About

Wild Wanstead www.wildwanstead.org

Rewilding Britain <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk>

Rewilding Europe <https://rewildingeurope.com>

Following the removal of the temporary morgue on Manor Park Flats the area has been sown with wild flowers. Similarly, some authorities and individuals have been asked not to mow grassed areas in a bid to develop wild havens for insects and wildlife.



save the forest

An Epping Forest anniversary to celebrate

Wanstead Flats was historically part of the Forest of Essex, part of the Bailiwick of Becontree and later of Leyton "Walk", as was Wanstead Park to the north east.

Often referred to as a "waste", the nature of the area - apparently wild and marshy - seems to have presented a less attractive area than adjacent lands that surrounded it. It seems that although this was part of a royal forest, it was less favoured by the nobility and this encouraged local people to turn out their cattle, sheep, horses and pigs to graze upon the unenclosed land.

However, as with the lush forest to the north, increasingly even the Lower Forest became threatened with enclosure by the more powerful landowners. In the mid-1800s the Crown had destroyed Hainault Forest and was selling its forest rights to the lords of manors. Cann Hall and Wanstead manor were sold in 1856. In 1851-2, Long-Wellesley (Lord Mornington) had a legal battle with the tenants of Cann Hall and other commoners before enclosing 34 acres of the Flats.

It seems that although other areas of the forest had and were being enclosed, the threat to Wanstead Flats aroused particularly high levels of anger among people, even over a considerable area of east London.

Wren committee member Mark Gorman shamelessly plugs his new book and tells the story of this fight.

SAVE THE FOREST.

**WORKING MEN !
ATTEND BY THOUSANDS**

AT THE

OPEN AIR MEETING

TO BE HELD ON

WANSTEAD FLATS,

Opposite Chesnut Walk,

On Saturday, July 8th, 1871,

**TO PROTEST
AGAINST THE
ENCLOSURES**

That have been made in all parts of the

FOREST.

The Chair will be taken at Six o'clock, by

SIR ANTONIO BRADY, J.P., F.G.S.

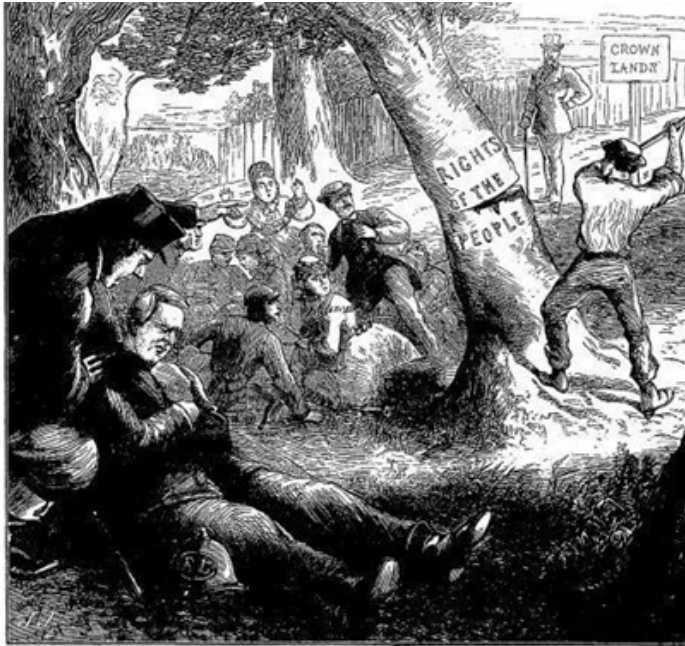
W. G. SMITH, Secretary,

Rose Cottage, Odessa Road, Forest Gate, E.

G. Harmer, Printer, "Courier" Office, West Ham.

This summer we celebrate a key anniversary in the history of Epping Forest. 150 years ago, on 8th July 1871, thousands of people gathered on Wanstead Flats to mount a protest against the illegal enclosure of part of the Flats by the local Lord of the Manor, inheritor of the Mornington estate, Viscount Cowley. London was spreading rapidly eastwards, and open land was being eaten up by housing.

Local landowners saw the opportunity to make a quick profit from their land. They reckoned without east Londoners though, who saw their precious leisure spaces rapidly disappearing.



This cartoon appeared in a popular newspaper on the day of the demonstration

By the summer of 1871 matters were coming to a head.

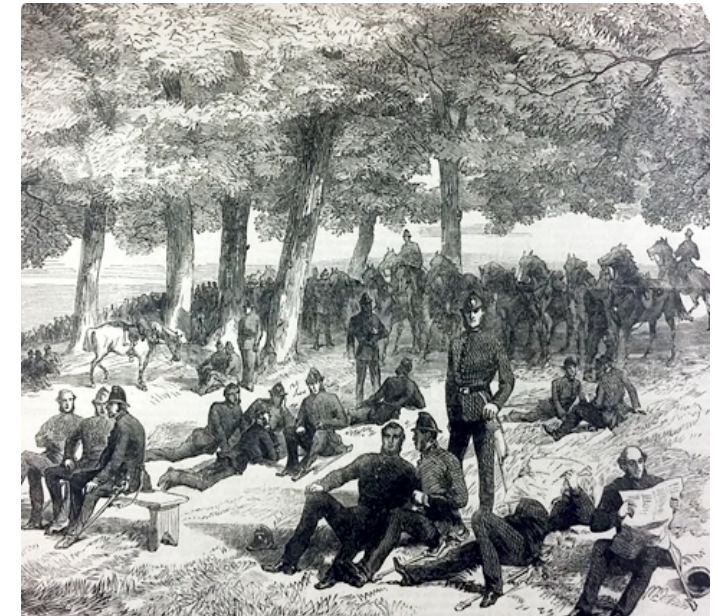
Cowley's enclosures were the last straw for many, and protest meetings were held across east London. A great demonstration against the fences was called for 8th July and thousands of east Londoners answered the call. An estimated 30,000 protestors descended on Forest Gate, and when their leaders tried to hold the meeting away from the Flats in the grounds of a nearby house the crowd refused to agree, manhandling the speakers' wagons onto the Flats.

The area fenced off by Cowley's men was on the north side of the Flats (a part now covered by the Aldersbrook estate) but the demonstrators gathered near Forest Gate turned their attention to fences put up some years earlier, where the land was already being marked out for roads. The gentlemen leaders of the campaign called for calm and counselled against damaging the fences, and on a sunny Saturday afternoon the atmosphere seemed peaceful. As the meeting ended a large contingent of police, sent to guard the fences against destruction, were marched away to their barracks in Ilford.

Then the mood changed. In the evening a man sitting on a section of fence was pulled off by his friend, and some of the fencing gave way. Instantly the crowd set about destroying the hated fences, and within minutes hundreds of metres of fencing was destroyed. The police, hastily recalled, rushed back to the Flats, but though they managed to make one arrest, it was too late to save the fences. The crowd, now occupying the no longer fenced area, mockingly invited the police to mount a guard over the piles of matchwood, all that remained of the enclosure.

A week after the demonstration local magistrates fined

Henry Rennie, the one person arrested by the police, for damaging the fences. He was fined a nominal sum, which was promptly paid by a local campaigner. Most of the press condemned the attack on the fences, but some commented that Cowley was the real criminal for erecting them in the first place. And a month later parliament rushed through the first Epping Forest Act to protect the forest from development.



The police on Wanstead Flats 8th July 1871

For the protestors this act was far too weak, and a campaign was now underway, one that the renowned ecologist Oliver Rackham has dubbed "the origin of the modern British environmental movement." The next few years also saw action by the City of London corporation in the law courts. They used their commoners' rights to sue the Epping Forest manorial lords, whose fences blocked their entitlement to graze cattle over the whole forest. These struggles in the law courts and in parliament were

supported by petitions, public meetings and lobbying of MPs; popular protest was a key factor in driving forward the campaign to save Epping Forest and other well-loved open spaces around London.

The apathy of the Government on the Epping Forest enclosure question is most provoking to any one who cares one fig for public health and public rights. It is not enough that 3,000 acres should have been filched from our Eastern Airing Ground further down in the forest to make rich men richer, and for the benefit of a few capitalists, but now that a slice is being taken off the most accessible portions of open ground in the neighbourhood, the play-ground of hundreds of children, and the recreation ground of thousands of smoke dried toilers in our own parish.... Parliament has passed a resolution declaring that Epping Forest shall be preserved, [yet] eighteen acres of Wanstead Flats were enclosed last week.... We are, however, glad to know that the attention we called to this encroachment has not been without results. As the Imperial Government will not act the Municipal Government of the City of London has already acted. The Commissioners of Sewers of the City are copy-holders at Wanstead, and they have given notice requiring the removal of the fences, and will test the matter, if necessary, in a court of law.

The Daily News. June 24, 1871

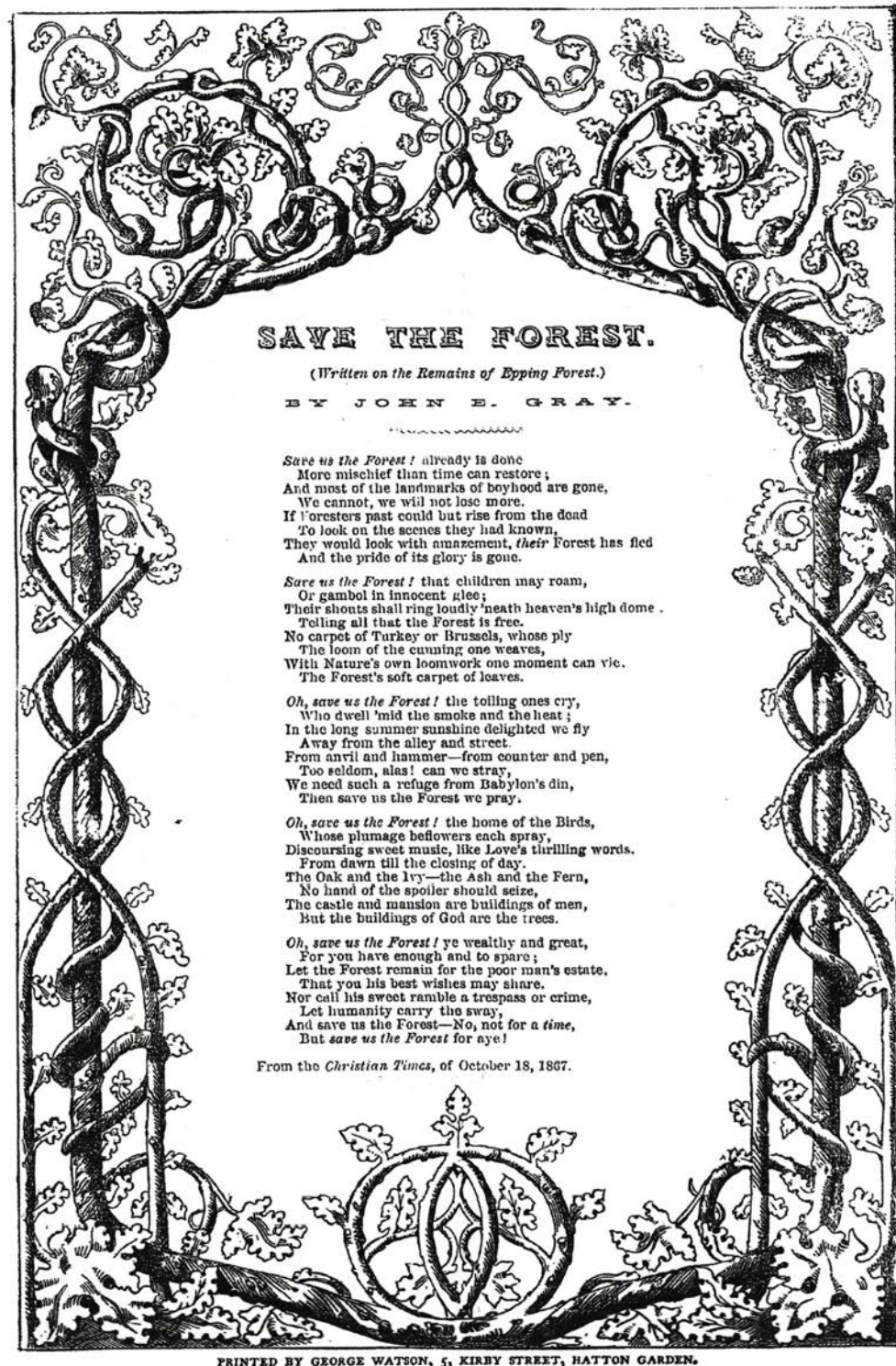
This struggle, not only to preserve Epping Forest but also other commons in and near London in the face of unchecked housing development, had its watershed moment that day. The Wanstead Flats demonstration gave a huge boost to a movement which contributed significantly to a key change in the law - the Epping Forest Act of 1878 - the first legal declaration of the public's right to use an open space in Britain for leisure.

So when you're next out and about in Epping Forest remember the protestors who gathered in July 1871 to save it from the enclosers and house-builders, and stop to listen for the echo of the unknown voice from the crowd that day, who called out "it is our own".

by Mark Gorman



Saving the People's Forest: open spaces, enclosure and popular protest in Victorian London" by Mark Gorman, published by the University of Hertfordshire Press www.herts.ac.uk/uhipress/books-content/saving-the-peoples-forest is available at the Newham Bookshop and other independent booksellers



hedge your edges

Hedge your Edges was an important message given out by John Stokes, CEO of the Tree Council during the talks arranged by this organisation to celebrate the first National Tree Week held from 29 May to 6 June.

Here local expert Tricia Moxey gives her take on the importance of the humble hedgerow.

Recent archaeological evidence suggests that hedges surrounded the homesteads of the early agriculturalists in England some 6,000 years ago. Since then, hedges with their varied uses have been an integral part of our landscapes, marking out field boundaries, reducing erosion as well as offering shelter and forage for livestock and wildlife.

Trimmed woody branches produced useful poles or fuel. Nuts and berries provided healthy food and natural remedies could be gathered by those who knew how to use them. 50% of hedges have been lost since the late 1940s as farmers removed them to enlarge fields so bigger machines could work the land. Sometimes forlorn trees were left behind as a faint reminder of a lost hedge.

As towns and cities expanded on to productive agricultural land, the layout of many estates was influenced by the hedged field boundaries and ancient trackways, subsuming these features within the urban development. Occasionally these relict field hedges and their trees have managed to survive.

Fortunately, the 35,126 hectares of the encircling Metropolitan Green Belt around London still retain many surviving sections of hedges and where possible, landowners are now being encouraged to carry out restorative management and additional planting to enhance these valuable countryside assets.

47% of the area of Greater London is recognised as being green. Parks and accessible open spaces account for 18%

of this with 24% being private gardens, although at least 10 % of these are covered with hard surfaces. As we are experiencing much higher summer temperatures, it is vital to recognise the value of vegetated areas which help cool our surroundings. Urban hedges also help to reduce surface flooding during heavy downpours as they soak up water.

Loss of hedgerows has been identified as a factor in the decline of many plant and animal species traditionally associated with farmland. Reasons for hedge loss include changes in farming practices, development, damage caused by straw and stubble burning (banned since 1992), spray drift, neglect and indiscriminate trimming.

Checking on aerial surveys it is possible to see which local areas have well vegetated gardens with hedges and where more might be added. Existing well vegetated areas are an undervalued resource, they can

Right: Unlike fences and walls, hedges provide benefits for us and the wildlife that lives in our gardens. They have the natural ability to capture pollution, reduce noise, mitigate flooding and provide food and shelter to wildlife. Pic - garden Ivy hedge



be considered mini-nature reserves for biodiversity. They provide benefits for people, especially if they are allowed to grow slightly taller and wider, they give greater privacy and demonstrate seasonal changes. Tightly clipped hedges are of less benefit to wildlife as are shrubs with large leathery leaves such as Cherry Laurel or Red Photinia as they support very few insects, and their more open framework of branches provide fewer nesting sites for birds.



Over the past year, watching birds and othe wildlife in our gardens has been a godsend to many people. One way to make your gardens more wildlife friendly is to plant a hedgerow. Hedgerows look natural, they provide shelter, some food, nest sites and green corridors for a range of creatures. They also provide a safe haven for fledgling chicks when they are at their most vulnerable. Pic - fledgling sparrow in garden by Tony Morrison

A well-structured hedge can absorb carbon too. The Committee on Climate Change recommends that some 200,000km of new hedges need to be planted to help meet the 2050 net zero target.

During the past year some 3 million people have discovered the delights of gardening and watching the wildlife within them. One way to make their gardens more wildlife friendly is to incorporate mixed hedgerow planting within their gardens where space allows. In an urban setting such shrubby areas are aesthetically pleasing, they provide shelter, some food, nest sites and green corridors for a range of creatures.

The large number of moths trapped by Tim Harris and others is an indication of the value of nearby trees and hedgerow species in providing food for so many moth caterpillars! Of course, large numbers of such caterpillars get eaten by birds, but those that reach adulthood provide food for bats. As the climate warms, there is the threat of increased numbers of mosquitoes breeding in watery places. A Pipistrelle bat will feed on 3,000 such flying insects in one night, which is a good reason to ensure there is an adequate and varied food supply for them!

Although native shrub species are best, research is underway to assess the value of including some non-native species too within an urban hedge. Planting small leaved shrubs alongside busy road junctions, around schools, playgrounds, and care homes can filter out toxic air pollutants. *Cotoneaster franchetii* has slightly hairy leaves and in trials was found to be rather effective in such locations, but other species can be included too.

Reinstating some shrubby plants in front and back gardens is a great idea, but many other sites will benefit from additional vegetation. Would the edges of the railed off area around a patch of green, the odd neglected corner, a car park or the fringes of an industrial site look better if screened by a hedge? If you know of somewhere like this then please do contact your local council and suggest that such a location might be suitable for some urban planting to help meet those zero carbon targets!

Article by Tricia Moxey



For more information about the value of urban hedges and the science behind this see:

www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/environmental-projects/hedge-benefits

RSPB History of Hedgerows

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/advice/conservation-land-management-advice/farm-hedges/history-of-hedgerows>

river roding walk

The River Roding, central to the Roding Valley, is a small, lowland clay river – the third largest of London’s rivers. Its source lies in Molehill Green (107m above sea level) in Essex, passing through the Essex countryside and then the London Boroughs of Redbridge, Newham and Barking & Dagenham, finally after some 35 miles draining into the Thames via Barking Creek.

The Roding forms the eastern edge of the Wren catchment. However, up until now we haven’t paid much attention to this historic and vital part of our industrial, natural and wildlife heritage.

Paul Powlesland – civil barrister and environmental activist – has a long association with the River Roding. He formed the River Roding Trust, with a group of people living on narrowboats that work on maintaining and cleaning up what has been a very neglected and abused river. As a result of their efforts, hundreds of trees have been planted and tonnes of rubbish cleared from the river. The River Roding is now navigable from Barking Wharf to Ilford Bridge for the first time in 50 years.

Despite Paul’s long association with the river he has never walked from its source to its end at the Thames – until now that is. In Paul’s own words here is his account of that journey.

Living on the lower Roding, I'd always wondered about what the river was like in its upper reaches - in the countryside - and dreamed of walking the length of the river to get to know it from its source to the confluence with the Thames. My plan to do it last spring was thwarted by lockdown, but luckily this year the stars aligned for a small group from River Roding Trust to do a Roding pilgrimage over the Easter weekend.



Paul Powlesland (centre) together with fellow members of the River Roding Trust, Jennie Rickell (left) and Cloe Waite (right) at the start of the walk and the river at Molehill Green just near Stanstead Airport.

From its source the River Roding passes through a group of villages in Essex known collectively as the Rodings, as many end with the suffix 'Roding'. After Chipping

Ongar, the river flows under the M25. It then runs past Loughton and between Chigwell and Woodford Green through the Roding Valley Meadows (a nature reserve). There is even a Roding Valley tube station (the least-used station on the entire London Underground network).

Next up is the town of Redbridge which takes its name from a crossing of the river which then passes through Ilford and Barking. After Barking, the tidal section is known as Barking Creek, which flows into the Thames at Creekmouth. Here, the Barking Barrier crosses the Barking Creek at its confluence with the River Thames. In the 1850s, the creek was home to England's largest fishing fleet, and the Victorian icehouse - where the fish were landed and stored before being transferred to London's fish markets.

Day One

We started at Molehill Green, just near Stansted Airport, where the Roding begins. One of the sources starts as a spring coming out from under a field and the other is a picturesque pond with bull rushes. For the first few miles the river is barely a trickle, but soon it was a babbling stream often flowing through beautiful woodland.

As there were no official paths, the going was slower than we expected, as we often had to clamber through trees and over fences, or put on wellies to walk through the river. By the end of the first day though, the Roding was definitely looking more like a river and we made it to an old castle at Canfield, where the old course of the river forms the moat.

Day Two

Today's walk along the Roding (from Great Canfield to Chipping Ongar) was pretty tough going. Much of the upper part of the river (above the M25) doesn't have official paths, which can be challenging.



Day two walking through the Essex countryside - much of the upper part of the river (above the M25) doesn't have official paths, which makes the going difficult.

The open fields and woodlands of the first day gave way to paddocks and fenced off fields; the tiny ditches and tributaries entering the river became larger and harder to get over; and the Roding itself became much deeper, so it was harder to cross to the other side when that became

necessary. So, we spent a lot of time getting caught on barbed wire fences, crawling through blackthorn bushes and getting our feet wet in the river. Combined with the river becoming ever more adventurous with its loops and meanders, it meant we were not getting anywhere fast and will struggle to walk the entire river by the end of the weekend.



Passing Fyfield Mill and finally came to a large stretch of river with a public footpath. The river flowed deep and clear by this point, flanked by willows and green fields.

Luckily, to make up for practical difficulties, most parts of the river were still very beautiful and much of the walk was very idyllic. I hadn't realised quite how rural the river is in its upper reaches. Even 'the Rodings' (the villages named after the river) are not actually on the river itself and the river doesn't flow through any villages until it reaches Fyfield. By that stage we were seriously flagging and were very grateful for a coffee and sit down at the home of group member Michael Brawn, whose home backs onto the river.

Returning to the river, we passed Fyfield Mill and finally came to a large stretch of river with a public footpath.

The river flowed deep and clear by this point, flanked by willows and green fields. As we continued, the signs that we were beginning to enter more urban areas began to show, with some litter, the first shopping trolley and the first major Environment Agency concrete dam making an appearance. Camping at the confluence of the Roding and its first large tributary (the Cripsey Brook), the river still felt very idyllic though.

Day Three

Helped no doubt by the bright spring sun sunshine and warm weather, the parts of the Roding that we walked today felt like the most glorious stretches. As we walked down from Chipping Ongar, the river had widened and deepened from being a stream and at the bends and



Day three - following the river meandering across the flood plain set in green fields we hardly saw a soul.

meanders in the river there were pools that were deep enough to swim in, even if the water was a bit freezing.



Reaching the bridge that carried the M25 across the river was a reminder that we were entering an urban area and that the peace and tranquility that we have enjoyed so far will now be accompanied by traffic noise.

As we followed the river meandering across its flood plain set amongst green fields, we barely saw a soul. Every now and then, the river wandered next to a woodland, with ancient trees and bluebells about to flower. The blossom of the many patches of blackthorn looked like white fluffy clouds against the blue sky. Even in this idyllic setting though, there were reminders of the problems the Roding faces: fields ploughed on a slope to within a foot of the waters edge, de-forested banks, sewage works, rubbish starting to build up and a local walker who told us about the dramatic declines in fish living in the Roding over the years.

Although the bridge taking the M25 over the river was dramatic in a concrete brutalist way, it was also a

reminder that the river was entering urban areas and that from now on, the peace and tranquillity of the river would always be accompanied by traffic noise. As the sun set, we found ourselves on the outskirts of Abridge with its historic bridge, and only the second settlement on the river itself since the source. We camped out on a field within sight of the M11, ready for the final day of walking, as we follow the river through its final urban phase to its confluence with the Thames.

Day Four

The final day of our walk along the length of the Roding on Easter Monday started in an inauspicious way, being woken at 6am by our tent nearly blowing away, followed by a snow storm! We set off early to keep warm by walking and soon the sun came out and made another glorious day on the Roding.



Day four - crossing under the M11 we found that there was no footpath along the river edge and so we had to make a slightly terrifying dash across the motorway.

After setting off from Abridge, the river meanders through a golf course on the edge of Chigwell, before crossing (not for the last time) under the M11. Unfortunately there was no path alongside the river under the bridge, so we had to do a slightly terrifying dash over the M11. Very soon after crossing the motorway, the change in character of the river was evident: we found lots more rubbish and the first big fly tip. The riverside land was much more manicured, with more parks and sports fields than open countryside, which at least meant that there were paths and public access for most of it (although we still had a lot of scrambling through bushes and over fences to do!)

Carrying on along the river, we reached parts of it I had been too before. The river here is one of contrasts - often flanked or crossed by vast concrete motorways or huge pylons, but itself being crystal clear and rippling over gravel with trees and greenery along the paths. By the afternoon, we'd reached the Red Bridge (after which the Borough is named) and the lower section of the Roding.

After 4 days of walking we came yesterday evening to the final section of the walk. This section of the river is in many ways home turf and one that we know well.

Although a part of the river with many challenges with rubbish, pollution and urbanisation, it is also in its own way magical and beautiful.

We had to fight our way through the bushes from Redbridge, alongside Wanstead Pumping station to

Wanstead Park (a section of the path we would one day like to create as part of our Roding Edgelands vision). This is a much-loved section of the river and you can see why; stunning parkland and woodland meeting a Roding running clear over shallow gravel beds.



Familiar territory now - the stretch of the river flanked by greenery again as it runs through Wanstead Park on towards Ilford.

Soon we were onto Ilford golf course, a hidden eden of green a stone's throw from central Ilford and somewhere that will hopefully have more public access along the river that runs through it in future. Walking along the river, I saw the confluence of the Cran Brook for the first time; it was bigger than I expected (hopefully large enough to walk through and explore at some point), but the water coming out of it was a worrying colour.

Reaching the end of the golf course, there was some of my favourite bridges on the Roding. The north circular goes over the river with a soaring and quite grand concrete overpass. Then we went under the railway,

where a small hidden footpath runs alongside the river, under the railway bridge, which is actually about 5 different brick bridges built on top of each other over time, which made for an interesting effect.

We went through a random green glade wedged between the river and the railway sidings and dog-legged round the Aldersbrook (which was in a sorry state with raw sewage entering the river) and Romford Road. We then reached the Ilford Hill bridge over the Roding and got to use the new path alongside the River Roding which the River Roding Trust has created and which volunteers recently cleared of rubbish. As this path has only recently been opened, we realised that we might have been one of the few people to walk the whole of the Roding without deviating at all from the river.



Railway crossing the Roding just beyond the North Circular - the bridge is actually about 5 different brick bridges built on top of each other.

We went along the path, passing under cherry trees just bursting into blossom and stopped at our moorings for a quick coffee before following the river through Barking

“I had hoped that by walking the entire river I would come to know and understand it better and the reality surpassed all of my expectations on this.. I’ll end my account of the walk by saying that during the course of the trip I fell in love over and over again with the Roding; despite its many problems, it feels like a unique, beautiful and magical river and one that I feel so lucky to live on and be connected to.”



Ilford Hill Bridge - Cran Brook inlet to the left

town centre. At Hand Trough Creek, the river changes significantly into its much bigger, tidal, reed fringed section, eerily beautiful and empty.



Moving on towards Beckton the river widens and becomes tidal fringed with reeds, new housing and industry

We walked out along the shore to as close as the confluence as we could get, to pour some water we had taken from the source back into the river, say a few words of appreciation to the river, and have a much-deserved glass of wine.

The end of the journey where the River Roding joins the Thames - marked by the Barking Creek Barrier.

Although the Thames Barrier is the most famous of London's flood defenses, it's only one of 36 industrial floodgates built to protect London — and one of the more distinctive is the Barking Creek Barrier.

Do you live near to the River Roding? Enjoy walking, spending time in nature, gardening or bird spotting?

Would you like to work in a team to preserve the paths, protect biodiversity and transform our forgotten river into an accessible nature space for the community?

JOIN THE RIVER RODING RANGERS!

We have a dream that there will be a River Roding Rangers group working to preserve, protect and restore the River Roding along every stretch of the river, from its source in Essex through to the Thames in Barking.

Our first River Roding Rangers group will be responsible for the stretch of the river from Barking to Ilford. As a member of the River Roding Rangers, your responsibilities will include:

- ☐ path maintenance, such as cutting back brambles and nettles,
- ☐ clearing litter from around the benches,
- ☐ watering the herbs in the planters,
- ☐ recording biodiversity,
- ☐ planting trees and looking after them to ensure their survival
- ☐ reporting concerns, news and positive stories to the River Roding Trust.
- ☐ spreading the word about the river and the adjacent path from connecting Barking and Ilford to encourage more people to explore the area and engage with the river.

River Roding Trust

<https://riverrodingtrust.org.uk/>

Friends of the River Roding

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/491859691019927>



Red Fox

Spell-Poem by Robert Macfarlane

I am Red Fox – how do you see me?
A bloom of rust at your vision's edge,
The shadow that slips through a hole in the hedge,
My two green eyes in your headlights' rush,
A scatter of feathers, the tip of a brush.

I am Red Fox – when do you hear me?
A scream in the night that stops you dead;
Dark torn from dark, a bolt through the head,
My sorrowful love-song howled to my lover,
My trash-can clatter from twilight's cover.

I am Red Fox – where do you find me?
In a copse and spinney, ginnel and alley,
For I haunt city as I haunt valley,
Climbing the fell-side, crossing the pass,
Walking the high street, bold as brass.

I am Red Fox – what do you call me?
Shifter of shapes and garbage-raider,
Bearer of fire and space-invader,
Taker of risks and riddle-maker,
Messenger, trickster, curfew-breaker.

I am Red Fox – why do you need me?
I am your double, your ghost, your other,
The spirit of wild, the spirit of weather,
Red is my fur and red is my art,
And red is the blood of your animal heart.

dear Wrens

Just a quick note.

Imagine the surprise us skylarks got when we flew into Wanstead Flats this year. To be honest, in view of all the kerfuffle there was last year, we'd been thinking of giving the whole area a wide berth. The last thing we wanted was a repeat. I'll never forget those dogs trampling all over our nests and disturbing our young.

Well, sometime towards the end of March we arrived and were staggered to find the grassland areas were largely quiet and empty. It was great. There were these two areas which had some kind of fence around them. Instantly we felt at ease and word quickly got around and other skylarks flew in. No one flapped. It was just like old times.

Later we noticed people in yellow jackets talking to dog owners and looking over our way. We think they were part of the new scheme. One of us - we call him swoop (I think you lot use the word scoop) - did a bit of digging around and discovered that a group of humans was responsible for the change. Apparently - a bit strange this - you're called Wrens. Anyway, the skylark community would just like to sing you a chorus of thanks.

When I showed this letter to the other birds, one or two of them thought it was a bit too informal. For one thing, they would have preferred me to use our species' Latin name - *Alauda Arvensis*. But, to be honest, most of us think they're a bit up themselves using such highfalutin language. There's been a few tweets about it, I can tell you. At the end of the day, most of us are quite happy with the good old Anglo Saxon word: skylark, thank you very much.

One more thing before I soar off. Some of you may be wondering why we skylarks fly so high. Well, it's a bit complicated but I'll try to explain it simply to you land-locked types.

First of all, it's only the males that fly up so high. Us females have it cushy. We get to just sit it out and listen. Then if one of the guys takes our fancy, we let him know, one way or another, like. So, one reason for the males going sky-high is to attract a female.

The other reason is that they do it to preserve their territory. They're like robins in that respect. And because us skylarks like low grassland so that we can feed off the seeds, there's hardly ever any trees around for them to perch in. So, that's why the guys go up in the world.

I suppose over the years we could have learned to adapt to something less strenuous but then we wouldn't have had all that poetry written about us. My favourite is the one by Shelley. Mind you, the Wordsworth one's not bad either. And I often sing that Vaughan Williams piece to myself. You know, *The Lark Ascending*. Lovely stuff.

Well, it's been great having a twitter. Once again, thank you very much for thinking of us. It's much appreciated. You've made us sing our hearts out just like we used to.

Must be getting on though. Before summer's out I'll be expected to bring two or three broods of little ones into the world.

Gotta fly,
On a wing and a prayer,

Skye Lark (Ms) xx
(Aka Wren member Robert Nurden)



verderer

The history of the Verderers of Epping Forest is fairly well documented however the roll is rapidly adapting as time goes on. The modern day pressures facing the Forest are probably increasing faster than ever before and along with that comes a unique set of challenges we have never faced.

My personal relationship with the forest goes back to my infancy, I took my first steps on the clay ride by Baldwins Hill pond and one way or another the Forest has played an important roll in my life. Being lucky enough to grow up with the forest at the back of your garden meant I was able to spend some wonderful childhood years playing in and learning about this unique asset we are so lucky to share.

I have seen many changes happen to the forest with how it's managed over the years and have personal understanding of the affects the forest and it's management has on those that live in and around it. This has created a strong passion in me to see the relationship between the people and the forest recognised and respected. That relationship is under as much pressure as the forest itself. Climate change, increasing visitor numbers, modern transport and changing recreational demands all add to the immense load on these ancient woodlands.

I stood as a candidate for the position of Verderer in early 2020, just before the first COVID lockdown. In many ways it was a baptism of fire for myself and Verderer Kennedy as we quickly moved from the traditional methods of how the roll works into a virtual scenario with decisions being made about mortuaries, closing car parks Red lines being delivered and having to watch the forest literally getting trashed in places by vast numbers of people suddenly discovering the great open space on their doorstep. There wasn't much time to get our feet under the table as so to speak.



The verderers of Epping Forest have represented the views of everyday people for over 800 years acting as a key go-between with the City of London.

Being the campaigner for the establishment of the Epping Forest Consultation committee and subsequently sitting within those meetings did allow me an insight into what I may expect. One thing I feel we have lost throughout this past year is the continuity of face to face contact with many of the groups that would normally sit on

this committee and now looking from the Verderers perspective and having an insight to what officers have to deal with I realise just how important these established groups, their work and input is. I don't know if it is ever said enough but I know all four Verderers hold the work and opinions of groups such as Wren in extremely high regard and thank everyone for all that they do, I know that I can say that on behalf of all the committee in general as well.

We are on the cusp of a new era with Epping Forest. A turning point in its history. Budget constraints, rising costs, climate pressures and neighbouring developments are all adding to the load and they are changing somewhat the overall aspects of our relationship with the forest. The natural aspects, the Flora and fauna are in need of more protection than they have before in recent years and there is a need to re-evaluate our expectations and what can and will be delivered. I have personal concerns that the move towards income generation for example will have hidden unintended consequences. We had the concept of the flats being used for huge events, this was muted about a couple of years ago, I am less confident of the ability to protect the environment than maybe some others are and I am even less sure of the ability to mitigate the effects of such schemes than maybe I should be. I view the rolls that general interest and support groups play are paramount in keeping an eye on the various impacts of the changes.

In a bygone era the "working forest" was delivering more traditional service, it may be deemed as redundant in that manner however it is working harder than ever

and the load will increase further with its delivery of offsetting human impact on the natural environment. The City of London is taking a proactive approach to this threat and the Great "People's Forest" will be ever more important in fulfilling the climate offset roll for the City. There is however an aspect of that of which I have reservations about. The dedication of the forest for the benefit of the people, to my thinking also means that benefit should be shared equally. The individual claim of a sole ownership and benefit of the offsetting service towards the City is disappointing to me. We each live in areas where the fight against climate change is being considered along with local development plans.

When you look at the impact of the loss of any claim, however small towards the offset means the likelihood of more radical mitigation measures being implemented. In areas such as in the North of the forest

the Epping Forest district is not land rich, the forest has always been the centre of the district and probably there has been an element of complacency towards needing to provide green spaces because the forest has been viewed as fulfilling that roll. Areas such as Redbridge however have the luxury and benefits of much more green space at their disposal and so we are seeing local development plans emerging with many various methods of mitigation strategies each having different impacts on the forest. These variables mean constant scrutiny and adaptation to react to the various decisions made and potential impacts.

As we hopefully return to some sense of normality from COVID I would like to be able to meet up with

groups and hear first hand their issues and concerns and fresh ideas of how we are going to counteract and protect against the increasing pressures on our open spaces. There are some quite dramatic changes that the forest is facing especially in the South with developments like Whipps Cross Hospital which has a proposed huge housing led development alongside the new hospital, developments that will no doubt affect the surrounding forest.

Verderer Paul Morris



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

bird report

This Spring has seen some very odd weather. Spring passage was undoubtedly retarded by some very long stretches of persistent northerly winds. Nevertheless, this year continues its march on as one of, if not, our best ever years for birds if we go by the rather blunt metric of the number of species recorded. Several of us are on track for personal best records.

As a team effort, the total monthly patch lists across the Spring were: March = 86; April = 93; and May = 97. The total spring list (March to end of May) was a pretty healthy 115 species.

More broadly, the health of bird diversity locally is a mixed picture. Action has obviously been taken for our dwindling breeding Skylark population, but we have sincere concerns that we might have lost or about to lose Meadow Pipit as a breeding bird. Other species seem to be fairing rather better: Cetti's Warbler seems to be moving from a patch rarity to a patch regular; Reed Warbler appears to have a couple of territories; and the number of Common Whitethroat territories seems strong. Wanstead Flats, in particular, remains a star performer in London for passage passerine migrants. Whilst the Spring passage is never quite as impressive as the Autumn, some of the records (such a day high of 12 Wheatear) are notable.



Birders generally rate a season by the number and quality of rarities and scarcities. High up on the list was our first ever Iceland Gull found by Mary on 23 March on Alex pond. There was a mad scramble to see this stunning 'first winter'/second calendar year white-winged gull and much gnashing of teeth from those of us who missed it on the first day followed by significant arm waving, 'whooping', and socially distanced air 'high-fives' when it appeared again the following day and the day after etc.



First ever Iceland Gull found by Mary Holden on 23 March on Alex pond- pic by Tony Brown

If a single day had to be identified as the zenith of our Spring birding, it is probably 24 April. Tony picked up the first Green Sandpiper of the year going north over Alex. A few minutes later and a mile or so west, two Green Sandpiper flew in and landed on Cat & Dog pond right



Wheatear - pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

in front of me before dawn and before they saw me and scarpered. Others heard and saw one or two flying around over the next hour or two, and so we settled on a minimum of three birds. Things got better when I picked up three Whimbrel flying east over the Flats (a full patch tick for me) and another flew over shortly afterwards. This all happened before Tony found a singing Nightingale just south of Long Wood. As several of us stood silently near a patch of brambles and brooms listening to the wonderful liquid trills and whistles of the king of songbirds, I certainly reflected that it was quite high up there on the list of most memorable day's birding on the Patch I have had.

Mary was clearly not content with having found our first ever Iceland Gull and discovered a wonderful almost-summer plumage Black-necked Grebe on Alex on 3 May. This is the second ever record locally and the first in just over forty years. I won't spare Bob V's blushes by saying he saw the first one back when I was six months old. This wonderful golden-eared bird was still present a month

after it was first found and having been twitched by a reasonable number of London, and even a few 'further-afield', birders.

Talking of twitches, bird-finder general, Nick C (although Mary is catching him up), spotted an Osprey heading west over the Flats on 6 May. He alerted East Central Turret Observatory (aka 'Jono L') who located the bird whilst working from home and he in turn cascaded comms to others including to Western Turret (aka 'yours truly') who managed to spot it out of my northern hatch (skylight) circling Bush Wood. There was a scurrilous rumour that I made a dash with my bins to the Patch to try and get Osprey on my Patch list, but failed. Clearly such a rumour of uncouth twitching is below the standing of an eminent naturalist and Chair of the Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group and I would deny it strenuously.



Nick Craft spotted an Osprey heading west over the Flats on 6 May - pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

Nick also flushed a single Woodlark from near Long Wood on 28 May - our latest ever Spring record. At the time of

writing, I am fresh in from listening to a bird sing that was an even better find from Nick, but I don't want to steal the thunder of a summer write up (which is likely to be somewhat more thin on the ground than Spring).



Yellow Wagtail - pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

For those only marginally interested in local birds, you might wish to turn the page or tune out now. For those hardier souls who get a kick out of phenological data, read on...

Spring Passage Migrants

Passage Migrants					
Species	Bird days	First & 'Last'	Arrival vs average	Average Count	High Count
Sand Martin	22	21/03 - 22/05	-7	2	6
Wheatear	24	23/03 - 13/05	+4	3	12
Swallow	36	27/03 - 02/06	-6	5	50
Willow Warbler	23	29/03 - 01/05	-6	2	11
Common Redstart	4	30/03 - 27/04	-9	1	1
Ring Ouzel	3	02/04 - 10/04	-6	1	1
Yellow Wagtail	14	14/04 - 11/05	0	2	6
Whinchat	4	27/04 - 22/05	+2	2	3
Sedge Warbler	5	01/05 - 15/05	+6	1	1
Spot Flycatcher	1	05/05 - 05/05	-4	1	1

The table hopefully speaks for itself. If not:

- The second column ('bird days') is quite simply the number of days from March to the end of May when a particular species was recorded. We tend to find this more useful than counting birds on passage e.g. if you see three Wheatear on Saturday and three on Sunday are the birds on Sunday new in, the same as the day before or some combination?
- The third column obviously relates to the first record of each species on the year. I have included 'last' date as this is a Spring review, but obviously some of these species might continue being seen throughout some of the summer months, and hopefully all of them will reappear in the Autumn on the way back.
- The fourth column and the coloured numbers refers to the first arrival of each species this Spring with green numbers relating to the number of days earlier than the mean average first date locally and red corresponding to those later than the mean average.
- Average count is mean average number of individual birds seen on each of the 'bird days' and high count is simply the highest number of individual birds of one species seen on any of the Spring days.

Whilst some of the poor weather - especially the prolonged northerlies during some of the key migratory periods - undoubtedly retarded the flow of some species by a bit, the table shows that there were still more species showing up for the first time on a date earlier than the mean average than later.

A couple of species are worth drawing attention to...



Common Redstart - pic by Nick Croft

We saw reasonable numbers of Willow Warbler on passage, including an impressive high-count of 11 singing on 11 April right across the Patch. Sadly, it does not seem that any of these birds stayed as Willow Warbler does not appear to have bred locally for a few years now.



Willow Warbler - pic by Bob Vaughan

Wheatear seemed to have a good Spring, despite being four days later than the average first arrival (and a full 12

days later than our earliest ever). We had a total of 24 bird days and an average of three birds seen on each of them (with a high count of an astonishing 12 birds on 20 April).

I will let the table on Passage migrants speak for the rest of the records.

Migrant and resident breeders

A quick canter through some of the breeding birds (albeit most definitely not exhaustive). Swifts first appeared on 21 April (two days earlier than our mean average first for year), and we had a trickle through on most days after that until 1 May when a sudden jump from 2 to 23 birds signalled that our local birds had returned. We have had a couple of days when over 100 birds have been seen across the patch and an average of around 25-30 daily. No comprehensive survey of nest sites has been completed and so it is difficult to draw any conclusions beyond the numbers we see frequently.



We seem to have at least two pairs of Little Owls on Wanstead Flats frequently seen on their favourite tree. Pic by Tony Morrison

Hobby was first seen on 25 April (four days later than the mean average) and one or two local birds seen regularly since then.

We seem to have at least two pairs of Little Owl on Wanstead Flats still and one or two of them were very frequently seen on favourite trees.



Our first Reed Warbler for the year arrived on 29 April - pic by Sean Kerrigan

Our first Reed Warbler for the year arrived on 29 April (4 days later than the mean average) in Wanstead Park and there have been two singing males in the Park and a third heard on three days during May on the Roding in the Old Sewage Works.

We only have a small colony of locally breeding House Martin. The first record was on 5 April which was just one day earlier than the mean average. Our high count of at least 25 birds on 8 May was followed by only three other days when double figures were reported. The rest of the time we have only had low numbers reported regularly.

It appears that the Roding in the Old Sewage Works has two singing Cetti's Warbler and there has been another

on the Ornamentals in the Park. Fingers crossed that this year or soon we get some breeding successes.

After the odd appearance of winter Chiffchaff and perhaps a couple of early arrivals moving through, we start to see a big influx from March and then with peak counts of singers in April (this year around 13 birds during the second week of the month).

Small numbers of Blackcap also remain resident locally through the winter; particularly in local gardens, but the arrival of migrating birds seems to happen around the beginning of March. This is steep increase in numbers, perhaps as some birds passing through temporarily swell numbers, before declining to numbers of birds with established territories.



Garden Warbler - pic by Tony Brown

I have decided to optimistically include Garden Warbler in the company of our resident breeding birds rather than with the passage migrants although we have no evidence of breeding beyond some persistence in one or two singing males. The first one was recorded by a visiting

birder to Wanstead Flats on 2 May (4 days later than the average first arrival) and the local regulars didn't connect to one until 19 May in Wanstead Park. We had a couple singing possibly for a few days in late May in the Old Sewage Works.

Lesser Whitethroat first appeared this year on 26 April (a full 9 days later than the average first for year). We had a peak of five birds on the day after the first (probably as the migratory flood gates had opened) and have two seemingly established territories on Wanstead Flats and one in the Old Sewage Works.

Common Whitethroat has had another good year if singing males are anything to go by. The first arrival (on 14 April) was only two days later than average. Double figure counts of singing males has been a regular occurrence and we reached a peak of 25 birds counted on 7 May.



Common Whitethroat - pic by Nic Croft

The number of Song Thrush territories on Wanstead Flats sadly seems to be declining whilst seeming more stable in

Wanstead Park and the Old Sewage Works. Two or three singing males on the Flats has been a reasonable count through the season whilst 5-7 territories in the Park and 4-5 in the Old Sewage Works are also commonly achieved counts.



After fencing off the main breeding area on Wanstead Flats it looks like two pairs of Skylarks have established territories - pic by Tony Morrison

As anyone local will know, this the first year that the CoL has fenced off the main areas of grassland where Skylark and Meadow Pipit are known to breed. We believe that two pairs of Skylark have established territories and some evidence of breeding over an above singing males has been witnessed. Three singing birds have been heard on a few occasions but we suspect that there may be 'spare' male aside from the two pairs. Let's hope that the fencing, few disturbances to their habitat will lead over time to more sustainable breeding numbers than 'hopefully at least two' which is where we are now.

Sadly, the story for Meadow Pipits is more dire. Whilst passage/movement birds were counted in the early part

of the season, there have been no singing males at all during the crucial stages of the Spring. Hopefully this does not mean that Meadow Pipit is yet another bird to have been lost to us locally as a breeding species. Time will tell.

I won't attempt to provide breeding survey updates of more of our commonly seen birds as I am not sure the data we collected really formed an accurate view this Spring.

Other birds

Our long-staying Common Shelduck was last seen on 25 March. We had two Spring fly-overs in March.

Mandarin Duck was reported from Wanstead Park on 14 March.

Marco strengthened his game bird credentials by finding a Pheasant on 28 March and then a Red-legged Partridge on 4 April.

Mike M heard the patch's only Cuckoo on 30 May.

Common Sandpiper was first recorded this year on 3 May (six days later than the mean average first appearance) in the Old Sewage Works and we had one which seemed to stay for several days on Heronry a few days later.

There was a little bit of confusion reminiscent of the double trouble we had with Mediterranean Gull a few months ago when a second calendar year Caspian Gull on 6 April turned out to be two second calendar year Caspian Gulls seen on Jubilee and Alex.

It has clearly been a good year for gulls (with the Kittiwake and Iceland Gull helping us to a record tally of ten species this year) and a late season adult Great Black-backed Gull in Wanstead Park on 10 April was a bit of a surprise.



A good year for gulls with a tally of ten species this year. Icelandic Gull - pic by Tony Brown

Indeed, we have had nine bird days with Yellow Legged Gull this year, the last of which, so far, was seen on 8 May. Our friendly second calendar Mediterranean Gull also stuck around until 12 March.

Unsurprisingly, Red Kite numbers seem to be continuing to rise with 29 'bird days' from March to the end of May (41 Red Kite counted since the beginning of the year). This is still not at the level of Buzzard sightings with 50 bird days during the spring months and a day high-count of 8 birds seen on 13 April. We have also had 16 bird days for Peregrine and up to two birds seen on each of those days.



Rook - pic by Tony Brown

There were nine 'bird days' for Rook this Spring from 8 April until 1 May with a high-count of three birds on 22 April.

A nice surprise in April, was a singing Firecrest in the City of London Cemetery. Whilst, strictly speaking, off-patch for the local birders, this individual was actually singing from a Holly Bush visible from the patch boundaries (whether it was audible or not whilst standing on the Patch is really a question one shouldn't ask a gentleman).

In the spirit of phenological last dates as well as first, it is perhaps worth noting that our last sighting of Fieldfare came on 26 March (only the second year on record where we haven't continued to record this species into April); a full two weeks earlier than the mean average last sighting. Redwing, however, continued to be recorded until 13 April which is a week later than the mean average last Spring record.

Those at the front of the class may remember that we had a bumper autumn and winter for Stonechat. We had one or two birds that stuck around until 23 March.

Similarly, some of our winter finches stuck around for a while. Our main flock of Linnet has been elsewhere since around mid February, but one or two birds in particular have been seen frequently throughout much of April and May on the Flats. The same is true for Lesser Redpoll (where a single bird was last seen on 27 April) and Siskin (last recorded on 30 April).



Nice surprise in April - a singing Firecrest in the City of London Cemetery - pic by Nic Croft

And, to finish with Buntings, we had three records of spring Yellowhammer (30 March, 5 April, 18 April). There were also nine records of Reed Bunting - all single birds - from March to May.

Report by James Heal



start at the supermarket

to Save British Wildlife

A new report, *Insect Declines and Why They Matter*, commissioned by an alliance of Wildlife Trusts in the south west, concludes that drastic declines in insect numbers look set to have far-reaching consequences for both wildlife and people. The new report by invertebrate expert, Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex, highlights the severe effects of the declines on insect-eating birds, bats, and fish, and the cost to society due to lost revenue and broken ecosystems.

Here Wild Wanstead's Susannah Knox discusses whether saving British wildlife should start at the supermarket.



Caring about British wildlife means caring about insects. The survival of most life on earth, including humans, is reliant on a diverse range of insect species. They pollinate our crops, decompose waste, control pests and are top of the menu for many birds, reptiles and amphibians.

But insect numbers are declining dramatically. A bug spattered windscreen is a thing of the past. In 2017, a study reported that flying insects had declined by around 75% in the last 25 years on German nature reserves. Among British butterflies, one of the best studied insect groups in the world, common species have declined by about half over the last 40 years and, despite conservation efforts, numbers of those needing specialist habitats have fallen by 77%. Over a similar period, the ranges of wild bees and hoverflies have shrunk dramatically. There are now large areas of the country where many species are no longer able to thrive.

41%
OF INSECT SPECIES
THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

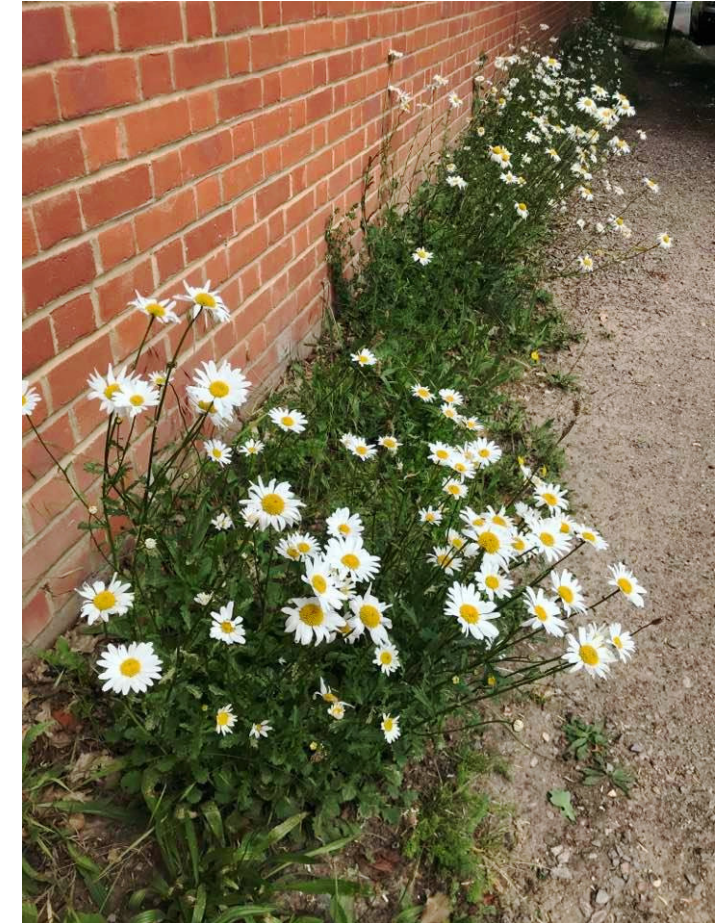
Last year, in his report for the Wildlife Trusts, *Insect Declines and Why They Matter*, entomologist, Professor Dave Goulson put forward two main strategies for addressing our rapidly disappearing insects: 1) stopping all routine and unnecessary use of pesticides and 2) creating more and better connected insect friendly habitats in our gardens, towns, cities and countryside.



According to Defra figures, farmers apply increasingly more pesticides to their crops. This approximately doubled between 1990 and 2015. Given that there are only about 4.5 million hectares of arable and horticultural land, this means that on average each hectare now receives 17 pesticide applications <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/pusstats>

The fantastic work of organisations like the Wren Wildlife Group is making inroads into the second of those goals. But is there more we could do to address the use of pesticides across the UK? Nearly 17,000 tons of pesticides are sprayed on farms every year – not to mention all the chemicals used by councils and home owners. According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), every hectare of arable land in the UK receives 17 applications of pesticide each year. Heavy use of pesticides has rendered much of the countryside a green desert, where the insect foundation of the food

chain has been destroyed. Little wonder that farmland bird numbers dropped by more than half between 1970 and 2018 in the UK, with Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove and Tree Sparrow declining by at least 90%.



The Nelson Road Grow Zone in Wanstead is blooming. The UK has 250,000 miles of road verges. More should be managed for wildlife locally by not spraying with insecticides, sowing insect friendly seed mixes, mowing later in the year and removing the cuttings.

In the future, it is hoped agriculture will become more sustainable in the UK following a major shake-up in government policy, which will see farmers subsidised for actions like restoring wild habitats and creating new

woodlands. However, buying organic produce remains one of the few ways individuals can object against pesticide usage and support farming techniques that are less detrimental to native wildlife. It is estimated that on average, plant, insect and bird life is up to 50% more abundant on organic farms. So it's good news that the newly published Organic Statistics for 2020 from Defra show an 11.6% increase in certified organic land in conversion across the UK. The Soil Association says this has been driven by significant and sustained growth in demand for organic produce through the Covid-19 pandemic; together with the availability of UK Government support for organic across some parts of the UK; technological improvements in organics; and growing interest amongst consumers and farmers for farming to provide more benefits for the environment and climate.

However, the UK - one of the world's most nature depleted countries - remains woefully behind our European neighbours. Only 2.3% of farmed land in the UK is organic, compared to 8.5 % of total EU agricultural land. In

“Every space
in Britain must
be used to help
wildlife”

Sir David Attenborough

a landmark step, the European Union has pledged to reduce the use of pesticides and fertilisers dramatically, and transform a quarter of agricultural land into organic farms by 2030. This June, the people of Switzerland will be voting in a referendum on whether to ban pesticides in agriculture, food production and the maintenance of public spaces like gardens and parks. If successful, Switzerland will become the second country

in the world to ban pesticides, after Bhutan. The UK urgently needs similar ambition if we are to reverse the insect declines that are destroying the foodweb on which our native wildlife depends. In the meantime, maybe the best way we can help support biodiversity isn't what we plant in our gardens, it's what we put in our shopping trollies.

Susannah Knox

Wild Wanstead www.wildwanstead.org



Read More

Insect Declines and why They Matter by Professor Dave Goulson, FRES

https://www.somersetwildlife.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/FULL%20AFI%20REPORT%20WEB1_1.pdf

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.





how clean is our river

Many people love to let their dogs and children play in the shallow gravelly sections of the River Roding in summer. The water looks clean and inviting: we can see ducks paddling, kingfishers fishing, tiddlers swimming and swans guarding their cygnets. In May and June, the banks are gorgeous with cow parsley and new leaf growth. So what's the problem?

A report in April this year of a massive sewage pollution event in both the River Roding and the Alders Brook emanating from the Romford Road might have alerted us to think about this.

Volunteers from the Friends of the River Roding clearing rubbish from the banks of the watercourse watched in disgust as poo, wet wipes and condoms spewed into the Alders Brook from a sewer outlet on March 27th. They called for action from Thames Water: "The Roding was affected less, but the Alders Brook - there is nothing alive in it. It's full of wet wipes and mud that stinks of poo. It's just an open sewer," said Paul Powesland, founder of the River Roding Trust. Since then, a spokesperson for Thames Water said the company responded quickly to the incident which was down to fat, oil and grease blocking the sewer.



An idyllic picture of the Roding taken recently from Ilford Golf Course - but further upstream it's a different story. Pic by Redbridge Council Officer Anna MacLaughlin



There are countless outlets into the River Roding. They are designed to take clean surface water from adjacent areas into the river and out to sea. However, under certain circumstances raw sewage and other pollutants can end up being discharged into our river. A problem that is becoming more and more frequent due to an ageing infrastructure and greater numbers of homes and other development.

Outfall pipes, Dodgy Plumbing and Careless Farmers

Have you ever noticed outfall pipes sticking out of our river the bank, some large, some small, which may be discharging into our stretch of river? The discharge is supposed to be rainwater runoff. But is it?

Walkers beside the river in the Wanstead Park area would not have been affected by the pollution event reported above, which occurred a mile or so downstream. But pollution events occur upstream as well - most recently, in Roding Lane South, just north of the Redbridge Roundabout. If you pause to look, you may notice some discharge from outfall pipes in our stretch. It may have no smell, or a pleasant laundryish smell, or if the discharge is greyish, it may smell unpleasant. So what is being

discharged? Is it safe for children and dogs to go in the river?

Across the country 15 per cent of rivers and 9 per cent of beaches are failing water quality standards, with analysis suggesting the River Roding which runs between Loughton and Chigwell upstream of Wanstead Park, may be particularly susceptible to pollution from misconnections.

Dodgy plumbing may be the problem. Misconnections occur when foul and surface water systems are incorrectly fed into one another. People misconnecting their washing machines, which may well occur in areas of high-density housing, cause their waste water to go into the river.

Worse, if the foul water drain is connected to the surface water drain, then waste water can travel untreated directly into rivers, where its effect on wildlife can be devastating.

Aside from dodgy plumbing, the runoff of chemicals such as fertilisers and pesticides from farm fields further upstream in Essex, or animal waste such as waste from chicken farms, can also pollute our river and harm wildlife.

Article by Gill James



Thank you Friends of the River Roding for raising public awareness and badgering Thames Water to keep our river clean. See riverrodingtrust.org.uk for further details of their work downstream.



pastures new

Anyone living in or visiting Leytonstone over recent months may have noticed neon 'Save our Pastures' posters in the windows of houses and businesses. These are the most visible element of a community campaign which sprang into life in late 2020 when the site in Davies Lane was identified by Waltham Forest Council for housing.

In the Winter 2020 newsletter, an article entitled 'Good Shepherd' recounted the history and ecology of the Pastures site in Leytonstone and its threatened loss for housing development. Andrew Shields brings the story up to date and explains how Wren Group members can help bring the facilities and grounds at the Pastures into wider community use.

The Council's initial proposal was for the demolition of one or both of the buildings on the site: the Pastures youth centre, constructed in the early 1980s and including a full-size sports hall; and the Good Shepherd Building, originally a home for 'fallen girls' and 'those rescued from persons or houses of ill-fame', which was founded in 1879 by Agnes Cotton, sixth daughter of William, a governor of the Bank of England and owner of the Pastures estate.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, both buildings were well used by local groups and individuals for a wide range of sport, culture and youth activities.

The site also includes a quarter of a hectare of semi-wild garden with lawns, stands and rows of trees and a large, fenced-off and overgrown pond.

A covenant apparently bequeathing the site to the local community for the purpose of supporting young people is often referred to, but extensive searches at records offices and in Agnes Cotton's will have so far failed to find any documentation.

A group of concerned residents quickly set up the 'Save our Pastures' campaign, which included an online petition and extensive social media activity. The strength of opposition to the Council's housing plans immediately became apparent, along with testimonials from former youth centre members who powerfully described the role of Pastures in helping to shape their lives.

The Wren Group also supported the campaign in this initial phase by carrying out two site surveys, concluding:

"We were pleased and heartened to find such an interesting site of mixed habitats in a residential area and interested to learn about the history and its role as a community resource. We hope that any planned development of the existing buildings or the wider site are conducted sensitively and with careful regard for any protected species (such as any bat species), as well as the broader community importance of this small but interesting location."



In addition to the buildings on the site the grounds offer an 'interesting site of mixed habitats in a residential area'

In March, the campaign group was delighted to learn from Councillor Clyde Loakes that following feasibility reviews and discussions with Council Officers and Councillors from both Leytonstone and Cann Hall Wards, the Council had concluded that it would not take forward the proposed housing redevelopment.

However, that announcement is not the end of the 'Save Our Pastures' campaign. In fact, it merely signals the start of the next phase.

The move to withdraw housing proposals now enables local businesses, organisations and residents to discuss how best to take advantage of the huge potential of the site's unique combination of buildings and grounds. The group is working to produce a robust and realistically costed business plan for use of the Pastures facilities and grounds by the whole community.

The shared vision that will emerge from this period of consultation will include opportunities within the creative sector, community services, culture, employment skills, sport and well-being, youth engagement, and business support. A revitalised Pastures centre will help to develop greater self-sufficiency for the Leytonstone area, supporting healthier and safer lifestyles without people having to travel to access such facilities.

The campaign group has successfully pressed for the Pastures centre to reopen following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions on May 17. You can now book the sports hall at www.playfinder.com/london/venue/pastures-youth-and-sports-centre and book the reception area for a party, meeting, workshop or other event by emailing feel.good@walthamforest.gov.uk.

If you're involved with a group that could benefit from a revitalised Pastures centre in the longer term, visit saveourpastures.org where there is a community survey to outline your interest. To find out more about the next phase of 'Save our Pastures' or even get involved, you can follow the campaign [@SaveOurPastures](https://twitter.com/SaveOurPastures) on Twitter, [@SavePastures](https://facebook.com/SavePastures) on Facebook and [@saveourpastures](https://instagram.com/saveourpastures) on Instagram.

Update by Andrew Shields



Following the theme of our river - here's an account of Wren committee member Alan James and fellow volunteers working to help clean up the Roding.

daft waders

After every winter when the Roding had been in flood and receded, litter gets caught up in trees and bushes and along the banks, plastic bags are left to flap around in the wind, like multicoloured flags. Not a pretty sight. Someone should do something about it.



Alan James with his new waders - up to his knees in it as usual.

So we did! Mindful of warnings about Weil's Disease, sewage and drowning, we, a small group of local residents, took to the Roding.

We set out with rubbish bags, litter pickers and even a kayak. It turned out that managing a kayak and a litter picker at the same time was challenging. So the following week, arming ourselves with 3 sets of waders (2 kindly supplied by the Wren Group- thank you), we found that some of us wading while others were on the bank was a much more effective method.



Volunteer Matt Webber and his cargo bike

Fortunately, a neighbour with a cargo bike volunteered to help transport the many heavy bags of litter each week to a spot where the City of London (many thanks) had agreed collect them.

Over a six-week period we collected over 60 bags full of rubbish, - lots of plastic bags, the usual cans, and more noteworthy, a soggy mattress, bits of iron, lots of stained golf balls from the river bed, a large orange roadwork barrier and numerous wet wipes hanging from the trees, which did indicate there was a previous sewage spillage into the river.

Then, because in late May, the birds are busy nesting

and the river is very full again, and having cleared several hundreds of yards of river bank, we decided it was time to call a halt- for now.

Our challenge for later in the year is to haul out a large tractor tyre, which at first glance looks a bit like Nessie.

We look back with satisfaction. Nobody drowned or caught Weil's disease and the river Roding once again looks more like it should look.

If you'd like to help out on the Roding why not get intouch with the River Roding Trust and see how you can get involved riverrodingtrust.org.uk



Volunteers with some of the rubbish removed from the Roding .

weather

by Scott Whitehead

My interest in the weather was probably sparked by the cold winter of 1978/79 when I remember the snow being so deep in the December that it drifted over our front step in Romford.

There started a fascination that has been with me since. It was further compounded at senior school when I studied weather as part of Geography GCSE in year 8 - the first and only time I managed a 10+3 out of 10!

I never took the weather studies beyond secondary school, other stuff got in the way, but it remains a lifelong hobby.

A few years ago I became aware of Luke Howard's studies of local climate from the late 1700s and I've since incorporated his statistics into my dataset as well as studying his diaries on past weather events.

Spring in this neck of the woods was really mixed

A chilly start to March became fairly benign before ending with the warmest March day locally since at least 1959.

April then turned much colder and drier; just 2.4mm of rain fell during the month - the driest April since 2007 and fourth driest in a local rainfall series back to 1797!

Sunshine was abundant with over 200 hours. But clear skies at that time of year, with a polar continental airmass, often means air frost. And the ten recorded overnight was far higher than normal.

May saw things warm up slightly but the month still finished a degree colder than average. Some 80mm of rain fell which is over one and a half times what we'd normally expect. The wettest May since 2007 - the month playing catch up on the total absence of April showers that bring the spring flowers!

It was a dull month with only 126 hours of sunshine, 69 per cent of average - the duller since 1990 was third duller back to 1881.

In terms of flora and fauna the colder weather played havoc with the trees, bud burst coming much later than recent years. As I write this on June 6th some of the later budders like false acacia have only just come into full leaf.

The birds, as they normally do, just seem to get on with it raising their young. I'm not sure what the food supply has been like but judging by the amount of healthy juvenile fledglings I've seen I would guess that it has been a good season so far?

Here's the stats.

March 8C (+0.3) 30.9mm (76%) 90.9 hours (84%)
24.1C on 30th (a record that had stood since 1965)
April 7.2C (-2.6) 2.4mm (5.5%) 202.6 hours (127%)
10 air frosts in April, much higher than normal
May 12.1 (-1) 80mm (156%) 125.6 hours (69%)

Spring 2021: Mean : 9.1C (1.1C below average, coldest since 2013, 111th coldest) Rain : 113mm (84% of average, wettest since 2018, 150th wettest) Sun : 425.4 hrs (94% of average, duller for three years. 51st duller) The average masked extremes.

Visit Scott's site www.wansteadweather.co.uk



then & now

Were you right ?

Keepers Cottages, rear of The Temple, Wanstead Park 1910 and how it looks today in 2021

We may be living in and out of lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic, but outside nature carries on and summer 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.

useful 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>

