

Summer 2023

# Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

*Female kingfisher on the River Roding - pic by Pranav*

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# a word from the chair .....

In our 51st year, I am proud that the Wren Group is still able to innovate and adapt.

This year, under the direction of Gill James, we made a few changes to our already successful bioblitz weekend format.

We were keen to reach new parts of the local communities and also find new ways to explore the natural world on our doorstep. The Wanstead Wildlife Weekend was born.

As you will read about in this Quarter's newsletter, we ran some art-themed activities, we partnered with new and different groups, all whilst staying true to our fundamental principles of protecting and promoting the wildlife of the local area. There seemed to be particularly large number of young people and children engaged this year, and many people who had never joined a Wren event before.

Watching children use a sweep net for the first time or look at an insect with a hand lens for the first time was magical. Similarly, those of us who were encouraged to draw a picture for the first time in years was also amazing. And seeing so many people come together for the Climate picnic and families exploring ways that they can embrace and support biodiversity with workshops was encouraging at a time of worry regarding the climate and natural world.

Finding new ways to discover about the natural world will inevitably mean we can attract wider audiences and I am immensely proud how the Wren Group volunteers stepped up to the challenge. To all of you who helped out - thank you! I am keen to ensure that we continue to find ways to adapt and reach out.

Finally, I would like to encourage members to look up at the side of the buildings the next time you walk up or down the Leytonstone High Road. Local photographer and artist, Annick Wolfers, has been taking photos of local people who utilise Wanstead Flats and you may notice that a few members and friends of the Wren Group are featured in murals: moth trapping, birding, bee-wrangling, practical conservation work, in amongst the footballers and runners. It's a wonderful community art project to celebrate our local green spaces.

James Heal  
Chair Wren Group



*Budding artists trying their hands at a bit of 'wild art' as part of Wanstead Wildlife Weekend*



# listening to skylarks

Back in February I'd received a newsletter from The Wildlife Sound Recording Society requesting that its members took part in a project it was running in association with the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society composer of the famous piece 'The Lark Ascending', marking the end of celebrations for the 150th anniversary of his birth, together with the British National Library.

Chris Watson, President of the WSRS and sound recordist for many of David Attenborough's Natural history series

and films suggested taking the project a step further and building on a project initiated by Ornithologist Eric Simms in 1951 documented in his book 'Voices of the Wild'. His chapter 'Heralds of the Dawn' documents the first song of the Skylark across the length and breadth of the country. The idea was if enough of the WSRS members are able to record on the same weekends they'd be able to track the first song from Shetland to Land's End creating a new record of the first Skylark song 70 years on from Simms own.





Initially I'd looked at recording over at Richmond Park as I'd heard there was a conversation area for Skylarks. However being a resident of Leyton it was going to pose quite a challenge getting over to Richmond Park for pre-dawn, equipment in-tow.



*Skylark on skylark reserve fence post - pic by Tony Brown*

Knowing the Skylark is a ground nesting bird with a tendency for long grass I thought Wanstead could well be the perfect location, a quick online search brought me to the Wren Conservation Group's notice about the fenced off area for Skylarks, I'd struck gold! Peter and Tim were kind enough to reply with invaluable info, marking out the conversation areas and the best places to listen setting me in good stead for the task at hand.

As a sound designer by profession I had enough recording gear to get me going but of course any excuse to buy more. I invested in some extra

equipment so that I could setup a few recordings rigs and have the best chance of capturing a good dawn chorus as well as detailed recordings of the flights.

The three weekends tasked were

- 15th - 16th April
- 20th - 21st May
- 10th - 11th June

I tried a couple of techniques across the three weekends;

For the first I recorded from 5am and caught the first Skylark song at 5.20am using two stereo attended rigs at the north west of the conservation area and captured at least one of two Skylarks over the course of a few hours.

The second week I wasn't unable to attend the recording myself, so used what's known as a drop rig in one of the trees alongside the fencing area to record over a 24hr period capturing the full dawn



*Skylark, a rainy Wanstead Flats - pic by Tony Morrison*

chorus, this particular tree had also been selected as the occupancy of rather chirpy and chatty Wren and, well let's just say that, if there was ever a Wren shaped hole in my sound library that hole is well and truly filled!

The final weekend I made sure I was there pre-light 2.30am, in hope for a show stopping performance.



*Skylark singing on the wing - pic by Tony Morrison*

It didn't disappoint, I'd setup the drop rig again to get a similar perspective as the previous weekend, an 'AB' mic setup to capture a nice panoramic stereo recording of the larger conservation area and also a directional microphone to record the flight song in a more direct way, not only was I treated to a fantastic Skylark dawn chorus but also a beautiful sunrise with a carpet of mist sitting just above the grass. The mp3 attached is of a flight captured at 5.40am where a lark circled over the rig before ascending and taking its song high up and out across the flats.

The recordings will be sent off to The British Library where analyst Cheryl Tipp will consolidate the



society's recordings and archive them as part of its huge audio library. There are hopes for a program about the initiative and 'first song' to be developed for Radio, which would further help to highlight and publicise the plight of the Skylark and its dwindling numbers.

It has been a really great experience for me, I've learned a lot through the process - not just about Skylarks and Wanstead Flats but also my recording knowledge and I am very much inspired to go out and explore more wildlife recording even if at silly hours.

It was great to hear from Tim that at the time of writing this the Group believe at least one pairing has successfully fledged young. I look forward to hearing more news on the breeding season and will certainly return next year with more

experience, hopefully more skylarks, and most definitely insect repellent (non-toxic of course).

Graham A Norman  
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#### Sources

Wildlife Sound Recording Society (WSRS)  
<https://www.wildlife-sound.org>

The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society  
<https://rvwsociety.com>

Follow this link to listen to Graham's [Skylark Recording](#)  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15ewzSRmNYJ5F4dOlaytfidfd0Z7clbxo/view>



## 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.





## *The Skylark*

*The earth was green, the sky was blue:  
I saw and heard one sunny morn,  
A skylark hung between the two,  
A singing speck above the corn;  
  
A stage below, in gay accord,  
White butterflies danced on the wing,  
And still the singing skylark soared,  
And silent sank and soared to sing*

*by Christina Georgina Rossetti*





The background image is a photograph of a grassy field. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass with some small white flowers. In the middle ground, there is a wooden fence. Behind the fence, there are several large, leafy green trees. On the right side, a large tree with a thick trunk and dense foliage is prominent. In the background, a building with a chimney is visible through the trees. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

# let it grow

Positive biodiversity steps being taken but genuine conversion still required.

The crisis in biodiversity does at last seem to be registering across the popular consciousness. The recent Chelsea Flower Show was notable for the biodiverse theme. Rewilding and re-use were at the heart of many of the designs.



Locally, it has been great to see biodiversity taking a greater hold over the daily fabric of people's lives. More and more people have adopted tree pits and planters. The work of the community gardeners from the high street beds to the work around the tube stations and on Cambridge Park at the approach from the Green Man are fantastic to behold. The beds around the top of Draycot Road could warrant a place at the Chelsea Flower Show on their own. The move toward a genuine Greenway through Wanstead via Cambridge Park Road seems underway.



*Wanstead Community Gardeners want locals to pick flowers and herbs planted in disused tanks as part of their mission "to transform sad patches of public soil and make them worth walking past". Katherine Poluck, a botanic illustrator, and Karen Humpage, a calligrapher and mural painter, created the mural above the tanks in a corner of Wanstead Station. Pic courtesy of Wanstead Guardian.*

Many shops along Wanstead High Street and Leytonstone High Road are doing their bit for biodiversity with some great planters.

The Growzones on Christchurch and George Greens are bringing forward all sorts of natural surprises.

There is also the start of a community orchard on Christchurch Green.

The Growzone at the Roding Valley Park, neighbouring Elmcroft Avenue, has been supplemented with a tree planting program earlier in the year.

All of these developments are positive but there needs to be more. And more means a human conversion to nature.

## The human being still seems determined to dominate rather than partner nature.

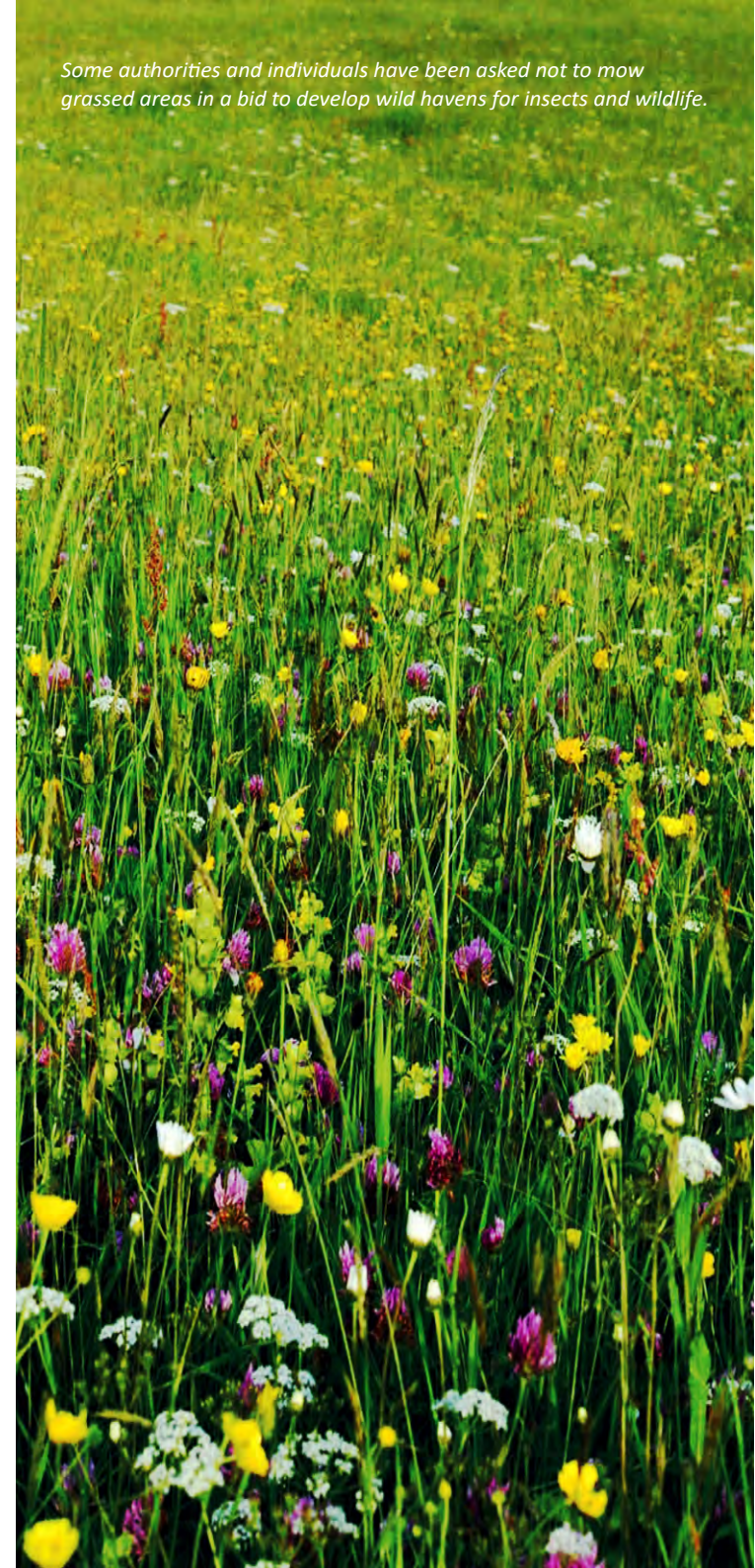
Rewilding is the essence of living with nature. A walk across Wanstead Flats or in the park reveals wild flowers a plenty - if areas are left to grow.

The Growzones epitomise the let nature breath approach

Yet move into the private sphere and what I call the window box mentality abounds. The human wants total control. This can involve concreting over areas, using artificial grass or simply regimenting everything rather than letting it go a bit.

There is probably some deep psychological reasons for how people manage their open (and closed) spaces.

*Some authorities and individuals have been asked not to mow grassed areas in a bid to develop wild havens for insects and wildlife.*







*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.*

A sign of the need to control and lack of conversion is evident in some of the objections to Growzones, such as the long grass etc.

Some are desperate to control, others happy to let go a little. The best is when humans and nature work in unison, then the real natural creative spirit takes hold.

But there needs to be a real change in lifestyles. Recycling a couple of yogurt pots is not going to save the planet, though recycling of course should be encouraged. There needs to be substantial change in the way we all live. Far less waste far more preservation and sustainable growth.

It is great that in so many ways things do seem to be changing for the better but there is no room for complacency. The world is in a biodiversity and climate emergency. Bold steps are urgently needed if the situation is to be saved. All is not

lost and there are signs of recovery but everyone has a role to play.

We can all do our bit for nature, whether in the domestic or public space, helping with tree pits, Growzones, tree and shrub planting. So let's double down on the conversion to an ever greener more biodiverse world.

by Cllr Paul Donovan



Read More About

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

Rewilding Europe <https://rewildingeurope.com>

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

*Sir David Attenborough,  
Patron of the Wren Group*





# only when it rains

Sometimes you see it sometimes you don't – but if you walk across Lake House Road from Jubilee Pond, or take the rough route over the ant hills in that same direction, you may discover a small, semi-permanent pond that goes by the curious name 'Cat and Dog Pond'. The pond presumably gets its name from the fact that it's only visible when it's been raining 'Cats and Dogs'.

First shown in an 1863 map as a body of water with a course going towards 'Harrow Lane' (now Harrow Road) it was possibly a sluice to help drain the road. Another line on the map shows a ditch or water course running toward an area of the Flats known as the 'Brickfield'. Early reports, when the area was used for mining clay and gravel for brickmaking, mention a water course there used in the industry.

If you're lucky enough you will see the pond with water and then the next time you visit it's gone - choked by undergrowth and lost from view.

In an effort to reverse this onslaught and restore this

historic landscape channels have been dug around the pond to form a network of ditches - a Wanstead Flats Wetlands - with tall rushes rising around the edge of the waterscape and birds fleeing between the reeds and bushes.

Aided by a small select group of helpers the main ringleader behind this act of love is Nick Croft – a local birder and naturalist who spends more time on Wanstead Flats than he does at home.

Here Nick Croft shares his experience of breathing life back into Cat & Dog pond – with a little help from his friends.



Picture - the Cat and Dog Pond complete with water - pic by Mary Holden



It may have come to your attention that a few of us have been doing a bit of work at the old neglected Cat and Dog pond.

The pond was in danger of drying out and becoming scrubbed over, threatening the amphibians, invertebrates and water birds that had depended on its fresh water.

Getting permission from the authorities to go ahead with the project was, I assumed, going to be the hardest part. That naïve assumption was put to bed the first day of diving into the reeds. Get a fork in, dig out the reeds, plant them further down the ditches – easy! Not. So here we are, three years on, seven pairs of wellingtons, one broken fork, one spade, six pairs of trousers, many gloves, three buckets, a visit to A&E and the unavoidable conclusion that I hadn't a clue as to what I was doing.



Some of the team - Mark Thomas on the left and Sean Kerrigan on the right and Nick Croft centre image - pic by Tim Harris.

It did look quite impressive over that first winter as the rain filled everything - take a look at this link to appreciate the work of nature and when the whole area was one soggy mess [The Lost Highway](#)

Water actually remained in the main pond throughout that first summer, bringing in the butterflies, damselfly, dragonflies and of course frogs and newts.



Water actually remained in the main pond all of that first summer bringing with it a myriad of insects providing food for amphibians and birds - pic by Mary Holden.

Last year, of course, the weather turned against us and warned of what's coming down the line as the climate catastrophe takes hold. The frogs managed to get out before the pond dried out, but I'm not sure the newts were so lucky. The drought also clobbered the planting we'd done around the site and at one point it looked like we lose most of the 200-plus trees and shrubs put in over the winter. Come the rain in August and September, we were pleased to see many bouncing back. Not

that you'll see many of them this year, as the grass has swamped everything and - with the help of burrowing critters - has made it a bit dangerous to guess where the paths are, so take care!



"Build and they will come" - the Cat and Dog Pond attracts all manner of things.

We will be back (once the autumn migration is over in October) as this is job that keeps on giving. Thanks to all my team of volunteers, especially Mark Thomas, Sean K, Sean T (aka JF), Tony Abbott, and not forgetting Trevor "The Mole".



Without rain it may not look much but wetlands even semi-permanent provide habitat for a wealth of wildlife - pic by Mary Holden.



Local photographer and filmmaker, Annick Wolfers, has launched a multimedia art project in Leytonstone about people who use Wanstead Flats for various different reasons. Called 'Common Ground' there are murals and photos in shop windows locally with QR codes nearby linking to short videos.

Nick and Thomas are stars in one of the murals (pictured) along with other Wren members talking about what Wanstead Flats means to them (click on links below).

# COMMON ground

[Nick Croft and Mark Thomas](#) talking about the work they have done with Cat & Dog Pond and more broadly

[Tony Madgwick](#) talking about bees

[Tim Harris](#) talking about moths

[June Nicholson](#) talking about running and the Flats

[Anson Mackay](#) talking about running and the Flats

[James Heal](#) talking about birds and nature more broadly

Common Ground launch and screening 20th July, 6-8pm  
Mammoth Tap, E11 4RE

RSVP: [info@annickwolfers.com](mailto:info@annickwolfers.com)





*Wheatear sweepstake this year was won by Wren Treasurer, Simon Raper (although many suspect a fix), who correctly predicted the early date with the bird jointly found by Nick Craft and Marco Johnson. Pic by Tony Brown.*

# bird report

by James Heal

Bird Report: Spring migration - a brief re-cap

March was a record month for the patch with 87 species (one up on 2021 and a whopping ten more than the poor March last year), April saw a pretty standard month score of 93, whilst May delivered 88 (also pretty normal for the month).





Spring migration began this year on 13 March with our earliest ever arrival of a Swallow by an astonishing 12 days. The following day, our regular harbinger of Spring, Northern Wheatear, arrived (only three days after our earliest ever) - the Wheatear sweepstake this year was won by Wren Treasurer, Simon Raper, who correctly predicted the early date with the bird jointly found by Nick Croft and Marco Johnson.



Louis handing Simon the Wheatear Sweepstake trophy - pic by Tony Brown

Spring 2023 was an extremely good season for Wheatear with 154 'bird days' (each record stretching from 14 March to 20 May and with peak counts of 15 birds on both 23 and 25 April. To get a sense of the volume of Spring Wheatear this year, compare 154 bird days with 32 bird days in Spring 2022 and 62 bird days in Spring 2021.

Those early birds were followed by Sand Martin on 21 March, our record earliest Hobby on 25 March and then Willow Warbler on 27 March.

On 28 March the male Black-necked Grebe we have seen for the last two years returned to Alexandra Pond but this year managed to attract in a female as well. News was not widely spread as it is a Schedule 1 breeding bird. I am sad to report that they did not breed (Alex is hardly the typical breeding location for this species), the female departed and then the male succumbed to predation on 26 May. We are grateful for the three years of views of this scarce local bird.



Female Goosander - pic by Tony Brown

The best day of the Spring was undoubtedly 29 April. A female Goosander first appeared on Alex

(found by Tony B) and was seen over several of the following days across the patch. I had a flyover Shelduck, Bob had an unusually late Merlin, and the season first Common Redstart.

Other birds of note would be:

- Marco had Great White Egret over the Flats on 4 April.
- Ring Ouzel on 22 April by Nick.
- Cuckoo on 6 May (and days after) from me.
- Spotted Flycatcher in Bush Wood on 24 May found by Sean K.

by James Heal



Andy Gibbons Arctic Turn



# adopt something green

It's hard to imagine that not so long ago much of the country was under water. Now, we are approaching the height of summer, Thames Valley stands a very good chance of having a 'hosepipe ban'. With climate change very much in the news we should perhaps expect more extremes in our weather. All the more reason we should appreciate the benefits that trees provide.

Trees put oxygen in the air and take out carbon dioxide. They create cooler micro climates under their canopies. They create much needed shade, protecting us from harmful solar rays. They even help to clean the air by filtering out dust particles and pollutants, not to mention the desirable effect they have on softening the often hard urban landscape.

Every year your local council plant young trees in our streets to replace trees that have died or become diseased or damaged. Also, local community groups such as Wild Wanstead plant wild flowers in tree pits and vacant open spaces.

Unfortunately, hot dry summers can take their toll, especially so on young recently planted trees and flowers. Though your council will probably arrange for regular watering of new planting, drought

conditions will always kill a few trees and in hot weather flowers are always thirsty. So this year why not adopt a tree or help care for a 'green' patch?



If you have a young street tree, planted tree pit or space outside or near your house or workplace, we are asking you to water it, please. You may notice a plastic pipe sticking out of the ground next to the tree, usually with a green cap on it. It would be great if you could pour water into the pipe and around

the tree pit or patch, whenever you can during the summer months. If you can water daily, or even once or twice a week with a bucketful it would really help the plants and trees to survive and to become established. To save on precious water use old bath water or other recycled water such as that from the dishwasher or water butt.



Your local Council will of course continue to water newly planted trees as part of their regular maintenance programme but trees give us so much why not give a little back - every little helps.

by Tony Morrison



No-one will object if you water thirsty street trees and plants but if you want to create new planting please get in touch with your local council.



# size doesn't always matter

Bumblebees are large, fuzzy insects with short, stubby wings. They are larger than honeybees, but they don't produce as much honey.

However, they are very important pollinators. Without them, food wouldn't grow.

Two-thirds of the world's crop species depend on animals to transfer pollen between male and female flower parts. Many animals are pollinators - including birds, bats and butterflies – but bees are thought to be the best at it. Their wings beat 130 times or more per second, according to the National Wildlife Federation, and the beating combined with their large bodies vibrates flowers until they release pollen, which is called buzz pollination. Buzz pollination helps plants produce more fruit.

The law of physics says that a bee cannot fly, each aerodynamic principle says that the width of its wings is too small to keep its huge body in flight; but the

bee doesn't know it, she doesn't know anything about physics or its logic, and it flies anyway.

*“Aerodynamically the body of a bee is not made to fly”;  
The good thing is that the bee doesn't know it”*

*A Quote found on one of the NASA's headquarters wall.*

A study - published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2005 - used high-speed photography to show that bumblebees flap their wings back and forth rather than up and down. This wing sweeping is a bit like a partial spin of a helicopter propeller - the angle to the wing also creates vortices in the air - like tiny hurricanes. The eyes of those mini-hurricanes have lower pressure than the surrounding air so helping to keep the bee aloft.

Regardless of it's small wings it beats the air into submission with them and gets that nectar to the hive and in the process unknowingly support the entire earth with pollination; the simplest act yet the most vital act for all the living organisms in the mother earth. This is so unreal but yet the best among the few.





# epping forest

for everyone to L♥ve

## Muslim Hikers Walk in Epping Forest

On Saturday 10th June, 200 walkers from the groundbreaking group Muslim Hikers joined us in the beautiful Epping Forest and hiked a 14-mile trail in the north of the Forest.

Starting from Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, the group walked through ancient trees, passed the Lost Pond, heard about the history and ecology

of the Forest, lunched at Debden Campsite, visited Ambresbury Banks, and took a short break at High Beach before returning to the starting point. The walk was full of happy chats, forest wonders and a strong feeling of community.

Here Chief Executive EFHT Peter Lewis gives his own take on this new community engagement event.



*Walkers took a break in the ancient woodland*



The last few months have really brought home to me the total joy of welcoming new people to Epping Forest.

In May, as part of the Urban Tree Festival, we welcomed over 60 people to our walk in Chingford just a week after a family walk with Black Girls Hike in partnership with the Hive. On both occasions, hardly any of the participants had visited the Forest before. In June, in partnership with Muslim Hikers, we completed a 14 mile walk in the north of the Forest, on the hottest day of the year, with 200 participants. Over 90% of the people on the walk had not visited the Forest before even though 75% of them were from London or Essex. And the sheer enjoyment people had in exploring the Forest, hearing a bit about its history, heritage and ecology, was just fantastic. You could tell during the walks because of the excited chatter between people, and the feedback afterwards has reflected the same.



Even though people live close to the Forest, they do not necessarily visit, and this was reflected in participant feedback:

*“Loved the hike, I live 10 minutes from Epping Forest & haven't ventured out on any of their trails so it was lovely to do it with Muslim Hikers & my friends”*

*“I enjoyed the opportunity to hear about the history and current efforts to manage the Forest. Overall I loved the walk, the excellent guides, and the hospitality”*

There was also some reticence among some participants to explore on their own:

*“As a woman in hijab I often feel quite vulnerable and intimidated to venture out on these kinds of activities”*

And this is in the context of new data we have collected in partnership with Waltham Forest Council about their residents visits to the Forest. on the hypothesis that people from some communities visit the Forest less than other people. We are still completing the detailed analysis, which we will publish in full in due course, but it shows clearly that on average Black and Asian people visit the Forest less than white people, and women less than men.

This is what lies behind our investment in a new Community Engagement program, led by Kelly Smith, and our efforts to get more diverse volunteers, and more women, involved in our



200 Muslim Hikers started the walk at Queen Elizabeths Hunting Lodge

conservation activities, led by Robyn Lammiman. We want to play our role in addressing the inequalities set out above, and welcome more people to the Forest in ways that work for them, and inspire them to love it as we all do. If you would like to help us with this work, know a community organisation you think we should speak to, or want to volunteer yourself in our conservation activities please do let us know [admin@efht.org.uk](mailto:admin@efht.org.uk)





On a totally different note, we remain concerned about the City of London's strategic approach to the Forest. We saw, and commented on, an early version of a headline strategy for the new Natural Environment Directorate.

## We expressed our concern about the consistent terminology of having to balance the needs of the Forest against other issues.

In our view, at this time of a biodiversity crisis, the City, and adjacent local authorities, need

to be prioritising nature recovery, in accordance with the approach of the government's environmental adviser, Natural England, not stating that there needs to be a balance between improving biodiversity and other objectives. As Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, consistently emphasises, nature recovery and economic recovery go hand in hand, and should not be set against each other. I sincerely hope that now that the City have now appointed their new Director for the Natural Environment, Emily Brennan, who has a strong environmental background and experience in the charity sector, we will be begin to see greater priority given to both protecting, preserving and enhancing biodiversity within the Forest, as

well as a better engagement on the ground with community organisations around the Forest, including, of course, the Wren group.

Peter Lewis  
Chief Executive EFHT



Epping Forest Heritage Trust <https://efht.org.uk>

*Nature is like air, water, health and wellbeing .....  
it belongs to everyone and is not anyone's to sell or profit from  
to be a custodian of nature is a privilege not a business*



# wild art

The Wren Group is good at organising wildlife-themed activities. We have been doing it for half a century. But I do not believe there have been many occasions when we have partnered with artists to do nature-themed art activities.

That was exactly what we did as part of this year's highly successful Wanstead Wildlife Weekend. In fact, we did it twice within one day!

Two local artists: Jo Wood, artist in residence at the Applecourt art space in Newham; and, Dr Gayle Chong-Kwan, newly-minted Patron of the Wren Group, international artist, lecturer, and workshop leader, led an activity each on Sunday 25 June and they were both unique and wonderful. Bold and creative new territory for the Wren Group.

A group of adults met at the tea hut late on Sunday morning as it was already very hot indeed. Some planned attendees sadly but understandably had to stay away due to the heat, but those who were able to join enjoyed the trip.

Jo explained that her objective was to help those who may not feel like they have any artistic ability to be able to engage with art. Luckily, Jo had me in

the group so undoubtedly ticked off this objective straight away as I have already been surpassed in artistic prowess by my four year-old son a year or two ago.

I was largely there to help find some wildlife and talk about the natural aspect of the walk to help encourage people to do some art as we progressed on a short walk. Sean Kerrigan beat me to it by finding a stunning Light Emerald moth almost straight away. This served as my initial muse.

Jo handed us all our very own beautiful little notebook, or art log book, at the start, and had a number of different media of drawing utensils for us to use and our first task, to smash the idea that we "couldn't do art", was to do our first drawing as



*The 'grown ups' proudly showing off their artwork on Sunday morning of the Wanstead Wildlife Weekend.*



badly as we could. I spent a few seconds crudely drawing the moth with a green chalky pastel and was pleasantly surprised to see that it was identifiable afterwards. The ice had been broken (if it hadn't already melted in the heat!) We proceeded to walk slowly in the shade, stop when we wanted and then were gently guided by Jo to a new artistic activity/ theme each time. We did: witches' trees, our feelings, tree rubbings, and all kinds of other drawings and art pieces. It was a wonderfully enabling and



enlightening experience and each of us went home with a little book of art that we had created together, inspired by Jo Wood.

A few hours later, I walked with some young people from Newham and their two adult guides, Candy and Julianna from AAA Zone Newham, down by the side of Perch Pond to meet Gayle. Gayle had brought a range of art materials and lots of bee-related inspiration and the young people started making some art pieces as we all sat in the shade.

It was wonderful watching some local young people express their creativity and curiosity, inspired by nature as much as Tony Madgwick and I are.

Tony Madgwick arrived and was joined by Nadia and Shree to search for bees and wasps while Kayla and Soumya stayed with Gayle to focus on their art. Nadia and Shree quickly proved to be expert invertebrate finders with Nadia finding a Bee Wolf (*Philianthus triangulum*) - a wasp that hunts bees for its larvae to feed on - which Tony netted for a closer look before wrangling it in his fingers and letting it fly off from Nadia's hand. They also found an incredible Jewel Wasp (*Holopyga generosa*) which was taken back like bounty in a tube to show Kayla and Soumya.

Talking of bounty, I was astounded at the treasures awaiting us as we returned to Kayla and Soumya and Gayle who had been busy bees making apian artwork - Kayla had fashioned an incredible Bumble



Bee and hive whilst Soumya had carved a beautiful shape replete with hive-like hexagons appearing as a smooth tortoiseshell.

Wren has dipped its toe into the creative waters of art-focused nature activities, but with Gayle as our patron and with friends like Jo, I am sure we shall take the plunge again.

by James Heal





# spiders of the South

David Carr is a very good friend of the Wren Group and a true expert on spiders. He joined us for the Wanstead Wildlife Weekend on the Saturday afternoon. We had a good mix of adults and younger people and there were soon many eyes on the lookout for spiders and working the sweep-nets to see what we could find.

The spiders that stuck out to me were several which are generally only found in the South of the country, some which are mainly found around London, and some even more local than that.

One of the orbweaver spiders, and a close cousin of the common Garden Spider, was *Neoscona adianta*. This spider has a wonderful colourful zig-zag patterns on its abdomen and is a real southerner. Neither David or I had seen as many of these spiders on the Flats today - a good chance they are growing in numbers.

Similar in range and also in the orbweaver family (Araneidae) is *Mangora acalypha*

which often goes by the informal name of 'cricket bat' spider due to a cricket-bat shape on the abdomen. It is quite a bit smaller than its cousin, *Neoscona* but often found in large numbers in the grass.

I guess the rarest spider we found on the day was the scarcest of the three species of Zebra Spider (*Salticus zebraneus*). Also found largely in the South East and only in small numbers, this tiny jumping spider was found patrolling on the bark of some of the trees in one of the copses in Wanstead Flats.

Another South Eastern jumping spider, albeit a lot bigger than the diminutive tree zebra, was *Ballus chalybeius*. And the most localised of all the spiders we found, also classed as nationally scarce due to limited range, albeit common locally is the jumper, *Macaroeris nidicolens* with its large swollen front legs.

As I have said many times, Wanstead Flats can be a particularly good location for spiders and seeing the expanding range of so many southern spiders is interesting albeit a little worrying as well (as climate change could be a factor in the range expansion of some of these spiders).

We will keep surveying to build a better picture over time.

by James Heal



Picture - *Salticus zebraneus*



# Simple pleasures

Children on a hot summer's day at the Wanstead Wildlife Weekend

What a joy it was to watch children with sweep nets running about in the long grass around the ant hills in Wanstead Park. It was the Saturday morning of WWW, and they were trying to catch skipper butterflies and other small creatures on Tajinder's wildlife walk. Then they could have the satisfaction of peering at them magnified in their bug pots and finding out their names.



On Sunday, in 32 degrees heat, the Shoulder of Mutton Pond was like a dream: still blue water with swans and ducks and swooping dragonflies, and small children paddling in the shallows with their pond nets during the Pond Dip. They found fish, crayfish,

dragonfly larvae, back swimmers, all sorts of exciting things. And Louis and Penny and Gosia were there to tell them what was what.

## Simple pleasures, but ones which many modern children never experience.

There were other popular activities for children during the weekend. Older children examined owl pellets during the Tindersticks Birds of Prey Workshop. Younger children listened to Insect Stories in the shade of the trees in the Temple Enclosure. Elsewhere there were spiders to examine and insects to draw.

Many parents commented 'You should do this every weekend'. Some of us smiled ruefully.

The truth is that there are few such opportunities for children to engage with nature in a way which was taken for granted fifty years ago. We can all cite a dozen reasons for this. Yet teaching children about what is out there is crucial to the future of our wildlife.

Thank you all who helped make this such a great weekend. You know who you are.

by Gill James





# where do birds sleep

Most of the birds around us are diurnal which means they are active during the day. Although you may hear the odd bird singing at night most birds seem to disappear so where do they go to sleep?

When birds are asleep they are at their most vulnerable to predators, so they have to choose carefully where they spend the night. They will tend to roost in large flocks in dense foliage in trees and shrubs, or find a cavity in a building, a hole in a tree or a nest box to sleep in.

Passerines, or perching birds, will find somewhere to perch, fluff up their feathers, tuck their beaks into their back feathers and often pull up one

leg close to its body before falling asleep. Although this sounds like it could be an uncomfortable position to get some shut-eye, it helps the bird keep warm and conserve energy during the night. By pushing the weight of their body down onto its leg muscles, the tendons of the feet will tighten, gripping the perch so they don't fall off.

Waterfowl and wading birds will sleep near or even on water. They tend to sleep in large flocks giving them protection and any movement on the water will alert them to predators nearby.

Swifts and frigate birds which spend almost all their life in the air, sleep on the wing. A study in 2016 showed that most of the time half of their brain is asleep although they also go into whole-brain and deeper REM sleep which lasts just a few seconds; the equivalent of a power-nap.

*A dosey fledgeling Skylark - pic by Tony Morrison*



## then & now

Were you right ?

Members of the Leytonstone and District Model Aero Club looking across the Model Yacht Pond (now the Jubilee Pond) at the turn of the last century and members of the Wren group at the same location in 2023.





# links

Wren links page [www.wrengroup.org.uk/links](http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/links)

Facebook [www.facebook.com/WrenOrg](https://www.facebook.com/WrenOrg)

Twitter <https://twitter.com/wrenwildlife>

Epping Forest Heritage Trust <https://efht.org.uk>

Wanstead Wildlife [www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk](http://www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk)

Friends of Wanstead Parklands [www.wansteadpark.org.uk](http://www.wansteadpark.org.uk)

RSPB North East London Members Group

[www.rspb.org.uk/groups/northeastlondon](http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/northeastlondon)

Wanstead Birding Blog [wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk](http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk)

British Naturalists' Association [www.bna-naturalists.org](http://www.bna-naturalists.org)

Bushwood Area Residents' Association

[www.bara-leytonstone.org.uk](http://www.bara-leytonstone.org.uk)

East London Nature [www.eln.yorkshirefog.co.uk](http://www.eln.yorkshirefog.co.uk)

East London Birders [www.elbf.co.uk](http://www.elbf.co.uk)

Friends of Epping Forest [www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk](http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk)

East London Nature [www.eastlondonnature.co.uk](http://www.eastlondonnature.co.uk)

Plenty of info here about walking in Essex - including the forest  
<http://trailman.co.uk>

Wild Wanstead - greening up the local area

[www.wildwanstead.org](http://www.wildwanstead.org)

BBC Nature [www.bbc.co.uk/nature](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature)

British Naturalists Association [www.bna-naturalists.org](http://www.bna-naturalists.org)

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

Field Studies Council (FSC) [www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)

London Natural History Society [www.lnhs.org.uk](http://www.lnhs.org.uk)

Natural England [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

RSPB [www.rspb.org.uk/england](http://www.rspb.org.uk/england)

UK Safari [www.uksafari.com](http://www.uksafari.com)

The British Deer Society [www.bds.org.uk](http://www.bds.org.uk)

The Wildlife Trust [www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)

