



Winter 2023

# Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

*Wanstead Flats - pic by Tony Morrison*

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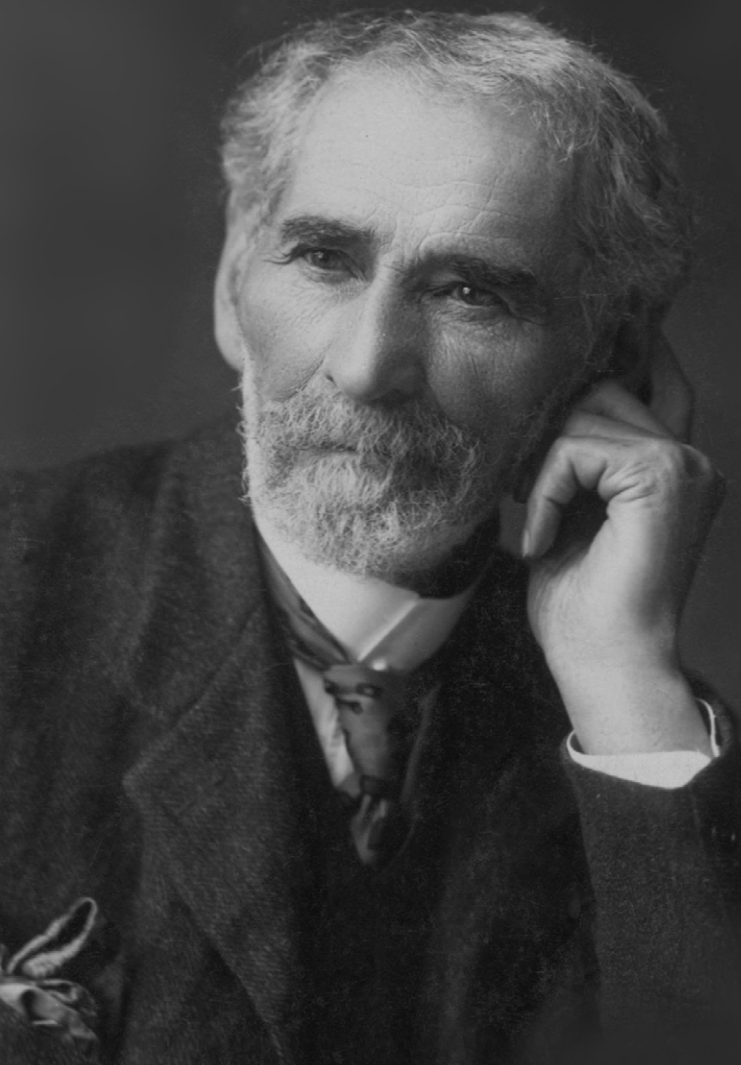
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## a word from the chair .....

I have a weakness for old literature on natural history and am lucky to have a small library of these beautiful old books. We can learn from the past and also understand what is changing and what is not by reading older sources.

Next year we are approaching the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of 'Birds of London' by W.H. Hudson. Please allow me to read you some relevant local excerpts and I will add some commentary.

*"... seven miles east of St. Paul's in the City - there is Wanstead Park or Wanstead Old Park, and this is the last public open space and habitation of wild birds belonging to East London to be described here. Epping Forest (with Wanstead Flats), although quite close to Wanstead Park at its nearest end, runs far into Essex, and lies in a perfectly rural district."*

By 1924, much of the urbanisation of this area, particularly Leyton and Leytonstone, was well underway (my own Victorian terrace house was built in 1870 - the oldest house on my street), however, this passage reminds us of the significant expansion of London as I am not sure anyone could say anywhere near us is "perfectly rural district" anymore.

*"...Snaresbrook and Leytonstone extend loving tentacles and clasp each other..."*

I love this description and I think it still holds true although the A12 and Green Man Roundabout has sliced through the tentacles somewhat.

Hudson then regales an old story from a traveller:

*"I was in despair for many days... but at length, to my great joy, I spied a gibbet, for I then knew that I was coming to a civilised country."*

I find this a somewhat worrying description of civilisation, but times change I guess. And, on to the

wildlife. Hudson clearly likes Wanstead Park a lot:

*"It has green spaces and a great deal of water [...] and is very charming in its openness, its perfect wildness, and the variety of sylvan scenery contained in it."*

Again his use of the word 'perfect' tests my modern sensibilities, but generally I agree - I would love to be able to go back in time and walk around Wanstead Park to see what was the same and what had changed.

But it is when Hudson gets on to the birdlife that changes become very clear:

*"As might be supposed, this park is peculiarly rich in wild bird life, and among the breeding species may be mentioned mallard and teal, ringdove [Woodpigeon] and turtledove, woodpecker, jay, hawfinch, and nightingale."*

Of the eight species that Hudson mentions, four are still breeding birds, but the other four are not, with three of them now considered local rarities. Teal is only a winter visitor (although sometimes in large numbers) and Turtle Dove, Hawfinch, and Nightingale have long been lost locally and cause quite a stir amongst the birders if they briefly reappear (the closest I have seen a Turtle Dove is Valentine's Park in Ilford), and I've only ever seen a single Hawfinch flock over locally and a small number of visiting Nightingale.

I have quoted Hudson in my past correspondence with the City of London before as a voice from the past and a guide for how we might wish to continue to treat our local forest and green spaces:

*"I wish to suggest that it would be well to make Wanstead Park as far as possible a sanctuary for all wild creatures."*

Hear, hear!

Jame Heal

Chair Wren Group





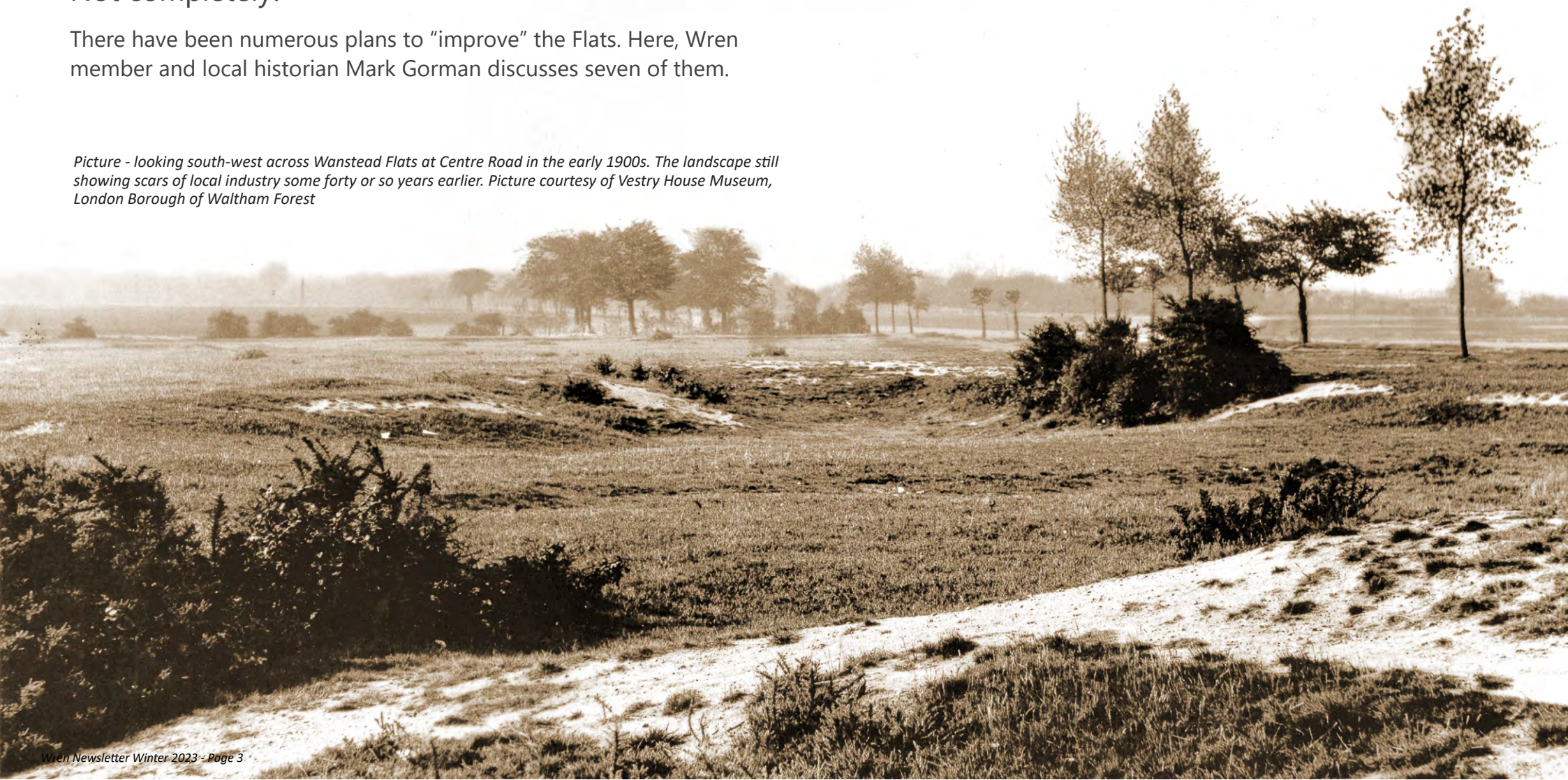
Wanstead Flats, as the southern boundary of Epping Forest, is protected by parliament. The 1878 Epping Forest Act was revolutionary in the history of open space in Britain - the first time a right was recognised for the people to use an open space for recreation and enjoyment. The Act also prevents any building anywhere in the forest.

So Wanstead Flats has been safe from the developers?  
Not completely!

There have been numerous plans to "improve" the Flats. Here, Wren member and local historian Mark Gorman discusses seven of them.

*Picture - looking south-west across Wanstead Flats at Centre Road in the early 1900s. The landscape still showing scars of local industry some forty or so years earlier. Picture courtesy of Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest*

## "improving" Wanstead Flats





## Seven attempts to “improve” Wanstead Flats

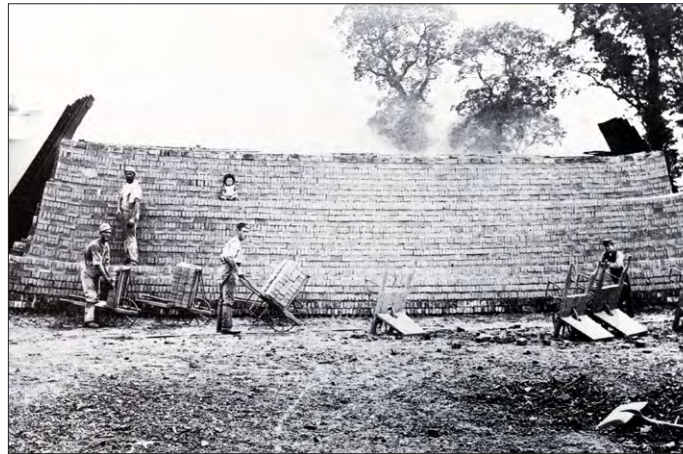
In **1851** Lord Mornington, the local landowner, offered to rebuild Smithfield meat market on the Flats – for a price. At that time cattle were still driven to market overland and the Flats was used for fattening cows. Plans were drawn up for stalls, abattoirs and railway yards. A report to the landowner said this was the ideal spot as it was “not a fashionable area”.



Wanstead Flats were almost treeless from the C12th after the Abbots of Stratford were granted the right in 1199 to graze large flocks of sheep here. Known as Wanstead Heath from the early C17th, its use for grazing cattle and sheep continued up until the 1996 BSE crisis.

In **1864** a brickworks was set up on the Flats, to meet the growing demand for construction materials as the area grew. Lord Cowley had inherited the Wanstead estate from his cousin, and was continuing the family tradition of determined exploitation. Despite local

complaints about the pollution, the brickworks remained on the Flats until the early 1880s. It's still possible to see remains of the old workings to the east of Centre Road.



One of the oldest methods of firing bricks was by a clamp. A clamp is a temporary construction of unfired or green bricks which is dismantled after firing and could be erected near the clay source.

Picture shows a clamp at Gregory's brickfield, Wood Street, Walthamstow c1885. Clamps like these would also be used on Wanstead Flats brickfields.

By **1871** Cowley had another development plan. He started to put up fences to prevent people getting on to large parts of the Flats. House building was starting in Forest Gate, and he saw his chance to turn the Flats into a large estate. A huge demonstration was called and the fences were flattened. This was a major step in the campaign to save Epping Forest.

But the Epping Forest Act didn't put off the developers. In **1907** plans appeared in a local newspaper to develop “the ragged end of the Flats”. These included the construction of a concert hall on the corner of Capel Road and Centre Road, complete with tram tracks.

An avenue was proposed from the hall to the gates of Wanstead Park. Fortunately, it never happened.

# 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.

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The Ohair will be taken at Six o'clock, by  
**SIR ANTONIO BRADY, J.P., F.G.S.**

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W. G. SMITH, Secretary,  
Rose Cottage, Odessa Road, Forest Gate, E.  
G. Harmer, Printer, "Courier" Office, West Ham.

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.

Between **1941** and **1946** the Flats hosted prisoners of war from Italy, and after D-Day, Germans too. The camps, on Capel Road

and west of Centre Road, were said to be surrounded by flimsy wire, but no PoWs tried to escape. Activities such as visits to Upton Park to see West Ham, and to local Council meetings to learn about democracy, may have tempted some to make a getaway.

As the last German prisoners were leaving in **1946**, West Ham Council came up with a plan to build a housing estate for 7000 people on the Flats. Both West Ham and East Ham Councils had built temporary housing for bombed-out east Londoners, and parts of the Flats were covered by small housing developments. West Ham argued that the land was needed to replace the houses lost in the Blitz, even though a Greater London Plan had been drawn up for housing further out in Essex. Invoking memories of 1871, a massive campaign was organised, including a petition signed by 60,000. After a public inquiry the plan was turned down.



*Large parts of East London had been destroyed by bombing during the war, and local councils needed to re-house many homeless families. Both East Ham and West Ham council built prefabs (called "hutmments") along the southern edge of Wanstead Flats. Meant to be a temporary solution, these much-loved homes survived for many years. The last prefabs were only removed from the Flats in 1962. After the war both East Ham and West Ham Councils attempted to build permanent estates, but a huge local campaign succeeded in securing Wanstead Flats as an open space.*

And finally...In **2012** buildings did appear on the Flats, when the Metropolitan Police sited their Olympics briefing centre next to Jubilee Pond. Again a local campaign was mounted, but despite petitions to parliament the briefing centre came...and went. Its legacy was funding which helped to pay for repairs to Jubilee Pond, which had previously been rescued from dereliction by the efforts of the local community.

So it couldn't happen again. Or could it? Watch this space!

by Mark Gorman



Meanwhile you can read more about these "improvements" and much else on the story of our unique local open space in the recently published "Wanstead Flats – a short illustrated history" by Wren members and local historians Mark Gorman and Peter Williams. It's available price £10-00 at Number 8 The Emporium Sebert Road in Forest Gate, and from the Newham Bookshop.





# epping forest

for everyone to L♥ve

## Celebrating Epping Forest's amazing volunteers

I am always humbled by the amount of time, expertise and commitment offered to Epping Forest by volunteers along the whole extent of the Forest.

Whether through formal groups like the Wrens, Wanstead Parklands Group, Highams Park Planning Group, Epping Forest Transport Action Group, Epping Forest Conservation volunteers, or our own volunteers at Epping Forest Heritage Trust, or through informal litter-picking or wildfire volunteering groups, the Forest benefits hugely from those who care so much about it, and are able to give their time for its benefit. From hands-on conservation to bird protection, from responding to planning or transport consultations which might impact on the Forest to pushing forward the provision of community facilities, from leading guided walks or nature activities to welcoming people to the Forest at one of the Visitor Centres, volunteers really are at the heart of inspiring people about the Forest, conserving it and protecting it.

But I want to use this article to celebrate one volunteer in particular who has dedicated a large part of her life to educating and inspiring people

about the Forest. Judy Adams, Chair of Epping Forest Heritage Trust, first became involved in the Forest in 1975, when she became a staff member at the Fields Studies Council at High Beach. Since then, in a voluntary capacity, she has led literally hundreds of free guided walks conveying her huge passion for the Forest to thousands of visitors. In 2014, when the City of London was planning to close the Visitor Centre at High Beach, she mobilised volunteers through the Friends of Epping Forest to keep it open to the public. Volunteers under her leadership have since then welcomed and advised over 130,000 visitors to the Forest, guiding them to specific bits of the Forest or recommending particular walks suited to their needs. She still loves leading walks and giving talks about the Forest, her empathy and enthusiasm for the trees spreading infectious among the people she is speaking to.



Right to left, Shirley Rodrigues, London Deputy Mayor for the Environment and Energy; the Chair of the Forestry Commission, Sir William Worsley; Judy Adams, Chair of Epping Forest Heritage Trust and celebrity TV gardener Manoj Malde.

And despite the fact that she clearly most enjoys being out in the Forest with people, she has also put

hours into the development of the Friends of Epping Forest, Epping Forest Centenary Trust and Epping Forest Heritage Trust as a Trustee and Chair, leading the development of our new strategy and investment into increasing our impact on the Forest as it faces what she calls "the greatest challenges it has faced in a generation" of adjacent development, increases in footfall and the climate and biodiversity crises.

So it was a privilege to accompany her on 27<sup>th</sup> November to the [London Tree and Woodland awards](#) established by the Mayor of London and the Forestry Commission, (the #TreeOscars) where she was the well-deserved winner of the prestigious of the Acorn Award for voluntary service to trees and woodlands in London. It was also great to be amongst the London tree community, and to hear about other fantastic projects across the capital, where skilled and dedicated organisations, staff and volunteers are helping make London a better, greener city, with a larger amount of tree canopy and more people appreciating the value of the trees we all love so much.

To all those of you who volunteer formally or informally to help protect the Forest a wholehearted thank you. Your contributions large or small as so important. Let's hope 2024 brings a new, more conducive environment for the Forest we all care so much about.

Peter Lewis  
Chief Executive  
Epping Forest Heritage Trust





# bovine magic

Three large mammals with large curving horns appeared in Wanstead Park one Tuesday morning in October.

There was shock. We were not expecting cows so late in the year. We had no cows at all in 2022, due to the long drought ruining the grazing. The Cow Volunteer Wardens rushed into action, sporting smart new High Viz jackets, to warn people to be kind (if necessary) and also to inform and enjoy chats about cows.

A few people were angry. Do you think you own this Park? What about my dog's space? Why were there so few warning signs up?

But most people were delighted to welcome them back and many people remembered them from 2021.



*A conservation herd of traditional Longhorn cattle was re-established on the Forest at Fairmead and Chingford in 2002 where they have now grazed for several summers. Pic by Tony Morrison*



Already and they remembered why they were here. They asked questions. What happened to the calves they had? What are their names? Are they pregnant? Why are they here so late in the year? How long will they be staying? What about all these cow pats?

Answers: Quinine, Nina and Mara (new girl). They were delayed by the requirement for bovine testing as a nearby farm tested positive. None pregnant. They will stay until the grazing gives out in January and February. Cowpats are very good for improving the soil and overwintering these hardy cattle encourages certain insect species. The grazing clears the habitat of encroaching scrub, and biodiversity is improved. As for the calves? The female will be starring in Wanstead Park soon. The male? Don't ask.



*Grazing by cattle has taken place continuously in Epping Forest for well over 1,000 years. Grazing by free-ranging commoners' cattle continued throughout the 20th century although numbers started to decline as farming practices changed. Pic by Peter Mayo*

Many people just stopped and gazed, with smiles on their faces. Then they took snaps and called their friends to share these new things. Some people had never seen a live cow before.

Some people struggled to express what they felt about this. I feel like Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, said one.



*In the early 1980's, farmers in the Waltham Cross area periodically released around 200 cattle onto the Forest and were a familiar sight wandering towards Wanstead Flats – which was apparently the cattle's favourite feeding area. When the vegetation was good, the cattle tended to stick to Wanstead Flats, but in dry summers and in the latter parts of the summer when they had gained confidence, they were often tempted towards people's gardens and wandered into adjacent roads. Pic - cattle on Wanstead Flats in 1979 before the onset of the BSE crisis in 1996, which led to the cattle being kept off the Forest.*

Those beasts reminded people of something. But what? Was it the cows which used to roam Wanstead Flats and eat our roses? Was it the cows on a long-ago childhood farm back in Ireland or India or Iran? Or was it something deeper, a distant memory of something even further back in a rural past?

These cows, for they were of course just cows, half-

tame and happy to follow the grazier's bucket when he came, seemed to belong in this landscape. That was part of the magic. A small patch of managed green in a London park, left half-wild, with rough grass, water and trees, and surrounded by the hustle and bustle of London streets. What a sight for sore eyes.

Mara, Nina and Quinine were magic in another unexpected way. They gazed at us thoughtfully. Calm down, you frantic urban creatures, they said. Though not in so many words. And just a few days after that first excitement, the Park went quiet. The cow-gazers still came, but now there was acceptance that this was a special space to share and enjoy. Dog walkers, strollers, cyclists, joggers, we all have to make space for each other. And smile. And look.

A heartfelt thank you Epping Forest from the volunteer wardens for this wonderful opportunity to engage with the public in the Park and to enjoy the Park we know so well from a new perspective.

## A little bit of English Longhorn history

English Longhorns are large lean beef cattle with an impressive sweep of horns that curve down to around the nose. The body may be any one of a wide range of brindle colours but they all have the characteristic white line or "finching" along the back and down the tail. Cows range in height from 130 to 140cm and weigh 500 to 600kg- about the weight of eight humans, so not a good idea to get in a fight with one.

The Epping Forest herd is kept primarily for grazing



rather than beef. These large herbivores keep the scrub down in the Forest to help maintain an open woodland habitat, known as 'mosaic', which experts now think is what once covered prehistoric Europe, rather than the deep forest we have imagined. Such cattle have shaped the landscape, first in the wild and later as domesticated livestock.



*For 800 years after the Norman Conquest common rights of grazing, along with wood-cutting, provided Epping Forest's cultural and economic heartbeat. This created the unique and very special landscape and wildlife diversity of Epping Forest. Pic by Peter Mayo*

Amongst farmers, they are known for ease of calving, excellent milking ability and they rear their calves very well. They are excellent mothers and their docile nature makes them an easy breed to manage - an important characteristic in an animal with large horns. Their breeding, longevity and relatively low body weight makes them very economical and inexpensive to feed.

The English Longhorn originated from the northern counties of England in the 16C and 17C. It was used

as a draught animal and its milk was used for butter and cheese. The creamy white horns were treasured by manufacturers of buttons, cups, cutlery and lamps. Fine slivers of clear horn were a poor man's glass and many a household were grateful for the end product of these elegant long horns.

The most usual method of cattle keeping in those early times would have been one or more animals belonging to an individual, kept on common grazing, which were served by a bull owned by the Lord of the Manor.

They are often the breed of choice in naturalistic rewilding projects on large farms such as Knepp in Sussex. With a strong herd instinct, they have shown themselves more than equal to the challenges of naturalistic living. Even with empty barns to shelter in, they will often prefer to lie up in woods or hollows in bad weather at Knepp, and they come through the winter in remarkably good health. They are able to choose what grass, leaves, branches or twigs they want, and can self-medicate. For example, after giving birth, cows often tuck into patches of nettles, rich in iron. The Epping herd is not left out all winter, however, but retires to the comfort of a farm.

Cattle are also important vectors of seeds, transporting up to 230 species of plants around a landscape through their gut, hooves and fur. This is an extraordinary number compared to, say a roe deer, whose efficiency at digesting and preening, means it transports only around 28 types of seed.

The longhorn is similar in appearance to the extinct aurochs, which we can see depicted in prehistoric

cave paintings such as at Lascaux. Julius Caesar described them and said that their strength and speed were extraordinary. The last aurochs died quite recently, in 1627 in Poland. Since then various attempts have been made to recreate a similar herbivore. The first attempt was made by the Heck brothers in Germany in the thirties and Heck cattle can be seen in rewilding projects today.



*Aurochs in a cave painting at Lascaux in France - the extinct ancient ancestors of our present day Longhorn cattle.*

When we looked at the longhorns grazing in our Park, did we imagine for a moment the ghost of those extinct aurochs, the large horned grazing cattle of our ancient past?

Article by Gill James





# must do better

Biodiversity and sustainable living is improving in Redbridge but needs to move faster - article by Cllr Paul Donovan

There is a transformation taking place on the streets of Redbridge, with greater biodiversity and forms of sustainable living developing. The process is slow but change is coming.

The impetus is coming from the local communities. So more and more tree pits are being adopted by residents. Individuals are provided with seeds to develop the pits. We have been doing this for many years in the road where I live. The transformation in the street is amazing to behold, a sea of colour, in spring and summer. There are now 3,000 tree pits adopted in the borough, 12,000 to go.

There has also been the positioning of planters around the borough, which again encourages

biodiversity. The ones outside the town hall in Ilford are particularly splendid. Voluntary groups like the Wanstead Community Gardeners and other offshoots have done fantastic work to improve the streets.

The council has been encouraging different streets to become pollinator pathways. This scheme extends sustainable living, so that residents take over management of much of the biodiversity. So, people in the road agree to deal with the weeds and care for tree pits. It is an important way of cutting back on pesticides. One ambition for Redbridge going forward must be the phasing out of pesticide use. It damages human and plant health.





**G**rowzones - areas that have been allowed to go wild. The biodiversity coming from these developments has been most encouraging - some 21% of grass verges on highways are now Growzones.

Parts of George and Christchurch Greens and Roding Valley Park have seen all sorts of plant and insect life developing. More Growzones are needed, though, borough wide.

Tree planting has continued in open spaces, as well as on the streets - this helps remove the carbon dioxide from the environment as well as increasing biodiversity.

There is much going on but the pace of transformation needs to be stepped up.

The Nature and Environment report produced by a group of councillors a couple of years ago recommended a review of the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) across the borough. There are 35 at present. The review would look at existing sites as well as potential new ones. There has been little progress on this thus far though it represents a key element of biodiversity management.

Council officers are now looking to move forward on the SINC review.

Another recommendation of the Nature and Environment report was to address the growing number of front gardens going under concrete. This is damaging to biodiversity and reduces flood resistance. There has been positive policy change, with a new

policy on dropped kerbs requiring new applicants to retain up to 20% of soft landscaping. There also has to be provision for drainage channels and soakaways.

But maybe some incentives also need to be offered to encourage those gardens already under concrete to return to a more natural state. It could for instance be part of the pollinator pathway program.



*Live near a street tree? Why not adopt it and plant wildflowers at its base? This can help bees and other creatures when they're moving about and stop the use of harmful chemicals. Pic courtesy of Wild Wanstead.*

It is important that ways are found to stop this creeping destruction of biodiversity, right across London. Some boroughs have brought in outright bans of dropped kerbs, something that cannot be ruled out.

On the active travel side, the cycle network is growing all of the time. If people feel safe, they will cycle to get around. That safety includes clean air to breathe. So the improvements coming from ULEZ

and the expansion of the school streets program improves that air quality.

It is excellent in Wanstead that it is now possible to cycle in protected lanes or through Wanstead Park to get from the north to the south of town.

There is much still to be done, with expansion of cycle hangars on residential streets a must.

More 20 mph areas across the borough are also important, especially for safety.

The advance of the electric car is another plus when it comes to expanding sustainable living. There are plans for more charging points to be rolled out across the borough.

Better public transport is another must. London is fortunate with the public transport network compared to other parts of the country but availability and affordability can always be improved.

So there are a lot of positive things happening, they just need to be speed up. Funding is often key with environmental issues not being given the priority they should be. Budgetary cuts from central government has not helped - more could happen more quickly if this funding were restored.

We are in a climate emergency. Redbridge Council passed it's climate emergency motion in June 2019. The biodiversity and climate emergencies need to be given the policy priority they merit - time is running out.

by Cllr Paul Donovan





# bird report

Autumn migration seemed to begin this year on 29 July. Sometimes passage passerines don't quite wait for the traditional August kick off.

Chair of the Wren Group and local ornithologist James Heal gives his take on this autumn's bird sightings.

*Pintail duck on Jubilee Pond, Wanstead Flats - 10th September 2023. Wren committee member, Mary Holden, took the picture in the morning flushed pink by the rising sun.*

*Later that day it reappeared on Heronry Pond in Wanstead park and stayed until 14th September before it went looking for a more suitable habitat.*

*This was the first recorded Pintail since 2020 when one was spotted flying over. It was the first one that was seen on a local pond since 1975.*





The starting gun was fired this year by a Sedge Warbler on the 29th (there were 11 bird days of records this year for that species, versus five last year and eight in 2021), followed shortly after by the first returning Willow Warbler on 30th and our first Autumn Wheatear on the first day of August.



Woodlark - pic by Tim Harris

The highlights of Autumn included:

- A Pintail, the first twitchable one since 1975, was found by Mary on Jubilee on 10 September and then found by Tim and Bob later on the same day in the Park (Heronry) where it stayed for a week. Forgive me for sharing that this Pintail was my 150th Patch bird. I become the seventh local birder to ever have recorded 150 or more

species of bird on the Wanstead patch.

- Six Crossbill flew south over the Brooms on 19 August - a patch tick for a couple of us and first picked up by Jono.
- A Wood Warbler, also found by Jono, was seen briefly on a few occasions on 22 August and 23 August around the eastern side of Long Wood.
- Great White Egret, our second of the year was seen at altitude and distance by Jono on 9 October.
- A single Woodlark was recorded by Bob flying over the Brooms on 16 October.
- We had five days of Short Eared Owl records on or over the Flats, all in October.
- Some highlights from Bob's NocMig recorder included: Ortolan Bunting on 8 September, Oystercatcher on 6 September,



Short Eared Owl - pic by James Heal

Coming back to passage migration, here are a selection of Autumn comparisons...

We had three Ring Ouzel records this Autumn, all in October in comparison to none last Autumn and only one in Autumn 2021.

Pied Flycatcher is always a special passage bird and we have only ever recorded this species during Autumn migration (never Spring). This Autumn we had nine bird days (another term for total records - three birds in one day is three bird days, as is a single bird on three days) helped by a long-staying individual in Coronation Copse towards the end of September. This compares with 17 bird days in 2022 and 18 bird days in 2021; so a material reduction in numbers recorded in recent years.

It was also a pretty poor Autumn and year for Tree Pipit. We had six bird days for Tree Pipit this year (all in the Autumn), contrasted with 16 bird days last year and 18 bird days in 2021.

All three of those species mentioned above are either far more frequently seen during the Autumn, or solely Autumn passage birds. A species which has more of a natural balance between Spring and Autumn passage is Garden Warbler. We had six Garden Warbler this Autumn (and nine in the Spring) compared with nine in the Autumn of 2022 (and only two that Spring) and four in Autumn 2021 (and nine in Spring 2021). So numbers a bit up and down but certainly nothing we can or should read much into.





Great White Egret - pic by Bob Vaughan

The reality is that with only three Autumns of data captured on eBird, we don't have a large enough sample of data to read into trends, but as we move into 2024 and can compare back across the three previous years, we are perhaps approaching a useful data set for local observations.

by James Heal



## 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 elusive weevil

Nine years ago, in September 2014, bug expert, Tristan Bantock, found a weevil called *Enedreytes hilaris* on Broom on Wanstead Flats. It was a new record for Britain. When he returned in September 2015 he found it again. Since then this very rare species has remained elusive with very few records found.

In September 2023, Tristan returned to meet some of the locals and search for this rare weevil once again. Was it still present ?



*Enedreytes hilaris* - pic by Tristan Bantock



The weevil is associated with mature Broom, which we have plenty of, but the first couple of hours did not produce any sign of the target. However, like a good sleuth, Tristan had speculated that if we could find the possible prey species, that might be a good indicator. We aren't sure what *E. hilaris* eats but Tristan had surmised that it likely preys upon a minuscule beetle - apparently also a weevil although with few of the expected obvious weevily characteristics - which burrows tiny tunnels inside the old Broom stalks: *Phloeotribus rhodactylus*.

Perhaps if we found the prey - which, almost by definition, would be more numerous than the predators - we might find the predators. Tiny holes in woody stems of Broom gave away their presence and before long we were finding the tunnels, the adults, the larvae, and pupa of this species.

There were more obvious weevils present that day as well, such as *Exapion fuscirostre*, which feeds on Broom seeds (and is even used as a biological control agent in the US to control the

spread of Scotch Broom). Back to the weevil search shortly.

Tristan is the expert behind the phenomenally useful, British Bugs website, and so I was pleased we got to explore some bugs as well, including a couple of national scarcities: The Sandrunner Shieldbug (*Sciocoris cursitans*), and another scarce ground-dweller, Dalman's Letherbug (*Spathocera dalmanii*).

We all had a great time searching in the early-September heat but eventually had to leave while Tristan stayed on to search a few more Brooms where eventually he found his target: including a male *Enedreytes hilaris*, beaten from Broom near Long Wood.

Tristan remarked how good Wanstead Flats was for invertebrates and I hope he returns again soon.



*Spathocera dalmanii* - pic by James Heal

by James Heal



*"Put your phone away - look up not down.....  
.....because this world is amazing."*







## The First Snow-Fall

by John B. Tabb

The Fir-tree felt it with a thrill  
And murmur of content;  
The last dead Leaf its cable slipt  
And from its moorings went;  
The selfsame silent messenger  
To one the shibboleth  
Of Life imparting, and to one  
The countersign of Death.



# pollinator pathway streets

Helping to increase insect connectivity  
and diversity in Redbridge

Pollinator Pathways are the next step on from Tree Pit adoption for the London Borough of Redbridge. This is an opportunity to remove your entire street from the chemical weed control spraying schedule, creating a pesticide-free corridor of pollinator friendly plants by manually controlling plant growth. If you and your neighbours have already adopted tree pits on your street, and enjoy gardening, this could be a natural next step, however it's not a prerequisite. Adopting tree pits so that they are not sprayed is a great start as it encourages wildflowers and biodiversity but our kerbsides and pavements are also regularly sprayed.

Chemical spraying by contractors tends to be rather a random affair, with noxious chemicals such as Glyphosate being regularly sprayed not just on weeds but on everything nearby. Keeping the chemicals out makes the street a whole lot healthier for humans as well as plants and insects !

According to Buglife, in the last 20 years there has been a catastrophic decline in flying insects and the UK is infamously known as one of the most nature-depleted places in the world. Wouldn't it be great to help reverse that shaming figure, and at the same time make your street a happier and more friendly place ?



**T**he scheme is open to any area in Redbridge, and with more streets joining in and forming a network, different areas of habitat become more connected and resilient. The application window for Redbridge residents is 23rd October to 31st December. Each street requires a co-ordinator, who will contact the street residents in order to gain majority support. Active supporters will volunteer to plant seeds, and weed the main areas to keep the pathway clear along the walls and pavements.

More details can be found at Redbridge - Adopt a Tree Pit and Pollinator Pathways.

## The Benefits of a Pollinator Pathway

- Seeing wildflowers and greenery in our streets improves our wellbeing
- Stopping pesticides in our streets helps to reduce the decline in our

bees and other pollinators, which are vital for our food supply

- Stopping pesticides makes our streets safer, especially for children, pregnant women, the elderly and vulnerable people
- Plant growth on pavements and in tree pits helps to reduce the impact of climate change, reduce flood-risk, and reduce pollution
- Participating in the Pollinator Pathway brings neighbours together in a positive way.

In the words of Dr. Amanda Tuke, urban botanist:

**"Pavement plants let us all connect with nature on our doorsteps. Wild plants may not have showy flowers like our garden favourites, but look closely and they're beautiful too.**

**It's fun learning to recognise the common plants growing in our neighbourhoods and noticing what is in flower as the seasons change.**

**"If you were**

**told there was a way we could – for absolutely zero cost – keep our city cooler, remove pollutants from the air, and reduce the pressure on our sewage systems, you might not believe it. But this isn't fantasy. Scientific evidence shows that letting wild plants make their home along pavement edges and in the soil under street trees contributes to all those things."**

If you would like to know more about the global effects of the use of pesticides, such as adversely affecting the health of farmers throughout the world, and how gardeners can find alternative ways to control pests, look

up <https://www.pan-uk.org>

Article by Gill James







# .... don't forget

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

- Provide fresh clean water every day.
- Feed a seed mix meant for wild birds.
- Also give kitchen scraps like cheese, cooked potato and bread.
- Clear up uneaten food at the end of the day as it could attract rats.
- Avoid giving salted nuts and only give peanuts from a good supplier.
- Clean feeding areas regularly to prevent any disease.

## then & now

Were you right ?

Cows watering in Alexandra Lake, Wanstead Flats, in the early 1900s with the Courtney Hotel on Aldersbrook Road behind and how it looks today. The modern view was almost impossible to obtain owing to scrub and sapling growth. Parts of the lake have also become silted - changing the overall layout and causing flooding on the adjacent road. This scrub encroachment is almost certainly caused by the ending of cattle grazing on the Flats around 1996.







..... and finally

# wren practical work

Wren's practical conservation work takes place in the winter from October to March, first Sunday of the month, and midweek most Thursdays 10-12.30.

We carry out a variety of tasks including clearing scrub; keeping paths open; and various pieces of work requested by the City of London where they do not have the resources or where their machines cannot go. Some tasks suit an approach with hand tools, and keen volunteers. For example we are clearing alder re-growth on the banks of the Ornamental Waters in Wanstead Park.

You need no particular expertise or strength to join us as we can adapt work to all levels. We supply tools and gloves. We just need some basic enthusiasm and a willingness to get a bit muddy. It is a great way to keep fit, get some fresh air and meet other Wren Group members.

To join the group contact Peter Williams 07716034164 or e-mail [wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com](mailto:wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com) or just turn up on the day.



# links

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

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

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

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)

Epping Forest

[www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/Pages/default.aspx)

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)

