

Autumn 2026

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Picture shows a Scarce Chaser (Libellula fulva). A less common UK species where females and immature males show rich orange-brown abdomens with dark markings. - pic by Pranav Khetia

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a word from the chair

Phew, what a scorcher!

I'm afraid there's no avoiding the topic for this Word from the Chair: what a summer we've had. It has been the hottest and driest on record, and in Greater London the number of days over 30°C has quadrupled compared with historic averages. Many of us are having to get used to the effects of climate change sooner than we might have expected. The heat has certainly been hard on people - but how are our local wildlife and green spaces coping?

*Early autumn the Silver Birch and Limes
are already dropping their leaves and
looking stark against the horizon.*

UK wildlife faces a tough autumn and winter ahead. Extreme summer heat has dried up water sources and caused vital winter berries to drop early, leaving many animals short on food and shelter. You can help in your own garden by leaving shallow dishes of water, keeping a "messy" pile of logs and leaves for shelter, and putting out high-energy foods like suet, sunflower seeds and mealworms. Every small action helps our wildlife survive the cold months ahead.



We know that bumblebees can struggle to fly without overheating. Birds cannot sweat, so they have a harder time keeping cool, and dry soil makes it much more difficult for them to find insects and worms.

Mammals, too, can become exhausted and hungry as food sources dry up and ponds evaporate. Shoulder-of-Mutton Pond in Wanstead Park has already shrunk to less than half its usual winter size and Alexandra Lake is also very dry.

There are small things we can do to help. Putting out water and a little food in our gardens can make a real difference. Water should be changed every day, and containers cleaned once a week. Seed and peanuts are best avoided for birds between May and October, and flat-surfaced feeders are not ideal either, as they can bring birds together and increase the risk of disease spreading. Little and often seems to be the safest approach. It will not solve everything, of course, but it can create welcome little oases for the more mobile creatures around us. Then, once autumn arrives, we can return to more regular feeding.

For me, the clearest signs of drought stress are in the bushes and trees on Wanstead Flats. On the SSSI, Motorcycle

Wood, just north of Jubilee Pond, is normally quite damp, but this autumn the Silver Birch and Limes are already dropping their leaves early and looking stark against the horizon. Some of the Hawthorn bushes have turned completely brown, with only a few dried-up berries left. For wildlife that depends on seeds and berries, the effects of this summer's drought will carry on well into autumn.

There has been some good news, though. It has been a remarkable summer for some insects. Lesser Emperor and Red-veined Darter dragonflies have both been seen in Wanstead Park — and not just as the odd individual, but in good numbers. We have also recorded some butterflies for the first time. Brown Hairstreak was perhaps expected, but Chalk Hill Blue came as a real surprise. It seems these species may be moving more widely as they respond to hotter, drier conditions. With regular monitoring by Wren members, we can also keep an eye on whether some of our more familiar species are starting to struggle. Times are changing, and we are certainly not the only ones having to adapt.

by Bob Vaughan



odonata of wanstead park

Nate Howard is one of the younger members of the Wren Group, and his enthusiasm for the natural world has already led him to develop a particular fascination with dragonflies and damselflies. With the encouragement and support of other Wren members, he has been building his identification skills and taking part in surveys around Wanstead Park.

In this article, Nate describes how a personal project grew into a much wider interest in recording and understanding our local Odonata. Along the way, he's made some exciting discoveries, including the Lesser Emperor, and has seen first-hand how valuable careful recording can be in helping us understand how the wildlife of Wanstead Park is changing.



*Wren Wildlife Weekend (WWW) 2016 - start
of the dragonfly walk, led by Nate and Bob*

This has been an exciting summer for dragonfly and damselfly recorders in the UK and in particular London, where we are seeing new species not just migrating through but establishing strongholds.

It has proven to be fortuitous that during the spring I had decided to take my interest in Odonata beyond enjoying their aerial combat to focusing on building my ID-ing skills!

My interest in insects began when I was very little, and I have been lucky enough to be supported locally by The Wren Group and it's knowledgeable members. The group records, together with those on iRecord and iNaturalist have helped to create an invaluable account of local wildlife, providing evidence of change over long periods of time and a useful tool for those of us just starting out.

With a list of 24 locally sighted species, evenly split between dragonflies and damselflies, and access to the Odonata collection and photo-stacking equipment in the Natural History Museum's Angela Marmont Centre, I hoped to spend the coming months not only developing my ID-ing skills but also creating something that could motivate

other people, to get out and record these incredible insects.

Making the guide improved my knowledge exponentially, and enabled me to start surveying with confidence. My study paid off when I spotted an unusual coloured thorax on an early morning bike ride...

Resting in a bramble bush, warming in the early morning sun, pumping its abdomen, just waiting to be identified - a Lesser Emperor (*Anax parthenope*). I had spent weeks photographing specimens and this one, in company with a female Emperor (*Anax imperator*), caused both confusion and excitement. The discovery of the Lesser Emperor in our local area was a brilliant start to the summer and reenergised my journey into the world of Odonata.

Surveying with the Wren Group's Dragons and Damsels team began in June. Unfortunately, our second survey coincided with contractors cutting back the iris to allow for inspection of the Perch Pond dam, a well-known site recognised not only as a convenient viewing area for emerging insects but also where Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*) grows, a plant frequented by a rare and protected solitary bee.



A Lesser Emperor dragonfly (*Anax parthenope*), identifiable by its distinctive blue saddle on the base of the abdomen and greenish-blue eyes.

This shrunk our survey site and highlighted the importance of working together with conservators and contractors to ensure any work on a site happens at a time when it is least likely to adversely impact wildlife.



Nate sharing his expertise and enthusiasm with a younger naturalist and helping to lead a dragonfly walk earlier in the year

This was a setback for our survey and possibly Odonata emergence, but undeterred the team shifted focus to other parts of the park and we were rewarded with further sightings of the Lesser Emperor, confirming that they are in the area, breeding and have established themselves here rather than just passing through. I look forward to seeing their numbers increase in the coming years. The annual Wildlife Weekend in mid-June provided an opportunity to engage local people in the flora and fauna of Wanstead

Park and for me to introduce everyone to our dragonfly and damselfly regulars, despite a slightly windy and overcast day, we ended up having an excellent turnout of both people and Odonata! From the flourishing Willow Emerald (*Chalcolestes viridis*) and Common Blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) damselflies to the first Azure (*Coenagrion puella*) damselfly of the season. I was also able to point out the Emperor, the Green-eyed Norfolk hawkler (*Aeshna isosceles*), Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*), and the Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*) along with the well represented Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*) dragonflies.



Common Blue Damselflies *Enallagma cyathigerum* mating forming what is known as a mating wheel or heart shape

These apex predators put on their best show and in doing so hopefully helped convert more people to observing, recognising and recording them.

Since commencing my project and surveying we have now added the Red-veined Darter



(*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) to the list of local species, and while previously only a 'status not verified' record in 2024, the White-legged Damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*) is now regularly sighted in the nearby river Lee - so we might expect to add them to our records in due course. As the season progresses our survey is showing the shifting demographics in the Odonata world, decreasing sightings of some species while numbers of others are increasing as their time in the sun arrives!

It is safe to say that what started out as a small personal project learning about these insects has turned into something much bigger than I could have anticipated. Now having finished the full Odonata guide, I am looking forward to spending the rest of the summer enjoying the exploits of these impressive insects, and I hope others will join in!

by Nate Howard



a new broom (perspective on)

Broom is a familiar sight on Wanstead Flats, particularly around the area known as the Broom Fields. But this seemingly ordinary shrub supports a surprisingly rich community of wildlife. During a recent survey, Wren Committee member James Heal discovered a remarkable variety of insects associated with the plant, including several scarce species and a tiny beetle recorded in Britain only from Wanstead Flats. Broom undoubtedly needs careful management to protect the Flats' precious acid grassland, but James's findings suggest that some patches are also worth preserving. Here, he explores this fascinating and easily overlooked side of our local landscape.



Scottish Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is a familiar sight locally and grows in abundance on Wanstead Flats in particular. Indeed, it is familiar to the extent that the area around the Skylark breeding grounds is even referred to as the 'Broom fields' or even just 'the Brooms'.

I am sure I wouldn't need to describe Broom to most of those reading. It is an evergreen bushy shrub that has yellow flowers in the spring and green and then black seed pods from which it regenerates and spreads fast. It grows to about 3m tall if left with most of the patches locally reaching about half of this height.

Very few people would disagree that it needs to be managed on Wanstead Flats. Without management, it would likely spread to the extent that it might choke off the important acid grasslands we have locally and even eventually perhaps threaten the future of the site as a nesting ground for Skylarks. The City of London Epping Forest has previously published and executed management plans. Our experience on the ground has been that the execution of management has not always been as positive as the original plans. In fact in the past, we have seen some pretty devastating levels of Broom clearance that have totally destroyed important mosaic habitats where Broom played a role.

Broom does not support the level of invertebrate biodiversity as Oak, for example, but there are a number of species that feed and

breed on Broom. Several bird species, including Common Whitethroat will often nest inside Broom stands and there are a few species that feed on, or are supported by, Broom exclusively.

On 16 August a highly experienced group of naturalists visited Wanstead Flats - despite the parched conditions - to see what they could find locally, with a particular focus on Broom. To cut straight to the punchline, we found a number of rare specialists supported by the local Broom, and this includes a species of beetle that has only ever been found on Wanstead Flats since discovered as a new species for the UK in 2014 by Tristan Bantock (part of the team that visited on 16 August as well).



Rare Broom Leafhopper, Dryodurgades antoniae - pic by James Heal

Enedreytes hilaris is a small fungus weevil (Anthribidae). Anthribids are known to feed on fungi or decaying plant matter. The larvae of this species perhaps feed on dead/decaying

Broom stems but the adults are believed to be predatory. Note the "perhaps" and "believed". So little is known about this species that we really are at the frontiers of science. Indeed this is where our recording day got interesting. Not only did several of us find specimens of this weevil, but they were all found on dead Broom and none were found on the verdant living Broom that were well beaten and swept on the day by the team.

E. hilaris has been found from France to Iran but there appear to be relatively low numbers of records and then this single dot on the map in the UK at Wanstead Flats. So what does it feed on? Well Tristan has a theory that it predated an even smaller beetle that bores holes inside the stems of dead Broom: *Phloeotribus rhododactylus*. These bark beetles are super tiny (less than 2mm) and also pretty rare. So both predator and (tentatively) prey were found on the dead, drought stressed Broom on the day.

On the living Broom a good array of other species, including many scarce and rare specialists were found. This includes a rare Broom specialist leafhopper called *Dryodurgades antoniae*, a phenomenal looking bulky Broom treehopper called *Gargara genistae* (also scarce), the similarly scarce and intricate-looking lacebug called *Dictyonota fuliginosa*, and more common Broom specialists such as the Scotch Broom Weevil (*Exapion fuscirostre*) and a tiny Broom psyllid bug called *Arytaina genistae*.

City of London employee, Will Langdon, who is an expert on leaf miners and similar, found evidence of several Broom specialist moths, and I swept an adult of one of them, a micro moth called *Teleiopsis diffinis*.

There are some plant galls which are only found on Broom including the white clusters on the stems caused by the mites *Aceria genistae*.

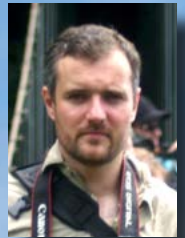
I could go on but I realise this article has the risk of becoming a soup of latin names. I guess the conclusion I would like to make is that there are not many sites in London with extensive Broom



The non-native Broom-feeding anthribid - Enedreytes hilaris - pic from Graham Lyons - <https://www.facebook.com/graeme.lyons.7>

patches, and the Broom we do have locally seems to support a disproportionate number of scarce, rare, and interesting invertebrates. The way Broom reproduces and spreads means it does need to be controlled but the survey we carried out on 16 August has certainly taught me that reasonable-sized patches of Broom should also be preserved and protected as part of the rich and diverse flora that makes Wanstead Flats what we know and love.

article by James Heal



Pan Species Listing - team of experts (and me) on 16 August



epping forest

for everyone to L♥ve

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the Epping Forest Act of 1878, Peter Lewis, Chief Executive of the Epping Forest Heritage Trust, reflects on the remarkable campaign that saved the Forest and helped shape the wider conservation movement in Britain. He also asks what that protection means today, as Epping Forest faces increasing pressure from housing development, transport, pollution and proposals affecting the Green Belt and the Forest's historic buffer lands. It's a timely reminder that the Forest we enjoy today wasn't simply given to us, but was fought for, and that protecting it remains an ongoing responsibility.



EFHT Guided Walk August 2026 - attendees trail through dry grassy area. The Forest is not only under threat from direct human activity but also indirectly. Climate change is also having a great impact.

it is tough out there for epping forest

ahead of the 150th anniversary of
the Act that protected it

The Epping Forest Act of 1878 was not only hugely important for the saving of the Forest that we all know and love so well, but hugely important in the development of the conservation movement in the UK.

It showed that through the actions of local people coming together with local and national politicians, policy makers and influencers (yes, I see Octavia Hill as an old school influencer!), green space could be saved for the enjoyment of people and in order for that green space to be protected in its "natural aspect". Other green spaces were subsequently saved, the National Parks were created, and we even, for a time at least, had the protection of broadly defined Green Belt land to prevent urban sprawl eating unnecessarily into the countryside or greenspace between towns.

The last few years have been tough for the conservation movement. Many of our most powerful and prestigious environmental and wildlife organisations, as well as many environmentalists themselves, welcomed the arrival of the new Labour government, and were then promptly blindsided by the shrill focus on prioritising housing and infrastructure development over the protection of the environment and nature.

And this isn't just a national disaster waiting to happen. It is a local one.

There are currently 5 large scale planning proposals around Epping, circling the Forest to the north and north west (in Upshire, Chigwell Rise, on North Weald Golf course, with two in Epping), outside of Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC's) Local Plan. These would constitute hundreds of extra homes being built



Pollution from vehicle exhaust, tyre and brake pad debris is harming the forest. Demands from new developments will have an even greater impact.

on Green belt, close enough to the Forest to have an adverse impact on it through increased traffic and pollution and increased visitor footfall, ON TOP OF the 68,000 homes in total already being built within the 6.2 kilometre Zone of Recreational Influence of the Forest, many of which in Waltham Forest. which will have a direct impact on the Forest. The impact is proportionately larger within the specific EFDC area where 11,000 homes are already planned.

And with EFDC under special planning measures, these proposals may well be considered by the directly appointed central Government Planning Inspectorate, rather than by local councillors. Not only that, the presumption will move in favour of permission being granted based on EFDC being behind on their delivery of their housing targets, elements of which are beyond its control. It really is a disaster waiting to happen.

Simultaneously, following publication of the new National Planning Policy Framework, development near to stations will become easier as the government encourage building near to public transport hubs. Not a bad thing in its own right as it encourages people to use public transport. But if you combine that with the proximity to the Forest of many of the stations in Essex along the Central line the, where there is a general rule of 2 car parking spaces per house, and that these developments are likely

to be on Green Belt, it is yet another policy that could adversely impact on the Forest.

At the same time the City, the Conservator of the Forest under the Act, still hasn't reached a conclusion on whether to sell or develop some of the Buffer Lands its predecessors carefully and cleverly acquired to provide a physical buffer to protect the Forest, which they have admirably done through a far-sighted and intelligent policy.

Alongside these, we have the shadow of the Grey Belt review looming over the Forest. This will remove areas of land from the Green Belt if

they do not strongly contribute to the purposes of the Green Belt, for example to prevent urban sprawl, and can basically provide approval in principle for development. Based on some of the planning applications we have seen, some of these areas are likely to be close, if not adjacent, to the Forest.

It will feel slightly hollow, to say the least, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Act which protected the Forest, if the Forest is ever more surrounded by new developments with the consequent damage and disturbance they bring, the City have sold off parts of the Buffer

Land for development, or developed parts of the Buffer Lands themselves, and more and more vehicles, still mostly petrol or diesel fuelled, power through the Forest, polluting it with fumes and particles from tyres and brakes.

Come on everyone. Surely we can do better than this!

Peter Lewis
Chief Executive
Epping Forest Heritage Trust



View of London City from Warren Hill. The view shows how closely major development approaches the Forest. Protecting the remaining buffer lands around it is vital, not only for the setting of this ancient landscape, but also for wildlife, ecological connections and the sense of open space that separates Forest from city.

*Whinchat in Wanstead Flats Skylark
paddock - pic by James Heal*

autumn bird walk

by Bob Vaughan

At about an hour after dawn, on the 30th of August, eight plucky souls (and Hugo) braved cloudy skies, and temperatures as low as 16C, as they met James Heal in Jubilee car park for the Wren autumn bird watch.

The trek from car park to the pond was immediately enlivened by a flock of small birds calling and flitting through the foliage in the sunshine. Amongst the Blue and Great Tits everyone got good views of the many Chiffchaffs and learned their "hweet" call.

Jubilee Pond had the usual resident geese, ducks, coot and moorhen but lingering over the summer were three Gadwall showing their brown, black and white wing panels and fine the vermiculation's on their chests. A couple of Little Grebes were hiding on the far side of the island.

Moving into Motorcycle Wood James heard our first migrants, a couple of Willow Warbler. They showed their yellowish throats well and made a good comparison with the similar but somewhat drabber Chiffchaff. The call is longer and disyllabic, a "hoo-

weet", a subtle difference although their songs are very different in spring. Then James picked up a female-type Common Redstart which showed briefly before disappearing into thick undergrowth. This bird is a scarce migrant through London and eagerly awaited on Wanstead Flats. A resident Great Spotted Woodpecker sat at the top of a silver birch and a Green Woodpecker posed nicely low on a tree, basking in the sun.

Long Wood was quiet, apart from the parakeets, until a Swallow flew over, another migrant for the growing list. Moving to survey the Skylark enclosure James spotted a Whinchat. This is another scarce migrant, with Wanstead Flats being a prime London site in autumn. Whinchats tend to perch up and it gave us all excellent views, Then, suddenly, another Common Redstart appeared and in contrast to the Whinchat sat under a hawthorn bush, flicking its bright orange-red tail waiting for some insect prey.

Altogether we saw 36 species of bird, of which four were migrant birds heading south for the winter. I think when birds are migrating south, they see London's vast sprawl before them and, depending on the weather conditions, take the opportunity to refresh themselves on Wanstead Flats. Long may this continue. Thank you to James for an exciting walk through the varied habitats of Wanstead Flats, a birdwatcher's paradise.





autumn on the patch

October to December

Autumn is a quieter time on the patch, but there's still plenty going on if you take the time to notice it. As the grasses die back, the trees lose their leaves and the light changes, Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park and Bush Wood begin to reveal things that summer has hidden.

This piece takes us through October, November and December, looking at those small changes in the landscape and wildlife that can easily be missed. It's a slower season, but for anyone who knows the patch, there's always something worth stopping for.

October to December is when the patch begins to open out again. After the density and noise of summer, Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park and Bush Wood shift into something looser, quieter, and more transparent. The tall grasses on the Flats fall away, the canopy in Bush Wood thins, and in Wanstead Park the trees turn briefly bright before letting go.



It's a season that can feel like a winding down, but that misses what's really happening. Autumn is not an ending so much as a rebalancing. The urgency of growth fades, replaced by slower processes: decay, dispersal, preparation. Seeds are shed, leaves fall, fungi emerge, and birdlife reorganises itself around the coming winter. What was hidden through summer becomes

visible again, and the structure of the landscape returns to view.

There is also a noticeable shift in how the patch feels to move through. Paths reappear where grass had grown long. Sightlines stretch further. Sounds carry differently in cooler air, sharper and less absorbed by foliage. In Bush Wood, fallen leaves soften the ground. In Wanstead Park, the lakes hold the season in reflection, colour gathering, then breaking apart with each ripple.

For those who walk here regularly, autumn rewards attention in a different way to spring or summer. There are fewer obvious signals. Instead, it's about noticing gradual change: a tree that has turned since yesterday, a path that feels more open, the sudden appearance of fungi where there was none before.

October – The patch letting Go

On Wanstead Flats, the tall grasses that dominated in August and September start to collapse under their own weight. Seed heads scatter, stems flatten, and the ground slowly reappears. Colours shift, golds and browns replacing green, and the landscape feels drier and more exposed.

Early in the day, especially after a cool night, the Flats can take on a different character. A low mist settles across the open ground, softening distance and quietening sound. As it lifts, fine

spider webs catch the moisture and briefly reveal themselves, each one edged with dew. For a short time, the grassland feels intricately connected, every step passing through a network that disappears as the air dries.

It's a time when movement returns to the open ground. Where summer held life low and hidden, autumn begins to reveal it again. Meadow pipits appear more regularly, moving in small, restless groups, lifting and dropping back into the grass with soft calls. Skylarks remain, though quieter now, their song largely absent, their presence easier to overlook unless they flush from underfoot.



The geese, Canada, greylag and Egyptian, feel more prominent again. As vegetation drops back, their movements become more visible across the Flats, their calls carrying further in the cooler air.

There's a clarity to autumn light here. Lower and more angled, it picks out detail: tracks through the grass, shifting flocks, the subtle rise and fall of the ground. The space feels wider again.

In Wanstead Park, autumn arrives first in the trees. Leaves begin to turn almost imperceptibly at first, then all at once, greens giving way to yellows, russets and deep browns. Around the lakes, reflections double the effect, colour mirrored and broken by movement on the water.



Fungi emerge quietly along paths, at the base of trees and in damp grassland edges. Some last only briefly before collapsing back into the soil. Others hold on longer, but all feel temporary.

Birdlife shifts here too. The intensity of breeding season is gone. What replaces it is looser, less territorial movement. Mixed flocks of tits move

through the trees, blue, great, occasionally long-tailed, often accompanied by nuthatches or treecreepers.

Bush Wood, perhaps more than anywhere else on the patch, defines autumn by texture and sound.

By late October, the canopy begins to thin. Light filters through again, reaching the woodland floor for the first time in months. Leaves fall steadily, building layer upon layer underfoot.

Walking here becomes a different sensory experience. The ground softens, footsteps muffled or, on drier days, crisp and unmistakable. Each step carries sound: rustle, crunch, shift.

November - Openness

As November settles in, the patch begins to feel more open again.

On Wanstead Flats, sightlines stretch further. What was enclosed by summer growth becomes visible again: distant figures, birds lifting earlier than expected, movement carrying further across the space.

Cooler mornings bring sharper air. Sound travels cleanly, and small details stand out more readily: calls, wingbeats, the sudden movement of birds rising together before settling again.

In Wanstead Park, fallen leaves gather along the edges of the lakes, forming shifting lines that move with wind and water. Colour begins to drain from the trees, branches becoming more

defined.

Bush Wood becomes barer, though never empty. With the canopy reduced, movement is easier to follow: birds crossing between branches, squirrels working through leaf litter.



On colder mornings, frost settles across Wanstead Flats, sometimes tracing the same fine structures seen earlier in the season, edges of grass, faint remnants of webs, delicate patterns that vanish as the day warms. The ground crunches underfoot, and the air holds that same quiet clarity.

Autumn on the patch is not dramatic in the way spring can be. It unfolds slowly, then recedes.

What it offers instead is a different kind of attention: to structure, to detail, to the brief moments when the landscape reveals more than it usually does.

December – The pause before turning

By December, the patch reaches a kind of pause. Not silence exactly, there is still movement and change, but everything feels reduced to essentials.

On Wanstead Flats, frost becomes part of the landscape. Some mornings it arrives lightly, catching the tops of grasses and edges of paths. Other mornings it settles more completely, flattening colour and turning the open ground pale and brittle under low light. What remains standing from autumn becomes more visible: seed stems, worn tracks, old growth holding shape against the season.

Cold air changes sound. Geese seem louder. A single call can travel right across the Flats. Footsteps become sharper too, frost underfoot, damp leaves, occasional frozen puddles breaking at the edge of paths.

The colour that held on through October and November has mostly gone. Trees become structure again: trunks, branches, spacing. Reflections on the lakes feel clearer now, less interrupted by overhanging leaves. On still days the water can seem almost fixed until a coot, gull or sudden breeze pulls it apart.

There's often more sky in December than people remember. With the canopy gone and the low winter sun moving beneath branches rather than through them, light reaches further.

The woodland narrows into texture: bark, leaf litter, exposed roots, damp earth. Without foliage, movement becomes easier to notice: a bird crossing low through the trees, squirrels moving with less urgency, small shifts that would disappear in summer.

December feels less like winter arriving than autumn completing itself. One day the patch simply seems to have settled, held in frost, open sky and shorter afternoons, waiting, without urgency, for the year to turn.





*Bat Walk led by Francis Castro on
Perch Pond - pic by Andrew Bolton.*

wren wildlife weekend 2026

This report, by chair Bob Vaughan, offers a brief overview of the many activities Wren packed into the hot weekend of 20–21 June. This year, we focused especially on children, inspired by our patron, Sir David Attenborough: “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.”

We began early on Saturday morning with the **Moth Reveal**, using a moth trap set up overnight at the Temple.

Tim Harris then carefully exposed the moths and other creatures, attracted to the light and hiding in egg boxes. Among the 30 species identified was a Four-spotted Straw (*Aethes tessera*), only the second-ever local record and the first since Gideon Knight's find in 2016.



Tim where he is the happiest - with the moths. Pic by James Heal

James Heal identified over a dozen non-moths, including a water scavenger beetle (*Hydrobius fuscipes*) a Potter Wasp, a Mayfly, a Leafhopper and many Harlequin Ladybirds.

Next on the menu was a **Bird Walk** with about twenty people led by James Heal, this went from the Tea Hut down through the Old Sewage Works to the Roding. Highlights here included

Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers. A follow-on group saw a Raven briefly over the Roding.



Four-spotted Straw TH. Pic by Tim Harris

Moira Duhig led a **Wildflower Walk** in the sun towards the Old Sewage Works where Wren has been attempting to establish a wildflower meadow. There were many beautiful wildflowers to admire, including this Slender Vetch (*Vicia tetrasperma*).

At lunchtime, the Wren stall near the Tea Hut was busy offering information and advice to the many people enjoying the gorgeous weather. Gill James had organised a **Butterfly Trail** for young children, who searched for butterfly images near the Temple. Any child who diligently ticked off all eight examples on the crib sheet could choose a prize from a colourful selection of washable transfers, which were then

applied to their arm. This proved to be a very popular activity.



Slender Vetch - pic by Tim Harris

After lunch, children aged six and under enjoyed **Minibest Story Time** by the Temple, where Jackie Withnall and her assistants entertained the toddlers. Older children and adults were invited on a **Dragonfly Hunt** along Heronry Lake, led by Nate Howard. The group saw nearly seventy dragonflies and damselflies from eleven species. Nate even managed to catch a few briefly so everyone could see these active insects close-up before releasing them. One highlight was a recent colonist, a Norfolk or Green-eyed Hawker (*Anaciaeschna isosceles*), discovered resting in the shade of a bush.

Later that evening, more than thirty people joined an exciting **Bat Walk** led by Francis Castro. As the sun went down, we walked around Perch Pond while bat detectors picked

up the bats' high-pitched calls, helping us identify the species. Everyone caught sight of a few bats foraging over the lake, including three species of pipistrelle, as well as Daubenton's and Noctule bats. On the way back, we heard quacking calls from the edge of Heronry Lake; these turned out to be Marsh Frogs (*Pelophylax ridibundus*), a large non-native frog now spreading in south-east England.

After a well-earned night's sleep, Wren volunteers re-erected the gazebo before the first event of the day: the ever-popular **Pond Dipping Session**, led by Louis and Gosia Lawler. Children and parents began arriving shortly before 10am and continued until 11.30. With plenty of nets to go round, participants were soon enthusiastically scooping and sweeping along the Shoulder-of-Mutton shoreline before emptying their samples into the sorting trays. Louis has produced a detailed account of

what was found, including Ramshorn Snail, Smooth Newts, Freshwater Shrimp and Lesser and Greater Water Boatmen. He has also made useful comments on the abundance of species compared with previous years.



At lunchtime, Gill James and the Friends of Wanstead Park team organised a **Family Picnic**

in the Temple play area. The **Butterfly Trail** continued for a second day, with plenty of family interest.

Bob Vaughan led a session titled **What Are Lichens?** Using a hand lens, we examined a twig covered with four different lichens. Bob introduced what lichens are, explained how the species differed, and clarified key terminology. The session ended with a short walk to closely examine lichens growing on nearby trees.

This brought an exciting—and warm—weekend of wildlife discovery in Wanstead Park to a close. A huge thank you goes to the wonderful Wren volunteers who worked together to transport, erect, and staff the Wren stall; to the Friends of Wanstead Park for their stall and support; to Francis Castro for leading the Bat Walk; and to every event leader who helped make the weekend such a success. What a team!





Welcome Autumn

The first cool morning finds the trees
half-green, half-gold beneath the rain,
and all across the open Flats
the wind is running through the grass again.

The leaves are turning, field by field,
in russet, yellow, brown and red;
summer's chairs are put away,
the garden table goes to bed.

Soon evening will come early here,
the dark will gather not so late,
and we will rake the last of summer
from the grass, and shut the garden gate.

But autumn is not ending yet.
It trades its falling for a seed,
its leaves for earth, its harvest for
the promise of another need.

And so I walk the Flats this morning,
dog beside me, rain in my face,
my feet upon the familiar ground,
my breath matching my world's slow pace.

For every year the earth reminds us,
when leaves let go and daylight ends,
that what looks like the closing door
may be the place where life begins.

So let the cold wind have its say.
Let summer leave, and darkness come.
I'll walk while there is light enough
and trust the turning earth to come.

Welcome, autumn. Let me see
what falling leaves are trying to say:
the world is not promised tomorrow.
It gives us only – today.

while the world burns

UK media and politicians obfuscate and mislead the public on environmental crisis - grass roots initiatives must take the lead

Wren member and regular contributor Paul Donovan considers the growing climate and biodiversity crisis, and asks whether our political leaders and media are responding with sufficient urgency. Drawing on the National Emergency Briefing film presented by Chris Packham, Paul looks at the consequences of rising temperatures for food security, health and nature, while also reflecting on changes closer to home, including drying lakes and the threat of wildfires. He argues that grassroots action has an important role to play, highlighting the practical work of the Wrens, Wanstead Climate Action and the River Roding Trust.

Firefighters have been preparing for what is expected to be an increase in wildfires in London over the summer months with regular drills in the city's parks - but nothing can train you for the real thing. Fire on Wanstead Flats 2014 - pic by Peter Williams.

The world is in the midst of a huge climate and biodiversity crisis, one that will redefine the planet and the role that human beings play upon it.

This may sound like stating the obvious, after a very hot summer. Wildfires abounding, floods and climate increasingly driving food inflation. It is estimated that if warming goes to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, then harvests will fail every three years. If it goes to two degrees, then harvests fail every other year.

The world is already perilously close to 1.5 degrees.

These alarming facts and others are contained in a National Emergency Briefing film backed by a coalition of groups, including the National Trust, Newcastle University, the National Education Union, WWF and a Plastic Planet.

The film hosted by Chris Packham sees experts in nature, climate, tipping points, weather, food security, health, national security. economy and energy transition address the issues.

Then people react, mostly with alarm. The briefing was first shown to some MPs and others

in Westminster last November. It has since been shown all over the country. Wanstead Climate Action hosted a screening in June, with councillors and Leyton & Wanstead MP Calvin Bailey in attendance. The organisers want more screenings, including one on national television.

Anyone watching the film cannot fail to be shocked by the implications.

The film has been accompanied in real time by climate and biodiversity devastation going on all around us.

Locally, so far, this year, we have been relatively fortunate in terms of fire. There have not been the devastating fires seen on Wanstead Flats in 2018. There have though been smaller but contained outbreaks. The lakes are draining of water.

Thames Water have not been slow to impose a selective hosepipe ban. Those who have gardens and allotments will have been struck by the increasing challenges of growing your own. Imagine those challenges writ big for farmers.

The response though from government to the climate and biodiversity crisis has been less than inspiring.

The new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, has not ruled out approving drilling for more oil and gas in the North Sea. Water and energy consuming data centres appear to be being given the green light. Targets for vehicle manufacturers to switch to electric vehicles look set to be reduced. While, plans to renationalise the water industry appear to be being shelved.



During this dry spell, water levels have dropped drastically across the Epping Forest water bodies, leaving large sections of ponds completely parched and exposing cracked, baked mud beds.

Not very encouraging. Some would say the PM clearly doesn't get the crisis we are in. There needs to be leadership shown on this issue.

Instead, much of the political class and media remains obsessed with pointless debates over Net Zero.

The Reform Party has led the charge, with its usual mixture of myth and denial on the topic. Unfortunately, those areas that elected Reform councils are seeing the impact on the ground, with environmentally friendly policies being dropped. The country cannot afford these self-indulgent self-serving debates.

In the media, there are the likes of the Telegraph suggesting we all accept the crisis and get used to Mediterranean type weather. Others ludicrously linked rewilding to wild fires.

The BBCs shameful record of giving equal billing for years to fossil fuel backed climate sceptics, despite the scientific evidence, has been replaced by an approach that obsesses about Net Zero, not the bigger picture.

So, there is much to be done. Fortunately, there are positives. The National

Emergency Briefing film highlights how there are jobs and sustainable growth in climate and biodiversity positive policies. The government is expanding the renewables sector. There is much rewilding going on, even in urban areas.

But as ever, it is never enough. This is an emergency and must be treated as such. Thousands died over the summer due to the heat. The NHS was under similar strain to the worst of winter months but no COVID style alert regarding the environmental crisis. Just one call about being careful with barbecues.

If the climate and biodiversity emergencies are not treated as such, then the country will be continually firefighting the crisis, both literally and figuratively. The crisis will absorb practically all resources, just in

survival mode. The time to act is now. Politicians have been and continue to back burner the issue. Much of the media continues to obfuscate and mislead, rather than inform and educate.

Change has to come from grass roots action. Groups like the Wrens, Wanstead Climate Action and the River Roding Trust are doing practical work on the ground, as well as advocating to the political and media class. More need to join and do similar actions. The National Emergency Briefing film is a good tool to spread the word, so let's get out there and make it happen.

by Paul Donovan



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

When nature meets history



The Avenue, Bush Wood, c.1904 - This tree-lined walk was part of the formal landscape created for Wanstead House in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Although often described as an historic lime avenue, the original Evelyn's Avenue appears to have been planted largely with sweet chestnut, with lime trees introduced later to maintain its formal character. By the time this photograph was taken, the limes had been regularly pollarded, creating the distinctive avenue seen here. During the 20th century many of the trees were lost through age and decline, while surrounding woodland gradually encroached on the old avenues. Surviving veteran trees still provide reminders of the grand landscape that once surrounded Wanstead House.

A photograph of two people walking away from the camera through a field of tall, dry grass and wildflowers. They are surrounded by a dense forest of trees with green foliage. The person on the right is holding a large, white butterfly net. Both individuals are wearing backpacks. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

From left to right: Epping Forest Conservation Officer, Will Langdon and the founder of Pan Species Listing and second person in the UK to record over 10,000 species and Graeme Lyons in Epping Forest

pan species listing

Most of us probably started recording wildlife in much the same way, with a particular group that caught our interest. Birds, perhaps, or butterflies, wildflowers or trees. But once

you start looking more closely, it becomes increasingly difficult to stop at just one group. There is always something else to discover.

In this article, Wren committee member James Heal explains the idea of Pan Species Listing, an approach that encourages naturalists to look at the whole range of wildlife they encounter. It isn't simply about building an impressive species list. Recording what we find

can help us understand the wildlife of a place and contribute valuable information to wider scientific recording schemes.

James also looks at the growing role of apps such as iNaturalist and iRecord, and why, despite the advances in AI identification, there is still no substitute for getting outside, looking carefully and learning to recognise what you're seeing.

Wildlife recording is a passion of mine. It started with birds but has blossomed into nearly everything. If I see a beetle, a bug, a bee, or a plant gall, I will want to photograph it, identify it, and record it somewhere centrally where it contributes to science.

There is a name for this; it is called Pan Species Listing (PSL) as devised by professional naturalists and recorders such as Graeme Lyons and Mark Telford.

In zoological and botanical sciences, there are options for naturalists to become specialists: knowing a lot about lichens, moths, crustaceans, or slime moulds. These experts are vital if we are to truly push the boundaries of science in each respective area. However, there is also real value in having more of a macro sense of what is out there in a particular habitat or area. For example, what sort of invertebrate life does an oak tree or a patch of acid grassland support? As local naturalist and founder of 'Wanstead Wildlife', Paul Ferris once said (and I may be paraphrasing from memory – sorry Paul!), "if we don't know what is out there, how do we protect it?"

There are now so many resources available to help people engage with wildlife recording. Phone cameras have become much more advanced and high quality at an astonishing rate

and AI-assisted identification apps have also become significantly more accurate (although still regularly get things horrendously wrong so should NEVER be used in isolation). But aside from this, the quality and accessibility of books on different groups has improved, wildlife collecting tools such as sweep nets, sieves, short-focus binoculars, hand lenses, microscopes, and specimen pots are now just a few clicks away from arriving on your doorstep. But for me the most significant and useful advance, has been the rise of wildlife recording applications to allow you to submit records and keep on top of your own lists: eBird, for example, is an excellent and global platform and resource for birders and has reinvigorated many listing birders' grip on their own records and their appetite to see more. Then for entomologists and PSL practitioners, apps like iNaturalist and iRecord have made it much easier to submit records to science and build a clear picture of what you have seen and when.

My own views on such tools and applications has changed. When iNaturalist started, I was a bit sniffy about the fact that any 'peer' could 'verify' a sighting and then it was accepted as correct. iRecord on the other hand has a verification process where experts have to verify the records. However, my view of iNaturalist has changed and, I think, iNaturalist has also

changed itself. Whilst it is true that anyone can corroborate or suggest an ID, I have noticed that the community has policed itself so that predominantly this is only done by people who have significant expertise in a particular group – so my beetle records are generally supported by corroborating IDs by people with significant expertise in beetles. Furthermore, from a scientific perspective, this process merely opens the gate to the next stage where the record is then released, sometimes via iRecord or other schemes where experts can then review the peer-screened records.

While I started on iRecord, the photo-focused approach with iNaturalist, the global range, the user functionality, and the ease of use have all meant that I have switched across and still get to see many of my records filter through to various national schemes. If you like taking pictures of wildlife and like the idea that an app can help you to improve your identification skills, help you build a list of flora and fauna, and contribute to science, then I would heartily recommend that you sign up and start using iNaturalist. A friend of Wren, and professional entomologist and naturalist, Joss Carr has even written a thesis on this topic and presented a webinar which can be seen (here: <https://biologicalrecording.co.uk/2025/09/16/inaturalist-invertebrates/>).

To beat the drum, yet again, and I am sorry to sound like a stuck record on this, please do not rely solely on AI for identification. iNaturalist has an in-built AI agent which makes a suggestion when you go to type the name of the record once a photo has been uploaded. Great, but try and have a sense before you upload the photo what it is you are looking at, or, if you need AI to give you a start as you really aren't sure, then please research the suggestion afterwards but before submitting. There are lots of good websites online such as British Bugs for Hemiptera that can help. Are there confusion species? Are there diagnostic features that can be checked off? If you can't be sure, you may need to submit your record at a less specific level of taxonomic identification.

One of the key benefits of not relying on AI, is that you learn more. For example, if you found an invertebrate and AI or I told you it was 'Rhabdomiris striatellus', what

have you learned? A name. But if you noted that you found a colourful and stripey creature on oak and you observed it feeding on aphids with a long spike of a mouth part, and you noted it had partially membranous and partially armoured wing cases, you might realise it was a Hemipteran or True Bug. The shape may tell you it was a Plant Bug (Miridae) and then looking through the tribes and species in a book or a website, you might be able to identify it yourself. Observation will help you not just learn the ID, but also understand it and remember it.

Elsewhere in this newsletter I have written about what happened when a group of pan species listers came to Wanstead Flats and surveyed the biodiversity found on our Broom. It is fair to say that the British science on the organisms supported by Broom was furthered that day.

Graeme Lyons, who has just written an excellent book on pan species listing (here: <https://pelagicpublishing.com/products/pan-species-listing?srsId=AfmBOop-WQ2Z2hc2fCBTa0zhfL8NeP0Y-a3bfl1cS1DVefdvsJ6zP1Es>), and who visited Wanstead recently, has just become the second person in the UK to have recorded more than 10,000 different species across taxa on the British Isles. Most of us will never make it to 10,000, but can have a lot of fun, learn a lot, contribute to science and push boundaries if we take up wildlife recording and pan species listing. Wren can help you engage locally - get involved and see you in the field!

by James Heal



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

David Hockney

Alexandra Lake, Wanstead Flats

St Mary Magdalene nature reserve

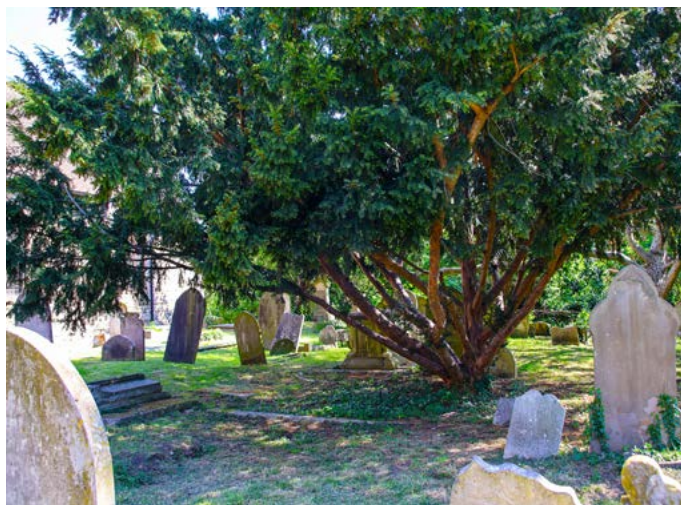
Although East Ham Nature Reserve lies outside our usual patch, it has a special place in Wren's history. It was here that the Wren Group had its early roots, so it's particularly nice to be invited back to explore the reserve and see how it has changed over the years.



There's a new nature trail to try, and plenty of scope for some informal wildlife recording and perhaps even a few surprises. If you haven't visited for a while, this is a good opportunity to have another look.

There have been considerable changes since the

first nature walk was created, probably in the 1990s. The old nature trail can be downloaded from the website.



Pictures of the wonderful East Ham Nature Reserve - including this ancient Yew tree. The Yew symbolizes the ultimate paradox of life, death, and resurrection due to its extreme longevity, toxic nature, and unique ability to regenerate

It mentions kestrels, which have disappeared. There was a sparrowhawk nest in the woods about 10 years ago. Song thrushes, responsible for many of the broken snail shells around the gravestones, are much less common.

Sandy has been doing the RSPB garden birdwatches, but it would be good if some of you bird enthusiasts could come and have a look at the site.

Whilst on the subject, it would be excellent to survey lichens on the gravestones, insects, plants and anything else. It is where Wren group started. There don't seem to be any old surveys from that time, but perhaps it could be adopted

as a satellite patch to compare and contrast with Wanstead.

Sadly, climate change is taking a heavy toll. Many of the trees are dying, or have already died. Attempts to introduce wild flowers have had limited success. They flowered for about two weeks, then shrivelled and died.

On a happier note, it's likely that we can have an above-ground pond if we can get a grant. The church are keen to gain their gold eco-church status. If they have a proper pond they would be able to claim every habitat on the list except sand dunes and heathland.



Please come and visit the nature reserve and try out our new [Trail Guide](#). Comments and suggestions of how to improve it are welcome.

Penny Evans
Nature Reserve Volunteer



skylarks

There was a touch of sadness as well as celebration on Wanstead Flats recently, as Epping Forest and the Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group marked another breeding season for the Flats' skylarks. The birds did not breed as well this season, but the fact that these remarkable birds are still breeding here must give us reason to hope. The message is simple: we must keep trying.

The event, held on 6th September, brought local people together for wildlife walks and talks about these remarkable birds. Skylarks are one of the characteristic sounds of open countryside, yet hearing one singing above the grass is becoming an increasingly unusual experience in London.

Wanstead Flats is particularly important because it supports one of the closest breeding populations of skylarks to central London. The birds nest directly on the ground, making them

vulnerable to disturbance from dogs, people and other activity during the breeding season.

Since 2021, Epping Forest staff and the Wren Group have worked together to protect nesting areas, with parts of the Flats temporarily roped off from spring until early September. The aim is simple: to give the birds somewhere quieter to nest and raise their young.



The numbers show why this matters. In 2021, the local population had fallen to around three pairs. Monitoring in 2024 recorded seven adult skylarks, including two breeding pairs, with

nesting activity confirmed. In 2025, the number of birds recorded towards the end of the season rose to around 8 to 10.

This year's results are less encouraging. Only around two young skylarks appear to have fledged in 2026. After the progress of recent years, that is disappointing, particularly when the breeding population is already so small. But it also underlines why the work must continue.

For those of us who regularly walk the Flats, it can be easy to take the skylark's song for granted. It rises almost invisibly above the grass, singing as it climbs, before eventually dropping back to earth.

The September gathering was therefore more than a celebration. It was a reminder that protecting these birds is a long-term commitment. The numbers may fluctuate from year to year, and this year's breeding success has been modest, but giving the skylarks space and reducing disturbance gives them a chance. We may have only a few pairs left, but we must keep trying. There is still something here worth fighting for.



and finally ..

What's Beer got to do with it !!!

The Wanstead Beer Festival – now in its fourth year – will be taking place in the halls of Christ Church from 1-10.30 pm on Saturday 10th October.

Many charities have benefited from this event including Wren. The local charities and good causes selected for 2026 are detailed on the [CHARITIES](#) page.

There will be more than 50 beers from across the country including a special festival beer Wanstead Heron brewed for us by Sambrook brewery. Strength 6.3 per cent infused with honey, not sugar as well as many local breweries, plus cider, gin, wine, Greek food and burgers.

The £10 admission fee includes a special Wanstead Beer Festival glass.

Tickets are available now on [Eventbrite](#) But be quick as it's likely to sell out fast.



links

Wren links page www.wrengroup.org.uk/links

Facebook www.facebook.com/WrenOrg

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

Wanstead Wildlife

www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk

Friends of Wanstead Parklands

www.wansteadpark.org.uk

RSPB North East London Members Group

www.rspb.org.uk/groups/northeastlondon

Wanstead Birding Blog

wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk

Epping Forest

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/Pages/default.aspx

British Naturalists' Association

www.bna-naturalists.org

Bushwood Area Residents' Association

www.bara-leytonstone.org.uk

East London Nature www.eln.yorkshirefog.co.uk

East London Birders www.elbf.co.uk

Friends of Epping Forest

www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk

East London Nature 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

BBC Nature www.bbc.co.uk/nature

British Naturalists Association

www.bna-naturalists.org

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

Field Studies Council (FSC)

www.field-studies-council.org

London Natural History Society

www.lnhs.org.uk

Natural England www.naturalengland.org.uk

RSPB www.rspb.org.uk/england

UK Safari www.uksafari.com

The British Deer Society www.bds.org.uk

The Wildlife Trust www.wildlifetrusts.org

