

Winter 2025

Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

*A very autumnal Little Owl on
Wanstead Flats - pic by Andy*

Page 02 - A Word from the Chair - a few words from the chair James Heal

Page 04 - Winter Trees - Poem by William Carlos Williams

Page 05 - Autumn Bird Report - by James Heal

Page 09 - Bootcamp for Birders - article by Jane Batey

Page 12 - A Nature Emergency - by Cllr Paul Donovan

Page 15 - Caspian Gulls - article by James Heal

Page 19 - East Ham Nature Reserve - a plea for help by Penny Evans

Page 21 - and Finally - Get your hands dirty and help nature

Page 22 - Useful Links



a word from the chair

I'm about to turn 45. Half way to 90, three quarters of the way to 60, and I still have the mind of a 25 or 15-year old; but sadly not the body. 45 years ago, ABBA's Super Trouper was top of the charts, Michael Foot had just taken over as leader of the Labour Party, and, sadly, the Yorkshire Ripper was still at large and still murdering young women.



Meadow Pipet on patch - pic by James Heal

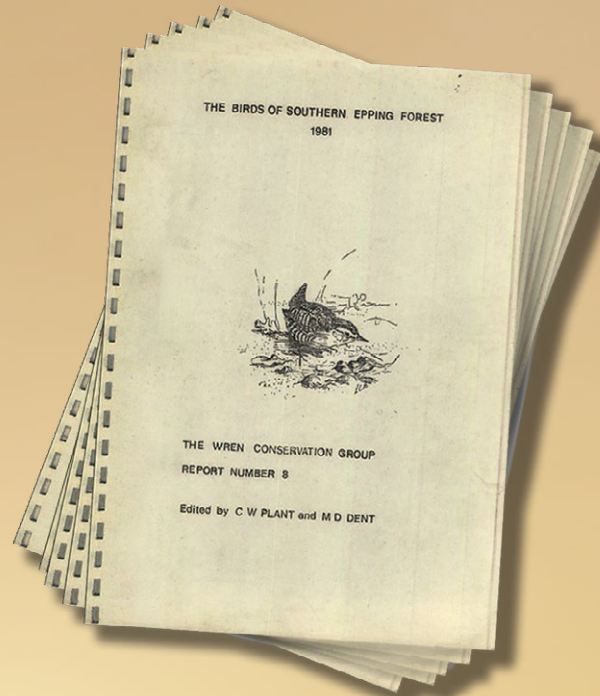
More locally, a group of local birders were recording their sightings and preparing annual bird reports in the way I am now working on for 2023 (yes, I am running a bit behind). Let's look back a little at some of the things they were seeing and weren't seeing...

In 1981 they recorded a Ring-necked Parakeet for the first time in two years; a species which is now our most consistently numerous: hundreds or thousands fly over every day back and forth between their roost sites.

Buzzard was last seen in our area in 1976, and so a presence during 1981, albeit at some distance above the study area, is pleasing. It is a shame that they could not be identified specifically.

It gives a sense of how rare Common Buzzard was that a distant flyover might also reasonably have been expected to have been a different species of buzzard (e.g. Rough-legged, or Long-legged).

Sometimes there is a sense that biodiversity travels in a negative trajectory, but there can also be ups and downs. Recently, for example, we have lost Meadow Pipit as a breeding species, although they are still common in winter.



But note the following observation on missing species in 1981:

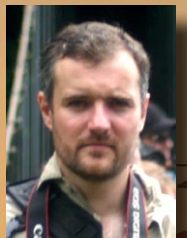
... there were no records at all during the year of Teal, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Marsh Tit, or Willow Tit.

It would be an extraordinary occurrence in the 2020's if we missed Teal, Meadow Pipit, or Yellow Wagtail in any given year, while it would be even more extraordinary if we saw Marsh Tit or Willow Tit; two species which have well and truly been lost to the local and wider area.

My parting comment is that things change, sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worse. But to understand what is happening and sometimes take positive action, we have to capture records and study our historic records.

If you would like to get more involved with wildlife recording, let me know.

James Heal
Chair Wren Group



Winter Trees

*All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!
A liquid moon
moves gently among
the long branches.
Thus having prepared their buds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold.*

by William Carlos Williams



bird report

Autumn 2025 was a season of two halves. August, when autumn migration really begins, was poor; September felt disappointing; October was excellent; and November has started off ok.

The first 'autumn' passage bird was, as is often the case, Willow Warbler on 27 July, followed by an unseasonably early Spotted Flycatcher on 30 July.

by James Heal

Whinchat - pic by James Heal



August

But we all know that autumn migration really kicks off in August. After a disappointing 1 August, there was a Garden Warbler on 2 August on the Flats followed by a Willow Warbler on the 3rd and our first autumn Wheater on the 5th (more on them later).



Unseasonably early Spotted Flycatcher 30th July - pic by James Heal

August delivered 87 species of bird which is at least three down on average for the month. The best bird by far came via Bob's all-hearing nocmig recorder scanning the skies while us birders slumbered. On 14 August, a patch first-ever Red Knot flew over calling in the darkness. Our 205th bird species for the patch and our 24th species of wader, although interestingly, only the second species of wader which has

solely been recorded by nocmig (Avocet is the other).



An adult winter plumage Mediterranean Gull was seen on 5th and 22nd August- pic by Tony Brown

Our best bird seen in August was a Wood Warbler (our only one of the year found by Marco J in Bandstand Copse on 14 August and only our fifth ever that I am aware of). Aside from that, it was largely the usual assortment of annually-seen passage migrants including Sedge Warbler, Tree Pipit, and Pied Flycatcher, and a flyover Great White Egret on 9 August. In addition to the monster rare Knot, Bob also contributed Whimbrel and Redshank via nocmig.

September

September was a little better than August. It has always been our best month by diversity of

species and, as, with four of the last five years, we broke the 100 barrier (101 this September), but it still felt a little disappointing. However, there were some quality birds. There were two migrating Osprey seen: one by Mike M in the Old Sewage Works on 2 September and one from Jim seen flying over the Flats on the 20th. We also had Merlin seen by Bob on 26 September and Barn Owl on the 30th. An adult winter plumage Mediterranean Gull was seen on 5th and 22 August and there were four records of flyover Rook.



14th August saw usual assortment of annually-seen passage migrants including Tree Pipit - pic by Bob Vaughan

October

October was a very good month. 94 species meant it was just one species down from our



Wryneck on 13th October - pic by Nick Croft

best October ever (2020). I was lucky enough to be looking at a patch of Broom when a Magpie chased a Stone Curlew out from deep cover, giving Bob, John F, and I good views and even some poor record shots once I had struggled to get my camera out of my bag. Rock Pipit on 9 October, Wryneck on 13 October,



Yellowhammer sighted 16th October - pic by Tony Brown

Short-eared Owl on 15 October, Woodlark and Yellowhammer on 16 October and four different day records of Raven (this latter is a painful stat for the author as I have still not seen one on patch) give some sense of the quality of birds found during the month.



Other highlights were a Mandarin Duck on 9th November on Alexandra Pond - pic by James Heal

November

November started well with Marco finding a perched Corn Bunting near Alex on 7 November. Other highlights were a Mandarin Duck on 9 November, a remarkable THREE first winter Caspian Gulls on Alex on 15 November, and 73 Lapwing (strangely our first for the year) in two flocks on 16 November just as our mild autumn

started to turn into a cold winter.

Autumn passage migration

There is no way to sugar-coat the early autumn passage passerine migration. It was poor. Almost every way you look at it, it feels worse than usual. This table of the 'magnificent seven' (I have labelled them that) of annual passage passerines (birds we see annually as they stop over heading back south but which do not stay to breed) should tell its own story.

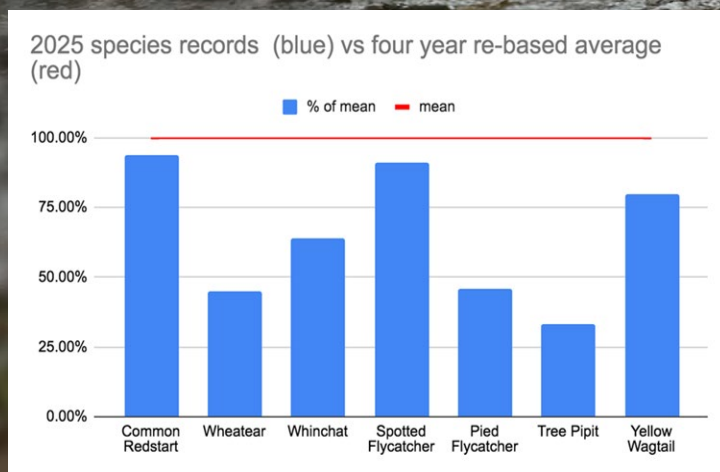
	Bird days	vs avg	Peak count	vs avg	Arrival	vs avg	Departure	vs avg
Common Redstart	15	16	3	3	14/08	16/08	07/09	15/09
Wheatear	23	51	3	9	05/08	10/08	08/10	03/10
Whinchat	63	99	4	9	12/08	11/08	29/09	30/09
Spotted Flycatcher	52	57	6	8	30/07	15/08	05/10	23/09
Pied Flycatcher	6	13	1	2	26/08	20/08	19/09	19/09
Tree Pipit	5	15	1	3	18/08	15/08	19/09	15/09
Yellow Wagtail	33	41	6	5	11/08	30/07	24/10	02/10

In terms of bird days (total records per day x total days recorded), every one of the seven species tracked here was down on average (see chart below); some by a little (Common Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher) and some by a lot (Wheatear, Pied Flycatcher, and Tree Pipit).

To call out a couple of stand-out specifics from the data: autumn Wheatear numbers have fallen in each of the past five years, with the biggest drop between last year and this year. Let's hope this trend doesn't continue; and, we only had five autumn records of Tree Pipit, the lowest in the last five years.

When we look at the autumn arrival and departure dates, Spotted Flycatcher is a stand-out anomaly: our first arrival was on 30 July which is a stonking 17 days earlier than the recent mean average; and the final departure (our latest ever) was on 5 October which was 12 days later than average.

Yellow Wagtail was also phenologically noteworthy in that the final squeaking flyover was on 24 October; our latest ever and 22 days later than the recent average. I fully expect this to be at least a contender for the latest Yellow Wag in London.



Yellow Wagtail - pic by Jonathan Lethbridge

bootcamp for birders

by Jane Batey

It all started with an email from an old school friend asking if I would like to come to Malta with her, to join a volunteer programme called the Raptor Camp, with Birdlife International. The invitation ticked all the boxes. I am an easy-going birder, enjoying my daily dog walks in Wanstead Park and on Wanstead Flats. I have an interest in natural history. I have never been to Malta. My attendance would halve the hotel costs for my old school friend. We could recreate earlier days, when as young women, we mulled over our lives in a sun-kissed week in Crete, to celebrate our 30 years. So 40 years on - yes indeed! - here we were again sharing a room and kick-starting mulling over the approaching 70 years. Well, not much time for mulling. I learnt so much.



Birdlife International oversees a well-managed programme targeting illegal hunting. Malta is a staging post for migrating birds who refuel and rest on this small island en route from Africa to Europe in spring and the other way in autumn.

It has a long tradition of hunting birds and each year 10,000 gun licences are issued. This is for a population of 600,000. The autumn hunting



Injured Short-eared Owl - pic by Jane Batey

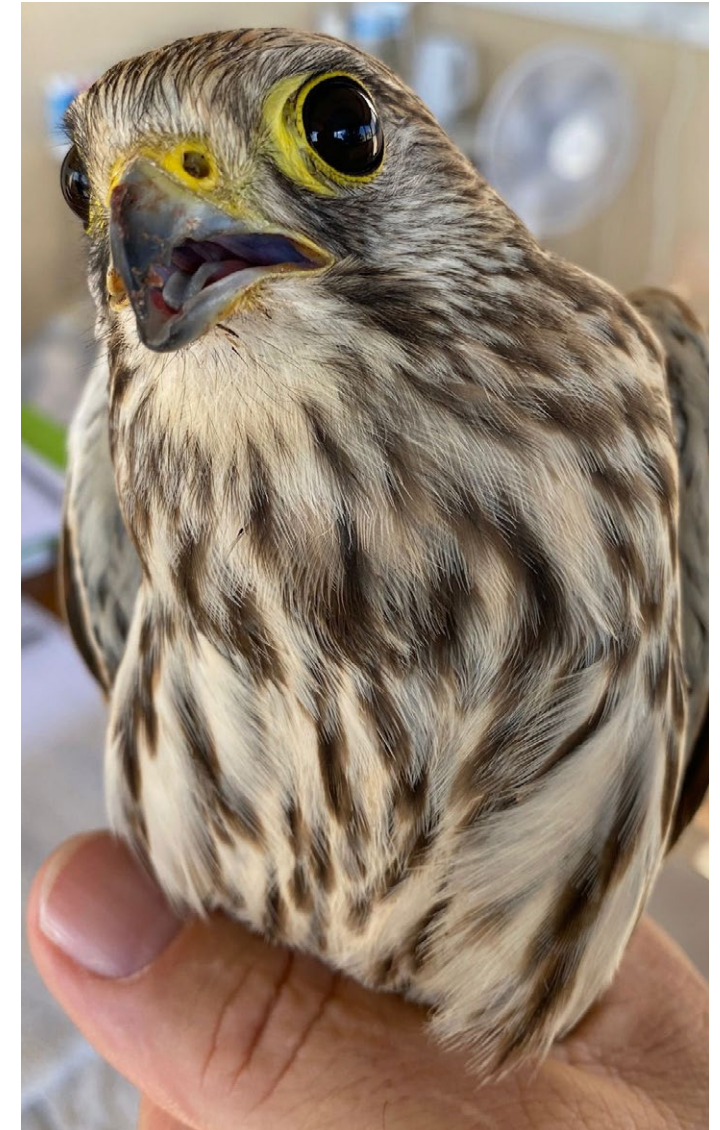
season runs from 1st September to 31st January, with 40 species legally hunted, including Turtle Doves and Skylarks. Malta is an EU member and the only country to allow spring hunting because of the influential hunting lobby.

So joining the Raptor Camp was quite a culture shock for me. At first I felt out my depth as some of the other volunteers were longstanding birders who knew their raptors, had worked for the RSPB or Nature Scotland, had been attending the camps for many years, were skilled in operating a camcorder and conducting sleuthing work. Indeed, two of the volunteers were ex-police officers. They took to the work like ducks to water...

I saw a lot of Malta, and some lovely sunrises and sunsets as the sleuthing work ran from 5.30-9.00am in the morning and 4.00-8.00pm in the evening. In between there was a much-needed power nap and then a meeting of the team to review, record and report our observations at 3.30pm, before the evening fieldwork.

We saw many birds of prey and lots of other birds besides: Honey Buzzards, Ospreys, Barn Swallows, Pallid Swifts, Kestrels, Black Kites, Grey Herons, Hoopoes, Sparrowhawks, egrets,

Quail, Nightjars, Montagu's Harriers, Bee-eaters, Turtle Doves, Short-eared Owls, Booted Eagles, Hobbies, Sardinian Warblers, stork, Cetti's Warblers, Yellow Wagtails, Spotted Flycatchers,



Rescued Kestrel - pic by Jane Batey

Chiffchaffs, Blue Rock Thrushes (the national bird of Malta, so not hunted!) and Dotterel. Of course I didn't see them all but collectively the group recorded all these birds.



Owl receiving treatment - pic by Jane Batey

The September 2025 raptor camp in Malta recorded over 242 illegal hunting incidents, 72% involving the illegal use of electronic bird callers, many targeting strictly protected species like Stone Curlew, Grey Heron and Long-eared

Owl. Birds of prey, including Marsh Harriers and Honey Buzzards, were the main victims. The Environmental Protection Unit, the police arm dedicated to challenging illegal hunting and bringing charges, has only 12 members and their response time is an average of 51 minutes - plenty of time for a hunter to melt into the background or just drive away.



Jane (wearing bins) & another volunteer out to lunch in beautiful Malta

Birdlife International fieldwork in Malta aims to uncover illegal hunting, have a presence on the island to support the campaign against illegal hunting and recover and treat injured birds. They seek international volunteers for both the Raptor Camp, in September, and the Spring Watch, to work with local members. If you are interested, register as a volunteer for Birdlife International, Malta, and if accepted, they will contact you to recruit to the programme.

by Jane Batey



More:

<https://www.birdlife.org/partners/malta-birdlife-malta>

<https://www.facebook.com/birdlifemalta>

BirdLife Malta's 2025 Raptor Camp exposing the shocking scale of illegal hunting in Malta, with 242 incidents documented in less than a month.

[Reel 1 by BirdLife Malta](#)

[Reel 2 by BirdLife Malta](#)

[Reel by BirdLife Malta](#)

The retired policeman guarding Malta's birds of prey. [Reel by BirdLife Malta](#)

a nature emergency

Redbridge council must do better in addressing biodiversity and climate emergencies.

by Cllr Paul Donovan

So how has Redbridge Council risen to the biodiversity challenges over the past few years?

When first elected as councillors for Wanstead Village in 2018, Councillor Jo Blackman and myself sought to move environmental issues up the council agenda. We were starting from a very low mark.



Jo and myself were on the Nature and Environment Task and Finish Group. This group took evidence, did some site visits and came up with a plan. Among the recommendations was a review of the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (sinc) around the borough, implementation of grow zones (wild areas), phasing out of pesticide usage, managing sites as wetlands for biodiversity and promoting wildlife corridors.

A new Urban Landscape policy was adopted as part of the overall strategy.

We also brought a Climate Emergency motion to the council in June 2019. This was duly passed. A corporate panel was established to come up with recommendations. These are now in process of implementation.

The biodiversity strand has been regarded by some of us as the poor relation to climate, lacking the same urgency. This is wrong of course, given the two are inextricably linked.

There have been successes. Grow zones have extended, with 10,000 square metres covered. Another 400,000 square metres has been given to wild space. Some 850 tree pits have

been adopted in the last year, with 7,000 trees planted in the same period.

Less encouraging is the failure to take forward the Nature & Environment Task & Finish report's SINC recommendations.

We're in a nature emergency !!!!

The UK nations are among the most nature-depleted in the world. But there's hope. By acting together, we can restore nature, creating a brighter, healthier future for wildlife and people.

Nature Emergency UK

There has been an increasing involvement from residents, operating on a voluntary basis. Groups like the Wrens and Wanstead Community Gardeners have contributed immensely. The River Roding Trust has done great work in cleaning up the river, whilst bringing private and public bodies to account.

Council has been supportive but has it done

enough itself?

This is an emergency, demanding rapid action, not back-burning of issues, until funds allow.

It has been an ongoing frustration of my eight years on the council that there seems to be different interpretations of what the word emergency means. My own perspective is that the present biodiversity and climate emergencies demand responses at least on a par with COVID. Obviously the response thus far is nowhere near that sort of level.

National government could help by making the need to address biodiversity and climate emergencies a statutory duty on councils.

Things need to change. There are two initiatives that offer hope.

The first is the London Local Nature Recovery Plan, which offers guidance on how things should progress in the future.

The second is a call for a nature emergency motion to be passed by the council.

This would not be offering mainly vague aspirations but definite measurable benchmarks, which must be met.

Things like committing to 30% of council land for nature recovery by 2030. And, the extension of the duty on developers to provide 20% biodiversity net gain in their projects.

The culture also needs to change, so the comprehensive nature recovery strategy is embedded in all policy and plans of the council.

A [petition](#) calling for just such an initiative has been collecting signatures over the past few months. It is now nearing the 1500 mark, which would enable the issue to be debated at the council. These moves will help ensure that a more comprehensive plan is laid down for the future. The next question will be what the shape of the new council to be elected next May. Wren members should contact their councillors urging

them to support the call for a nature emergency.

The election is another important opportunity to make clear to those seeking office how important it is to address the environmental emergencies.

For my own part, I will not be standing for election as a Labour councillor come next May, though, will be seeking to do all I can to ensure that climate and biodiversity are at the top of the agenda.

Given the political will, garnered from grass roots pressure, we can really accelerate efforts to confront these crises. All is not lost, with many positive things going on, but time is running out.

Paul Donovan is a Labour councillor for Wanstead Village ward, Redbridge Council and a blogger



paulfdonovan.blogspot.com

More:

<https://wansteadclimateaction.com/2025/06/26/petition-to-lb-redbridge-to-declare-a-nature-emergency/>

<https://www.natureemergency.com/>

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.



caspiian gulls

Eagle Pond in Snaresbrook, has a tree-lined south bank with the Victorian neo-gothic towers of the Crown Court rising up behind them. The North side is concrete; a drop to the water from the pavement and Snaresbrook Road. The strong man-made aspect to the water means it is not everyone's favourite wild space, but it has consistently deeper water than many of the other local water bodies and supports large numbers of ducks (particularly Tufted Duck) and Mute Swan.

For at least the last eight years, this pond has been the winter home of one of, if not the most, regularly dependable Caspian Gulls in London; perhaps on record.

Article by James Heal



Adult Caspian Gull this winter on Eagle Pond, Snaresbrook - pic by James Heal

I remember my first encounter with this wonderful bird. It was a freezing day in December (17 December 2017 to be exact) and the eastern end of Eagle Pond was frozen.

I scanned the water looking for a Caspian Gull that had been reported and eventually settled on a large but sleek looking third winter (or third calendar year [3cy from now on] to use the more recent terminology) gull standing on the ice with a large bone in its bill! It stood out from the rest of the gulls it was with as they were largely the smaller Black-headed.



My first encounter with a Caspian Gull 3cy, Snaresbrook, 17th December 2017 - pic by James Heal

Despite it being a little distant from me, the key features jumped out: the bright white head, with small, dark eyes contrasting brilliantly, the

sleeker, flatter forehead, the long and quite straight bill (not much of a 'gony's angle'), it was leggy and quite upright, and the mantle, although not yet in fully matured moult was more advanced than a Herring Gull would be at this time of year and was a good shade darker than a Herring Gull. The features together meant it was unmistakably a Caspian Gull.

Some of the best gulling birders in London came to see it. It was identified that it was almost certainly the same bird as a 1cy bird that Tony Brown had found on Jubilee Pond in November 2015. So a returning bird...

But returning from where? Of course, without leg-ring data (this bird is not ringed) or GPS tracking, we can't know exactly. Caspian Gulls breed largely around the Caspian Sea (where it gets its name) and the Black Sea with a few inland water breeding spots as far west as eastern Germany. But Caspian Gull is a 'scarce' (BTO designation) visitor in the UK, although growing in numbers of records; perhaps because of range expansion across Northern Europe and partly because birders' identification skills with gulls (some of the hardest challenges in European birding) get better over time and a better accompaniment of resources.

The Thames estuary can be a great place to scan for and find Caspian Gulls.

After the Snaresbrook Caspian was seen (first in the Autumn of 2017, if we put aside the potential presence on the Flats a couple of years earlier), it has since returned every single year to Eagle Pond with the exception of last year



Snaresbrook - Adult Caspian Gull this winter - pic by James Heal



1cy Bird this winter (Bird B) - Wanstead Flats

(2024). We assumed it had perhaps died, and so several of us were particularly delighted that it returned this year. Found on 23 November on Eagle Pond again by local birder and Wren member, Geoff. My mother was visiting London that day, but I snuck off for an hour to twitch the bird as I was so pleased it had returned. It is now 11 years old, a full adult and looks absolutely pristine. A Herring Gull will rarely look so cleanly white in winter months (they normally have streaking on the head). It has beautiful long narrow-looking wings and a clean dark grey mantle (somewhere closer in shade to Herring Gull than Lesser Black-backed Gull but between the two). I saw it fly it to some people throwing bread and got a few pictures of it as the light began to fade in the afternoon.

Over the last decade or so on Wanstead Flats, we normally get one or two Caspian Gull records a year; occasionally we get lucky and a bird stays or returns for a few days (although nothing like the winter long residence of the Eagle Pond bird).



Iceland Gull - 2cy Wanstead Flats - March 2021 - pic by James Heal

So, it is truly remarkable to report that, as at the time of writing (23 November), there have been four different Caspian Gulls on Wanstead Flats in the last week or so; three 1cy birds that will have hatched this summer and one 2cy bird.

On 15 November our most highly adept local gulling birder, Tony B, found a 1cy bird on Alexandra Lake (Alex). I went to investigate it and found 'it', then watched it fly around the lake and saw it again and then lost it after a motorbike spooked all the gulls. I then stood with Louis and Gosia and Louis found 'it'. I



Snaresbrook Caspian - adult this winter - pic by James Heal

was watching it and kept thinking it looked better and cleaner than the bird I had just been watching. On later examination, it became clear why I was confused. They were separate birds! Bird 'A' that I had seen first was a small, likely female bird, with a dark neck shawl. The dark feathers on the hind part of the neck is a great identifier for first winter Caspian Gull but this gull sported one that was darker and denser than I had seen before. The gull that Louis found was Casp 'B' and had more classic features for a first winter bird, a more diffuse shawl, more advanced scapular feathers (on the top of the folded wings) than a Herring Gull would show, and it had some replaced (more advanced) covert feathers than bird 'A'. Then, astonishingly, when Tony posted pictures of the bird he first found, it was a third different bird... 'C'.

An adult Caspian Gull has a pristine quality with its snow-white head and gun-metal colour mantle, but my favourite age is probably during its first winter. As touched upon with the some of three birds mentioned, the first feature that is often spotted is a cleaner white head. Structurally head and bill shape are important across the ages.

Then on 23 November, Tony found a 2cy Caspian Gull on Alex. Showing the long parallel bill again, and dark beady eye, still with a neck shawl, but showing a majority of adult grey feathers on the scapulars and even some advanced moult in the coverts and tertials (the latter are feathers that are not that noticeable in the flight but stretch out towards the primaries and tail feathers when the wings are folded at rest).

In all ages, Caspian Gull will almost certainly be more advanced than an equivalent aged Herring Gull.

Studying gulls is more challenging than I could have possibly conveyed

here, and the journey of learning will be littered with errors (or at least my journey has been - I once mistakenly thought a Herring Gull with advanced and strange moult and black eyes probably caused through the recovery from avian flu was a Caspian Gull), but it is hugely rewarding. Yellow-legged Gull, Mediterranean Gull, and Caspian Gull are all now pretty much annual but scarce visitors to our patch and there is always the chance of a rare gull in London like when Mary found a 2cy Iceland Gull on Wanstead Flats in 2021 - one of my favourite ever patch birds (like a beautiful white angel).

Perhaps Caspian Gull will become even more common - the number we have had locally in recent weeks (5 birds if we include the Snaresbrook returner) is quite astonishing. And so now is the perfect time for people to study gulls a little more if you are already a local birder. Let us know how you get on, and feel free to share photos if you are unsure.



1cy Bird this winter Bird A - Wanstead Flats - pic by James Heal



east ham nature reserve

by Penny Evans

Some of you may know that the Wren group originally started in the graveyard of St Mary Magdalene church in East Ham, as a way of interesting boys in looking at birds rather than collecting their eggs.

The church is the oldest parish church in London that is still used as a church. The parish graveyard, the largest in the country at 9.5 acres, became a nature reserve in 1976, when it was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II.

Father Paul, the vicar, is pleased to have his little village church standing in a piece of countryside, even though it has 6 lanes of A13 on one side of it.



East Ham Nature Reserve was once London's largest nature reserve and has since been dwarfed in recent years by Walthamstow Wetlands in 2017 and Barnes Wetlands in 2000 however its value to local residents should not be underestimated

The nature reserve was originally cared for by Passmore Edwards Museum, with a full-time warden, Colin Plant. It was very active, with laboratories doing scientific projects and

working with local schools. Unfortunately, the museum eventually moved out and Newham Council took over the visitor centre building and management of the site. It was passed around various parts of the council, but nobody took much interest in the nature reserve, which did not fit very well into leisure facilities.



The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), then the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) started a Green Gym group and worked on the site every Wednesday morning and some Saturdays. To start with there were two gardeners, who mowed paths and looked after the site. When they disappeared because of budget cuts, the volunteers continued clearing paths and generally looking after the site.

We are still there, working away. The group dwindled in size but is now back to strength with about 10 people every week.



The reserve is home to a variety of wildlife including Common Lizards.

When Active Newham took over, they started to organize school visits again. They also had visiting corporate groups from companies, who gave employees time off for charity and community work. These big groups were used to install crushed concrete paths, making the site much more accessible. The council also installed the lovely gate and grids on the windows, as well as the map and notice board.

Responsibility then passed to Parks Department and, of course, Covid happened. Very little access meant the site went back to nature even more and became less accessible. School and corporate visits resumed eventually, and the

Parks gardeners made improvements such as cutting paths through The Wilderness. With recent cuts these have stopped again and there are now only occasional gardeners strimming the grass nearest the church. Most of the maintenance and development of the site, apart from major tree work, is now done by the conservation volunteers.



The East Ham Nature Reserve Conservation and Heritage Volunteers formed a Green Gym Group and number around 10 volunteers every week.

A recent development is that we, the volunteers, are forming much closer links with the church. The Church of England now has an eco-church programme and St Mary Magdalen has gained the silver award. This has involved installing low energy light bulbs and making the building more efficient, as well as creating a small

eco-garden around the church hall. Quite an achievement for a building that dates from the twelfth century.

If you look under logs there are plenty of minibeasts like wood lice, slugs, centipedes and snails to look at.

The next stage towards gaining the gold award is to develop the churchyard. It already ticks nearly all the boxes suggested on the official form, apart from the heath and coastal habitats. We now want to improve the biodiversity. There are many different habitats including woodland, scrub and grassland and also hazel coppice and a laid hedge, but more flowering plants are needed to attract pollinators. These in turn will attract more birds. Removing ivy will allow flowers to grow in the woods. An ongoing task as the ivy soon grows back.

The grasslands are the most difficult areas for biodiversity. The books suggest removing the topsoil with machines to reduce fertility and planting wildflowers into the subsoil. We are not allowed to dig, because it is a graveyard, and it

is obviously impossible to use machines so we are limited to scything and hoeing.

We are experimenting with planting yellow rattle seeds and plug plants to parasitise and weaken the growth of coarse grasses, but it is very difficult to establish and maintain. Wren group has a parallel experiment going on in the old sewage works (OSW) to increase diversity in the grassland there.



If you find any black mats, they are for a survey of slow worms that collect under the mats because they like to be warm.

Apart from the physical work, it would be very useful and tick a box for the eco-church, if we could survey what plants and animals there are on the site, so we have a baseline to see if we can make improvements. Sandy Davies, who led the school visits when they were happening,

is doing butterfly and bird counts. She and her husband have also helped me with reptile counts, but we would like to do more.



East Ham Nature Reserve Heritage and Conservation Volunteers enjoying a well earned cuppa. Why not join them - come and get your hands dirty, get some exercise, meet new people and give a little back to nature.

The site has an exceptional population of slow worms and a good population of common lizards. Not what you would expect next to the A13! Slow worms collect under refugia around the site and are relatively easy to count, although they move very fast when they want to. Common lizards are difficult to quantify because they rarely go under refugia and are usually just a flick of a tail as they leave basking sites on anthills and logs. The reptiles, especially slow worms, are our star animals, although I

hope we can find others. There are lesser stag beetles, but we have not yet spotted the big stag beetles. Plenty of dead wood about, so it could be a good site for them as well as other invertebrates.



Volunteers use traditional hedge-laying in the conservation of the churchyard - pic by Peter Williams.

Now the plea for help. If you could spare any time to have a look at the nature reserve and see what plants, animals and fungi you can spot we would be very grateful. Wren group patch will always be around Wanstead Flats and Park, but it would be good to have a satellite patch in the south of the borough, with records of what is going on there.

If you contact me at newhamgg@gmail.com I can open the building and provide tea, coffee and biscuits. The 101 bus goes past the site. Go to www.newhamgreengym.org for more information.

The Heritage and Conservation Volunteers meet every Wednesday and the last Saturday of each month 10am – 1pm. Please come and help, there is lots of work to do and it's great for your mental and physical health. No need to book. Just arrive at the Norman Road entrance at 10am.

Please come and visit East Ham Nature Reserve.



Penny Evans



.... don't forget

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

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

then & now

Were you right ?

Youngsters posing beside Angell Pond, Wanstead Flats, in 1911 looking east with Capel Road to the right. The bandstand built by West Ham Council in 1905 is in the background. The more recent picture shows the same view in 2020 after a wet winter. The site of the bandstand is marked by the ring of trees in the background.





..... and finally

wren practical work

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

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

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

To join the group contact Peter Williams 07716034164 or e-mail wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com or just turn up on the day.

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

