

Winter 2020

wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

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a word from the chair

Phenology is the study of periodic plant and animal life cycle events, in particular how these cyclic events respond to seasonal, climate or other environmental changes. This may sound a little bit esoteric or complicated, but it is actually a study approach that lends itself to relatively simple citizen science.

It is most commonly used locally to monitor bird migration patterns; so, what date do Spring and Autumn migrants first appear and leave. The local birders even turn this into a bit of a game on the 'Patch'; every year we run a sweepstake for the first Wheatear of the year (yours truly won this year when I correctly predicted 17 March). But why does this matter, you might ask. Well, having an accurate understanding of

migration dates, or butterfly/moth emergence dates, or even plant flowering dates can give us a picture of the behaviour and natural cycles of a particular species but also how external factors such as climate change impact on them.

In the bird report featured later in this newsletter, there is a heavy focus on the phenology of our Autumn migrants. If you go out on Wanstead Flats at the moment, you might be lucky enough to see some of winter migrants... a Stonechat or two perched up on thin stems; Redwing feeding on berries or flying over with their distinctive "tseep" calls; or maybe some of the gathering numbers of winter ducks on our local ponds (Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal, and even Wigeon). These species are seen every year, but they arrive and leave at slightly different times, gather in bigger or smaller numbers - all of these stats can be useful to build a picture of the species, the season, and the location.

When fed into big recording schemes, these records contribute to major national and

international studies. We can build up maps and timelines to understand trends and patterns. It doesn't take much knowledge to start being able to contribute to this. We are now well into winter, but it won't be long before spring migrants return: perhaps you could keep an eye out for the first Chiffchaff song you hear, the first screaming Swift in the sky, the first Orange Tip butterfly or Brimstone, the first Snowdrops, Bluebells, or Hawthorn blossom.

Keeping a diary, notebook, or even a spreadsheet of your records can be a fun and informative thing to do; it could just be about records in your garden, or in the local area. Get in touch if you would like to find out more about how to make your records count, and help us all learn more about our changing world.

James Heal - Chair



Litter kills

People's rubbish doesn't look nice and spoils the enjoyment of our green spaces for everyone. But aside from its environmental impact, flytips and other litter also pose a real hazard to wildlife.

If you see a flytip or excess litter on Epping Forest land please report it. Call 020 8532 1010 (24 hours) or mail epping.forest@cityoflondon.gov.uk



insects and why they matter

Bees and similar creatures pollinate more than a third of our food crops, meaning significant declines in their numbers could affect agriculture. Pic by Tony Morrison

Insects are the foundation on life on earth, making up two thirds of all species. That's why the massive decline in their numbers is so alarming. The abundance of insects back in the 60s and 70s has long gone, along with those bug-splattered car windscreens, but the loss of insects has crept up on us almost unnoticed. Until now.



In 2017, a German study reported that flying insects had declined by around 75% in the last 25 years – and that was on nature reserves. It's thought the picture is similar in the UK.

One of the best studied insect populations in the world are Britain's butterflies. We know that our common butterflies have declined by about half over the last 40 years, and that despite conservation efforts, numbers of those needing specialist habitats have fallen by 77%. Over a similar period, the ranges of wild bees and hoverflies have shrunk dramatically.

There are now large areas of the country where many species are no longer able to live.

Not surprisingly, the plight of insects is reflected in changes in the population of insectivorous birds. Take nightingales and spotted flycatchers – numbers fell by 93% between 1967 and 2016. 'Insectageddon', as it's been christened by the media, isn't just bad news for insects, it's bad news for the birds, bats, lizards, amphibians, fishes and many other creatures that rely on them for food. And it's bad news for us humans too. Insects perform an important function controlling pests like aphids on our crops. They help old material decay, recycling nutrients into the soil. And they pollinate the plants we eat. Three quarters of food crops need insects. No insects means no tomatoes, no apples, cherries, strawberries, coffee, and even no chocolate.

To shine a spotlight on this major problem, a new initiative has been launched by the country's Wildlife Trusts, kicked off with a report by leading entomologist, Professor Dave Goulson. ***Insects & Why They Matter*** collates the evidence for the downturn in British insects and puts forwards solutions to urgently address their decline.



'Insectageddon' is not just bad news for our insects but bad news for birds, bats, lizards and all creatures that rely on them for food - bad also for us humans who rely on insects to pollinate our crops and help control pests and keep the soil in good condition.

According to Goulson, there are three main reasons why our insects are dying:

- 1) Loss of habitat – in particular the destruction of flower-rich grasslands, which were incredibly diverse habitats, but have been almost completely erased from the UK, with just 2-3% remaining.
- 2) Intensification of farming – small fields with multiple

crops have been replaced by giant fields of monoculture, with hedgerows and wild areas ripped out.

3) Use of pesticides – these were only introduced after WWII and since then their use has snowballed, with nearly 17,000 tons sprayed on farms every year – not to mention all the chemicals used by councils and home owners. The area of land where pesticides are applied has doubled in the last 25 years, and the toxicity of the chemicals used is much higher. For example, neonicotinoid insecticides are about 7,000 times more toxic to bees than DDT – so the tonnage of chemicals used has gone down but the damage they do has gone up. According to DEFRA, every hectare of arable land in the UK receives 17 applications of pesticide each year. Yes, 17!! Despite the EU-wide ban on neonicotinoid pesticides, one in five honey samples in the UK are found to contain residues, suggesting that these chemicals are still being widely used.



There is growing evidence chemicals (such as glyphosate) used for pest and weed control in local councils are not only killing our insects but also damaging to human health, in particular children. Pic from the Ecologist.

With less habitat, fewer flowers, and an environment contaminated with poison – it's not surprising that our insects are dying. But there is still hope – because there's still time to make a difference. Many insects may have reduced range, but they are still in existence, so there is scope to rejuvenate their populations.

Insects & Why They Matter recommends two key strategies for turning back the clock on insect declines:

1) Stopping all routine and unnecessary use of pesticides. The Government must set a compulsory pesticide reduction target for the UK and we should all stop using pesticides and weed killers wherever possible in our homes, gardens, parks and places of work.

2) Creating more and better connected insect friendly habitats in our gardens, towns, cities and countryside (termed a 'nature recovery network').



We are so lucky living with so much nature on our doorstep but we should never take it for granted. Keeping our open spaces and ensuring 'green' is designed into new development is essential for the wellbeing of both us and our wildlife.

Greening our cities and towns so that nature is part of our everyday life

We can turn towns, cities and villages into a buzzing network of insect friendly habitats. Every street should be a valuable space for wildlife. In return, we will gain the benefits for human health and wellbeing that come with having nature on your doorstep (not to mention the impact on carbon, air quality and urban heating). There is so much potential to have an impact if we act collectively. There are about half a million hectares of gardens in the UK, and 250,000 miles of road verge – a huge amount of land that could be quickly improved for wildlife. Our urban spaces should be dripping in vegetation, with green roofs and walls, and more street trees and parks. And we should also be making more of public spaces for nature. Two thirds of amenity land is short-mown grass, but meadow habitats support 8 times more wildlife. We've made a start on this in Wanstead with the new wild areas project being undertaken by Wild Wanstead, Redbridge Council and Vision, which is being extended in 2020 (find out more at wildwanstead.org/local-projects).

Helping farms become more wildlife friendly and sustainable

Around 70% of land in the UK is farmland. Our current system is inefficient, with about one third of all food grown going to waste, and too much land dedicated to



There is some evidence that insect friendly farming can increase crop yield with a more natural and sustainable pest and soil management.

growing crops to feed livestock. There is an unnecessary reliance on the routine spraying pesticides as a preventative treatment, which is a key driver of insect declines and a cause for concern for human health too.

What we can do to help as individuals

Tackling insect decline requires action at many levels, and we all have a role to play. So what could Wanstead's residents consider doing to help? We could...

- Stop using any pesticides or weed killers in our gardens
- Use every bit of outdoor space we have to create a habitat for wildlife... greening up our driveways, installing green roofs on extensions and 'garden' rooms, planting trees and pollinator friendly

flowers in our gardens, and leaving some areas to get a bit wilder

- Work with neighbours to make changes together to create bigger areas where nature can thrive, for example switching a fence panel at the back of the garden to a native hedge so that wildlife can move around more easily, or ensuring there are hedgehog holes along shared boundaries
- Spend a few minutes every month or so writing short emails to lobby Redbridge Council to do their bit. This really does make a difference in highlighting to councilors what's important to residents. For example, you could:
 - Email cleansing.services@redbridge.gov.uk to tell them you support the new wild areas (Grow Zones) which are being established on verges and parks in Wanstead and would like to see more
 - Email the council leaders, jas.athwal@redbridge.gov.uk and kam.raai@redbridge.gov.uk, and environment lead, john.howard@redbridge.gov.uk to ask for the council's use of pesticides to be stopped
 - Email the council leaders, jas.athwal@redbridge.gov.uk and kam.raai@redbridge.gov.uk, and planning lead sheila.bain@redbridge.gov.uk to request that all new developments incorporate green roofs and that policies are amended to reduce the concreting over of gardens

- If you can, consider buying organic where possible to send a message to the farming industry that you don't fancy food sprayed with pesticide 17 times a year and demonstrate there's a market in the UK for sustainably produced fruit and veg
- When you see those requests to sign petitions asking the Government to act, consider signing them. The Government has a depressingly poor record on environmental matters and is set to miss a whole raft of green targets, including 14 out of 19 designed to support biodiversity.

Nearly 1 in 4 UK front gardens are completely paved over

5 million front gardens have no plants growing in them

Three times as many front gardens are paved compared to ten years ago

Royal Horticultural Society Survey 2015

According to ***Insects & Why They Matter***, ecosystem crashes due to a critical loss of insect abundance and diversity are a real and present threat to society but they are not inevitable. Insect declines in the UK are mainly caused by a loss of habitat in which to thrive, and the use of pesticides on farmland, urban green spaces and gardens. These can be addressed without major economic or cultural cost. It just needs all of us to act.

Susannah Knox
Wild Wanstead



For more information on Wild Wanstead visit www.wildwanstead.org

Download ***Insects & Why They Matter*** at:
https://www.somersetwildlife.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/FULL%20AFI%20REPORT%20WEB1_1.pdf

Susannah is a founder member of **Wild Wanstead** - an organisation, amongst other things, dedicated to the greening of Wanstead in the London Borough of Redbridge. There may be other similar organisations in your area. If not why not lobby your local councillors or perhaps even start up your own organisation. (Ed)



Winter

Wintry days and chilly nights
Mist and fog, sky is crisp and bright
Bare twigs on trees from fallen leaves
Such a wintry sight

Glistening frost, sleet and snow
Central heating on the go
Blustery wind and rain
It's Autumn time again

The blackbird's song is silent
The red robin's busy tweet
The Grey squirrel clambering on the trees
Searching for a treat

Foxes seen here and there
In the daylight they don't care
Looking for scraps to eat
In your bin or in the street

Silent streets and behind closed doors
Smell the smoky mist as the house fires roar
Seasonal lights on very cold nights Christmas arrives once more

So, we salute you Mother Nature
For all your wonderful ways
Preparing our precious green land
For those special summer days

By Janet Briggs

autumn spider survey

by James Heal

On 13 October David Carr led the way with another spider field trip/survey on Wanstead Flats. This followed the very wet but successful trip on 27 July and a couple of solo visits he has made since. There were about nine of us: members of the Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group and the London Natural History Society.

Unfortunately, the day was another wet one as with the July visit, although it was luckily mainly just overcast and drizzly with one heavy shower. The focus of the visit was on the copses on the Flats (on this occasion, Long Wood and Coronation Copse) with a few spiders found nearby in the grassland, broom and scrub, and a single specialist found on the margins of Angel/Bandstand Pond. David employed the methods of bush/tree beating, some sweep-netting, and some leaf-litter sorting. A number of the species mentioned below required microscopic examination for confirmation to species level.



Anyphaena numida - pic by Anke Marsh

The July visit had been tantalising with a find of an immature spider suspected to be *Anyphaena numida*, a nationally rare 'buzzing spider'. Whilst we were not able to confirm that find, David had a confirmed adult male on a solo visit a few weeks later. And so we were



Araneus redii - pic by Anke Marsh

delighted to find another on the October trip by beating the same oaks where he found a specimen before on his own. There are only three species of the *Anyphaena* genus found in the UK, with two of them being very rare and recent finds for the UK, and all three having been found locally by David. Whilst *A. numida* was undoubtedly the rarest find of the day (only a handful of specimens have been confirmed nationally), David also found a number of other scarce and interesting spiders.

After meeting and gathering in Centre Road car-park, we began the spider-search in Long Wood, aptly named as a long and narrow bisected copse running from east to west along the northerly part of the largest section of Wanstead Flats and dividing the Brick Pit fields to the north from the broom field grasslands to the south.

In the first round of tree-tappings and undergrowth sorting, David quickly picked up *Harpactea hombergi*, a small stripey-legged woodlouse hunting spider. With the exception of the very rare, *H. rubicunda*, *H. hombergi* is the only species in its genus likely to be found in the UK.

We also found the very common *Amaurobius similis* in this location, the lace-webbed spider. I learned that 'similis' part of its binomial refers to its similarity to the closely related *A. fenestralis*. The latter is more likely than the former to be found away from human habitation, but on this occasion we clearly happened across a 'wilder' woodland specimen (albeit you are never very far from habitation on Wanstead Flats).

Another common 'domestic' species found in this bit of woodland was the large house spider, *Eratigena atrica* group (probably *E. gigantea*). A pale specimen was hiding in a crevice surrounded by leaf litter. We also found the false widow spider now almost ubiquitous in built-up areas in the South East; *Steatoda nobilis*.

In this environment we also came across one of the two species of pinkish goblin spiders, from the *Oonops* genus. David later confirmed that this was *Oonops pulcher*, a spider he had not previously recorded on Wanstead Flats.

It was no surprise to find the orbweb spider, *Araneus diadematus* (commonly called Garden Spider), on a web with its distinctive white cross-like shape on the abdomen. However, Anke Marsh, who had joined us for the day with her daughter, was particularly thrilled to find a lifer, *Agelenatea redii*, another orbweb spider on Broom just south of Long Wood (it was also a lifer for me, but as a arachno-newbie, that is not a great surprise).

Just outside of the wooded areas we also found a chunky wolf spider that David identified for us as *Trochosa terricola* and the commonly-found nursery web spider, *Pisaura mirabilis*.

As the rain started again we went back into a wooded area to the east of the gap in Long Wood. This was where David had found *Anyphaena numida* a few weeks earlier and on the first few taps of the oak, we had an



Trochosa terricola - pic by Anke Marsh

adult male. It is worth noting that there have still been fewer than 20 confirmed finds of this species in the UK.

David also got a likely immature *Philodromus praedatus* (one of the tricky running crab spiders) from the oak in the same location (*Philodromus dispar* was also recorded on the day, although I appear not to have been paying attention at that point as I have no photos of it). We also got to study one of the larger money spiders (Linyphiidae), which seems somewhat misnamed as *Lepthyphantes minutus* considering it is at least two or three times the size of an average expected money spider.

Another interesting find nearby, and another new species for the local area, was *Megalepthyphantes sp. near collinus*. This species has still to be fully studied and properly named in science (hence it is just a species similar to/"near" *M. collinus*) and has just a double digit

set of records in the UK, all in the South East. David actually found and confirmed male and female specimens of this enigmatic species.

Heavy rain then temporarily stopped play and the small party of spider hunters adjourned to a nearby cafe for a spot of lunch. A little later when the rain was slightly less of an impediment to arachno-detecting, we went back to a different copse; known locally as Coronation Copse. David focused on sorting through the top layers of loose leaf litter. It was a productive method in a productive location.



Haplodrassus sylvestris - Pic by Anke Marsh

Another linyphid appeared almost straight away: *Microneta viaria*, and things just got better from there. A chunky looking ground spider turned out to

be *Haplodrassus sylvestris*, a woodland native that is not often recorded and has apparently been in decline, so lovely to find in a semi-urban site. This was another first for our location.



Another linyphid/money spider, *Walckenaeria acuminata* - pic by Anke Marsh

Next out of the leaf-litter was one of the ant-mimic spiders, *Phrurolithus festivus*. And then something truly remarkable came fell out of the plastic soil sieve. Another linyphid/money spider, a male with extraordinary boxing-glove-like pedipalps, and an even more extraordinary thin stalk-like protuberance on its head, which is where the male's eyes are situated. The spider's name is *Walckenaeria acuminata*. There are a number of species in this

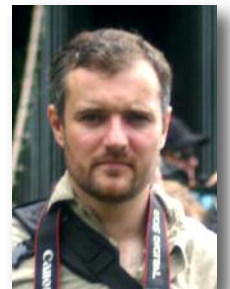
genus, but surely none are quite as strange as this particular species.

We also found another wolf spider, but did not identify it to species level, so it remains *Pardosa sp* in our records.

David and I then bid farewell to the last of our spider-finding team, Anke and her daughter, and made our way down to the swampy circle that used to be a small lake, called Angel. Sifting through the litter there did not seem to prove very productive until one small spider fell through the sieve. It was the last spider David found for the day and was not only new for the local area, but also a nationally scarce spider: a member of the Theridiidae (or 'tangle web') spiders, called *Robertus arundineti*.

Overall, it proved to be another great day of spider finds, yet again showing Wanstead Flats to be a fantastic location. I am sure we will organise further surveys/field trips in the future, so please do keep an eye out.

Report by James Heal



let them eat bread

Official Statement on feeding Bread from the Queen's Swan Marker

As many of you know there has been a lot of debate about feeding swans and other waterfowl bread.

We have always maintained that feeding them bread is fine, Today we received a this statement from The Queen's Swan Marker, David Barber, MVO, endorsed by Professor Christopher Perrins of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology at Oxford University.

"There has been a great deal of press coverage in recent months regarding the 'Ban the Bread' campaign which is confusing many members of the public who like to feed swans.

Supporters of the campaign claim that bread should not be fed to swans on the grounds that it is bad for them. This is not correct. Swans have been fed bread for many hundreds of years without causing any ill effects. While bread may not be the best dietary option for swans compared to their natural food such as river weed, it has become a very important source of energy for them, supplementing their natural diet and helping them to survive the cold winter months when vegetation is very scarce.

There is no good reason not to feed bread to swans, provided it is not mouldy. Most households have surplus bread and children have always enjoyed feeding swans with their parents. The 'Ban the Bread' campaign is already having a deleterious impact upon the swan population; I am receiving reports of underweight cygnets and adult birds, and a number of swans from large flocks have begun to wander into roads in search of food. This poses the further risk of swans being hit by vehicles. Malnutrition also increases their vulnerability to fatal diseases like avian-flu which has caused the deaths of many mute swans and other waterfowl in the past.

Furthermore, there have been statements made in the media claiming that feeding bread causes angel-wing in swans. Angel-wing is a condition where a cygnet develops a deformed wing. Professor Christopher Perrins, LVO, FRS of the Department of Zoology at Oxford University stated, 'There is no evidence of a connection between feeding bread and angel-wing; at least some cygnets develop this condition without ever having seen any bread'.

I therefore encourage members of the public to continue feeding swans to help improve their chances of survival, especially through the winter."

We'd like to thank everyone for their support and we hope that this will help these beautiful birds.

www.theswansanctuary.org.uk/general-information



50 years of recording show average dates of flowering of some harbingers of spring - the picture shows the familiar Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis*. Picture by Tony Morrison.

spring is on its way

Article by Tricia Moxey

It is an apparent tradition to start the New Year with fresh resolutions! Naturalists are fortunate as they are connected to the natural world, a state which brings many benefits, including the chance of sharing your enthusiasm with other like-minded folk!

They can joyfully watch garden wildlife from the comfort of their warm homes, or brave the elements in the wider countryside in their search for that elusive species. Many households now have security CCTV or wildlife web cams and these can reveal what animals are prowling around after dark.



At the start of the year, birdwatchers often organise bird-spotting races to welcome in the new year, or visit reservoirs or lakes to observe and record the overwintering wildfowl. Shy mammals leave their footprints in wet mud or in snow and can of course be identified from their droppings! Although the majority of invertebrates are hidden away as eggs or pupae there are several which appear on sunny days, such as Winter Gnats or queen bumblebees.

Whilst it is a challenge to identify leafless trees from their silhouettes or by close examination of bark and twigs there is a sense of satisfaction to do so.



Species such as Gorse seem to flower all year round

The members of the Botanical Society of the British Isles celebrate the new year searching for wild species actually in flower. At the start of 2016, 865 plant-lovers spent up to three hours hunting for open blooms, recording a staggering 8,568 individual plants from across Britain and Ireland. These represented 612

different species, compared to only 368 in 2015. They sent in more than 400 lists and around half of them contained 20 or more species. Our record for the Wanstead area was 37 species in flower!

Plants open their flowers in response to changes in temperature or day length and much research is being carried out to determine the actual mechanisms involved. The production of alluring perfumes and sugary nectar from such open flowers requires energy and neither is produced unless the conditions suit the appropriate insect pollinators. These only fly when the ambient temperature is right for them. It is a delicately balanced interaction between plants and insects, which has been honed to perfection over millions of years.



Plants such as Green Alkanet continue to flower with warmer autumn days until cut back by frosty nights

Why not record when you first see open flowers at the start of 2017? Do make a note of their surroundings as a sheltered sunny spot will be so much warmer than an exposed windy hill top.



Analysing the list of open flowers at the start of the year reveals that some are species which seem to flower all year round, such as Gorse. Others, such as Yarrow and Green Alkanet, continued to flower, influenced by warmer autumn days until cut back by frosty nights. The flowering Alexanders may have been triggered by the warm weather as this species usually blooms in early spring.

Based on 50 years of recording, these are the average dates of flowering of some harbingers of spring: Winter Aconite *Eranthis hiemalis* January 21; Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis* January 25; Hazel *Corylus avellana* February 10; Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* February 28; and Coltsfoot *Tussilago farfara* March 3. (Data from Sparks et al., 2000). However, there is considerable variation around these dates as many local factors will influence when these plants start to flower. Why not record when you first see them in 2017? Do make a note of their surroundings as a sheltered sunny spot will be so much warmer than an exposed windy hill top.

The science of phenology observes the key moments in plants' or animals' annual cycles, such as when they come into leaf or flower, lay eggs or hatch out, and offer insights into shifts in the seasons. This study is not new with records dating from 1736 when Robert Marsham began recording seasonal events. Today, a large number of observers record the first sightings of frog spawn, butterflies or opening hazel catkins on an interactive map and the data collected is helping to analyse the

trends and give clues as to which species are adapting well to warmer autumns and shorter winters. For more information about phenology and how to get involved with reporting signs of spring do visit the website: www.naturescalendar.org.uk.

In addition to recording the impact of a changing climate on wild species, volunteers are noting the date of flowering of selected plants in the Botanic Gardens at Kew and Edinburgh. These include both native and introduced species and records are linked to similar projects across Europe. The responses of agricultural crops and the emergence of pests are also being monitored to help plan for the future.

One group of plants which are rather more obvious at this time of year are the mosses, minute green plants which are found in a wide range of habitats. It is best to use a hand lens to see the finer details of these diminutive plants, which reproduce by shedding spores from capsules. Many exposed wall tops will support at



One group of plants which are rather more obvious at this time of year are the mosses, minute green plants which are found in a wide range of habitats. Picture shows the Wall Screw Moss *Tortula muralis*



The Springy Turf Moss *Rhytidelphus squarrosus*

least two species well adapted to such dry conditions. These are the Wall Screw Moss *Tortula muralis* and the Grey-cushioned *Grimmia pulvinata*, which is sometimes referred to as Hedgehog Moss! The soil in flower pots or bonfire sites may be colonised by the Bonfire Moss *Funaria hygrometrica* which has very obvious capsules on red stalks. The tiny cushions of Silver Moss *Bryum argenteum* are found at the base of walls and in cracks of pavements in many urban locations.

Other common mosses to find are those that look like green feathers, some of these form extensive carpets in damp lawns. You may find the Common Feather-moss *Kindbergia praelonga* and the Springy Turf-moss *Rhytidelphus squarrosus* which has long pointed tips to its curved leaves. A similar but more robust species often found in churchyards is the Big Shaggy-moss *R. triquetrus* which has the alternative name of the Electrified Cat's-tail Moss. Growing up to 20cm, this has red stems and its leaves stick out in all directions. Feather mosses are often selected by birds to line their nests.

The Field studies Council produces a range of laminated guides which include trees, animal tracks and common mosses and liverworts of towns and gardens. Details on: www.field-studies-council.org

The woodland Trust produces a winter twig identification chart as well as many other activities for all ages!

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/activities/2016

The Collins Tree Guide by Owen Johnson and David More (published in 2004) has some good illustrations.

Article by Tricia Moxey

Article first published Dec 2016



Two books which may be of interest;

Simon King's *Nature Watch: How to Track and Observe Wildlife* (Quadrille Publishing), is full of useful tips for naturalists as he gives details of how and where to watch wildlife, as well as giving details of binoculars and suitable clothing for outdoor observation.

Companion to Wildlife Gardening by Chris Baines (published by the Royal Horticultural Society), is a new edition of *How to Make a Wildlife Garden* published over 40 years ago. But this is a revised and much updated version with fresh illustrations and includes the new research on the value of gardens for wildlife.



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.
- ☐ 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

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

Autumn Phenology (1 September- 30 November)

Summary and highlights by James Heal

Autumn 2019 on our Patch will not exactly go down as being a great vintage in the way that 2018 did (anyone remember Rustic Bunting, Red-backed Shrike and Barn Owl? You may not, however, remember the 'untwitchables' of: Gannet, Yellow-browed Warbler, Cattle Egret, and Merlin).



Despite being pretty pale in comparison with 2018, autumn 2019 has had some solid bird records which were patch ticks for several of us. Highlights included:



Kingfisher - Pic by Nick Croft

- Tony B's Osprey over the Brooms on 28 September (a bird I sadly missed), followed just a week later by...
- A Marsh Harrier on 5 October, also flying east over the Brooms (spotted jointly by Jono and Tony).

- Also on 5 October Tony flushed our first Jack Snipe of the year by Heronry.
- A few mostly-annual birds (if you are part of a very small and elite sub-section of our most committed workers) fell in quick succession this autumn with Yellowhammer on 7 October, Rock Pipit and Woodlark (both latter birds I have yet to etch on to my patch list and were found by Bob), and Lapwing on 24 October, found by Nick.
- A Short-eared Owl was seen on both 22 and 23 October.
- It was a good autumn for Yellow-legged Gull, with at least two different individuals being seen on 8, 9, 16, 19, 22, 24 and 29 September as well as 1, 6, and 10 October.
- Nick also had Goldeneye over the Park on 10 November, only the sixth occasion this species has been recorded on the patch in the last decade.
- The bird of the autumn for almost all of us, certainly in terms of how well viewed it was, must be the long-staying Greenshank on Heronry. First seen on 5 September (found by Simon Raper, although misidentified at first as he was in a rush taking his children to school) and staying 12 days (!) until 17th. This was the first time this species had been seen on this lake since it was drained over 20 years ago. Ludicrously, it wasn't even a patch year tick for Nick, but still his first on the deck.



Greenshank - Pic by James Heal

The last of the summer breeding birds

Most of our breeding Swift had departed by early August, but the last passage bird was seen by Nick on 1 September (apparently, the last one seen in London this year was on 14 September).

Garden Warbler hasn't been a breeding species on Wanstead Flats since 2014, but I include it in this section more out of hope than expectation. Autumn birds appeared from 1 August with the last one being seen for the year on 14 September.

Willow Warbler also did not establish any breeding territories, sadly, and was also last seen for the year on

14 September. Aside from the departure of Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler, the 14th was also the last day we had Common Redstart and Yellow Wagtail on the Patch and saw the autumn arrivals of Stonechat and Reed Bunting, so a real point of transition. The weather was very fine over 14 and 15 September with top temperatures of 25 degrees, clear evenings and low winds.



Common Redstart Pic by James Heal

Hobby had a successful breeding year locally and they left us in swelled numbers for warmer climes on 23 September. According to London Bird Wiki, the last London sighting of Hobby occurred just up the road in Walthamstow on 8 October.

Our last Common Whitethroat seemed to depart on 30 September, only a day before the last London record of



Hobby - Pic by Nick Croft

this species for 2019. Lesser Whitethroat followed shortly after, with our last bird being seen on 2 October and the London-last three days later on the 5th.



Reed Warbler - Pic by Nick Croft

Nick also had the last Reed Warbler of the year on 2

October. This was a patch record latest and was also the London latest for the year. Reed Warbler seemed to have a good year on the Patch with territories on Shoulder of Mutton and on the Roding by the Old Sewage Works although no nests were seen.

I stopped seeing our dwindling population of House Martin after 19 September, although the last record of a passage bird was on 8 October. This was three days later than the mean average and 9 days earlier than our record latest ever.



Blackcap - Pic by Nick Croft

Swallow are no longer breeding birds, but they are also being included in this section. Our last sighting was on 16 October, pretty much spot-on as the average last day that we see them (although I am aware that the last

London record for this species in 2019 was 3 November).

We occasionally have one or two over-wintering birds, although the last Blackcap we recorded this autumn was on 22 October.

The passage migrants

In the summer summary (here), I ran through the seven key species of regular passage migrants that began with a Wheatear on 8 August. We now have a full picture of the autumn migration window: it was exactly two months long ending on 8 October with the last Whinchat for the year.

	Autumn arrival	Autumn depart	Bird days	High count
N Wheatear	8 August	22 September	28	12
Whinchat	16 August	8 October	40	10
C Redstart	12 August	14 September	23	7
Spotted Flycatcher	11 August	2 October	33	12
Pied Flycatcher	11 August	21 September	13	6
Tree Pipit	11 August	17 September	22	6
Yellow Wagtail	13 August	14 September	15	11

The table above attempts to give a picture of what our patch autumn migration looked like with first and last

dates for each of the key species (I left out Ring Ouzel as they are just a bit too scarce and Willow Warbler was missed off as it was a recent breeding bird on the patch). The number of 'bird days' refers to the number of days each species was recorded on the patch, not the length of 'window' between first and last. And, 'high count' is hopefully obvious as the peak number of individual birds seen of each species on any particular day.



Wheatear - Pic by James Heal

To pick out a few key observations (otherwise I shall let the data table speak for itself):

- To borrow Nick's lingo, the autumn was a bit 'meh' for Wheatear. The 28 bird days were, interestingly, split exactly between August and September with the mean average number of birds seen slightly weighted in favour of September.

- Whinchat not only had the widest migration window (53 days) but also the highest number of bird days (40). In September Whinchat was seen on 19 days in total.
- Common Redstart numbers reached their peak at the end of August and beginning of September with an average of five birds a day between 29 August and 2 September.
- It wasn't exactly a bumper year for Spotted Flycatcher, although a total of 33 bird days through the autumn and 15 days in September is not bad. There were rarely high number of them, and so 12 birds on 13 September was a bit of an anomaly as the second highest count was 6 birds (and that was the day before).



Spotted Flycatcher - Pic by Nick Croft

- Pied Flycatcher had the lowest number of bird days of the group, but this was still a record breaking autumn for this species on the Patch, although only three of the 13 bird days were in September.
- As I mentioned in the last summary, it was a very poor autumn for passage Yellow Wagtails although the high count of 11 birds was recorded on the first day of September.

Ring Ouzel was an October bird this autumn with a total of four sightings in the fortnight between 7th and 21st October.

Autumn/Winter arrivals

The first Linnet of the autumn appeared on 10 September and since then we have had our usual flock often congregating around Jubilee Pond, Police Scrape and in the Broom Fields. On 18 November, Tony counted 39 of them (although apparently there used to be c50 in our Linnet flock(s).

The first autumn Stonechat was recorded on 14 September (actually three birds) and they have been almost a constant feature since then in both the Brooms and SSSI with up to five birds being seen on any given day.



Stonechat - Pic by Tony Brown

The first Redpoll of the autumn was seen on 15 October, but there have been very few records since. Rather more frequently recorded on the Flats this autumn has been Woodcock. Bob scored the first of the season on 31 October and there have been regular sightings of up to two birds since, although still evading yours truly for my list despite one flying over my head whilst I was carrying morning coffees back to my patch workers. I'm not bitter.

Of winter thrushes, the less said the better. The first Redwing of the autumn flew over on 2 October, but numbers haven't exactly been epic since then; reflecting what has felt like pretty poor visible migration to me more generally. Fieldfare was first recorded on the patch on 7 October this year. I didn't think I could top the

embarrassment of blanking Yellow Wagtail on the Patch this year, but it is now looking increasingly likely that I will go the whole year without ticking off Fieldfare (I saw literally hundreds last year).



Redwing - Pic by Nick Croft

Whilst on the topic of visible migration, there have been good numbers of locally gathering Greenfinch (tens), Goldfinch (high tens), and Parakeet (700+), with some impressive counts of flyover Jackdaw (hundreds), Woodpigeon (many hundreds), and even the odd murmuration of Starling (1000+), although Chaffinch, Brambling, and other finch numbers seem to be down on average, and you can forget about Hawfinch.

Report by James Heal





Breath

by J. Daniel Beaudry

Tree, gather up my thoughts
like the clouds in your branches.
Draw up my soul
like the waters in your root.
In the arteries of your trunk
bring me together.
Through your leaves
breathe out the sky.

.. and finally

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 0208 555 1358 or 07947 819472 or e-mail wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com or just turn up on the day.

Meet Stables gate, Empress Ave, E12 for January 2020
16/1 midweek - OSW lower new enclosure
23/1 midweek - OSW lower new enclosure finish
30/1 midweek - OSW lower new scrape plus truck turning circle

Meet Temple for February and March
2/2 Sunday - clear round oak plantation at the top of the Glade
6/2 midweek - clear round oak plantation top of the Glade
13/2 midweek - clear round oak plantation top of the Glade
20/2 midweek - sort paths in wood behind keepers cottage
27/2 midweek - Chalet wood logs check and path edging
1/3 Sunday - Shoulder of Mutton beach clearance
5/3 midweek - adjacent to the Perch pond dam
12/3 midweek - spare slot for catch up (island)

Meet Wanstead Flats (to be confirmed)
19/3 midweek - Flats work on the enclosure
26/3 midweek - bramble opp Capel /anti vehicle ditch



then & now

Were you right ?

Centre Road looking towards Forest Gate. The road has been widened since the original photo was taken in 1910 and the verge has become overgrown somewhat - but the London Plane trees are a giveaway. The Plane trees in the original picture were newly planted as can be seen by the use of protective timber cages around their trunks.



links

Got any links to go on this page? Get in touch wreneditor@talktalk.net

Wren links page <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/links>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WrenOrg>

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

Local

Wanstead Wildlife
<http://www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk/>

Friends of Wanstead Parklands
<http://www.wansteadpark.org.uk/>

RSPB North East London Members Group
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/northeastlondon>

Wanstead Birding Blog
<http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>

Epping Forest
<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/Pages/default.aspx>

British Naturalists' Association
<http://www.bna-naturalists.org/>

Bushwood Area Residents' Association
<http://www.bara-leytonstone.org.uk/>

East London Nature <http://www.eln.yorkshirefog.co.uk>

East London Birders <http://www.elbf.co.uk/>

Friends of Epping Forest
<http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/index.htm>

East London Nature <http://www.eastlondonnature.co.uk>

Plenty of info here about walking in Essex - including the forest
<http://trailman.co.uk/>

Wild Wanstead - greening up the local area
www.wildwanstead.org

National

BBC Nature <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature>

British Naturalists Association
<http://www.bna-naturalists.org>

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

Field Studies Council (FSC)
<https://www.field-studies-council.org>

London Natural History Society
<http://www.lnhs.org.uk/>

Natural England <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk>

RSPB <http://www.rspb.org.uk/england>

UK Safari <http://www.uksafari.com/index.htm>

The British Deer Society <http://www.bds.org.uk/index.html>

The Wildlife Trust <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org>