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wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

spring 2015

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a word from the chair

These are strange – and contradictory – times. Never before have green spaces been under so much pressure, not least from development and anti-nature agriculture, but never before have so many people felt they should be protecting the environment. Of course, in our area of Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest there are few if any truly natural environments, but the point still remains that the open spaces we hold so dear (crafted as they have been by human hands) cannot be taken for granted.

This is the last newsletter before a general election. The way we vote is decided by any number of factors but to my mind environmental policy is one

of the important ones. It impacts not just on the 'here and now' but what legacy we leave for future generations. This government has not been good on 'green' issues and I'm not holding my breath that its successor in May will be any better. There will still be pressure to build on green spaces, restraints on development could be relaxed and local authority budgets for the environment will face more cuts. We are fortunate that Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats are covered by the protective shield of the Epping Forest Act. However, I don't believe that even this is sacrosanct given the pressure to squeeze more housing, retail and commercial concrete and glass into London. I could envisage a time in the not-too-distant future where areas deemed to be marginal – parts of Wanstead Flats, for example - are sold to developers to cover deficits elsewhere. For land without the protection afforded to Epping Forest, this temptation for local authorities will be greater still.

As a wildlife charity one thing we have a responsibility to do is act as a champion for our area's flora and fauna, particularly in the face of development pressures. And we can't do that effectively

unless we know what animals, insects and plants we have. Many of our members are involved in regular survey work, and the group's bio-blitz weekend on the weekend of 26-28 June aims to offer members of the wider public the chance to get involved. Please make a note in your diaries and watch for more details on this exciting event.

Members will have seen – and hopefully given their views on – the recent Wanstead Park consultation process. It is not easy to plan for the future in such a way that people out for a Sunday stroll, children wanting a bit of adventure, those with an interest in history, and the park's wildlife can all be catered for. There are some very good proposals – and some essential ones, especially concerning the park's water system – but the authorities charged with seeing them through need to ensure that in the process of 'improving' this space we don't end up losing the semi-wild charm that makes it so popular. If carried out well, the proposed changes could make a positive difference. If not, a lot of damage could be done, not least to its wildlife.

Tim Harris



The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now

I believe that this proverb says as much about people as it does trees.

If a child is taught to understand and care about nature then I believe he or she is likely to grow to be a better person for it. The proverb also implies that it's never too late to learn. Involving and encouraging others, both young and older, to care about their environment is to plant a seed whereby they may grow more a part of where they live – caring more for it and others living there.

The Wren Group is trying hard to engage more with local groups and people in caring about where they live. We now have a regular presence at local markets and events. We have a lively Facebook page as well as a website, and you can even follow us on Twitter.

However, probably the best way of spreading the word is through you. If you are not a Wren member – why not join? If you are a member why not tell your friends? Please take a look and 'like' our facebook

page – by following us you will be kept up-to-date with what's happening. And please tell your friends to like us.

Lastly, remember this is your newsletter and cannot be produced without your support so if you have any news, views or stories please send them to me at wreeditor@talktalk.net

Joining details, previous newsletters and much more can now be found on the Wren website at <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk>

the value of our green spaces

Article by Tricia Moxey

About 47% of Greater London is made up of green spaces! In addition to all the private gardens, golf courses and playing fields, and riverside walks there are the Royal Parks, protected common land, 142 Local Nature Reserves, 3,000 parks, 37 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 4 World Heritage Sites and 300,000 allotments. Covering 2,476 hectares (6,118 acres) Epping Forest is of course the largest of these green spaces! Although

technically not within Greater London, the plantations of Thames Chase now extend to 9,842 hectares (24,320 acres) astride the M25 and are starting to impact on the landscape, but new woods take centuries to mature.

With an expanding population of over 8 million, the pressure on these green spaces is increasing as developers see some as building plots. But it is vital that these green space

remain green as they provide opportunities for recreation, socialisation and many restorative properties to counterbalance the stresses of modern life. Research has shown that access to such green spaces by residents, workers or visitors has tremendous health benefits with significant therapeutic effects on mind and body. Observing the wildlife that lives there or learning about the history of the site enriches the experience.

Collectively over 13,000 different species have been noted: birds, mammals, fish, slugs and snails as well as trees and other plants. But how many of those using these green spaces takes time out to listen to the natural sounds of bird song, the wind in the branches or the buzz of insects? Of course, the incessant background hum of traffic in many areas may make this a challenging activity!

As the majority of the population now reside within an urban environment, their outlook is inevitably one of built development interspersed by fragments of greenery and hopefully some trees. In an ideal world each one of us should see a tree on waking and planners are struggling to achieve this! More trees are required as they add financial value to an area, raising house prices, making it a more pleasant place to walk through, they intercept rainfall to reduce flooding risk, and they remove pollutants from the air, manufacture oxygen and provide habitats for wildlife, too. They are aesthetically pleasing and provide inspiration for art, poetry and music and help some people overcome depression. Certain trees produce edible fruits too!

Mature trees improve the appearance of green spaces, but for many people the quality of the maintenance of green spaces is important too. Sadly for many of the owners of such green spaces, budget restrictions mean that effective management is much reduced. Those in charge of budgets should be made aware of the clear financial benefits to the local communities of well-maintained green spaces. Many more people will be encouraged to visit their local green space if it is an attractive safe area with suitably located seats, stunning vistas, leafy glades, water areas and

some facilities as well. The Victorians placed great emphasis on high standards of maintenance of their green spaces as they recognised their potential value to society. Such parks were part of the collective civic pride in the local area and it would be good to see resurgence in civic pride once again, so green spaces can receive the attention they deserve.

Many more people will be encouraged to visit their local green space if it is an attractive safe area with suitably located seats, stunning vistas, leafy glades, water areas and some facilities too

However, we must be on our guard to ensure engaging with the natural world goes hand in hand with access to green space, by reminding everyone of its importance in all our lives. The editorial team for a recently published junior dictionary had removed words concerning nature such as acorn, ash, bluebell, buttercup, kingfisher, nectar and pasture as they felt such words were no longer relevant to children. Terms such as broadband, celebrity and cut-and-paste were included instead as they were thought to be more appropriate! As a result of pressure, an updated version will re-instate the plants and animals, but this example highlights the need to emphasise the significance

of the natural world to all sectors of society! For future generations we need to ensure that there are oaks, bees, bluebells, kingfishers and pastures for them to see.

A view of wider horizons helps to lift the spirit. A landscape is best appreciated from some hilltop or glimpsed unexpectedly as one rounds a corner. We all benefit from exposure to vast landscapes, with the open cloud studded sky above and undulating ground sweeping towards the horizon, preferably one with masses of trees and open fields. In his recent publication, *Landmarks* Robert Macfarlane writes that he has spent years visiting many parts of the British Isles, noting the incredibly rich vocabulary used to describe the details of the varied landscapes and he is rightly concerned that for many folk today their only experience of the great outdoors will be the urban fringe 'blandscape' which they will only be able describe with a limited range of words.

A stunning view should bring about exclamations of wonder and although we may not have the words to describe it fully, we should all take time to stop and stare and feel better for doing so.

Landmarks by Robert Macfarlane was published by Hamish Hamilton on 5th March 2015 and will extend your appreciation of the natural world.

Article by Tricia Moxey

For information about the green spaces in Greater London visit www.gigl.org.uk



the future of wanstead park

In 2009, English Heritage declared Wanstead Park on its 'at risk' register. The park was deemed 'at risk' as it was believed the landscape was declining and was in urgent need of new investment.

Consultants, Chris Blandford Associates (CBA), were appointed by the City of London to help develop long term regeneration plans for the

park. Public consultations were held in February.

The main proposals to improve the landscape, its historic features, visitor facilities, community and educational programmes, have been summarised in a document called a 'Conservation Statement'. This statement will be used to inform any works carried out in the area.

Among the CBA proposals for Wanstead Park are the relining of Heronry Lake, and the enhancement of wildlife habitats on the southern shore. This picture shows the lake as it was in the early part of the 20th century.



Building on a public consultation in 2011, proposals for enhancing Wanstead Park's landscape, historic features, wildlife habitats and visitor facilities, and developing a volunteering and educational programme, have been drafted by CBA for the City of London. They have called for individuals and groups to comment on these provisional plans and feedback on our priorities for one of London's most important parklands.

"We also wish to emphasise that the plan needs to make the commitment that works on which capital is expended are sustained by ongoing revenue expenditure and voluntary contribution and work. To that end the CoL and various voluntary groups need to work together toward agreed ends and on a day-to-day basis"

In response chairman Tim Harris comments on the WREN Group committee's discussion:

"We welcome the initiative to develop a plan for the Park, and the opportunity to comment on it. The Group have made detailed comments on the proposals (available on request) but much will depend on the detail as initiatives are developed.

We would wish to be included and consulted as part of the development and execution of details as they arise.

We support a number of the proposals, such as improvements to entrances, signage and footpaths. Access needs to be inclusive, to assist those with impaired mobility and encourage contemplation and appreciation of the Park.

We also welcome removal of invasive species, but where this is proposed would like to see more detail regarding selective removal of vegetation would take place. Natural habitat is a key feature of the Park and should not be unnecessarily destroyed.

While we agree that a vision for the Wanstead Park of the future should seek to draw attention to, enhance and provide interpretation for some of its most important historic features, we are concerned that pushing too far in this direction will damage the unique charm of the Park, as well as its natural history.

Overall we think these proposals, if implemented with due attention to this important and delicate balance between the park's history and its existing habitat, would be a great step forward."

The proposals, with work due to start next year, include extensive work to Heronry Lake, which would see it completely relined, and wildlife habitats enhanced.

The Temple is set to be refurbished into a "visitor hub" with a new cafe and the main entrances of the park will be improved with new signage and maps installed. The site of the old mansion, demolished in the

19th century, is due to become a tourist site in itself with signs detailing its size and history.

Wanstead Park was one of the most spectacular and ambitiously designed gardens in the country during the late 17th – early 18th centuries. Sir Josiah Child and his descendants, arguably one of the richest families in England at that time, invested significantly in the grounds, creating 'one of the most magnificent places in this country'. Many features remain from this period and still dominate the site today.

There are also plans for the park to be used for self-guided tours with a smartphone app, and generating income with open air cinema and concerts.

Article by Mark Gorman



More on CoL website
<https://consult.cityoflondon.gov.uk/gf2.tif/546498/1>

invertebrate report

Spring 2015

by Paul Ferris



One reason for even including an article about invertebrates in the Newsletter is to try to give just a little insight to those less aware of some of the other – perhaps less obvious – creatures that live around us. My previous invertebrate reports for the Wren Group's newsletter have tried to show the incredible variety of such creatures, creatures which many people will be unaware of, find distasteful, or avoid. However, a bleak February day in winter is not the best time to attempt to write such a report!



7-spot Ladybird (pic. By Rose Stephens)

Many people who develop an interest in the nature of the world around them often do so firstly by an awareness of the bird-life – obvious and for the most part pretty or charming creatures – and much publicised and promoted through large organisations such as



Hebrew Character moth (pic by Paul Ferris)

the RSPB, primarily bird-oriented nature reserves, guided walks or – nowadays – a host of websites. Plants do not get quite that coverage, but amateur botany has been a favoured and popular pursuit at least since Victorian times. Some botanists will turn to birds in the winter, as some birders may turn to flowers in the summer – especially when there are so many leaves on the trees that the birds become a bit difficult to see.

The summer is the prime time for insects, too – typically making use of plants for food and nectar or as a place to live whilst hunting for food. It was often the case when photographing a plant that I either noticed at the time, or frequently found afterwards, an insect or insects which caught my attention and interest. So – when there aren't too many plants in flower and the sun's warmth is too low to enable much insect activity, it can be a bit of a

search to record many invertebrates at all.

I have been fortunate this winter season – when I haven't been very mobile anyway – to have had an extra set of senses out there in the local world, to help keep track of things – and to discover species which we have been unaware of locally. Rose Stephens has managed to find and often capture on camera a variety of invertebrate species which I possibly wouldn't have noticed even if I had been out there! Some of the creatures referred to here have been Rose's finds, and for the sake of inclusivity, I shall mention some that have occurred outside what I consider to be the Wren Group's traditional hunting ground, but which I know may well have been present here anyway.



Red-belted Clearwing (pic. By Rose Stephens)

One of the most interesting finds was a moth. This was not a winter find, but a summer one –

when Rose reviewed some earlier photos. If you have read one of these articles before, you will be aware that both Tim Harris and myself have been putting out moth traps for a number of years. From these we have amassed information about a good number of moth species that may be found in our area, supplemented by observations in the field. Most field observation is of course done by day, and the results usually show day-flying moths. The **Red-belted Clearwing** is a day-flying moth and yet neither Tim, myself, nor,

flew or was carried, but it doesn't really matter: it is an indication that others may be around. There are 15 or so species that live in this country, and they tend to be difficult to observe compared to some other moths. Although their wings do have some coloured banding they are otherwise transparent, so making them somewhat invisible to the human eye. Even seeing one landed, its resemblance to some other flying insect may mask the fact that it is a moth at all. Because they fly by day they are not attracted to light-traps.

put his trap out on the same night (5/6 March) and attracted a **Beautiful Plume**, 2x **Brindled Pug**, 3x **Common Quaker**, a **Small Quaker** and a **Herald**. Also news from Tim is that one of the **Emperor Moths**, the eggs of which were laid in my moth trap last year, has hatched into a female.



Small Tortoiseshell (pic by Kathy Hartnett)

Having become aware that they may be present in our area, I wondered how to go about finding more and discovered that the males were attracted to females by pheromones. Thus, the usual way for a lepidopterist to attract these creatures is to lay a pheromone lure, and that is what we intend to do. Each species uses a different pheromone, of course, and these are available from lepidopterist suppliers. Armed with a selection to target the most likely species, we hope to put out some lures in the forthcoming season. It's exciting, isn't it? If your answer to that was 'no', then it would seem that I have not succeeded in encouraging you that invertebrates can be of interest!

until Rose's find, anybody else - to our knowledge - has seen any species of Clearwing locally. This one was found on the curtain of Rose's house, just off Wanstead Flats. How it got in is not known, whether it

Other Lepidoptera that have been seen this Spring have included a **Small Tortoiseshell** butterfly, **Red Admiral** butterflies and on the first night that I put out the moth-trap this season three **Hebrew Character** moths. Tim



Pine Ladybirds - Exochomus 4-pustulatus

Included in the last newsletter was a photograph which was intended to show one of the smaller of our common invertebrates, a species of springtail. This was inadvertently cropped out of the first on-line version of the newsletter, so I shall include a photograph of

another species. This is one of the larger ones – ***Orchesella cincta*** – which may be up to 4mm long. Springtails – at least to the non-entomologist (which includes me) - come in two ‘versions’: globular and linear. In the previous newsletter the photograph was of a 1mm globular species. The photograph this time is of a linear type.



A linear springtail - Orchesella cincta (pic by Paul Ferris)

When I first became interested in birds and flowers there were a number of field-guides available which provided the possibility of reasonably easy identification. Butterflies, and some moths, were also quite easily identified by readily available books, and more recently such groups as bees and grasshoppers have had numerous books published which could help the non-expert get an idea of what they

were looking at. What was certainly not available before were the on-line facilities by which means so much information – and photographs – have become available to most of us. Together with this is the ability to actually ask an expert on-line for help in identification, and it is this skill which Rose has developed which has led to some interesting and revealing I.D.’s.

However, by the nature of things, a certain identification can in many circumstances only be given by an expert if they have the specimen before them; often a photograph is not nearly enough. That is even more true of most invertebrates, where some tiny detail may indicate the difference between one species and many similar ones. Thus increasingly, when I add a species to our list of those found in the area, I am having to put ‘possibly’ or ‘looks like’. I don’t like to kill or even unnecessarily disturb creatures for the sake of an identification. That’s not very scientific – but then I am not a scientist.

What else has been sighted? Well, I saw my first ‘spring’ ladybirds - **Harlequins** - in January. These were in a regular venue, on the inside of my kitchen window. In years past on a sunny day in January and February, when they were wooden sash windows, there would be “hundreds” of ladybirds crawling about. But those weren’t the Harlequins of a few weeks



Honey-bee (pic. By Rose Stephens)

ago. Our 2-spot and 7-spot ladybird populations have taken a dive since the invasive Harlequins have appeared – cannibals that they are. Rose’s first ladybird was a **7-spot**, on February 10th, so that is encouraging. Bees have started to appear on sunnier days – even when the temperature is quite low the sun can warm up a sheltered area enough for a few to go foraging on some of the winter-flowering plants. There were **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** in Stratford and in South Woodford on February 9th, and a **Honey-bee** on the same day. Buff-tailed Bumblebees are the most likely species to be seen this early, in fact males may forage on suitable days throughout the winter. In the City of London Cemetery, ornamental shrubs that flower at this time of year, such as Oregon Grape, can attract many bees of those species. On

February 17th the shade temperature was not much more than 6 C. during the whole day, but the sun was shining for almost all of that. In the cemetery, the Oregon Grape was in flower and had numbers of Honey-bees and one or two bumble-bees visiting. There were also two species of hoverfly, one of which was the familiar and easily identifiable “**Marmalade Hoverfly**”. However, it was around the flowering heathers that even more bees were feeding. There may have been hundreds of Honey-bees, a few Bumble-bees and even a butterfly, briefly; I think it was a **Small Tortoiseshell**. There were also a few spiders sitting on dry leaves enjoying the warming sunshine, and a 7-spot Ladybird.



Zebra Spider - *Salticus scenicus* (pic by Paul Ferris)

Nearby, in shallow crevasses in the bark of a birch tree, there were perhaps thirty **Pine Ladybirds** *Exochomus 4-pustulatus* in close groups.

On the 27th February, a warmish, sunny day encouraged a **Red Admiral Butterfly** to bask on the brickwork of my house, and a **Zebra Spider** *Salticus scenicus* to hunt on the wall. That outdoor spider was pre-empted the evening before by an indoor one – the **Daddy Long-legs** or **Cellar Spider** *Pholcus phalangioides*, which was in my kitchen. But back to outdoors – I continue to enjoy looking into my compost bins, and with the more recent interest in much smaller things (the springtails, for example), was pleased to find a selection on a bright March 1st. There were springtails, and mites – which are related to spiders – as well as spiders, and overall activity in the invertebrate world seemed to be picking up. I picked up my glasses, which I'd put down to get a closer look at something, and on the arm was a **Woundwort Shieldbug** nymph, which used to be *Eysarcoris fabricii* but is now *Eysarcoris venustissimus*. It seems that there has been a recent scientific review of shieldbugs, and as well even some of the common names have been revised, for example the Green Shieldbug is now to be known as the Common Green Shieldbug. I assume that's because there is an uncommon green one.

I shall end on that note. Perhaps one reason why there may not be quite as much interest in some groups of plants (or plant-like organisms) or animals is that there is a lack of a common name – even for a common species. There is no doubt that for clarity the scientific name is absolutely essential, but for enjoyment and to gain early interest, common names can be so



Woundwort Shieldbug - *Eysarcoris venustissimus* (nymph) (pic by Paul Ferris)

useful. That understanding seems to be gaining ground nowadays, with common – and hopefully to some extent descriptive – names being applied to all manner of the living things amongst which we live.

Report by Paul Ferris

Visit Paul on his website

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





Kestrel

By David Harris

It climbs on thermals high
Hovers in air effortlessly bound
Looks down with ever watchful eye
At tiny specks on the ground
Moving shadow its only give away
Then down it swoops on its prey

Picture - Kes over Wanstead Flats by Tony Morrison

winter bird report

Report and pics by Nick Croft



Stonechat - pic by Nick Croft

December 2014

It felt like there were no highlights, but to my surprise there were and I missed most of them!

Jack Snipe: the second for the year on the 6th

Woodcock: two sightings which doubled our records for the year (23rd and 28th)

Lapwing: just the one record and again a poor year (one on the 27th)

Warblers: both Blackcap and Chiffchaff made it into December

again(459 on the 27th), so how long before the big 500 is achieved?

Wigeon: in record numbers on the basin (16-17 birds on the 26th)

Red Kite: Gary scores a late bird over the flats

Buzzard: just the two records

Water Rail: possibly five on site

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: the year's only record, in Jane Cleall's garden midway between the park and the flats



Chiffchaff



Firecrest

Firecrest: a regular for Stuart Fisher in the laurels at Snaresbrook

Oystercatcher: Mr F's ears pick up a flyover on the 5th

Gadwall: records broken and then broken

January

One down, eleven to go. Bet you can't guess what the best bird of January was (which may well be 2015's best bird)?



Redwing

Obviously the answer to the first was the Slavonian Grebe present on Heronry for much of the beginning of the month, before the ice took a grip, leaving just small patches of open water and a Little Grebe not for sharing. The cold weather brought nothing of interest and even those birds we'd expect have been exceedingly thin on the ground.

We know why Siskin numbers are way down - thanks to a record spruce crop, could this account for the lack of Redpolls too? It's been a poor year nationally for Mealy Redpolls, but Lessers are mighty thin on the ground. We would expect a few more Reed Buntings than the one regular male that we have (Tim managed two on one WeBS count) and the last few years have usually offered up a flyover Yellowhammer. Fieldfare and Redwing numbers are way down and this after a supposed record crop of berries. Where are they? In Wood Pigeons, that's where!

The Chiffchaff seen before Christmas has not yet

been refound, which is a bit annoying when numbers of up to 30 birds have been seen in the Colne Valley over the other side of London. Bob did stumble upon a Blackcap, down the road from his house, in a garden, and that's where they probably all are - on fat balls!



Slavonian Grebe

Even gull numbers are way down. The Great Black-backed Gull again favoured the worms on the Brickfield for a number of days in the month, but would soon move on after the human and dog traffic became unbearable. There were very few Lesser Black-backed, and only a handful of Herrings, and then mostly immatures. Valentino the Mediterranean Gull has yet to check in.

The freeze that finally did for the Slavonian Grebe also hit duck numbers and finally pushed out the Wigeon, though one male stoically sat it out on a freezing Basin. In the park both the Heronry and Perch have been devoid of Gadwall, which now favour the Ornaments, Basin and Shoulder of

Mutton (even numbers on the Alex are only just managing double figures), so we won't be hitting any new records any time soon. As for any rarities, the mild weather in Europe has restricted the source, there appear to be very few Smew, Goldeneye and Goosander anywhere in the country let alone in the capital.

Bush Wood, our hope for things cresty and creepy, has been dire. Bob or Dan did get a Treecreeper on one day, but Stu's Snaresbrook remains the best place in the vicinity to find Firecrest.

Raptors have also disappointed: Kestrel and Sparrowhawk can't even be counted on as a given, though we've had two records of Peregrine, but no Buzzard. Josh picked up a calling Tawny Owl early one morning, but things are looking bad for the Little Owl - it's roosting hole appears to be filled with leaves and bits of rubbish, suggesting that squirrels are now using it as a larder.



Kingfisher



Fieldfare

Better news on the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker front as a further sighting was notched up in the churchyard on Overton Drive by "next-day" Keith and with many more birders in the park for our star bird, possible sightings have been noted. A possible Woodlark was on the Police Scrape in the company of one of our Skylark's; discernibly smaller and with bouncier flight, unfortunately it was just a silhouette...

Our one representative wader, a Common Snipe, lurks somewhere in the SSSI or Cat & Dog, while the wait goes on for the year's first Woodcock. Also absent from the list at the end of the month is Little Egret; the Roding's too high and too dirty, which would also account for the lack of Kingfisher sightings in the second half of the month, especially with the park's waters frozen over. As per usual, finding any of our Water Rails after the new year becomes a major undertaking, high water levels again have pushed the SoM's birds out, but the Aldersbrook remains the best bet for this elusive bird.



Tree Creeper

An early Lapwing on the third promised a good month, but lied

And there was some other stuff...

... no there wasn't

Where is everything? Hardly any wintering birds (few Redwing, fewer Fieldfare), no overwintering Chiffchaff, or Firecrest (in Bush Wood), no interesting ducks and not even a Med Gull to liven things up.

February

This has been the worst start to the year that I can recall: four less than both 2014 and 2013, and five fewer than 2012. February's only saving grace is that it is now over and Wheatear are back in March.

I now have the arduous job of trying to make something purse and silky-like out of a real pig's ear of a month, that we call our highlights

Stuart didn't let us down with regular Firecrest sightings at Snaresbrook, a Treecreeper and at the month's end the third Buzzard of the year

Marco chipped in with the only Little Egret of the year, and probably the only time they'll make the highlights of this or any other year.

Josh notched up the second Woodcock of the month near Bush Wood with a bird being seen at dusk going to play a few holes of golf ...



Lapwing

Scraping the bottom of the barrel, I note that this is the first year Little Grebe have over-wintered on Alex (how exciting is that?) and what is going on down on Heronry with an adult Great Crested Grebe and a first-winter bird displaying to each other? I am going away now to cry and think about Wheatears.



Great Crested Grebes

We've made it through another winter and it's time for the action to start all over again... ... what can we expect over the next quarter? Stonechat, Whinchat, Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Swallow, martins, Swift, Hobby, who knows something big and Osprey like, Cuckoo, some waders – a Stone Curlew perhaps or Little Ringed Plover or a Sandpiper or two. Warblers of course and maybe a biggy like last year's Blyth's –that's if there's any cover left!

*Article and pics
by Nick Croft*

*Follow Nick on his
excellent blog at*

<http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>





trees with no

clothes on

Looking at trees on a winter walk in
Wanstead Park by Jackie Morrison

A walk in winter to identify tree species? My first thought was, why, when there are no leaves on the trees? My second, when I noticed I was down to joint lead it, was how!?! Well, to be honest, that was my third thought.

So I fled off to read up on it and it turns out there are many clues to be had, some not so evident when a tree is in full leaf.

look out for ...

Monitoring bud burst is revealing that spring is happening more quickly, the rising sap is starting to flow several days earlier and although some cooler spells may delay the final expansion of leaves or flowers, the buds are being primed in readiness for the explosive expansion of new growth! Do check on the advance of spring on the website <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk> and please add your own observations too – the greater the number of records, the more accurate the overall picture becomes and why not ask your friends elsewhere in the UK to contribute too!

But on that chilly February Sunday morning, I imagined few would leave a warm bed to walk and talk trees. But nineteen did. And a very friendly and interactive walk it became with everyone chipping in what they knew. We used clues to identify twenty species and after a while, tree sleuthing turned quite Midsomer Murders.



We looked at these clues...

1. Where the tree is growing. Like us, trees thrive best where their particular needs are met. Around the lakeside we found Willows which love water and Alders that give our tea its name. We knew the soft bud of the pussy willow but noted also bright, bendy, willowy new shoots sprouting straight up from a fallen trunk. In contrast, a Wellingtonia, planted in memory of Winston Churchill, seemed to be struggling on the thin soils of The Plain.

2. How tall is the tree? Oaks and Beech, which are common in the Park, reach over 45 m. Holly, along with Yew, is shorter in the dark under storey; low shrubby Elders are found along the sunnier edge. But also consider the tree's age by measuring its girth and seeing if its growth is stunted by competition with others.

3. What shape is it overall? Spreading, straggly,

tight, columnar? The massive limbs of Oaks were noted. Some, projecting horizontally, were prized for providing readymade jointed beams for shipbuilding. We saw the Silver Birch had light wispy branches whilst those of the Horse Chestnut dipped and tipped up like a graceful candelabra waiting for its spring candles.

Human intervention in the Park has altered some naturally occurring tree forms. Some trees were planted in bundles to create a larger form. We noted a Lime with many trunks by Perch Pond and the remnants of an avenue of Oaks striding across The Plain. On each, their several trunks had fused into one.



4. Evergreen, coniferous or deciduous? Most Park trees, being deciduous, were without their leaves. Yet dead dry leaves still clung to the branches of some, a characteristic of Beech and Oak. In

contrast the Corsican Pine by the Ornamental Water retained its cones and narrow needles, leaves that reduce water loss through winter. Yews, both planted and naturally spread, were distinguished by their fibrous red trunks and dark green leaflets, along which we saw minute cones.



5. The tree trunk. The colour of some was a dead give-away... the Cherry, Grey Poplar and Silver Birch. But most, as tree charts state, had unhelpfully “brown/grey or grey/brown bark”. But to differentiate we noticed if the bark was smooth, knobbly, peeling plates or rough and rugged? A fine Sweet Chestnut displayed its characteristic sweeping diagonal furrows. We felt the smooth trunks of Beech, Sycamore and Hornbeam. But confusion arose too because, over time, some bark peels off or cracks into furrows..rather like us!

Closer inspection can reveal tell tale clues. We saw the distinctive pattern of lenticels (breathing pores), very noticeable on the Grey Poplars edging Chalet Wood; also here the mottled, sinuous and buttressed trunks of Hornbeam and, by The Dell, the sharp claws on the Hawthorn or Cockspur Thorn.

6. Buds. Everyone knew the bold sticky buds of the Horse Chestnut with horseshoe marks along the twig. But we went on to see the variety of bud colour, shape and position...the fine pointed light brown buds of the Beech; the robust, black buds of the Ash and the bright pink of the Lime.

look out for ...

The dangling catkins of Hazel or Alder lengthen during February and March, but other trees produce catkins too. Wind-pollinated Beech, Birch, Hornbeam and Oak all have less obvious dangling catkins as they appear alongside the unfurling leaves during April and May. The light small pollen grains can travel a long way, borne on the wind. As all pollen contains DNA, the protein which provides the genetic code of the plant, inhaling the grains can cause an allergic reaction in certain individuals. Monitoring when such pollen is released can provide advance warning of such irritants and sufferers can take any necessary precautions.

7. Birth, death and neighbours. The “nuts” and spiky shells of the Chestnuts and the mast below Beech were easily identified whereas the Alder’s clues of catkin and cones, remaining aloft, were more of a challenge. Trees are also particular about their neighbours, friendly to some lichens, moss, and algae, but also attacked by others. Tar spots identified Sycamores.



In the end, desperate tree sleuths can rummage in leaf litter..yet, beware, the confusion that flows from blustery winter winds.....

But by the end of our walk we had identified at least twenty species.

Article by Jackie Morrison



a tale of two waterbirds

Counting waterbirds on a monthly basis can be a bit of a slog at times. For a start, it takes several hours to get around all the lakes in Wanstead Park, let alone those on Wanstead Flats. The weather may be cold and wet, the paths muddy and sometimes not very much has changed since the previous month. Counting gulls on Wanstead Flats is particularly frustrating, regularly producing the classic situation where – close to the end of logging a large loafing roost of Common Gulls, 583, 584, 585 ... a dog charges through the middle and disperses the lot. Right, where was I? 1, 2, 3, 4 ...

Despite this, the numbers produced provide useful information for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), helping them to evaluate which species are faring well and which are in trouble. Locally, we have a team of tireless counters, so during the winter months not only Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats but Eagle Pond (Snaresbrook) and Hollow Pond (Whipps Cross) are covered. We also now have an almost complete record for the months of autumn, winter and early spring stretching back to January 2009.



That makes it possible to look at trends and, maybe, draw some conclusions. Combined counts for Wanstead Park, Wanstead Flats and Eagle Pond can be compared now over seven winters of WeBS counts. Systematic counting has only recently restarted at Hollow Pond, so a comparison cannot be made including that site. Browsing through the figures, trends for two birds jumped out at me: those for Gadwall and for Moorhen. Figures for the recent WeBS count produced record January numbers for both.

The 'Gadwall army'

The main concentration of Gadwall in our area is on Alexandra Lake and the lakes of Wanstead Park, all waters where there is plentiful weed for these ducks to eat. Numbers at Eagle Pond rarely exceed single figures. The rate of increase was slow and irregular in the first years of the sequence: 40 in January 2009, 24 in January 2010, 101 in January 2011 and 88 in January 2012. During these years, the peak counts were respectively 111, 86, 137 and – this is where things really start to lift off – 200+ in December 2012.

Since then, the rise of the 'Gadwall army' (as former Wren newsletter editor Steve Swaby has dubbed it) has been seemingly inexorable, with 363 in December 2013 and 459 in December 2014. The 422 counted in January 2015 was the highest-ever January count, and the biggest count on a WeBS day.

Gadwall was a pretty rare bird in London not that long ago. According to Andrew Self (*The Birds of London*, 2014), the average wintering population in London was only about 100 in 1970. *Wanstead Bird Reports* from the late 70s and early 80s mark it out as a local rarity. However, by the end of the century the London winter population was around 2,500, and Self describes an average of 600 in the Lea Valley in recent years. The peak count (at the time of publication of his book) he lists was 453 at



Cheshunt GP in December 1989. A larger share of London's birds is now wintering in Wanstead, but there is no obvious reason why. Clearly there is a plentiful supply of weed on which the birds can feed, and maybe the growth of weed in our lakes has made it easier for these attractive dabbling ducks to feed by upending. Whether other factors

are involved – such as an increase in the continental populations from where most of our birds originate, or problems with the food supply at locations where they previously wintered – is not clear. One thing is certain, we should enjoy the phenomenon while it lasts because like pretty much everything in nature, numbers go down as well as up. Cutting of the weed in The Basin later this year may well impact on the numbers that the lake can support in late 2015.

Moorhen success

Another success story, though much less dramatic, concerns Moorhens. Again, January WeBS figures for the years 2009-2015 show a consistent increase: 20, 21, 35, 44, 2013 figure lost by a careless recorder!, 66 and 80. And maximum counts for those years were as follows: 47, 56, 35, 65, figure unavailable, and 78 in 2014. Judging by the number of juvenile Moorhens seen on our lakes in recent autumns, I believe this increase can be put down to local breeding success. The species nests in emergent vegetation, where they are better protected than Coots' nests, which are exposed stick islands, easy pickings for Lesser Black-backed Gulls. With the highest-ever January WeBS count for the species this year, I reckon we could be in for another bumper breeding season.

Article by Tim Harris



gossiping rambles

Continuing on our journey taken from 'Round London' Publishing Company's *Gossiping Rambles in Suburban Essex, Epping Forest and Beyond*, published in 1908 and written by Charles William Burdett. His guide gives a marvellous setting of scene at the beginning of the last century at a time of transformation from the village era to the urban townscape we know today.



Aldgate

In this, the concluding ramble of the series, we will take the line of departure from Aldgate, that curious part of London which is scarcely in the City, but is yet of it, which lies on the borderland between perhaps the richest spot on earth and the poorest.



Petticoat Lane - 1907

Aldgate may be reached *via* Middlesex Street from Liverpool Street (now a decent, commonplace thoroughfare, formerly the notorious Petticoat Lane) or from the Bank of England *via* Lambard Street. If the approach be made by Middlesex Street, then the visitor passes the top of Wentworth Street, perhaps one of the most peculiar spots in all this vast metropolis. This street runs at right angles through into Commercial Street and is a great Jewish market-place: to the unaccustomed eye of the Gentile dirty and squalid to a degree. Casters' stalls line it on either side many of them being devoted to the sale of fish of all kinds according to the varying

seasons. Your Jewish person is a great fish-eater, and he likes it good. Hence, in this thoroughfare some of the finest fish in London is to be obtained. The street is filled with a shouting, struggling mass of humanity, for the most part not speaking English, which is *here* the foreign tongue, the vocabulary of most being the Yiddish jargon; a mixture of Hebrew, German, Spanish and a few other elements from Poland and Russia. Hawkers With rings of bread on strings carried on the arm or slung suspended from the neck ; old women with tubs of gherkins or herrings, men: shouting themselves hoarse in an unknown tongue, such is Wentworth Street; once seen never forgotten, strange, unusual, weird. Passing thence we arrive at Aldgate, and board an electric car for Bow Bridge. The system of traction adopted is the "stud" system, which requires neither conduit or overhead wires.

Whitechapel

We glide smoothly and swiftly along the wide and even noble Whitechapel Road, passing on the way the Whitechapel Art Galleries, where some of the finest exhibitions of painting ever seen in the East of London are held, free.

This approach to London is a revelation to those who see it for the first time. It is one of the widest thoroughfares in the whole extent of the metropolis, and runs eastward for many miles. Here in the olden days the London 'prentices used to disport themselves in rural games and pastimes, and the name of Mile End Gate still serves as a reminder of the length of one of their running tracks.

People's Palace

Presently we pass on our left the fine building row known as the East London Technical College, formerly the People's Palace. This owed its inception to Sir Waiter Besant, who built an ideal palace in his book "All Sorts and Conditions of Men." Many thousands of pounds were spent upon its erection and maintenance as a pleasure resort for the teeming population of the district, but when the novelty had worn away the people stayed away, and the governing authorities altered the scope and plan of the palace, making it into a great centre of educational light and leading where a high-class education can be obtained at a comparatively small expense.



East London Technical College formally the People's Palace in early part of last century

Bow Church

Presently we reach Bow Church, the tram lines passing it on either side, as it stands in the middle of the road way. It is a quaint little church,

hundreds of years old, and has a small grave yard around it, no longer used for burials. The statue facing us is that of the eminent statesman, W. E. Gladstone, put up a few years ago, already blackened by the fogs and smoke of London.

Bow Bridge

At one time Bow was a pretty little village, used as a country resort by the wealthier citizens of London. It has long since lost all such distinction, and now presents but a poor appearance to-day. *Bow Bridge*, the spot at which we have now arrived, is famous as marking the dividing line between Essex and Middlesex at this point, and claims the proud distinction of being the place at which the first arched stone bridge was erected in England. This came about as follows:- Matilda (wife of Henry I, who reigned 1100 - 1125) was on a Journey from London to Barking, to visit the famous abbey which then stood at the latter town, when she was nearly drowned in the river Lea near the spot we are speaking of. In those days bridges were few, and the Stratford



Cheapside, St. Mary-le-Bow, c.1909



Stratford Broadway, St John's Church in 1906

or street ford was dangerous in flood time. To indicate her thankfulness for this escape from death, she caused a stone bridge to be built, which has long since disappeared. In reference to this same old Bow Bridge, John Stowe the antiquary says (1598) :-

“Matilda, when she saw the way to be dangerous to them that travailed by the old foord over the river of Lue (Lea) (for she herselfe had been well washed in the water) caused two stone bridges to be builded in a place one mile distant from the old foord, of the which one was Situated over Lue at the head of the towne of Stratford now called Bow, a rare piece of worke for before that time the like had never been seen in England ; the other over the little brooke commonly called Channelsea bridge.”

(The Channelsea, as it is now called, is near to Stratford Market Station, and is supposed to be one of the many channels cut by Alfred the Great, in order to alter the course of the Lea, and thus harras the Danes).

In the early part of the nineteenth century a new bridge was built; this too has gone, and to-day the Lea is spanned by a wide iron bridge more than twice the width of its predecessors, looking as if it too will stand for centuries to come. Incidentally it may be stated that the District Railway electric trains run nearly to this spot under the roadway from Aldgate East, also motor busses from Putney and Fulham make Bow Bridge their eastern terminus.

We change cars here, and embark on a Leyton car for Leytonstone, via Stratford. A sad change is observable in the width of the road. It has now dwindled down into a narrow, somewhat evil-smelling thoroughfare, and continues so for about a mile until we reach the G.E.R. *Stratford Market* station, when it again widens out and is once more a very fine roadway. At *St. John's Church* the trams diverge right and left, our way being in the latter direction. We note as we pass along a conspicuous monument in the churchyard. This is



Stratford, Maryland Point early 1900s

to commemorate the burning of a large number of Protestant martyrs in the evil days when men thought differences of religious opinion could be thus obliterated.

Daniel DeFoe

A little further along we pass *Maryland Point*, a quaint name mentioned by Daniel DeFoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, in his travels in Essex. In his day this was a hamlet, and Stratford was a village. Many wealthy citizens of London lived here, having here their country seats, as distinguished from their “townhouses” in the city of London. As an indication of the wealth to be seen, he mentions that no fewer than 200 coaches were kept.



Children fishing in Leytonstone, Green Man Pond in 1908. The pond has since been filled in.

At length we arrive at the *Green Man*, Leytonstone, where we alight, as we determine to make the rest of the journey on foot. Nearby is *Leyton*, and the car we have alighted from would

have taken us by way of Whipps Cross Road to the Baker's Arms had we so desired, but that is not in our programme on this occasion.

We should then have passed the *Hollow Pond*, a wild bit of forest scenery, made out of some old gravel pits, surrounded by trees, and now very pretty. Good boating is to be had. But this is literally “by the way.”

Snaresbrook

Our way lies to the left, up the High Street, past *Hermon Hill* in which is situated a fine pile, the *Seamen's Hospital*, “standing in a commanding position,” as the auctioneers say, and affording a sheltering roof to many orphan children. Passing under the arch of Snaresbrook railway station, we arrive at the *Eagle Hotel* and the *Eagle Pond*, both well-known landmarks. The fine expanse of the pond is rippling and trembling in the sunshine its glassy surface reflecting the outlines of several stately swans and quacking ducks who are being fed by a delighted little girl in charge of her nursemaid and in the background we see the towering block of the *Infant Orphan Asylum*, its many windows lucent with the rays of sunlight pouring upon them. The road we are walking along is called the Mountford Road. Grove Road, on our left, would take us to Walthamstow if we were to follow it.

Woodford

Our road passes through very pleasant surroundings, under fine trees, and along shady walks, grass bordered and sweet scented. Here and there we note specimens of the old wooden houses at one time so common in Essex, but

which are gradually giving place to the more comfortable, if less picturesque structures of brick and stone. Woodford itself is a pleasant open place, with good well paved roads, and wide spaces of greensward, quite free to the public.



Snaresbrook Station at the time of Burdett's walks

The Church

On the left is the old parish church, known as St. Mary's, formerly St. Margaret's. It has a high square brick tower, which is considerably older than the main building. This latter was rebuilt in 1896, and is disfigured by the sort of stucco plastering outside which was so prevalent in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Near the entrance porch is a fine old yew tree, its dull green foliage offering a very marked contrast to that of the oak, elm, and other trees around. It is a famous tree, and said to be one of the largest in the kingdom. Its massive bole is practically destitute of bark, yet its branches arc apparently as green and vigorous as ever they were.

We press on cheerfully, for

“The merry heart goes all the way,
The sad heart tires in a mile a,”

and note with a smile as we pass Woodford Wells, a piece of unconscious humour in a public house sign. It is the Horse and Well hostelry, but there is no sign of either of these objects. There is, however, a tall post bearing the name of the house in bold letters, and this is surmounted by a fox in full flight ! Perhaps the horse has stopped at the well to drink, and the fox is making the best use of the brief delay to get away into the adjacent forest!

Presently we pass the massive red brick pile of the Bancroft School maintained by the Drapers' Company, one of the famous Guilds of the City of London. The fortunate lads who are educated in such pleasant surroundings should value their privileges highly. We sincerely hope they do.

Those who feel that a little refreshment would now be acceptable cannot do better than walk as far as *Riggs Retreat*, Buckhurst Hill, which is close at hand. Here all kinds of eatables and many kinds of (non - intoxicating) drinkables can be obtained at very moderate charges; with quickness and cleanliness and civility thrown in, and no extra is charged in the bill for these essential, but sometimes forgotten details of a good meal.

There is something very satisfying to the eye in long reaches of landscape, and at this point the sense of extended space is gratified to the full. The waving heights of the trees on High Beech, the open spaces in which glitter and shine the sparkling water, all speak volumes to the receptive mind:-

*“And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running
brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything.”*



Robin Hood Hotel early 1900s

Perhaps the best spot for this view is just after passing the *Warren Wood House* on the left of the road. Only a day or two before our visit the angry skies have poured down a deluge of rain, and the trees have whirled and twisted in a wild agony of impotence against the fury of the storm. To-day the skies are clear and blue, birds flit from tree to tree in happy freedom, no sign of the storm is left, except here and there a fallen branch and a swollen stream; nature is in one of her gentlest moods once more, and life is gay all round us. No jealous hedgerows obstruct the delighted vision, no surly “keep off the grass,” but one may run or walk or leap or gambol, if one is light-hearted enough to do so, and even Mrs. Grundy is faraway and sleeping.

At length we reach the *Robin Hood Hotel*, and note the cordial invitation to step in and talk to Little John if the first-named famous man should happen to be abroad in the forest; and by and by we turn again to the left finding *Dick Turpin's Cave* the *Wake Arms*, and the *Royal Oak Hotel*. The latter name is really a misnomer for the fragment of tree, blasted, withered, dead, which still stands on the green is a beech tree, and not an oak at all! But local tradition has it that King Charles the Second of blessed and pious memory, slipped off his horse here, hid himself in the branches from the vindictive pursuit of the soldiery and left them to chase the flying, rider less horse. As nobody ever heard of the aforesaid Charles hiding in any tree anywhere but an oak tree, hence the name.

On our way to Loughton Station we pass numerous little clearings, where fires are burning in the open forest. Those have been made by the keepers and their assistants, and scores of lads and lasses are at hand filling bags, baskets, sacks and perambulators with pieces of fallen and lopped wood. Darkness is at hand; the glowing embers shine in the cleared spaces like so many fiery eyes of night; the blue haze curls slowly upward, and floats lazily away among the trees; and we at length reach the welcome railway station, tired, but not weary, for our tired feeling is but the natural outcome of a strenuous day's walking, until at length as Tennyson (himself a dweller at Loughton) says in *Locksley Hall*:

*“We at night along the dusky highway near and
nearer drawn,*

*See in heaven the light of London flaming like a
dreary dawn.”*



bluebell woods under threat

The native bluebell flower is a rich blue colour, scented and hung on an arched stalk, but the plant is battling against an alien imposter. The Spanish bluebell is paler, scentless and has an upright flower stalk, and this import has cross-pollinated with the native flower to produce an extremely aggressive hybrid. The hybrid first appeared in the wild in 1963 and has spread rapidly, and now many of the bluebells found in gardens, urban areas and increasingly in woodlands are the hybrid bluebell.

Picture shows Bluebells in our own Chalet Wood in Wanstead Park

The sight of woodlands carpeted in blue petals may be denied to walkers within 20 years as the British landscape changes

Bluebell woods are one of the magical events of an English spring, with their carpeting of blue petals and enchanting scent – but within 20 years this experience may be denied to future woodland ramblers, experts warned recently.

Mark Ballard, curator of the Forestry Commission's National Arboretum at Westonbirt, said: "Within the next two decades it will become much rarer for people to see a native bluebell wood. They are under threat and the British landscape, however beautiful, is changing."



The blanket of intense blue flowers, with their distinctive perfume, has for centuries been a source of captivation for springtime wanderers in the countryside, but is under threat from pollution, the encroachment of urbanisation – and above all the

invasion by non-native Spanish bluebell varieties, which are less colourful, less prolific in their flowering and lack the heady scent of native flowers.

Bluebell woods will already be more difficult to find this year, owing to the late spring which has held back flowering, and visitors are being advised by the National Trust to wait until late May in order to see the flowers – about two weeks later than usual, after the unusually chilly conditions so far this year.

But in many cases, people will be seeing not the native bluebell woods of times past but a combination of English bluebells and hybrids, the result of the cross-fertilisation of native bulbs with the Spanish invaders, which were introduced at least a century ago in ornamental gardens and have since spread rapidly to colonise vast tracts of British woods. The inter-breeding of the two varieties is the biggest threat to native English bluebells, because the hybrids that result tend to be more vigorous than the natives and can quickly take hold in forests, resulting in the pure English variety being squeezed out. The hybrid invaders have been spreading steadily from areas close to ornamental gardens and suburban gardens – many of which were populated in recent decades with the easier-to-grow Spanish bluebells that were popular sellers in garden centres – to reach more remote woods that had previously been uncontaminated. In the next 15 to 20 years, according to the Forestry Commission, most bluebell woods will be a combination of hybrids and Spanish bluebells, and it will become ever more rare to find an entirely native wood.

Ballard said the Forestry Commission was taking steps to ensure that the non-native Spanish variety was

being "stamped out" on its land – in some cases almost literally. "We are digging them up where we find them and disposing of them," he said. But he warned against members of the public taking similar action in woods close to them. "We know what we are looking for, and what to do about them. If people spot hybrids or Spanish bluebells in the wild they should tell us or the owners [of the woods]."

Hybrids can be more vigorous than either parent, but the real problem lies in the fact that once you have a population of nothing but hybrids, you have lost the original genetic material. If the hybrid is then affected by disease and there is none of the original species left, the threat is that the whole bluebell population could be in danger.

Hugh Angus, of the volunteer wildflower group at Westonbirt Arboretum

Article by [Fiona Harvey](#), environment correspondent The Guardian

Thanks to the Guardian for allowing us to publish Fiona's article

practical work report

Practical work began again in October 2014 after the summer break, meeting on the first Sunday of each month. As usual work began with a task on Lincoln Island to cut back undergrowth to allow the Bluebells and wild Daffodils to come through in the Spring. There was a good turnout on a day of great weather, and the same morning there was a bio blitz elsewhere in the park. We managed to clear some fallen logs from the water in front of the island that block the view.



In November we were asked by the keepers to tackle the area at the top of the Glade. There is a small but important patch of acid grassland here but a few years ago the Corporation planted some



oaks trees adjacent to the grassland. The original trees were planted too densely and had not been thinned, so were taking over and some oaks had self seeded in an area where there should not have been trees. We removed the unwanted oaks and cleared a large patch of bramble that was also encroaching. We were also asked to take out one large oak that was interfering with the main path down the glade. Wren does not normally cut down interesting trees but this was a specific request from the keepers. The morning was very wet but we had an excellent turnout and got a lot done. We had some new volunteers who have continued to turn out regularly since.

We were back there in December with a small group just to finish off group in better weather. The rest of the group that morning cleared undergrowth, especially bramble, in Chalet Wood building on the work we have done in previous years. This will allow a Bluebell display in the Spring. Then, post Christmas, a group led by Alan and Gill James used Thursday mornings to define

the paths in the bluebell wood to try to stop trampling and cleared further bramble.

New Year - in January we began a couple of sessions on the old sewage works site with its varying habitats. We have been cutting back bramble and other plants encroaching on the more open grassland to try to maintain its diversity over the last year or two. In February we were



back on the sewage works site with a small group of volunteers on a bitter morning but we soon got warm tackling large bramble banks.

March saw us complete the year's work by clearing further areas in the old sewage works. We will be back in action the first Sunday of October.

Peter Williams
Practical Work officer



a lucky escape

Wren member Rose Stephens is a self-taught naturalist and artist who was born in Newham and still lives in Forest Gate, close to Wanstead Flats. Here Rose describes a remarkable event she witnessed last year – with a real moral to the story. In Rose's own words;

These are photos I took April last year and I thought I would share them with you to show how something discarded like a simple carrier bag can cause death and injury to birds and wildlife but also the heroic and family orientated nature of the Crow.



I was walking around Alexandra Lake when I heard lots of Crow activity and noise - not unusual as quite often the Crows seem to have debates and heated discussions amongst themselves. However, on closer inspection I saw that there was a Crow inside a plastic carrier bag and the other crows were desperately trying to help it get free. I watched for a while as I didn't want to move forwards and make matters worse. The other crows, try as they might just couldn't get their friend free. In the

I thought as there is a real problem with litter on the flats. There was also a kite someone had made last year left on the flats and the string from it left a seagull hanging from its neck in a tree with the line wrapped around it's wing, it was hanging in centre wood all last year, the Gull was not so lucky.



end some of the crows gave up and flew off. I was really concerned by this time so decided to move forwards to see if I could help. Unfortunately I made matters worse and the Crow flew up with the bag still attached into a tree on the island in the Lake.

I watched as most of the other crows gave up and left. But there was one that didn't. And what I saw next was the most amazing thing I had ever seen.

The determination of this one crow to help its friend was immeasurable. As you can see in the photos it tugged and pulled with its beak to try to release the

crow in the bag - that by this stage was hanging by its neck from the bag's handle and was not moving. Then the other crow flew off - I thought it had given up, but it hadn't. The crow came flying back as fast as it could and dive bombed the hanging crow. With one swift movement the hanging crow was released from the bag and flew off and seemed to have made a full recovery. The determination of the other crow not to give up had saved the life of its friend.



Please if you see carrier bags on the flats or anywhere around wildlife pick them up and put them in a bin. Not all animals are so lucky.....

Story and pics by Rosemary Stephens



Follow Rose on her Facebook page

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

Wren rings london

Over the year, Wren Group walkers have been making their way round the Capital Ring, a 78-mile path encircling London. So far we've completed the south London section, bringing us through wonderful places for wildlife such as Oxleas Wood and Richmond Park - and learnt alot more about the capital as we do.



turning home

We're now at the half-way point of the Capital Ring, turning for home as we reach the Thames.

It's taken us seven months to get to Richmond on the Wren Group's midweek walks around the Ring, which links many of London's finest open spaces. It's been an eye-opener to see other parts of London in such detail; we know our own local parks, commons and woods, but don't give much thought to what other Londoners guard and treasure.



In truth January's trek from Streatham to Wimbledon didn't count as one of the highlights so far. Pleasant as Tooting and Wandsworth commons might be, they're over in something of a flash (despite harbouring some very good coffee stops),

and linked by some of south London's more prosaic streets (though it's always remarkable how vernacular architecture differs across the capital). But there's always an older, wilder London beneath the surface, here shown by the slow descent to the River Wandle – till Victorian times, this stream, the fastest-flowing in the capital, was home to many watermills, and it's still famous as a home to kingfishers. From Wimbledon Park one can look west to the tennis arenas; but for us, the views were eastwards, back to the high ground around Crystal Palace where we had been a month before.

February could hardly have been more different, taking us through Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park before a brief Thames-side finale, some of London's most open ground. The Common is less well-known, despite the Wombles, but there's plenty of interest; in direct distinction to the two commons we had walked the month before, which are manicured urban parks, it's left semi-wild, and like our own Epping Forest, survives thanks to a late-Victorian Act of Parliament.

As a Royal Park, Richmond Park has a different legal status entirely. It's large enough, just about, to harbour secret places where one doesn't know one is in a capital city at all. It's famous for its herds of red and fallow deer, though it was a little unnerving to read the warning notices about the night-time cull (though without it, there would in a few years be little significant vegetation left). It's not difficult to spot them, though much harder to get close. Just by Sidmouth Wood, we saw a small herd of fallow in the mid-distance, and spotted too a human, leaning silently against a tree, just a few yards from the pack.

Alas, this walk took place on perhaps the greyest day of the winter. But now we are heading to the spring, with blossom, wild flowers and the green awakening ahead of us. Hanwell, Harrow and Hampstead, here we come!



Next walks

Wednesday 15 April, Thursday 14 May, Tuesday 16 June. Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Just turn up - no need to book.

Walks are between five and seven miles, check Wren Facebook page for updates.

Article by Peter Aylmer

You can contact peter for more information – email peteraylmer@hotmail.com





**Wanstead
nature club**

December: Waterbirds & Christmas Wreaths

Last meeting of the old year- nearly Christmas. A lovely bright morning so we made sure we knew which birds which might be seen on Jubilee Pond and then went with our binoculars to see if they were there - and we saw lots of black-headed gulls (without black heads but with a little black spot instead!) and Canada geese, some swans, a white duck, a moorhen and coots. These are all resident birds which means they stay there all year round. There were also some shovellers, tufted ducks, and pochards, which are winter migrants which go northwards in the summer. The pochards might



have come all the way from Russia - where it is much colder and snowier in winter so they can't find any food there and fly all the way to Wanstead Flats to find something to eat!

Then as it was Christmas we made some wreaths out of bendy willow sticks (called whips) which came from Bush Wood and decorated them with green leaves so they looked really nice.

Then finally a game of Bird Bingo which was won by Neels and Ruduo.

January 2015: Twigs & Birdfood

What a windy day! We felt sorry for the hungry cold birds in our gardens. We thought that blackbirds wanted to eat worms and berries and robins ate most things like seeds and insects and worms. We made some bird feeders to hang up at home out of empty drinks cartons and twigs and filled them with birdseed, mealworms and crumbled birdcake made out of fat and seeds.

When it stopped raining really hard we went out and collected some twigs which the wind had blown off the trees and made a lovely big twig skeleton on the floor. It had leaves for a skull and shoulders and conkers for eyes. It is hard to identify twigs in winter without their leaves but we knew the dogrose, the oak, the willow and the hawthorn and we could see the buds on the twigs waiting to open in the spring.

February: More Winter Twigs, Buds & Bark

What's inside the fat bud at the end of a bare winter twig?

We cut cross sections of sticky brown horse chestnut buds to find out. We found tiny curled up green leaves and tiny fluffy flowers waiting for





spring to arrive. Then we looked at some green lichen on old twigs and through the microscope the lichen seemed like a beautiful miniature garden. After that we enjoyed making millions of tiny brown spores puff out of a puffball, which is a kind of fungus.

Then we went for a cold walk to look at tree bark. It comes in all sorts of patterns. We did four bark rubbings with paper and wax crayons on a lime tree, a silver birch tree, a plane tree and an elder tree and they all looked different.

Then we got creative with some clay, sticks and bits of leaf and feather and berry and made model birds, horses, woods and reptiles. They looked great!

Why not come along with your child to have fun with others learning about our local nature – birds, plants, trees, butterflies, pondlife and insects etc.

The group meet at the changing rooms, Harrow Rd, Wanstead Flats, E11 3QD the 4th Saturday of each month.

The group is run by Wren committee member Gill James and volunteers. Only £1.50 a session. To find out more about the group or to register contact gilljames@btinternet.com

now & then

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



Wren crossword

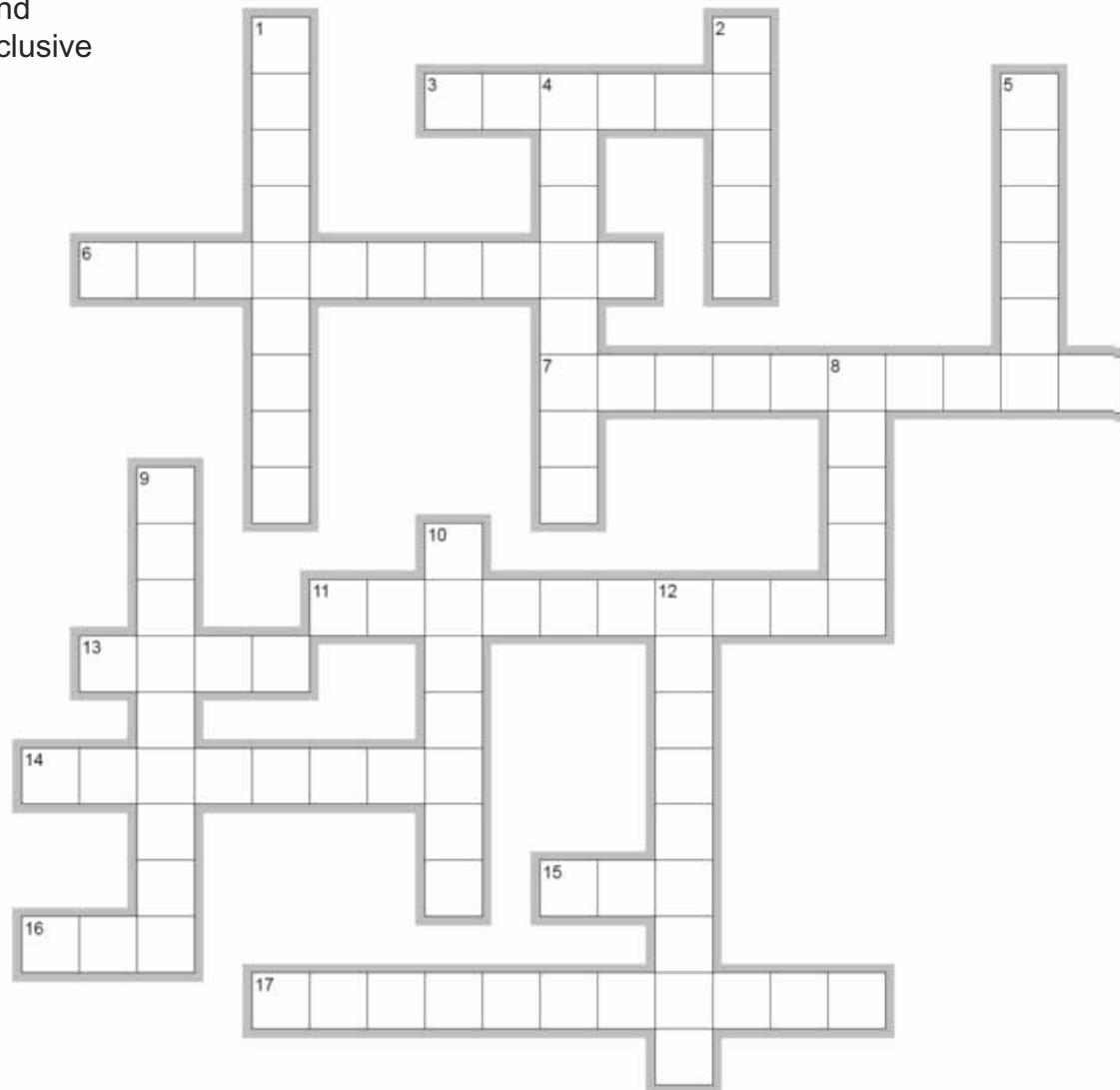
This season's Crossword is by Norman Olley and is all about flowers. Print off this page and have a go. The first one to send their answers to me at wreeditor@talktalk.net will get an exclusive Wren 'T' Shirt

Across

- 5. Grows on South American plain
- 6. I wouldn't grasp this
- 7. Mug of cholesterol
- 9. A piece of bunting
- 10. Sounds like herds of sheep
- 14. Harmless Nippon mouthorgan
- 17. The Queen was this in Jubilee Day
- 18. Sound of Music hit
- 19. Popular name for a member of the Dianthus family

Down

- 1. Prisoner minus e.g.
- 2. Emblem of Scotland
- 3. Sugary prince
- 4. Emblem of Wales
- 7. I bag one (anagram)
- 8. WWI flower
- 11. Eye for a flower
- 12. Looks sweet on a bicycle made for two
- 13. Carnation
- 15. Don't call me this if I am weak
- 16. From Amsterdam



events diary



March 2015

Wednesday 25th 7:30pm - Annual General Meeting (AGM). Wanstead Golf Club, Overton Drive. The London Wildlife Trust's development manager for East London, David Mooney, will be giving a presentation on the exciting project to develop the largest urban wetland nature reserve in London, Walthamstow Wetlands.

April 2015

Saturday 11th 10:30 - Skylark walk Meet at Centre Road Car Park. Leaders Tim Harris and Thibaud Madelin

Sunday 12th 10:30am - Wanstead Flats, joint walk with Friends of Epping Forest. Meet in Jubilee Pond car Park, Lake House Road.

Sunday 19th 8:30am - Wanstead Flats, joint walk with NE London RSPB group. Meet in Jubilee Pond car Park, Lake House Road.
See www.rspb.org.uk/groups/northeastlondon for details

Saturday 25th 10:30 - Skylark walk Meet at Centre Road Car Park. Leaders Tim Harris and Thibaud Madelin

May 2015

Saturday 2nd 10:30 - Skylark Walk. Meet at Centre Road Car Park. Leaders Gill James and Geoff Sinclair

Saturday 9th 10:30 – Stall at Forest Gate Community Market, Siebert Road. Come and meet us!

Thursday 14th - Capital Ring Walk led by Peter Aylmer. Mail peteraylmer@hotmail.com for more details

Sunday 17th - Awayday to the Buglife reserve at Canvey Wick.
Contact Tim Harris on 07505 482328 or mail tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

June 2015

Thursday 18th - Wild Flowers in Wanstead Park, a walk led by botanist Tricia Moxey. Meet outside Riding Stables, Empress Avenue, 7:30pm

Saturday 27th - Bio-blitz activities in Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats. Activities will include guided walks looking for butterflies and dragonflies, pond-dipping, moth-trapping, and an evening bat walk. Look out for more details on our website and Facebook page!

Sunday 28th - Bio-blitz activities in Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats. Activities will include a dawn chorus walk, guided walks looking at wildflowers and dragonflies, and pond-dipping at Alexandra Lake and Shoulder of Mutton Pond. Look out for more details!

July 2015

Thursday 16th – Capital Ring Walk led by Peter Aylmer. Mail peteraylmer@hotmail.com for more details



Links

Got any links to go on this page ? Get in touch
wreeditor@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/>

National

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

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

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

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

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

UHK Safari <http://www.uk safari.com/index.htm>

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

The British Deer Society

<http://www.bds.org.uk/index.html>

and finally

What to look out for this season

The sweetly scented flowers of the Limes open in late June or early July and are very attractive to both Honey Bees and various species of bumble bees. There has been much debate about the toxicity of Lime nectar to bumble bees as often dead bees are found beneath such trees. Anthony McCluskey at Bumblebee Conservation Trust has explained that the observed mass deaths may just reflect aspects of bee biology and behaviour and those bumble bees found dead are the older workers and males. Many dead bees are then eaten by tits. Checking to see if they are older workers or males which die could be a topic for research this summer.

Not all Lime trees have this toxic effect on bees and our native Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata* and Large-leaved Lime *T. platyphyllos* are bee friendly and of course you can buy jars of Lime flower

honey. However do check the webpage at Bumblebee Conservation Trust for more information about this. <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org>.

Hawthorn or May flowers in late April or early May when the orchard fruit trees are in flower too. Such flowers produce fragrances and sweet nectar to lure potential pollinators once the ambient temperatures are sufficiently high for the insects to fly.

The spires of the Horse Chestnuts open in late April early May. Newly opened flowers have a golden central eye, which changes to bright pink once pollination has taken place. As with many trees a number of fertilised ova fail to develop and subsequently drop off leaving just a few to mature into conkers.

Growing up to 25cm long male flowers of the Sweet Chestnut do not appear until late

June or early July. The female flowers can be found in small clusters at the base of some of the unopened male flowers. There are different forms of flowers in Sweet Chestnuts with some having just long male flowers which are the most prolific pollinators as cross pollination ensures a good crop of nuts. The pollen can be transferred by wind in dry seasons or locations but nectar is produced in damper summers and bees turn this into a dark woody flavoured honey. There is only a short growing period for ripening nuts to mature before autumn.

By Tricia Moxey



now & then

Did you guess right ? Stratford, Romford Rd - The Technical Institute (now University of East London) in the early part of the last century and how it looks today.

