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*Last years Wren Wildlife Weekens (WWW). A Spider walk expertly led by David Carr as usual together with some young enthusiastic invertebrate finders. This year we are holding a Wren Wildlife Weekend on 20–21 June, with a special focus on children and young people. - pic by James Heal*

# a word from the chair .....

The word "incoming" often suggests trouble ahead. As the incoming Chair, however, my aim is quite the opposite: to keep things steady and, if possible, avoid making too many ripples.

My first words must be to congratulate James on all he achieved as Chair of Wren over the past seven years. I am also very glad that he is staying on the Committee, so that both Wren and I can continue to benefit from his experience and knowledge. Thank you, James. I am delighted to have been elected Chair, and I remain in awe of my predecessor.



By way of introduction, I joined Wren shortly before retiring from my NHS role, and I have served on the Committee since James was elected. My main responsibilities have included maintaining the website and supporting Wren activities wherever I can.

I like to describe myself as a nature enthusiast. I have been a birdwatcher for more than fifty years and, more recently, have become especially interested in birdsong and calls. It was a pleasure to lead the Wren Dawn Chorus walk on 24<sup>th</sup> April; being in the Park and listening to birdsong is exactly where I like to be. I have even been known to try identifying birds recorded flying over my house at night - but that is a story for another time.

I am also interested in lichens, although they can be a challenge because their taxonomy is constantly evolving and the accepted names are in Latin. Even so, lichens have one great advantage: they grow slowly rather than moving around. They are easy to photograph and examine with a hand lens, although microscopy is sometimes needed to distinguish similar species. As partnerships between two very different organisms living together for mutual benefit, lichens also offer a useful reminder that people, too, might do well to be a little more tolerant of one another.

I am equally fascinated by larger insects.

Dragonflies and butterflies are relatively straightforward because there are only a modest number of UK species. Smaller insects are much more challenging, and I usually need to photograph them before identifying them - or, more often, ask other Wren members for help. The knowledge shared through the Wren WhatsApp group is remarkable: post a picture, and someone will often point you in the right direction. I record my sightings on iRecord and eBird, while lichens go into the British Lichen Society recording system.



*Just how our patch is changing - Muntjac deer have been recorded on Wanstead Flats, and they're one of those quietly surprising pieces of local wildlife that make the Flats feel wilder than most people expect in inner London. Pic by Bob Vaughan.*

Looking ahead to summer, Wren has an exciting programme planned. As wildlife flourishes once more, we are holding a Wren Wildlife Weekend on 20–21 June, with a special focus on children and young people. Many of you will know that our patron, Sir David

Attenborough, celebrated his 100th birthday on 8 May. One of his best-known remarks captures our purpose: "If children don't grow up knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it. And if they don't understand it, they won't protect it." For Wren, that is a clear call to action.

This year, we are shaping our events around children and young people, although all children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. A Wren gazebo will be located near the Tea Hut in Wanstead Park from 10.00 to 16.00 on both 20 and 21 June, with displays and information available there. Events will include an early Moth Reveal, a Minibeast Story Time, and a late Bat Walk on Saturday 20 June, followed by a Pond Dipping session on Sunday 21 June. A week later, on the 28<sup>th</sup> June, we are delighted to welcome back Tony Madgwick (LNHS recorder for Bees and Wasps) for a Bee Identification walk, starting at 10am from the Tea Hut. A wildlife packed packed June for Wren.

Bob Vaughan  
Chair Wren Group



For the latest details, please visit our website: <https://wrengroup.org.uk>, where updates on all events will be posted.

A Greater Whitethroat bird is perched on a thin, brown branch against a clear blue sky. The bird has a greyish-brown head and back, with a white throat and breast. Its beak is open, and it appears to be singing. The branch extends from the top left towards the bottom right of the frame.

# dawn chorus

Walk 25th April 2026

There was an excellent turnout for the Wren dawn chorus walk, with 20 people braving the 06.00 am early start in cold and misty conditions. Visibility across Heronry was limited, but this enhanced the experience by encouraging us to focus on listening rather than looking. Learning bird sounds - both songs and calls - is particularly valuable at this time of year. As foliage thickens, birds become harder to spot, but their vocalisations remain easy to detect, even when out of sight.

*Greater Whitethroat - pic by Bob Vaughan*

The Wren, most appropriate, was one of the first birds we heard, it has a distinctive set of loud staccato notes, often followed by an almost machine-gun like hard fast trill.



Despite the wren being one of the UK's smallest birds, its song packs in over 100 notes in just a few seconds and finishes with a rapid, machine-gun-like rattle Pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

The Robin is one of the few birds to sing all year round, and in spring it never seems to sleep, starting before dawn and continuing late into the night under streetlights. It has a very varied song which is difficult to describe, but it is all at a relatively high pitch. Compare this with the deep fluty song of the Blackbird. The Song Thrush is renowned for singing loud, short phrases two, three or four times over and once learned this phrasing is distinctive.

One of the highlights of spring is to hear birds that have flown in to breed locally, sometimes

migrating from Africa to take advantage of the increase in temperature and the life blossoming around us. As we walked along the northern side of Perch we were introduced to two migrants. A few Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs may over winter here, but it is only in spring that they start to sing and their numbers increase with incoming migrants. The Chiffchaffs name is onomatopoeic, it just gives a repetitive "chiff-chaff" song, but at least it is easy to learn and pick-out. The Blackcap gives a loud warbling song, quite varied, up and down the scales but with a quality quite different to a Robin when learned.



The Chiffchaff's song is a distinct, repetitive, and rhythmic "chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff" that directly gives the bird its name. Pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

The Dell held more of the same birds, useful revision, but as we stepped out into the OSW we heard our first Whitethroat, a scratchy song sometimes given in song flight, however as the sun was behind clouds the Whitethroats were hiding today. A distant trill of a Lesser

Whitethroat beckoned us towards the Roding and we walked along the path heading east. A Lesser Whitethroat duly performed its loud trill for us, with the wheezing of a Greenfinch as accompaniment. Further down the path some of us were lucky to hear a Cetti's Warbler's abrupt very loud song. This bird hides in dense undergrowth all year, and if you don't know the song it would be almost impossible to detect, it is very secretive.



Cetti's Warbler - as you can see likes to hide in dense undergrowth all year round. Pic by Nick croft

You may have noticed that I have not said much about the Great Spotted Woodpecker, the geese and ducks on the pond, or the crows flying overhead. That is because I have been focusing on the songbirds. All birds make sounds, even Mute Swans, but some have a particularly well-developed vocal organ called a syrinx. These birds are known as oscines, more commonly referred to as songbirds.

Humans produce speech using the larynx, which sits at the top of the windpipe. Birds also have a vocal organ, but theirs sits lower down, where the windpipe divides towards the lungs. In songbirds, the syrinx contains many tiny muscles that can move rapidly and even produce two different from each lung. This is what allows birds such as the Skylark, Robin, and Blackcap to create such rich and complex songs.

Leaving the science aside, I do encourage you to go out and listen to the dawn chorus. It is a direct and rewarding way to connect with nature.

At first, the birdsong may seem like a jumble, but with a little patience you can begin to pick out and recognise individual songs.

Many people in the group were using the Merlin app on their phones. The app listens through the phone's microphone and highlights birds it detects, showing an image of each species. Merlin is fun to use and I do recommend it as a learning tool. Although it can be accurate, it is not infallible and should not be treated as definitive.

## Examples of Merlin misidentifications on the walk

**Bittern** this record was most likely triggered by the low rumble of distant traffic on the North Circular Road.

**Redshank** appeared to be based on a short phrase repeated by a Song Thrush.

**Serin** also came up, although I am confident it was not actually present.

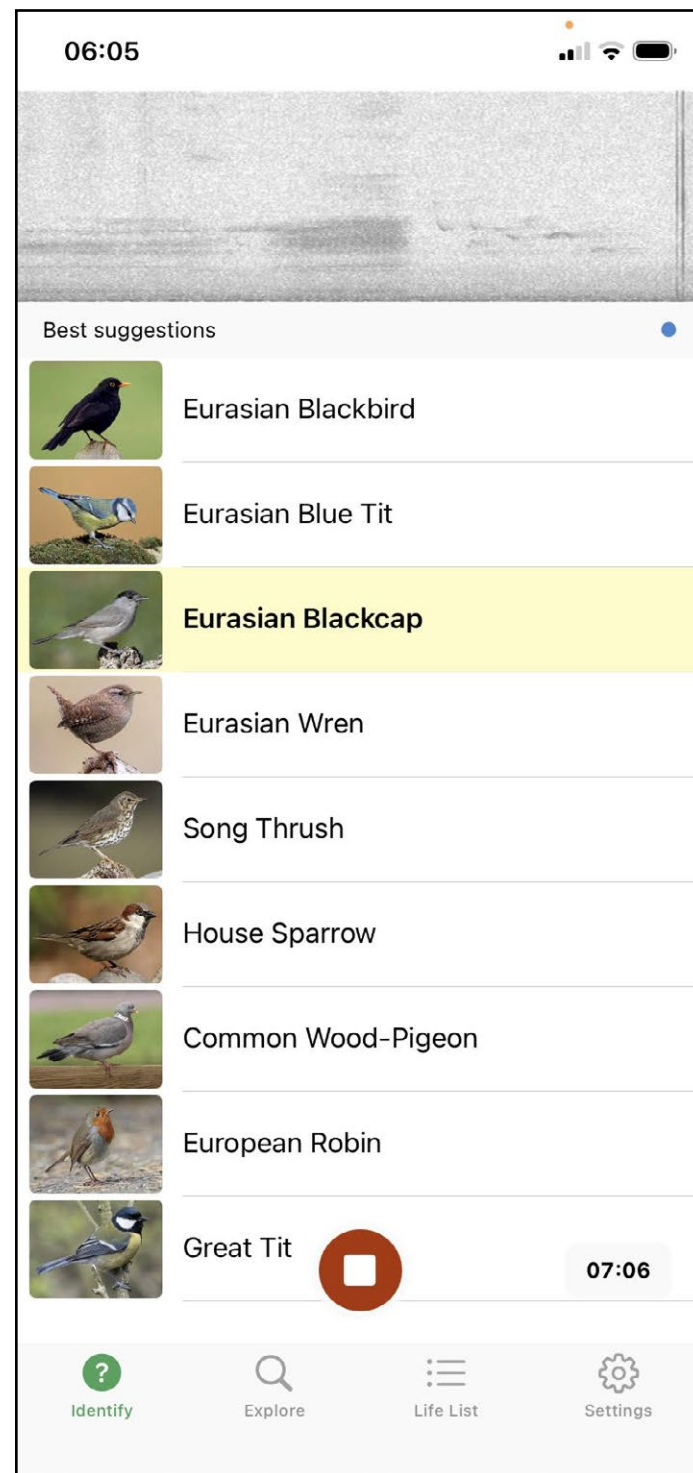
By the end of the walk we had, between us, seen or heard 34 species of bird: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S326852431>

One Wren member reported a dawn Window Watch. This involved Merlin and here is the picture that appeared on the phone when Merlin was used:

All these nine birds that very likely to be found in our local gardens. Congratulations to Anita McCullough for taking part in the Dawn Chorus walk from home! Anita did say she didn't see the Song Thrush, but this bird has a very clear, loud and repetitive song so could have been singing a few doors down.

Spring and early summer are the ideal times to enjoy the busy chorus of songbirds as they defend territories and attract mates. The best time to listen is soon after dawn, whether you are at home or out for a walk.

by Bob Vaughan



# the clock is ticking

Paul Donovan's article argues that environmental action can no longer be treated as an optional extra by councils or governments. Drawing on examples from Redbridge, he points to the gap between political promises and meaningful action, while recognising the work already being done by local residents and volunteer groups. The piece is ultimately a warning that protecting biodiversity and addressing climate change will require real commitment, proper investment and pressure from the public at every level.

So the dust has settled on the local council elections in May. Labour retained control of Redbridge Council, taking 43 seats. The Independents (Your Party) got nine, the Greens and Tories five each. Thankfully only one seat for Reform. The Greens took Walthamstow Council from Labour. It will now be interesting to see if the Greens are greener in power than Labour - a big ask, especially in Waltham Forest.

In Redbridge, the opposition parties will have to ensure that Labour steps up to the plate on the environment.

In March, the Labour Council passed a nature emergency motion. Some suspected green washing but now is the time to prove the doubters wrong and deliver.

Time to act on environmental catastrophe is running out - everyone has a responsibility

A lot of the biodiversity gains in Redbridge have been due to the actions of residents and volunteer groups, like the Wrens, Wanstead

Community Gardeners and the Friends of Wanstead Park.

There has been the adoption of tree pits and creation of pollinator pathways (which include tree pits and stopping the use of pesticides in the streets). Unfortunately, there are just 10 pollinator pathways in 1800 roads in Redbridge. So, a long way to go.

The concept of grow zones, where areas are allowed to run wild have been a success. Developments at Fairlop and Hainault Forest have also been encouraging.

The concern though is that the council is happy to empower residents to act, just so long as it doesn't cost too much.

What a real commitment to address climate and biodiversity emergencies requires is real funding and officer resources to make it happen.

## There is a lot to do to really move forward on the environmental agenda.

There also needs to be an overall effort to deepen and increase biodiversity. Too much of the borough has disappeared under concrete. Why not incentivise people to re-green their front and back gardens. Our gardens have huge potential for biodiversity - the creation of corridors and connection.

Nationally and internationally, the climate and biodiversity disasters attract a varying level of reaction. These go from Donald Trump's total denial that the disasters exist at all to the likes of Reform and the Tory Party in this country, who accept the problem but not prioritisation. Both target net zero policies as a bad thing, a luxury that cannot be afforded, whilst arms spending spirals upwards.

The nihilist approach on fossil fuels like oil and gas underline the point. The country is too dependent on these energy sources, so instead of moving away from them to renewables, the Tories and Reform believe we need to double down on production. Turkeys voting for Christmas doesn't really cover it.

So there are challenges at all levels. Pressure needs to be brought on national and local governments to accelerate programs to address climate and biodiversity emergencies. Denial is not an option. We must all act in different ways to bring about the change at local, national and international levels.

by Paul Donovan



Read more of Paul's views on his blog [paulfdonovan.blogspot.com](https://paulfdonovan.blogspot.com)



# epping forest

for everyone to L♥ve

As pressures on Epping Forest continue to grow - from climate change to funding changes and development around its edges - organisations working to protect and support the Forest are facing an uncertain future. In this thoughtful update, Peter Lewis, Chief Executive of Epping Forest Heritage Trust, reflects on recent challenges, new opportunities, and why community involvement remains vital to the Forest's future.

After what was a gorgeous Spring I am sure people are already worrying about the recent temperatures, and the impact on the Forest. Let's hope we manage to get a perfect summer for both people and the Forest with blue skies, overnight rain and moderately warm temperatures. I am not asking too much, I hope!

The instability of recent temperatures has also been reflected in life at Epping Forest Heritage Trust. In January, after 48 years of being generously housed by the City at Warren Lodge, we were given notice to leave, and left on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. In April, the Visitor Centre at High Beach was put out for commercial tender, with the City looking for a "Visitor Experience" rather than a visitor welcome, alongside a sizeable rent. All this seems to fit into the City's current plans to, as some members of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee have put it, "sweat their assets". This fits into the broader move to grant funding for its local, wholly owned, green space charities, and, for example, the ongoing debacle playing out on Hampstead Heath with the City replacing four independent cafes with a contract to one organisation, Daisy Green, to run all four.

While I understand the City's desire to generate income from its Green Spaces in order to reduce the burden on its £2.3 billion City Estate Fund, I believe this should be done in a balanced and sensitive way. For example, they could be broader in their approach to securing more

resources for the Forest, and work more closely with community partner organisations around the Forest, such as us at Epping Forest Heritage Trust, the Wrens, the Wanstead Parklands Group and Highams Park Action Group, for example, to help them secure more resources for the Forest for mutually agreed priorities.

## Communities, Change and the Future of Epping Forest

Like many unexpected convulsions, the office move and Visitor Centre tender gave us time to think and reflect, and we are now hoping to move into shopwindow premises on one of the Forest high streets. Should this work, we will become part of a proper, local, Forest community and gain access to wider public audiences, one of our key strategic objectives. We will want to fully activate the new space, so as well as providing information about the Forest and offering local Forest products, we plan to invite local Forest artists to display their works, have a "welly exchange" for children, so parents can affordably ensure their children can visit the Forest even in the muddiest conditions, let the space out to local community organisations and put on evening events about the Forest. Watch this space for future developments...

At the same time, we have been continuing to deliver all our walks, community engagement and conservation activities, with our volunteers

delivering a record number of conservation hours last year (over 4,300!), helping the City to improve the condition and biodiversity of the Forest. We are particularly delighted that the volunteers we mobilised last year were a younger and more diverse group than before, with most of them being women.

Most recently, we have also been delighted with our #LoveEppingForest awareness campaign ahead of the local elections in May, securing pledges from 140 candidates to protect the Forest. 40 of those candidates have now been elected, and we have already begun engaging with all the elected councillors in relation to how they can help protect and enhance the Forest through their roles. This active engagement with local politicians to properly protect the Forest is going to be even more important in the months to come, with new leadership in Newham and Waltham Forest, a new Local Plan being developed in Redbridge and a new balance of power in Epping Forest District Council.

With the challenges of climate change and adjacent development only escalating, it has never been more important for communities to come together to protect the Forest.

Peter Lewis  
Epping Forest Heritage Trust



Learn how you can help <https://efht.org.uk>

# spring bird report

Spring blended into summer quite seamlessly this year with an intense heatwave (yet another record-breaker... what climate crisis?!). So as we enter summer (heat-waves and summer storms are already well underway), let's look back at the patch birds of spring.

As a re-cap, so far this year (by the end of May), we have recorded a total of 115 species. That is nine fewer than the same time last year - 2025 was a record breaking year by diversity - but pretty bog standard if we look back over the past few years.

*Willow Warbler once bred regularly on Wanstead Flats but has now disappeared as a local breeding species, reflecting wider declines across southern England and changes in suitable habitat. Pic by Tony Morrison*



March gave us 86 species which is one down on March '25 but still above average. Spring kicked off a little late for Wanstead after a long, cold and wet winter. Bob's NocMig recorder picked up a Little Ringed Plover (a migratory wader) on 21 March.



Female or immature Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) - pic by Andy Gibbons

This was followed by Sand Martin the next day and a late first Wheatear on 24 March (our latest arrival for this harbinger species for a decade) with Louis L finding our first bird again and yours truly winning the coveted Wheatear sweepstake by predicting the first date (zero skill or prescience involved I am afraid, but let's move on).

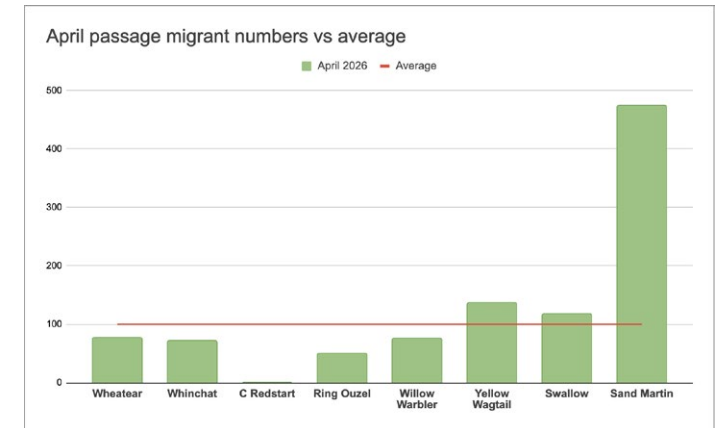


After a very poor April and May the best bird prize probably going to Andy's Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) - pic by Andy Gibbons

Best bird of March has to be an Osprey seen flying over by Jono L on 28 March supported by a small array of nice nocmig records from our fearless sonar-wielding Chairman, Bob (Bar-tailed Godwit [many of us would pay good money to see one of these fly over the patch], Curlew, and Wigeon).

Let's move on to May! "What about April?!" I hear my second reader cry. Well... the painful truth is that April was, in birding terms, diabolically poor. We recorded 88 species. That

is six species down on average and a monster 17 down on the previous April. Bear in mind that April is traditionally our second best month of the year.



The best bird of a poor month was probably a Black Redstart found in the Large Skylark Enclosure (lovingly called 'LSE' in birding lexicon and more on that later) on 18 April by Andy G followed by a Woodlark that I saw fly from LSE and perch briefly in the Brick Pits on 19 April. A couple of Ring Ouzels, plus Sedge Warbler and Garden Warbler, were probably the best supporting cast...

I am sorry to report that May also scored the lowest number of species for that month that I am aware of. However, I would note that quite a few of the regular birders were away for quite a lot of the month which may have had an impact. There were 80 species recorded, six lower than average, and best bird prize probably going to Andy G's Cuckoo on 30 May. Bob's little box of

noc mig tricks also gave us Grey Plover and Oystercatcher for the month.

As I always say after getting a bit 'listy' on you, a season should not really be judged by how many scarce migrants are found, but more by how many regular migrants and breeding birds there are. We don't have any comprehensive survey data from the season, but I can share a bit of a picture.

I have taken April, our primary spring passage month, and expressed this year's records as a percentage of the average April total for each species over the last few years. That is why the average appears as a straight red line in the chart. As you can see, five of the eight test case species are underwater with a complete absence of Common Redstart this spring, while three are above average. And let's celebrate where it is due: just look at the rate of Sand Martin versus the average: nearly five times the norm, making it a genuinely exceptional year for those lovely understated hirundines which can often be tricky to see but were in abundance this year.

Finally, if long-staying territorial males are a reliable judge of likely breeding, then we have had a couple of typically-passage migrants which have stayed around: two Garden Warbler territories

and possibly a Sedge Warbler territory alongside three or even four Reed Warbler territories. This supplements our more common migrant breeders: a small handful of Lesser Whitethroat (I am being deliberately vague here), one or two Cetti's Warbler, and reasonably healthy numbers of Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, and Chiffchaff alongside our resident breeders. A reminder that Meadow Pipit and Willow Warbler no longer breed locally and following a disappointing intervention at the last remaining House Martin breeding site locally, neither do they.

Skylarks seem to be doing their best and are likely breeding in similar numbers to the previous year. The rope is almost certainly helping and a repeat offending vandal was luckily caught red-handed by a combination of CoL, Wren, and local birder vigilance and the regular damage we were experiencing at the beginning of the year has stopped.

So, as is often the case with bird reports, a mixture of good and bad news. Let's see what the summer brings.

Report by James Heal



*Skylarks seem to be holding their own and are likely to be breeding in similar numbers to the previous year.*

Confessions of a

# Wren Newbie

I jumped into Wren in November. I'd been aware of the group for a while and when I was made redundant, volunteering with my local wildlife group seemed the ideal way to keep busy and contribute to the community.

I turned up for a Thursday work session behind the stables in Wanstead Park and was immediately welcomed and gently ribbed ("You look young – shouldn't you be working?") by a cheerful bunch of rather shabby old timers. One of them was assigned to look after me (i.e. keep me away from the most dangerous tools – they spotted me looking wistfully at the scythes) and off we went to start preparing a wildflower meadow.

On that first day I learned a lot. A bit too much about football but also plenty about meadow management, tools and local history. I watched in awe as the old-timers powered their way through the work, striding around with huge bundles of cut brambles casually balanced on a rake over their shoulder. In two hours we'd cleared a large patch and the others bounced

away while I trudged homewards, knowing my muscles would soon be having some stern words with me. I was hooked.

As the days got shorter and colder we worked our way, rain or shine, through jobs to establish the meadow, maintain the rare acid grassland (who knew that was a thing?!) and improve habitat for breeding skylarks. Every week our gentle leader Peter would explain the task and we'd set off, bristling with sharp implements, to chop, saw, dig, rake and chat vigorously before tidying everything away and going home for a well-earned cup of tea.



*Heather hiding in the back row (right of centre). Back in November when Wren volunteers were assigned the job of clearing ground in the Old Sewage Works, Wanstead Park, in preparation for planting a wildflower meadow - including the famous Yellow Rattle.*

There were lots of highlights (my biggest was being taught to scythe) and unexpected benefits. Connecting with people I'd never

otherwise meet brought delightful discoveries of music, literature, film and cooking, as well as lots of laughs.

The practical work stops over summer to avoid disturbing nesting birds, so I went to the AGM to test out the idea of getting involved in the committee as a way of staying involved. I wanted to make sure the people were nice, the work wouldn't be too onerous and that I could be helpful despite my lack of specialist knowledge. It looked good on all counts to me and fortunately the committee had space so I was in.

Again, I've been astounded by the energy and expertise of a small group of people. Our chair Bob keeps meetings focused and everyone pitches in to help wherever they can. I hadn't realised that, as well as the practical work and running events like the Wanstead Wildlife Weekend and the Dawn Chorus walks, the group plays its part in a wider ecosystem of nature conservation work and policy development. My contribution so far? I've been watering the yellow rattle planted in the wildflower meadow and I'll be fetching and carrying for the Wildlife Weekend. Not rocket science but much needed. It feels good to be helping.

Heather Noble  
Newbie and Committee Member





# rattlers in the park

The following article comes from Wren member Moira Duhig. Moira shares the story of an ambitious and quietly encouraging project in Wanstead Park: introducing Yellow Rattle to help create a richer, more diverse meadow habitat. It's a lovely example of patient conservation work and the difference that Wren volunteers can make over time.

*Yellow Rattle - a hemiparasite that parasitises coarse grasses and suppresses their growth, thereby helping less competitive wild flowers get more of a chance to thrive. Over time, this should improve the species diversity of the meadow. Pic Wiki Commons*

No, not the poisonous Viper, but the rattling native plant *Rhinanthus Minor*. More commonly known as Yellow Rattle, named for its yellow flowers and its seeds rattling in the dry seed pod.

An annual, herbaceous, native meadow plant, it is semi-parasitic on nutrients in the roots of coarse grasses and by weakening these overshadowing grasses encourages a greater diversity of flowering plants to grow and flourish.

In 2024 an area of grass was identified in the Old Sewage Works, Wanstead Park that had the potential to become meadowland. A five-year plan was proposed to support this. In Winter 2024 Wren Working Party volunteers scythed grasses and a created a number of areas ready

for planting. Yellow Rattle was planted in April 2025. Wren members watered them and monitored their growth. By mid-April there was evident growth and the plants looked healthy and undisturbed. They thrived, flowering that summer and by autumn had produced seed. In Spring 2026 it was evident this seed had successfully self-sown and germinated.

## A new flush of Yellow Rattle was growing.

It was decided to repeat the planting in 2026, expanding the area. More planting areas were made and plant plugs ordered. Wren volunteers planted them in mid-April. Watering continued for both the new plantings and those thriving 2025 seedlings. However, there followed a period of very hot, dry weather and in spite of

frequent waterings the 2026 plantings did not establish. On a more positive note, the seedlings produced this year from the successful 2025 plants will, hopefully, flower and seed to spread and grow throughout this emergent meadow. The five-year plan will continue with future seeding, planting and monitoring. There is already a diversity of flowering plants growing on this patch including, Dyers weed, Poppy, Mugwort, White Top, Common Mallow, Hoary Cress, Yellow Salsify, Cinquefoil, Cow Parsley, Nettle, Bramble, with variety of grasses and Ox Eye Daisy close by too. Not all these plants are considered meadow plants. The more dominant plants will need discouraging for the meadow to establish and so support a greater diversity of flowering plants and wildlife.

by Moira Duhig



April 2025 first planting ....



..... April 2026 seedlings appear from 2025 planting .....



.... May 2025 growing strongly ...



..... and starts to flower .....



.... May 2025 in flower....



.... and set seed in June

# Summer on the patch

June to September

For those of us who spend time on the patch, summer doesn't arrive with a single moment of change. It settles in gradually - in the length of the evenings, the weight of the air, the steady hum of insects building week by week. By June, Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park and Bush Wood have already reached a kind of fullness, but summer is not static. It shifts, deepens, and softens as the weeks pass.

This is the season of abundance. Grasses stand tall across the Flats, alive with hidden movement. Bramble spills into flower and then fruit. The woodland, once open and bright in spring, becomes enclosed and shaded, its energy turned inward. Around the ponds, life continues at a quieter pace - young birds growing, adults less conspicuous now the urgency of breeding has passed.



Summer never really arrives all at once on the patch. There's no clear turning point. It comes gradually - in longer evenings, warmer air, and the steady rise of insect noise until one day you realise the season is already well underway.

By June, Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park and Bushwood feel full. Grassland thickens. Woodland closes over. The ponds settle into a quieter rhythm. But summer here isn't static. It deepens, softens and begins changing almost as soon as it arrives.



For regular walkers and Wren members, summer asks for a different kind of attention from spring. Spring announces itself. Summer doesn't. It rewards returning, noticing, standing still for a while. Even at its height there are signs of what comes next.

## June - Fullness

By June the patch feels occupied.

On the Flats the grass has grown long and varied. What seemed open in spring becomes dense and textured. Walking through it means life all around - grasshoppers springing away from your feet, beetles hidden below the stems, fine spider webs catching low morning light.

Skylarks are still here, though easier to overlook now. Their song flights continue but with less urgency. They belong to this openness more than most people realise. Lose the structure of the grassland and the habitat quickly becomes less suitable for them.

Along paths and boundaries, bramble flowers begin opening. Easy to pass without much thought, but among the most important summer plants on the patch. Stand beside flowering bramble for a minute and the sound arrives before the insects do - bees, hoverflies and countless others working steadily from flower to flower.

In Bush Wood, spring has closed behind us. The canopy thickens and the woodland floor falls into shade. Birdsong fades and is replaced by quieter work - adults carrying food, leaves shifting, brief flashes of blue tits and great tits slipping through the branches.

Around the ponds in Wanstead Park, young birds become easier to spot. Moorhen and coot chicks pick through the edges while great

crested grebes continue their careful routines. Sometimes a chick appears riding quietly on a parent's back - gone again almost before you notice.

## July - Heat and Quiet

July changes the mood.

On warmer days the Flats can feel almost still beneath a bright sky. Spring's energy settles into something slower and heavier. Wildlife shifts toward cooler parts of the day, making early mornings and evenings the best times to notice what's going on.



This is the season of insects. Butterflies move low through the grass - meadow browns, gatekeepers and small skippers. Dragonflies patrol the ponds with determined purpose while damselflies hold themselves lightly against reeds.

The grassland changes too, seed heads drying and colours fading into softer tones - straw, pale gold and muted brown. Areas kept short often bleach under the sun while taller sections hold their texture longer.



Birds haven't disappeared - they've simply become less obvious. Most are busy feeding young out of sight rather than announcing themselves.

Above it all, swifts remain one of summer's constants, cutting fast arcs across the sky. Few sounds feel more tied to the season.

Bush Wood becomes somewhere cooler and slower. At first glance it can feel empty, but stop for long enough and it begins to reveal itself.

## August - The First Signs

By August, the stillness of high summer starts to

shift. Nothing dramatic - just small changes that become obvious once you start noticing them.

Parts of the Flats begin to look worn by heat and use. But late flowers still hold things together. Ragwort, yarrow and thistle continue feeding insects long after earlier blooms have faded.

Butterflies remain active, depending on the weather. Red admirals and small tortoiseshells seem to make the most of what's left.

Grasshoppers continue almost unnoticed, their soft rhythm becoming part of the background of the place.



Birdlife shifts too. Family groups begin breaking apart and movement feels less fixed now - less tied to nesting and territory.

Around the ponds, vegetation reaches its fullest point. Reedbeds feel dense and secretive. Most things remain hidden, but patience still

gets rewarded - a sudden rustle, a brief call, something slipping through cover.



Often it's the evenings that change first.

The light softens and shadows stretch earlier. After hot afternoons the patch seems to wake up again.

## September - Edges

September sits between seasons. Some days still feel entirely like summer. Others carry something cooler underneath.

On the Flats the grasses begin to fall open. Seed heads scatter and the landscape slowly loosens again. Quietly, almost invisibly, conditions begin resetting for next year.

Bramble fruit appears and draws birds in. Blackbirds and robins become easier to notice in quieter mornings.

In Bush Wood, the first leaves turn. Not enough to transform the place - just small patches and hints.

Birdsong mostly disappears, replaced by occasional calls and rustling through foliage. Migration begins quietly too. Species slip away without announcement, and you only realise later they've gone.

The light changes more than anything - lower and softer, catching dew and spider webs stretched across paths and grass.

## Returning

Summer shows how much this patch depends on being looked after.

Wanstead Flats needs to remain open for species that rely on grassland. Across all three spaces there are constant pressures - footfall, disturbance, invasive plants and changing weather patterns.

That's where regular presence matters. Not just organised work or monitoring - but noticing.

Summer doesn't offer the obvious milestones of spring. It unfolds slowly and fades the same way.

A path in June isn't quite the same path in August. Spend enough time here and you begin recognising those differences - not as events, but as part of the rhythm of the place.

And perhaps that's what summer offers most on this patch. Not spectacle - just the chance to slow down and notice that even in the quieter weeks, the patch never really stands still.





## “Dandelion”

A little flash of gold and mane,  
The gentlest beast on Wanstead plain,  
He wakes before the morning's done,  
To stretch and yawn and face the sun.

His whiskers catch the shining light,  
His tail glows softly, warm and bright,  
Then gives a roar - though not too long  
And turns his thunder into song.

But by and by his mane grows white,  
A floating crown, a feathery sight,  
Until a breeze comes whispering by  
And sends his wishes through the sky.

by Anon

# oak processionary moth

Season Returns

Last year as I sat beneath my favourite oak on Wanstead Flats sipping my coffee I saw the tale-tale signs of the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM). I knew enough about the caterpillar to realise that this wasn't a good sign. I contacted the Forestry Commission's [TreeAlert](#), gave them the location of the tree using [What3words](#) and within a couple of days someone came and treated the blight.

One year later it'd that time again to keep your eyes peeled for the pest. From late spring through to August, residents and visitors are once again being asked to stay alert for OPM.

These caterpillars are now a familiar seasonal problem across London and parts of the South-East, including areas around Epping Forest and of course the Wren patch. They feed on oak leaves and, in large numbers, can weaken trees by stripping foliage during the growing season. While healthy oaks usually recover, repeated attacks can leave trees more vulnerable to drought, disease and other stresses. ([Forest Research](#))

The greatest concern, however, is the risk to people and animals. Older caterpillars develop thousands of tiny irritating hairs which can become airborne if disturbed. Contact with these hairs may cause itchy rashes, sore eyes, throat irritation and occasionally breathing difficulties in both people and pets. ([GOV.UK](#))

OPM can usually be recognised by several distinctive signs. The caterpillars often move nose-to-tail in long processions along trunks and branches. They also leave white silky trails and build silk nests on oak trees. Fresh nests are usually white, later becoming grey-brown and harder to spot against bark.

If you encounter OPM, the advice is simple: do not touch or disturb the caterpillars or nests. Even old nests may still contain irritating hairs months later. Sightings should be reported using the [TreeAlert](#) reporting system.

As warmer weather draws more people outdoors, a little awareness can help protect both our oak trees and the people who enjoy these landscapes.

# When nature meets history

I have always had a particular interest in old postcards and photographs of our patch, especially those from the early twentieth century. They are small windows into familiar places that now look very different.

These old images remind us that the landscapes we enjoy for wildlife today did not appear by chance – they are the result of many layers of history – interventions by people and nature.

For years I have included 'Then and Now' photographs in the newsletter to show how our patch has changed and evolved. Recently, I have begun experimenting with careful AI enhancement of old photographs and postcards. Not reconstruction, and not alteration – simply trying to reveal more clearly what is already there.

Old photographs are often faded, scratched, low contrast or difficult to read. Used cautiously, modern digital tools can remove stains, improve clarity and make details easier to see. This can help bring forgotten images out of the box and allow them to be shared and appreciated again. Seeing a clearer view how places like Wanstead

Flats, Wanstead Park and Bush Wood looked back in the early c20 can sometimes help us notice connections with the landscape and habitats we see today.

## There is, however, an important line not to cross.

AI can also invent detail that never existed. If pushed too far, enhancement can become reconstruction – smoothing faces, changing textures, creating buildings, foliage or features that were never captured in the original image.



*An original picture postcard of Angell Pond on Wanstead Flats - posted in 1911. Believe it or not this card is not in bad condition but with the help of AI much more of the image can be brought out.*

Once altered, an image may start to tell us more about modern expectations than actual historical reality.

For that reason, I try to work from a simple

principle: preserve, reveal, but do not recreate. If something in an enhanced image is uncertain, it should remain uncertain. Where a detail appears clearer, we should ask whether it comes from the original photograph or from software interpretation. If I ever make a guess about what an image shows, I will say that I am not sure and explain what the guess is based on.



*Here's an enhanced copy of the original postcard using AI and Photoshop that's been pushed too far - making it look like a photograph that's been taken today. The importance is to restore the original quality and character of the photograph and not change it - to know when to stop.*

The original photographs remain the important thing. Digital enhancement should never replace preserving scans and originals for future generations. These old images are not just records of buildings and people – they are records of changing environments, and part of the story of why our patch looks and supports wildlife as it does today.

by Tony Morrison





*Angell Pond complete with bandstand in 1911. Capel Road to the right. Inset - the same view a rare time Angell Pond held significant water back in 2022.*

# and finally

As editor of the Wren newsletter, I'd first like to offer a heartfelt thank you to our outgoing Chair, James Heal, for everything he has given to the Wren Group during his time in the role.

Anyone involved in community groups knows how much work happens quietly in the background - the meetings, conversations, planning, encouragement and all the small decisions that somehow keep things moving. James has carried those responsibilities with calm good sense, generosity and good humour, usually without making any fuss about it.

His contribution has helped make the Wren not only well organised and well regarded, but also welcoming and enjoyable to be part of. Leadership in groups like ours is rarely about grand gestures;

more often it's about consistency, reliability and creating the sort of atmosphere where others feel encouraged to join in. James has done exactly that, and the effect of his work has reached further than he may realise.



*James Heal receiving a well deserved 'thank you gift' from all of us in the Wren Group from incoming chair Bob Vaughan at the last AGM.*

On a personal note, James has made my role as editor considerably easier. He has always been approachable, supportive and generous with both his time and advice - and, perhaps most importantly, he always delivered the goods. I know I'm not alone in being grateful.

At the same time, periods of change bring new opportunities, and I'd like to offer a warm welcome to our new Chair, Bob Vaughan. Many of us already know the enthusiasm and commitment he brings, and I know the Wren will continue to thrive under his guidance.

Thank you, James - and welcome, Bob.

Tony Morrison  
Editor



*"The world is very very beautiful - if you look at it"*

*by David Hockney*

*Alaxandra Lake, Wanstead Flats*

# 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)

