

Summer 2024

Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

Male kingfisher hunting and flying with fish into nest on bank of Roding, Wanstead Park. Could be feeding the incubating female, 5 visits with fish in the space of 40 minutes. Great to see! - Pic by Pranav Khetia

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a word from the chair

You, dear readers, have me at a disadvantage. You know something I don't by dint of being in my future.

I am writing this on the eve of the General Election. Tomorrow morning I will exercise my democratic right and then wait and see the result which, as someone reading this newsletter, you will have known for some time.

The Wren Group is very obviously not a Party political organisation and I have no doubt that we have members who sit across the political spectrum. Diversity of membership, in many different ways is something to be cherished. We are brought together by our love of nature and our local green spaces, not our political persuasions.

However, I am not a believer in saying we are a-political. Politics and policy affects all of us and it also affects our environment.

I hope that whoever wins the General Election (and yes, the polls are pointing in one particular direction) will take matters such as the crises in climate and biodiversity more seriously than any of their predecessors.

My suspicion is that over the course of this Parliament, we will start to see net zero policies bite in a way which impacts ordinary people. The science tells us that the longer we do too little, the deeper and more impactful the change will be when we eventually start to move in the direction needed to avoid catastrophe. My fear is that green issues become a dividing line in politics in the way in which Brexit was before.

Transitioning away from damaging levels of consumerism and carbon intensive industry need not be divisive in the community. In fact, my experience is that it can be cohesive - the exact opposite of divisive. Our friends in the Transition movement are doing lots of things which bring the community together to live locally in a less impactful way. They should be applauded. Similarly, I was filled with hope over the Wanstead Wildlife Weekend when I saw so many families and people come together to explore, learn about, and enjoy the natural world together. Another world is possible. It is possible because we make it so.

James Heal
Chair Wren Group



*Nature is like air, water, health and well-being
it belongs to everyone and is not anyone's to sell or exploit.*

To be custodians of nature is a privilege not a business.

epping forest

for everyone to L♥ve

Perhaps it is the warmer weather but for the first time in a long time there seems to be lots of positive energy around the Forest.

Report by Peter Lewis
Chief Executive, Epping Forest Heritage Trust



The tireless work the Wrens have done protecting the Skylark nesting site is paying dividends with more nesting birds; we have a new Superintendent who knows the Forest well and is building a larger team with a mixture of experienced staff and expert new joiners; nature organisations are coming together to Restore Nature Now and [politicians across the political spectrum are committing to champion and protect the Forest at a local, Londonwide and national level.](#)

At the same time, I am really proud of what my team have been doing at EFHT. Our community engagement work has been progressing well with over 700 people from different diverse communities visiting the Forest over the last year, most of whom have

never visited the Forest before. Our headline event with Muslim Hikers attracted a further 200 people this year, and we have co-created bespoke events with a further 12 organisations.

Our new conservation programme, funded by the City Bridge Foundation, has welcomed 122 new people into conservation activities in the Forest, most of whom had never done conservation work before, most of whom have been women, most under 45 and a third Asian. And we have launched a [new, GPX-based Walking App](#) for the Forest, to make it easier and safer for people to explore the Forest on their own, without the fear of getting lost or lost.

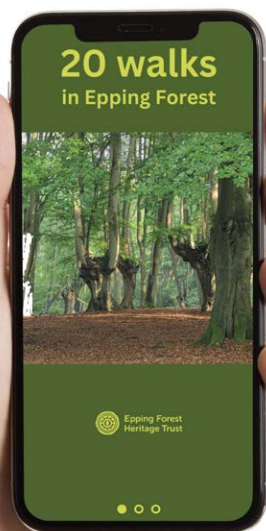
Our biggest concern remains the ever increasing pressures facing the Forest from climate change and pollution, and we are busy [responding to large numbers of planning proposals](#) which might have a negative impact on the Forest, mostly in the north of the Forest, and mostly due to the likelihood of increased car journeys and

footfall, if that footfall is not properly managed. We also know that the quality of the paths in the south of the Forest is a particular issue for many of our members, particularly if you want to do the lovely walk from Hollow Ponds up to Chingford, where in winter months the paths can be practically impassable due to the mud. We hope that with the new staff coming on board, and resources specifically available for path maintenance, we will some progress on this in the coming months.

But for now, as we all enjoy a bit of sun for the first time in a longtime, lets spread the joy of visiting the Forest to friends, colleagues and neighbours, so they too can come to love and want to protect it as we do.

Peter Lewis

Chief Executive
Epping Forest Heritage Trust



Epping Forest Walks App

- 20 walks of various lengths across Epping Forest
- The pointer will show you where you are - works offline
- Simple walk information and directions to the starting point
- with public transport
- Points of interest and descriptions

Scan the QR Code below to download 'Epping Forest Walks' App



a suburban heronry

Wanstead Park described in 1883, when the Shoulder of Mutton and Heronry ponds were connected, keepers helped boys to take Herons' eggs and pike, carp and tench swam in the lakes. Golden Plover, Snipe and Woodcock were to be found on the Flats and in the Park, as well as over 100 Herons' nests...

by Mark Gorman



FEW persons, I fancy, are aware of the unrivalled sylvan retreat which exists within five miles of London. Some day Wanstead Park may, like other public grounds, be strewn with ginger beer bottles and the débris of luncheon parcels and baskets, and be the haunt of the rough.



Wanstead Park Boating Lake (Heronry Pond) - 1911

At present it is the haunt of herons, wood-pigeons, coots, moorhens, and numerous songsters of the grove which have not yet been forced to fear the presence of man. A sportsman friend with whom I have fished and rambled in the Antipodes, invited me last week to run down and see the herons building in Wanstead Park, and as a heronry busy with spring duties is not to be seen every day, I went. While the foliage is yet in its tenderest stage, and the branches of the trees are yet unfurnished with their summer

drapery of green, I would strongly recommend the lover of birds to take a ticket to Forest Gate and ramble round Wanstead Park. The time is waxing short now, for the herons have been back at their long established homes more than a month, and when their young ones are strong enough to fly, they will be off again to the marshes, where they engage in the fishery business during the remainder of the year, and when the leaves are full the nests and birds can be little seen. There are probably not a dozen heronries worth the name in the country, and certainly none within half an hour's space of town. The opportunity, therefore, is a rare one, to be taken advantage of without delay.



Wanstead Park Boating Lake (Heronry Pond) - 1913

Woodford road runs right across the middle of Wanstead Flat[s], and the clever landscape gardener of the Corporation of London city has successfully planted on either side a double row

of black poplars, which in a few years will form a grand avenue. This is not a dreary flat by any means, since, though treeless, it bears heather, bracken, and patches of stunted haw thorn in summer and autumn. Even now, when London has crept down to its borders, it preserves some of its old characteristics, and as recently as last winter it was visited by numbers of golden plover, and a few snipe. Fortunately it is one of the open spaces to be preserved as breathing areas for the public evermore, and for some time to come, at least, we may hope to retain these wandering birds. There is no park, public or private, near London that has so much well-distributed water.



The western end of the Heronry Pond, Wanstead Park. Picture postcard postdates the relining of the pond in 1905-6. Postally used. Postmarked August 1912 - picture courtesy R Arnopp

Soon after entering by the lower entrance you reach the Shoulder of Mutton lake, and my friend at once took me across the soft turf to show me a four pound pike lying dead amongst

the aquatic weeds at its head. This lake has been extended to the heron pond, and the two thrown into one make a fine expanse of water. It is stocked with coarse fish, and the Corporation allow the public to fish both this and other ponds. The prolific weeds, fortunately, are an effectual conservation for the pike, carp, rudd, and tench, and the reedy growths good shelter for the waterfowl. Coots and moorhens are plentiful, and as we advanced I saw three or four specimens of the pochard.



Wanstead Park Boating Lake (Heronry Pond) - 1913

By-and-bye the walk conducts you through the coverts, where, within very recent years, my companion took part in a day's shooting that produced a hundred head of game, chiefly pheasants, and not reckoning rabbits which used to abound in the warrens. The perch pond is a bit of overshadowed water, surrounded by reeds, rushes, docks, and flowers in as wild

a state of nature as may be found in the most secluded corners of our most unfrequented counties. Thenceforth we wander by a winding path bordered with thickets of bramble, alder, birch, and wych elm, amongst which are holly, elder bushes, chestnut trees, willow (commonly called palm at Easter time), and willows. Carpets of wild hyacinths, at present in leaf only, but shortly to bloom a lovely blue, are spread right and left the ground ivy blossoms are out, and the real ivy in many places is running free all over the ground. Here you have a bosky dell, through which water soaks and trickles, and where my sportsman guide has shot his couple of woodcock before breakfast.

After the perch pond there is a long serpentine water called the canal, though its charming environments of forest trees and natural thicket render it deserving of a more romantic name. Starlings, blackbirds, thrushes, marsh tits, finches, and Wrens fly out of your way, and you notice arums, foxgloves, and wild strawberries waiting for a little encouragement to put forth their blossoms in this bleak, tardy spring. At the extreme limit the little Roden [Roding] babbles round as a boundary to the park, and at this part of its course it is the very model of a trout stream, though, alas, the fouling of the higher reaches has killed the chub and other coarse fish which were once so plentiful. The music of the ripple when there is enough water is very pleasant, and the stream itself is at present wholesome to look upon, as it is not generally

when reduced to summer level.

By-and-bye you arrive opposite the island from which the public walk is separated by the so-called canal. Everything here has been delightfully let alone from time immemorial, and amongst the reeds and tangles you might fancy yourself a thousand miles from any town. The only reminder of the intruder is the steady firing going on at some rifle butts hard by, but this seems hitherto to have had no evil effect upon the wild birds. The plantations seem full of fat wood-pigeons, and as for rookeries, they are legion, while the waterfowl, with heron and there tame ducks and swans, amongst which are a number of the black Australian variety, appear or disappear in peace and comfort at every turn.

The heron we know on the coast as a persevering fisher in the creeks and pools along the low water line. We see him standing sometimes like a solitary sentinel on the shining, muddy fore shore, or spreading his long strong pinions, and soaring away before we can get within fair distance. Inland he may be surprised on marauding expeditions at early morn, or flitting phantom-like in the evening dusk, and by cautious walking and concealment you may snatch the opportunity of watching his interesting operations, as he gazes intently into the water, and with no little grace strikes his fish, which, with a pretty bending of neck and tossing of head, he absorbs between the long bill.

Here, however, during the breeding season

we have the heron in the family circle. There were last year thirty-six nests counted, and it is computed that the heron colony now numbers some hundred members. It is verily a curiously interesting sight. High up in the grand old tree-tops are the huge nests, of how many generations standing who can say. In early March the birds gather, guided by never-failing instinct, to the homes of their ancestors, and repair the ravages wrought by winter tempests. I saw a noble heron sweep out of a distant plantation with a stick cross-ways in his bill that looked like a moderately-sized fishing-rod, and it dipped down close to us before winging up to the colony, where a weird squawk gave it welcome. Some of the birds were sitting in their nests, with heads and necks protruding others were perched statuesque on a bough, apparently gazing upon the nest and its contents, and pronouncing them very good. Some had their necks reposing upon their breasts, as if trying to pose for a picture of an eagle sitting on a rock some were in very bold relief, revealing the heron in all its familiar points.

They all, however, were like a smart tradesman in some fashion or other, more or less, ostentatiously or shyly, they presented their bill. My friend pointed to one elm and to a specially fine nest. Years ago he had climbed the tree and taken four eggs, long and blue suggestive of attenuated duck eggs. The keeper stood below with a gun to protect him from the possible

return of the parent birds. He incurred no danger from them, it is true, but he encountered much difficulty in finding the eggs, for the nest, which from the ground seemed of bushel-basket dimensions, turned out at close quarters to be a formidable construction of coarse sticks, and it bulged out, presenting to him the problem which the landsman encounters on arriving at the maintop of a ship, with the difference that there was no rope ladder, and no lubber's hole. However, he persevered, and brought his eggs down in the bosom of his shirt, after disturbing a number of starlings that had built outside the heron's nest.



Wanstead Park Boating Lake (Heronry Pond) - 1920s

On a still sunny morning an hour may be very profitably spent in watching the herons in Wanstead Park. It must be great fun for the birds when the winds blow and the cradles rock, but those conditions are not favourable for the

student who is making his observations below. Our morning was of the favourable kind, and when the sun caught a heron wheeling from tree to tree, we could clearly mark the grey, white, and black facings of his plumage, and the handsome plumes forming the crest. Should a hawk be so silly as to venture near, the herons and rooks are upon him in a moment with hue and cry to chase him away. The rooks, wood-pigeons, and herons may not call upon each other for five o'clock tea, or attend each other's at homes, but their relations are evidently of the friendliest nature.

There are other charming things to be lingered over in Wanstead Park after leaving the heronry to wit, a grotto, rhododendrons, and not a few relics and reminders of the splendid mansion which the profligacy of the last occupant, whose sins and ruin will long be remembered, caused to be pulled down and sold piecemeal, the furniture having previously in a sale of thirty-two days' duration produced £41,000 towards satisfying the host of creditors. It is the old story. Throughout the exquisite park "every prospect pleases"; you pass out of the venerable iron gates which still remain at the entrance, and reflect that Bishop Heber's other remark is, after all, not far from truth Only man is vile."

Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic
News - Saturday 21 April 1883



the heronry pond problem

Many people feel fiercely protective about Wanstead Park, and the lakes hold a central place in the regular visitor's affections. One lake is especially well loved: Heronry Pond. Toddlers are brought to feed the ducks there, school children and people walking to Wanstead Station pass it every day, dog walkers come to sit by it and enjoy a cup of tea at the Tea Hut, and nature lovers admire its wonderful water birds and – in summer - bats.

Article by Gill James and Peter Brimson



A quiet walk beside the lake, observing the trees and swans reflected in the water, soothes the soul and reduces melancholy - now a proven benefit in our stressed times, a cure for a very modern malady now made official with a name: Nature Deficit Disorder. The view from the Temple towards the Heronry must be the most stunning in the whole of East London.

Heronry Pond is one of the surviving elements of a historic lake system which was the centrepiece of one of England's most significant gardens and which still gives the Park its unique character today. But the Heronry Pond is not without its problems. Over the years since they were constructed between 1715 and 1745 by Sir Richard Child, the Park's lakes have had



The Park was first enclosed about three centuries ago and formed part of the landscape grounds of a large mansion known as Wanstead House, which stood on what is now Wanstead Golf Course. It was not until 1880 that the Corporation of London acquired the grounds, and it was opened to the public in on 1st August 1882. Wanstead House, by Richard Westall (1765-1836). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

recurring difficulties with water retention. Five lakes now survive from an initial nine. The Heronry Pond survives in more or less the same size and shape as it was originally, give or take an island or two; long ago when the Park looked much neater and tidier, it would have been visible as the focus of one of the vistas from the great House. It was constructed as part of a cascading chain of lakes utilising a natural valley running from west to east. The lakes were fed by the Holt Channel, an artificial stream that once flowed from Leyton Flats. Water should cascade down to the Heronry via channels from the Basin, which is now owned by Wanstead Golf Club, via the Shoulder of Mutton Pond.

Heronry Pond has undergone several changes over nearly 300 years. In the 1820s, after Wanstead House was demolished, the Park was let to tenants and the dam between Heronry and Perch was cut to provide extra grazing land so the lake was partly drained. Then in 1882 the dam was reinstated by the Corporation of London when it acquired the land. So the lake was restored to its full size again. In 1906-7 it was dug out to a uniform depth and relined with a concrete rim and base, using unemployed workers, to create a lake suitable for boating and bathing but also in an attempt to reduce leakage.

Leakage problems became acute after 1901, probably exacerbated by the laying of plumbing,

drainage pipes and gas mains to the newly built Aldersbrook Estate. During World War Two the Lake took a direct hit from a V1 flying bomb which caused yet more damage.



A V1 flying bomb is recorded as having hit the pond during WWII. This created a hole in the lining of the pond, and led to it leaking - adding to the recurring problem of water retention.

In recent years the water level in the Lake has been kept up by water which is pumped from a borehole in the Park utilising an underground aquifer. An abstraction licence is issued by the Environment Agency to the landowners, the City of London Open Spaces, and the current licence expires in March 2025. The license is granted by the Environment Agency (EA) and there important conditions attached to renewal including measures to make the lakes impermeable to leakage (e.g by relining the Heronry) and/or replace borehole abstraction by utilising surface water run-off. A report on how the City of London Corporation (CoLC) will meet these conditions is required by March 2025.

Meeting these conditions has become very important as the E.A. seeks to confine the use of water from the aquifer for essential uses only (i.e. domestic and commercial) and to reduce or exclude altogether non-essential uses such as filling ornamental lakes. The reasons are connected to falling water levels in the chalk aquifer underlying the Wanstead area in the context of increasing demand and a future of drier summers. The Agency is clearly concerned to avoid any water shortages.

To date, the CoLC has been keen to rule out any relining of the lakes due to high cost.

The last estimate of the cost of relining the Heronry was £1.4million in a report by J&AB Consultants. There is no doubt that the cost will be substantially more today.

Other initiatives are planned:

1. Drainage schemes to increase surface water supply to the lakes. In 2022 the CoLC applied to the GLA Green and Resilient Spaces Fund to cover the costs of a dozen schemes to direct surface run-off into the lakes e.g. road water run-off from Blake Hall Road, drainage from the golf course, creation of wetland areas by the Heronry etc. Unfortunately the bid was rejected in early 2023. The CoLC continues to look for alternative sources of funding, so far without success.

2. Up-Pumping from the River Roding. The CoLC is aware that three of the lakes have a water retention problem, especially the Ornamentals which are currently dry. A possible solution is to pump water from the Roding to refill the Ornamentals. The pumping would take place in winter months only as the river flow in the summer is too low to allow abstraction. Once the Ornamentals are filled, water would be pumped from there into the Perch and then on to the Heronry. If this solution works it will greatly reduce water abstraction from the Heronry borehole to zero in the winter months and only as a necessary top up in the summer. This reduction could meet the EA license renewal conditions. There are nonetheless two important issues to be overcome before up-pumping can proceed:

a) The whole project requires Environment Agency approval. CoLC are optimistic that approval will be gained later this year.

b) Funding. We have been informed that funding is available within the City Surveyors Department. Work to install the pumps is not now anticipated to start until winter 2025/26 and we are still attempting to establish whether or not funds will be increased in line with inflation and can be rolled forward into F/Y 2025/26.

3) Dam Strengthening. Work is due to take place on dam strengthening. The 1975 Reservoirs Act

requires landowners of “raised reservoirs” above a certain size to maintain containing walls to prevent any flooding that might cause loss or damage. The Wanstead Park lakes fall within this category and so the CoLC is legally obliged to strengthen them. The cost will be around £500,000.



Members of the West Ham Distress Committee visit the Heronry Pond during the re-digging of the pond and provision of a concrete rim and base in 1906-7.

Finally, given the concerns about the waterscape shared by the EA. The CoLC, FoWP and others, the CoLC will set up a working party of all concerned organisations (the Wanstead Waterscape Task and Finish Group) to discuss and chase progress on the schemes. The first meeting is scheduled for July this year.

by Gill James and Peter Brimson



skylark



In the absence of arable fields locally, Skylarks construct their nests on the ground in areas of unmown grass; they also feed on areas of mown grass, such as football pitches. This makes Wanstead Flats – the only breeding population of Skylarks in inner London – even more important.

At the time of writing in early July the grass has grown very tall in the roped-off areas on Wanstead

Flats - helped by the wet spring - making it very difficult for us to see what's happening with our Skylarks. What we do know, from watching adult birds flying with fecal pellets and food for their young, is that there have been two active nests so far. One distinctive, tailless adult female was particularly busy at the end of June. Once young birds can feed themselves, they become invisible in the grass so we probably won't have a clear idea of breeding success until the start of autumn. Four adult males were singing through June.



Update by Tim Harris

If you get up very early from April to August, and go out on to Wanstead Flats, the Skylark is likely to be the most prominent bird you will hear, starting even before the sun rises. When you see or hear one stop awhile – or better still, lie down and give your neck a rest so you can enjoy an 'exaltation of skylarks' - the wonderfully descriptive collective noun for this little bird.

But this could be a thing of the past if we're not careful - we've already lost Larks on Leyton Flats.





leave it alone

The biodiversity crisis often seems to be overshadowed by the climate one. Both threaten the future of the planet. Indeed, they are interlinked, with the depletion of biodiversity resulting in more carbon being pumped into the atmosphere, causing climate change.

Here - Paul Donovan argues that the restoration of ancient woodland and temperate rainforest is essential to counter biodiversity crisis

..... and the best way to protect ancient woodland is by just leaving it alone.

The biodiversity crisis is very real, amounting to the disintegration of the web of life on which we all depend. We are amidst the sixth mass extinction of species.

In the last 50 years, the numbers of farmland birds have reduced by half, woodland edge butterflies by 40% and insects by huge numbers.



Epping Forest is the largest open space in London at just over 6,000 acres of ancient woodland, stretching from Manor Park in east London to just north of Epping in Essex.

One area of devastation that has helped accelerate the crisis is the loss of ancient woodland. This process has gone on over centuries, as the human way of life has changed.

In the 20th century, there has been much publicity about the clearance of tropical rainforests in the Amazon and other areas, to make way for more cattle to feed hungry human carnivores. Maybe, less well known is that the UK is home to many temperate rain forests,

mostly down the western side of the country plus Scotland. These areas have high rainfalls.

The temperate rainforests boast lichens, moss and liverworts - they are great carbon sinks, as well as fostering biodiversity and human well-being. Birds like pied wagtail and redstarts live in these habitats. Unfortunately, these rainforests have been reduced to a fraction of their former selves. Previously, they covered 20% of the UK landmass. Today, they account for less than one per cent.

The UK is one of the most deforested countries in Europe, with just 13% of the landmass covered by trees.

Writer and campaigner, Guy Shrubsole has called for the saving of existing forests and restoration of much of what has been lost. He makes a powerful case in his book, *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*. Some 30% of Britain's ancient woodlands were cut down from 1950 to 1980, being replaced by quick growing conifers. This variety of tree provides commercially saleable timber more quickly but it has less biodiversity value.

In some ways, the best way to restore lost ancient woodland is to leave alone what remains.

Shrubsole argues that protecting and encouraging existing temperate rainforests will help re-establish them into the future. Much of the devastation to trees has been caused by sheep, deer and rhododendrons.

So reducing all three will help ancient woodland re-establish. A rewilding advocate, Shrubsole would like to see some of the apex like wolf and lynx reintroduced. This would help control deer numbers.

The spread of pine martins would control grey squirrel numbers. Squirrels also cause tree damage.



In the absence of natural predators the wild fallow deer populations of southwest Essex and Epping Forest are thriving and without effective deer management, the overall health of wild deer and the environment will suffer.

Farmers have a key role to play. Working with nature to achieve sustainable farming is the way forward. The government's new Environmental Land Management Scheme, which rewards

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Under our current system, a forest has no value until it's cut down which explains a lot about the root of our problems.

Adam Idek Hastie

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landowners for using land in a way that enhances rather than diminishes nature, can prove a powerful tool in forest restoration.

So there is plenty that can be done to restore ancient woodlands and amongst that the temperate rainforests.

One of the encouraging things is that much of what has gone wrong in the past can be put right by simply leaving what is left alone, let it regenerate in a natural way.

Enhancements like controlling the deer and sheep population and eliminating rhododendron will help but nature is a great healer of itself.

Let's hope in the coming years that our ancient woodlands and temperate rainforests revive. It will be for the betterment of all creatures living on this earth - including the human being.

Cllr Paul Donovan



then & now

In each edition of the Wren newsletter we will be showing you a picture of an area in the Wren catchment taken around 100 years ago and how it looks today. Just for fun have a guess where this picture was taken (answer to follow). If you would like to see a particular area in this slot why not get in touch and we will see what we can do.





bird report

This Spring was very... average. March saw 83 species of bird recorded locally, which is bang on average, but a full four lower than the record March high last year. April (always the peak of Spring migration) was also an average for the month with 92 species and exactly the same as the year before, and only down three on the record April from 2022. May delivered a disappointing 86 species; two lower than average and the lowest score in the last four Mays (four down on the record 90 in 2016). All a bit.. Meh!

Little Owl Wanstead Flats - pic by Diane Dalli

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Wheatear on edge of Skylark field - pic by James Heal

Spring migration could be said to have begun this year on 11 March with our first Common Sandpiper of the year, although I guess there is always potential for an unseasonal Common Sandpiper. Next up was our traditional



Common Redstart, Wanstead Flats - pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

harbinger of Spring - the Northern Wheatear arriving first on 16 March; slightly earlier than average which gave us a false sense of hope that Spring migration was up and running as just about everything else was late and we only had three days in March with Wheatear being found.



Dunlin on Wanstead Flats, Alexandra Pond - pic by Bob Vaughan

There were 51 Wheatear bird days (each record counted) with a high count of seven individuals on 6 April. To give a stark sense of how poor this Spring was for Wheatears, we only have to compare it with last year which saw three times as many Wheatear recorded (154).

It felt poor as well for hirundines. There were 113 Swallow records this Spring which was 27% down on the previous year, but with only 8 records this Spring, Sand Martin numbers were down 61% on 2023, 77% down on 2022, and 84% down on 2021. A worrying trend if it can be read as such.



Ring Ouzel, Wanstead Flats - pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

There was a usual smattering of other passage passerine migrants. Of note was a relatively long-staying singing Common Redstart that got our hopes up for a few days in early April.

Good records through the Spring included:

- A pair of winter plumage Dunlin on Alex found by Marco J on 11 March
- A single surprisingly good March day with flyover Mandarin, Yellowhammer, and Rook all on the same day that the Wheatear sweepstake organiser, Tony B found the first Wheatear of the year (16 March)
- Tony also found a Red-legged Partridge in the Brooms on 27 March.
- A singing Nightingale in a location I won't divulge here; first found by Simon Raper on 20 April.
- Two Ring Ouzel found by James H in Old Enclosure on 27 April.
- Four calling Whimbrel flew over Tony B on the Flats on 4 May.
- A Stone Curlew - our third ever and bird of the year so far flew between Long Wood gap on 12 May.
- Our only Spotted Flycatcher of the Spring was found on 28 May in Long Wood by Marco J.



Spotted Flycatcher - pic by Nick Croft

Coot on Alexandra Pond, Wanstead Flats - pic by Tushar



August Bank Holiday

in the park

Bank Holidays began with an Act of Parliament in 1871. There were four holidays and two 'Common Law' holidays (Good Friday and Christmas Day). Other days have been added since. The August Bank Holiday occurred on the first Monday of the month until 1971 since when it falls on the last Monday in August.

The following is an extract from the East Ham Echo, 5th August 1904 describing a Bank Holiday Monday in Wanstead Park.



Reading of the many thousands that flocked from West Ham and East Ham to the seaside, one would almost think for the moment that the districts were empty on Bank Holiday. But anyone who was out and about recognised that this was not the case. Despite the fact that the Great Eastern Railway carried 121,371 passengers to suburban stations, and the London and Tilbury, 40,000 to Southend, there were droves of people all over the district who were holiday-making close to home. The opening of the new line of municipal electric tram cars to Wanstead Flats saw every car packed; in fact, Monday must have made Mr. Blain's heart glad. Every recreation ground had its teeming multitudes, but the great thing seemed to be a visit to Wanstead Park.



"The Glade", otherwise known as the Long Walk, looking east towards Ornamental Waters, Wanstead Park - c1906

With light fleecy clouds overhead which travelled slowly across the sky and veiled the face of the sun from time to time - with a soft

wind blowing from the south, and rustling the trees in the groves, Wanstead Park on Monday was a glorious place for a holiday, and some thousands of people caught time by the forelock and revelled for hours in the beauties of that fine playground.



An East Ham Corporation tram turning onto Aldersbrook Road from the tram terminus down Wanstead Park Avenue. The tram is heading for the docks - just as the trains brought more affluent 'tourists' from London so the trams brought workers from poorer areas to places like Wanstead Park. This image is from the 1920s, by which time the trams had roofed upper decks.

By ten o' clock the number of people in the park was not large, but after that time they arrived in hundreds. Tram after tram, at intervals of about three minutes, came gliding up from East Ham and Manor Park, and deposited loads of happy holiday-makers at the entrance of Wanstead Park Avenue. These people were augmented by the large number who walked to the park from Forest Gate, Leytonstone, Wanstead and Ilford, so that by mid-day, Wanstead Park was pleasantly full.

The crowd - although a large one - was good-

tempered and good-mannered. It was drawn from that strata of society who believe that, after all, enjoyment is not to be found in drinking and street singing. There in the quiet nooks beneath the trees, by the waterside, where the white and golden water-lilies swayed gently to and fro by the action of the breeze, in the glade, which commands a view of the lake beneath, could be seen groups of men, women and children enjoying the peacefulness of the scene.



Visitors to Wanstead Park were from all walks of life. Here, more wealthier folk, possible 'day-trippers' from the city, take a stroll in the early 1900s.

Of course, the great attraction for the more boisterous of the children was paddling in the lake. Tiddlers had a lively day on Monday; the mere sight of one led to quite a commotion, and sometimes to a capture. And when this desirable end was brought about, the marmalade or pickle jar was requisitioned and tiddler was borne away to scenes anew. But when the tiddler refused to be beguiled, a forward movement was made on the small frogs - many of which were carried away in pickle bottles and delight to meet a

speedy death in the dry and unsexed realm known as dad's garden, in order to complete a small boy's holiday.

When the sun had passed its meridian, and begun to throw shadows to the west, you could come across groups seated beneath the umbrageous foliage of the trees, and revelling in all the delights of a picnic. But some of those picnic baskets must have been terribly heavy if the sweat poured down father's face, and his ejaculatory expressions count for aught. But there - ginger beer is enclosed in very heavy bottles. But when the cloth was spread and 'dad' had wiped his brow for the last time, all thought of the trouble departed. Then comes mother's turn, and - but who has not known the joys of a picnic in his or her youth?



The Cedar - Ornamental Waters, Wanstead Park c1890s

In the ornamental water, where the angler is not allowed to play his seductive art, a crowd gathers to watch the movements of a shoal

of small roach. They are "on the feed" as the anglers put it, and fight valiantly for the small pieces of bread which have been thrown in for the ducks. Their small tails stir to life the otherwise placid face of the waters, and the crowd on the bank hazards conjectures as to the species of the fish. But suddenly there is a whirr, and from the sedges on the opposite side of the pool, half flies, half swims, a coot, and seizes the pieces of bread nearest mid-stream. Back again goes the half-terrified bird - gay in its summer plumage - and a minute afterwards it can be seen sharing its prize with its more sombre mate.



The Chalet in 1908. The Chalet was built in 1883 (the year after the Park was opened by the City of London) to serve refreshments. The Chalet burned down in 1948. The trees behind the site of the Chalet is named Chalet Wood, which is now well known for the display of bluebells in the springtime.

These are but a few of the quiet amusements which helped to make the Bank Holidays a pleasant one for the many thousands who visited Wanstead Park.



Rustic Bridge Wanstead Park. The overflow from the Ornamental Waters 1914

An extract from the East Ham Echo, 5th August 1904:

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Researched by Tony Morrison (pics belong to author but he didn't actually take them)

Originally published September 2012



I am often lost in thought
of where I want to go
and places I want to see,
that I forget this place is magical
right here in front of me

by Kelly



post box restaurant

The locked post box on a pole in Windsor Road is a bit dilapidated but is still sometimes used by our postmen and women for temporary storage.

There were clearly some lichens growing on the top and sides, even though metal isn't one of the most natural lichen habitats. I decided to look and see what I could identify with a 10x magnifying lens, the photographs of lichens are approximately at this scale.

Article by Bob Vaughan



The first and most obvious lichen was *Xanthoria paretina*, with its bright yellow thallus and fruiting bodies like tiny lemon curd tarts. This lichen is one of the most common locally, found on twigs, rocks and stones. The greenish tinge indicates it was recently wet, it has been that kind of spring.



Xanthoria paretina - one of the most common lichens found locally. Pic by Bob Vaughan

In the picture above you can see some young lichen thalli, the greenish shapes to the right of the *Xanthoria*. This is one of two very common *Physcia* species which are difficult to tell apart until you can assess their shape when they are more adult. Fortunately, there were some fully grown examples of *Physcia adscendens* with characteristic hooded ends to the thallus, and a few of *Physcia tenella* with the open slightly up turned ends to the thalli resembling small hands. Both these *Physcia* species have obvious



Physcia adscendens - pic by Bob Vaughan

marginal cilia and often grow together, usually on local wood and twigs although *P. adscendens* is also common on rocks and cement.



Physcia tenella - pic by Bob Vaughan

These first three lichens were expected, they are very common in an urban environment and

are pollution resistant. As I looked more closely, I found a few more lichens scattered over the box, mostly on the upper surface.

Physcia caesia has a grey thallus and is far less common locally than *P. adscendens* or *tenella*. This lichen is found on rocks, asbestos and cement although it is rarely found on dust impregnated wood. It is characterised by blue-grey granular rounded soralia towards the centre of the thallus. These soralia are clusters of soredia which are powdery propagules containing a few algae and fungal hyphae. These propagules are one way in which lichens may spread, as they are easily dispersed by wind, rain and beast and on finding a suitable surface can immediately start to form a new lichen.



Physcia caesia - pic by Bob Vaughan

Hyperphyscia adglutinata has a greenish thallus and is mostly found in the south and west of the UK. The thallus edges are closely adpressed to

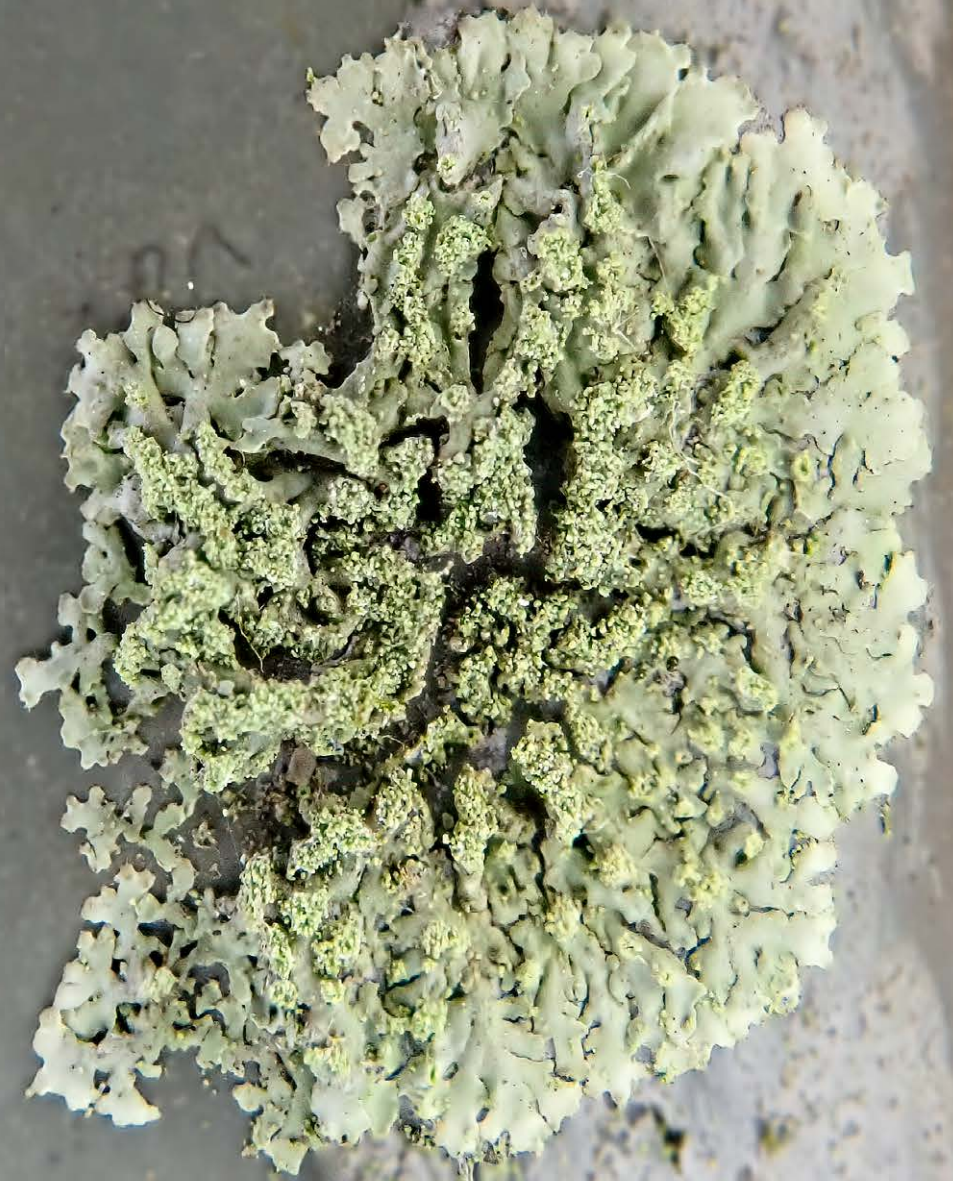
the surface it grows on and it has green soralia towards the centre. Locally this lichen is usually found on the bark of trees.

I have tentatively identified two more lichens, *Rinodina oleae* and *Physcia dubia*, but they require a bit more work. The question is why is there such a diversity of lichens on this bare metal box? Although the box has been present for tens of years, it is quite shiny, exposed and faces south so must suffer from extremes of hot and cold which would surely kill most organisms. The secret to so many lichens proliferating on this unpromising local environment is probably because the surface is nutrient rich. The box is directly below a small tree and bears unsightly evidence on the metal that birds perch directly above it, this together with the urban dust which descends in the rain, means this box is acting as a restaurant for lichens.

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Although the box has been present for tens of years, it is quite shiny, exposed and faces south, so must suffer from extremes of hot and cold which would surely kill most organisms. A lichen isn't just one organism though, it is made up of at least two different types of organism working together. The fungal component consists of tube-like hyphae which interweave and form the shape and structure of the lichen. Buried within the fungal hyphae are algae, sometimes cyanobacteria, which photosynthesise. All a lichen needs to generate energy in the form of sugars or alcohols is sunlight. The fungal hyphae protect, but also regulate the water content and basic nutrient and mineral levels within the lichen. The secret to so many lichens proliferating on this unpromising local environment is probably because the surface is nutrient rich. The box is directly below a small tree and bears unsightly evidence on the metal that birds perch directly above it, this together with the urban dust which descends in the rain, means this box is acting as a restaurant for lichens.



Hyperphyscia adglutinata - pic by Bob Vaughan

Wanstead Wildlife Weekend

We recently held another highly successful Wanstead Wildlife Weekend. It was so lovely to see so many of you join us and hopefully enjoy yourselves. I am very grateful to all of those who organised it and helped out.

by James Heal



I wasn't able to join all of the activities (you would actually need to be in more than one place at once to be able to do that and even quantum entanglement - look it up if you haven't heard about this astonishing scientific discovery - can't do that for us yet) but I did join a few.

I even led one of the activities myself. I thought I would share a smorgasbord of brief memories from the weekend that meant something to me; focusing in on one or two species per activity rather than listing off lots of names as can sometimes be my tendency.

Early birds catch the moths

Several of us felt virtuous joining Tim for the moth trap reveal by being up and functioning at 6am until we learned that he had been there since 4.15! There



Buff Arches - pic by James Heal

was a nice selection of moths. Nothing that was ultra exciting for the man who has recorded hundreds of species of moth locally, but some lovely moths nonetheless. Buff Arches (*Habrosyne pyritoides*) was one of my favourites from the catch - it is a handsome moth with a smooth look (the markings remind me of the Nazca Lines or perhaps as if a creative barista on LSD made some shapes on your cappuccino). The larvae feed on bramble; which makes me wonder why I don't see more of these glorious moths.



Pantaloon Bee (Dasypoda hirtipes) - pic by James Heal

The mini desert is not deserted

Next up for me was the annual bee walk with our very own bee and wasp expert: Tony Madgwick. First, Tony made the group laugh by informing us that we were actually likely to see more wasps than bees, but we call these bee walks as people are more likely to



Orb weaver spider (Gibberanea gibbosa) - pic by James Heal

show up. The bare and sandy patches of path north of Heronry are covered in holes and excavation mounds at this time of year and, if you stop and watch the ground, there is an astonishing amount of activity taking place. Bees and wasps are patrolling or coming back and forth; either with pollen or their prey: some actually carry similar-sized bees back to their holes to feed their larvae. To pick out one species, the Pantaloon Bee (*Dasypoda hirtipes*) was particularly impressively equipped with dense hairy configurations. This is a nationally notable species and one of many impressive looking ground excavating hymenopteran.

The man with the upturned umbrella

Our good friend and spider expert, David Carr, joined us again on Wanstead Flats to explore our

rich arachnid fauna. He was joined by a young scientist who had a colourful umbrella that he would open upside down under a tree and shake the branches over it. It proved to be a great technique to catch spiders and other invertebrates. It may not have been the rarest spider of the day, but the orb weaver, *Gibbaranea gibbosa*, with its green coloration and prominent abdominal turbercles is a handsome spider to get up close to.

And now for something completely different

I led a walk on the Sunday loosely termed Plant Galls and Bugs. In reality it was a cross-taxa invertebrate walk, but I named the activity after those two groups as I know marginally more about them than others. Regular readers will know I can be pretty disparaging about AI identification tools (they



leafhopper (Eupterycyba jucunda) - pic by James Heal

are often wrong and mean people sometimes don't learn the systematic ways to identify and study invertebrates). However, when I found a black and yellow leafhopper nymph on Alder that I had never encountered before, I opened an identification

app, and ran a photo I took of the nymph through the software. It came back with a suggestion which I then checked on Tristan Bantock's excellent website: British Bugs. It turns out it was my first time recording the leafhopper, *Eupterycyba jucunda*. Tristan has the following to say about this bug which clinched the ID for me: "The yellow and black-banded nymph is equally striking and easily recognised. *E. jucunda* is found predominantly on alder in England and Wales, as far north as Lancashire."

by James Heal



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

Alaxandra Lake, Wanstead Flats - pic by Tony Morrison



.... don't forget

Early summer is breeding season for our birds and

there are millions more hungry mouths to feed. Nesting parents will have to work hard to feed their young, while maintaining their own energy levels.

It can still be pretty parky out there and food may be hard to come by for our birds.

So please keep an eye out for our feathered friends.

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

then & now

Were you right ?

The Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) by the Ornamental Waters in Wanstead Park, which is shown on Edwardian postcards leaning over the lake as it does now (perhaps more so now).

Note that in the earlier picture there were two trees. Note also that there seems to be a black swan at the waters edge - it looks like the much missed Bruce of Hollow Ponds may not have been the first such visitor to the area.



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



Egyptian Geese by Tushar