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a word from the chair

A charter for the Flats

Quite rightly, much attention in recent years has focussed on Wanstead Park, especially on a variety of issues to do with the state of its lakes. Hopefully, this year will see the beginning of the implementation of the Wanstead Park Plan to ensure that – among other things - all the Park's lakes are functioning as was originally envisaged, with a flow of water from The Basin right through to the Ornamental Water – and that the damaging, invasive floating pennywort is eradicated.

Another open space close to the collective heart of the Wren Group is, of course, Wanstead Flats. Local naturalists have for years been doing their damndest to ensure that the amazing biodiversity of this area is recognised. And more recently scores of local residents have been arming themselves with litter-pickers and bags to fight the perennial problem of dumped plastic, bottles, builders' rubble, condoms and sharps.

In my view there still needs to be more of an appreciation of Wanstead Flats as an area of importance for nature, as well as a space for playing sport. This value should be understood to be part of the area's leisure value – rather than in conflict with it. Organised and unorganised sport has been part of the tradition of the Flats for well over a century. But the area has so much more to offer. It is therapeutic to be there not because it is an open space *per se*, but because it is an open space alive with wildflowers, butterflies and birds. It is great as it is, but it could be much more interesting and pleasant still.



To achieve this, I've come up with some suggestions. Some will require a lot of work and – even with a desire to achieve them – won't be accomplished quickly. Others seem to me to be pretty straightforward. Some are happening but need to be maintained.

- The City of London to make approaches to the relevant authorities, including Thames Water, to discuss getting water from surrounding roads and estates into the water system of Wanstead Flats. Water that is wasted at the moment could be working to revive the formerly damp areas by the Brickpit spring and to the north-west of the SSSI. With a filtration system in place, this will have a beneficial impact on biodiversity.
- Discuss with the Lakehouse Lake Project ways to improve the planting and general surroundings of Jubilee Pond.
- A balanced approach to scrub and grassland management to ensure that the acid/semi-acid grassland areas are maintained, but that patches of gorse, broom and hawthorn are also allowed to flourish.
- Re-evaluation of the exact nature of the rotational cutting regime to ensure that it is working in favour of the ground-nesting birds.
- More education – through discussion and signage to keep dogs and people off the areas used by ground-nesting birds. If these birds are lost, they probably won't be coming back. We need more general education, too, to talk up the other 'stars' of the Flats. How many people know that this area is one of the prime sites in London for migratory songbirds, for example?

“The Wren Group appreciates that most (not all) of these projects will cost money and that Epping Forest has had severe financial constraints imposed upon it. However, the Group is willing, able and keen to assist in developing and maintaining this unique place”.



- Connect the unmown areas to the south of Alexandra Lake and to the east of Centre Road.
- Pursue careful management of the bank at the east end of the Brickpit and abandon weekly mowing of the eastern Brickpit. This area is no longer used for sport and could become as flower- and invertebrate-rich as the bank itself.
- Remove the rest of the *Crassula* (New Zealand Pygmyweed) from Alexandra Lake. Rubbish should also be removed regularly from this lake also, with due care and attention to breeding waterbirds. The industrial-scale feeding of wildfowl here and at Jubilee should be discouraged.

The continued closure of the Alex car park will probably assist.

- A combination of harsher penalties and hearts-and-minds approaches to football teams to discourage littering.

This list isn't exhaustive. Some ideas may be controversial. What do you think? Why not send your suggestions to the Editor?

Tim Harris
Chair of the Wren Group



no trees were harmed

Welcome to the spring Wren newsletter. This is an online newsletter so we can make it as long as we like and have as many pictures as we want without a single tree being harmed. We can also afford to go 'off-piste' now and then to embrace interests on the periphery of the group's traditional subject of wildlife, such as walks, places to visit and local history etc. By doing this I hope that there will be a little something of interest to everyone. I also hope that we might get a wider audience and more people interested in what we do.

However, this is your newsletter and will not happen without your support so if you have any news, views or stories please send them in. Similarly, if you would like to see any changes in the newsletter either in the way it looks or the content please get in touch with me at wreneditor@talktalk.net

Members often ask me for previous newsletters - these can now be found on the wren website at <http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/about-us/newsletter/>

Wren annual general meeting

March saw The Wren Group's AGM. The past 12 months have been very good for the Group. Membership has continued to rise, now being not far short of 300. Our level of activity has also been maintained at a high level, and our ever-improving newsletter and Facebook presence reflect both of these trends. We have fulfilled our brief of continuing to evaluate the area's flora and fauna, publicising the importance of this for the local community, providing education, continuing our programme of practical work and all the while having some fun!

Just over 50 people attended the AGM - our biggest ever - and the committee elected for 2016-17 is as follows: myself, Jackie Morrison, Norman Olley, Gill James, Mark Gorman, Tony Morrison, Jane Cleall, David Giddings, Peter Aylmer, Kathy Baker, and Simon Raper. The evergreen Richard Oakman continues as president. Although not a committee member special note was made of Peter Williams who has dutifully organised practical works through rain and shine.

Howard Vaughan gave a superb presentation on 'Rainham Marshes, Past, Present and Future'. Touching on the history of the grazing marsh, the challenges faced during its transformation from MOD land to nature reserve, and mentioning some of the plans for future development, Howard left no one in and doubt as to the importance of this RSPB reserve. He also became a member of the Wren Group and left with an invitation for us to visit the reserve.

Tim Harris
Chair of the Wren Wildlife and Conservation Group



Tim Harris
Chair



Richard Oakman
President



Mark Gorman
Membership



Jackie Morrison
Secretary



Gill James
Nature Club



Norman Olley
Treasurer



Peter Aylmer
Walks Coordinator



David Giddings
Website



Simon Raper
Committee Member



Jane Cleall
Committee adoptee



Kathy Baker
Committee adoptee



Peter Williams
Practical Work



Tony Morrison
Newsletter



winter bird report

Report and pics by Nick Croft

December 2015: The highlights

Bob's Caspian Gull resurfaced and hung around, mostly in the mornings for a good part of a week, with the last sighting on the 17th. The year's only adult Yellow-legged Gull was in the gull roost on the football pitches to the west of Alex on the 5th.

Firecrest(s): After many a fruitless trip around all the old haunts and not too long after Jono found the birds back in Bush Wood, it looked like they were everywhere. A slight exaggeration. I found two in Long Wood, and the next day one by the Shoulder of Mutton, then a few days later there was a probable in the wood to the south of Perch, confirmed to me by Irish Mick who was visiting the wood for a call of nature. Bob also had a probable bird by the bridge over the Roding, which means up to seven birds could have been in the area.



Firecrest

There were record numbers again for Wigeon in the Park and possibly for Shoveler, too. Of course the former had magically disappeared for the New Year blitz, apart from the two Bob got on The Basin.



Record numbers of Wigeon in the Park

The Little Owl re-appeared just in time for the New Year.

December 2015 was good for Redpolls, with a high of 20 one day in the Old Sewage Works/Roding area, the same day as the highest count of Siskins since the autumn. Linnet numbers were not great, though, with only a few days of 10+.

A wintering Stonechat – the first in years – took up residence somewhere near Cat & Dog pond – but was elusive.

There were a couple of Woodcock sightings, but

where were the Snipe? Where's the SSSI boggy bit? Still stubbornly refusing to get damp while everywhere else floods!

I just hope I don't find a BB rarity in January when I am on my own!



Stonechat

January 2016

We kicked off with the best first day ever, a great team effort. 69 birds on day one and there were only two ways this could pan out: tortuously - or even better. Luckily it was the latter. By the end of the month we had achieved what it took us to the 13th Mar (2015), 5th Mar (2014), 3rd Mar (2013), 11th Mar (2012) to attain: 84 species. Let's hope we can carry on in the same manner ...

The highlights

- Short-eared Owl: first January record and Josh gets his contribution in early
- Little Owl: job done on the 1st, too
- Firecrest: no worries this year with at least four still kicking around; Stu's bird is still in Snaresbrook
- Shelduck: a really unseasonal record this; we don't usually get them till March-April, and thanks to the ever vigilant Mr Lethbridge
- Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: following a slight bit of trespassing looking for Bob's Wigeon - and proof that crime does pay. Two also reported from the Dell later in the month!
- Great Snipe*: seen in flight between Alex and the scrub to the east, where it was then flushed, giving a good view of the outspread tail and the heavily marked wings. Tim sent a fuller description to some eminent birding chums, who unanimously agreed GS as best fit. Unanimously they also agreed it stands little or no chance of being accepted! Having not found the bird again in my morning visits, I changed tack and lingered in the Alex scrub at dusk. My reward, the unwanted attention of a strange man and the sight of a large-ish bird flying backward and forward through the scrub!

- Turtle Dove: not wanting to miss out on courting controversy Bob V picks up a summer migrant over the Brick Pit (at least there were two other sightings reported around the same time from Devon and Norfolk)
- Brambling: flyovers on the 15th and 16th
- Caspian Gull: re-identified from some really crap shots and confirmed on the 29th
- Mediterranean Gull: Tony Brown spots the lazy larid in amongst a huge roost of Black-headed and Common Gulls

* And with all the eastern vagrants that have been turning up over the month here and on the continent, perhaps not so ridiculous for a former scarce overwintering bird.



Blackcap

Of note: both Chiffchaff (2+ birds) and Blackcap (1 male, 2 female) are currently overwintering, while it hasn't actually felt like winter apart from that week in the middle. A cold snap, which brought in our first Common Snipe for ages, a flyover, calling Lapwing in the darkness and very little else. However, it did for our Gadwall: only one recorded in the Park towards the end of the month, down from several hundred birds.



Siskin

Siskin numbers are way up on the last few years with a high of 40+ in the Dell and good numbers on other occasions. Linnets are down and Redpolls not as numerous as before the New Year, and where are the Bullfinches? (A dog walker has told me he had three visit his gardens to the south of the Flats during the month). The only records of Treecreeper came from Leyton Flats, and only one of these was from Stuart Fisher: what's going on there, mate?

The Stonechat lingered in the brambles by the Harrow Road changing rooms, while larger

thrushes were few and far between. Redwings were a constant by the stables and in the ivy covered trees in Bush Wood and elsewhere, but there were only a few Fieldfare flyovers. Song Thrushes are belting it out everywhere.



Redwing

Meadow Pipits are hard to find, though seven one day was interesting, indicating some movement is still happening. The Skylarks remained stubbornly hard to find.

Peregrines have been sighted fairly consistently throughout the month, outnumbering Sparrowhawk sightings. However, it wasn't quite warm enough to get Buzzard on to the list.

February 2016

..... was poor, but we can look forward to a whole heap of goodies in March to help us forget. Just the 72 species were recorded in the month and just the

one new bird – a Common Buzzard, which Bob and I nearly missed as we talked through Gravitational Wave Theory by the side of Shoulder of Mutton on one not-too-unpleasant morn towards the end of the month. Luckily a crow spoke to us and we looked up.



Meadow Pipit

The other highlights were:

- The Caspian Gull visited, and apparently visits the Eagle Pond in Snaresbrook
- The only Firecrest we could be bothered with lingered in Long Wood till near the end of the month, but may now be checking bus times from the brambles on Lake House Road. Stu did rather better round by Gilbert's Slade
- A record 27 Teal in the Park on the 27th
- The wintering Stonechat lingers till the end of the month, and the first migrant of

spring was a male of this species at Angell on the 28th

- The Little Owl may be two, but probably not...
- Skylark numbers on the rise, with 6 birds (3-4 singing) by the end of the month. Now we need a few females and the promised new signage will serve a purpose, even though it is still likely to be ignored.
- 4-5 Water Rails reported through the month

Shoveler numbers held up through the month, while Gadwall looked to be making a small comeback towards the end, and it was a good time for Teal.



Great Crested Grebe

Very few Little Grebes made themselves known, and there was only a pair of Great Crested Grebes

on The Basin (virtually the only birds of note there) while a single adult and a 1st winter bird did the rounds in the Park. With water levels still low on Heronry, perhaps this isn't surprising. Low water levels could be interesting for wader movement - or for prolonging low levels of interest.

Siskins have split into smaller groups with one at the south end of Bush Wood and a few hanging on in the Dell, but Redpolls have not been seen anywhere for some time. A lesson I learnt this month is don't take pictures of finches while they are eating – they are extremely messy feeders!



Mandarin Duck - a pair on Ornamental Water mid March

The one wintering Chiffchaff is most likely to be stumbled across by the stables, but no Blackcaps were noted in February. In a few weeks they will be singing everywhere. Which brings us on nicely to the strange sub-song of the Redwing – I would love to hear a Fieldfare give it some – now emanating from an Ivy clump near you.

Let's agree not to do February next year.

March and what to look out for

... It's time for Rooks, for Red Kites, for Swallows and Sand Martins, waiting for Wheatear, for waders and warblers, for the rare and unusual

Any combination of the following would do very nicely, thank you:

- Mandarin Duck: a pair on the Ornamental Water got down to business from 11th March 2010 onwards, but nothing transpired, while a solitary male spent the day on Heronry on 30th March 2014.
- There was a female Wood Duck – a rubber duckie – on the Shoulder of Mutton on the 25th in 2012
- Red-legged Partridge: two of, in the SSSI from 14th in 2006 for some time were apparently game birds, while a Pheasant put in an appearance in 2010
- Rare Bird Alert and BirdGuides both have a report of a Ring-billed Gull on the Alex from the 18th in 2002, which has one thing in its favour – that being it occurred not long before the long-staying bird at the Isle of Dogs, which wintered for many

a year. Hmmm!

- Our second Stone Curlew on a particularly cold 24th in 2011, and the following day we had three Golden Plover hiding on the Police Scrape for a couple of days. A Little Ringed Plover joined a Common Sandpiper on the Alex in the fog on the 16th in 2011 – a bit of fog goes down a treat at this time of the year
- With a nice bit of symmetry (or whatever it's called), nine Curlews flew over on the 9th in 2013 (I still need it)
- An Alpine Swift graced the skies over the Hollow Ponds on the 22nd in 2010 and our only Water Pipit checked in at the Alex on the 18th in 2011

So when will the Wheatear be here: the earliest was on the 15th and latest on the 30th, with the week between the 15th and 20th the spread bet

Report and pics
by Nick Croft



Follow Nick on his excellent blog
<http://wansteadbirding.blogspot.co.uk>

bug life

Pictures and commentary by Rose Stephens

Two-toothed Door Snail (*Clausilia bidentata*)

I walk around Manor Park Cemetery at least once a week but quite often more often than that as I find it such a peaceful and pleasant place to walk.

*One humid sunny Sunday in January I decided to take a walk in the cemetery and noticed a large number of beautiful long, thin snails that I had never seen before, climbing up a number of old gravestones. The weather must have been just right for them to make an appearance: it had been raining but was very mild. I was so taken by them I just had to find out more about them. I looked at various websites but found that there were others that looked very similar, such as *Alinda biplicata*, the Two-lipped Door Snail, which is quite rare. I realised it wasn't easy for a beginner to identify a snail and not as easy as I had hoped, so I decided to post them on the Essex Field Club Facebook page. I was delighted when Simon Taylor identified them as *Clausilis bidentata*, the Two-toothed Door Snail. This door snail normally lives in crevices of rocks or under bark and is seen at night climbing up trees or, in our case, gravestones to feed on lichens. This little snail has inspired me to start finding out more about snails in our area as quite often these fascinating gastropods are not only overlooked but also can end their days victims of dreaded slug pellets.*

Wren member Rose Stephens is a self-taught naturalist and artist who was born in Newham and still lives there - in Forest Gate, close to Wanstead Flats.

Rose has built up a collection of artwork using various mediums. Through her love of all things to do with nature and her passion for art, she manages to produce work that is original and different from her contemporaries. Her love of nature shines through in her work.

In the past Rose has used photographs as a basis for her work - painting from pictures taken in the area. More recently, she has started to express her fondness of all things natural solely in the media of photography.

Rose has an extraordinary eye for seeing the detail in the nature around her. This she has recently used to her advantage by taking up 'macro' or close-up photography.





False Widow Spider (*Steatoda nobilis*)

I have encountered this most beautiful spider many times on my travels, mainly around buildings, including my own home. It's always a treat for me to find one. Every one I see seems to look slightly different but they all have very elegant legs and amazing patterns on their back. The media has hyped the danger of this spider, sometimes giving the impression that it has only just come to the UK. In fact it has been here since 1879. It is well established on the south coast from Cornwall to Essex. This spider has been known to bite and again has received a lot of unjustified press coverage. The bite would be similar to a bee sting but there are very few records of definite and confirmed bites from this particular spider. My personal experience of these spiders is that they are normally very gentle and quite shy but never aggressive and sometimes very happy to sit still whilst I take a photograph. The spider in the photo is a very beautiful juvenile found under the lid of a galvanised incinerator (thankfully not used) in my garden.

Gall wasp on Black Horehound

This gall wasp seen on Black Horehound on 18 February on Wanstead Flats. I can't really be sure which one it is as they look very similar and normally they are identified by the gall they make. I see many Marble Galls on Oak around the Flats. It really is very interesting how these tiny insects can change the shape of the plants they grow on.



10-spot Ladybird (*Adalia 10-punctata*)

This one was on my kitchen ceiling on 11 February. These can be tricky little ladybirds to identify as they come in various colours and the number of spots can vary. It can be very interesting to see what insects are around the house; look in doorways, porches or even around wheelie bins.

Leafhopper (*Idiocerus herrichii*)

This leafhopper was seen on Wanstead Flats and in Manor Park Cemetery in mid-February. I have mainly seen them on Sycamore trees, but the one in the cemetery was on a different tree. In certain light conditions they have a metallic gold sheen on them.



Hairy Bark Aphid alate (*Pterocomma pilosum*)

I saw this insect on a gravestone in Manor Park Cemetery on 24 January and was quite taken by how a tiny aphid like this can look so amazing close up. In fact, at first I had no idea it was an aphid at all! I saw a website called 'Influential Points.com' all about aphids worldwide, so plucked up courage and sent them an email of my photo. I was delighted to get a reply straight away from Bob Dransfield, asking for a bit more information. His second response was so informative, helpful and inspiring that I'm glad I asked for their help. Bob explained that when the trees have leaves on them the aphids have black stripes and when the leaves come off the trees they change colour and have an aposematic (warning) red colouration to deter predators. Here's the link about aphid colouration that Bob sent me.

http://influentialpoints.com/Blog/Aphid_colour_cryptic_camouflage_colouration_late-autumn_2014.htm

And here's another link about the aphid

http://influentialpoints.com/Gallery/Pterocomma_pilosum_Hairy_willow_bark_aphid.htm

I hope you find it as interesting as I did and will now be looking a lot more closely at aphids.

Forest Shieldbug nymph (*Pentotoma rufipes*)

There have been quite a few of these on gravestones in the same area of Manor Park Cemetery, with trees nearby.



Wanstead sewage farm

A bird report from 1919, plus a Wonderful Visit
from H.G. Wells

Article by Paul Ferris



Trying to discover something more of the history of the land now known as the Exchange Lands - or Aldersbrook Exchange Lands, which is slightly more descriptive - I came across the following passage from the Medical Officer of Health's Report of 1919 relating to Wanstead Sewage Works:



Wanstead Sewage Works or Aldersbrook Exchange Lands

All the work on the farm is carried on practically without noise, and as the Council have thoughtfully forbidden the use of guns the place has become a bird sanctuary. I have seen on the farm in my time the following less common birds : the Kingfisher, the teal and mallard ducks, the snipe, the heron, many varieties of finches, sand martins, pied and yellow wagtails, and partridges. One of the older men on the farm has told me that the former farm manager

captured a "golden heron." This may have been a specimen of the bittern.

Some fifteen years earlier H.G. Wells had written a fantasy novel - although that term would not have been in use then - called *The Wonderful Visit*. I won't go into the plot, suffice to say that it contains satirical elements and describes and to some extent mocks some of the Victorian values of the time. This passage from the novel may have been just as prophetic as some of Wells' science-fiction novels:

H.G. Wells on collecting specimens, from *The Wonderful Visit* published in 1895 -

If it were not for collectors England would be full, so to speak, of rare birds and wonderful butterflies, strange flowers and a thousand interesting things. But happily the collector prevents all that, either killing with his own hands or, by buying extravagantly, procuring people of the lower classes to kill such eccentricities as appear. It makes work for people, even though Acts of Parliament interfere. In this way, for instance, he is killing off the Chough in Cornwall, the Bath White butterfly, the Queen of Spain Fritillary; and can plume himself upon the extermination of the Great Auk, and a hundred other rare birds and plants and insects. All that is the work of the collector and his glory alone. In the name of Science. And this is right and as it should be; eccentricity, in fact, is immorality—think over it again if you do not think so now—just as eccentricity in one's way of thinking is madness (I defy you to find another definition that will fit all the cases of either); and if a species is rare

it follows that it is not Fitted to Survive. The collector is after all merely like the foot soldier in the days of heavy armour—he leaves the combatants alone and cuts the throats of those who are overthrown. So one may go through England from end to end in the summer time and see only eight or ten commonplace wild flowers, and the commoner butterflies, and a dozen or so common birds, and never be offended by any breach of the monotony, any splash of strange blossom or flutter of unknown wing. All the rest have been "collected" years ago.

The Chough - happily - has returned to Cornwall, its presence there for many years being only on the Cornish Coat of Arms. They nested there until 1952 and its final demise was hastened by it becoming more and more of a prize for egg-collectors and other trophy hunters. It wasn't until 2001 that four returned to take up residence and there has been a gradual increase since then, with lots of volunteers keeping a look-out for eggers and the like.



The Chough - happily making a comeback to Cornwall

The Bath White Butterfly is an extremely rare migrant and appears always to have been so. Similarly, the Queen of Spain Fritillary is known now as an extremely rare migrant to Britain, though it may never have been much more than that even in its heyday when it was seen in every year from 1818 until 1885. Mind you, if every one seen was caught



The Bath White Butterfly - an extremely scarce immigrant to the British Isles

The Great Auk had a most peculiar end in Britain. Three sailors from St. Kilda spotted the bird on a nearby rock stack, saw that it was evidently different from the other sea-birds they were used to, and caught it. They kept it alive for four days, but on the fourth day a storm blew up and the superstitious sailors feared that it was caused by the bird. They called it "A maelstrom-causing witch" and stoned it to death! It has never come back.

In the main, we don't treat our witches like that any more, at least not in Britain. And there has also been a change in values regarding collecting of specimens - at least just for the sake of collecting. We can now keep our collections in the form of digital photographs. I've always liked the idea "Take only photos, leave only footprints", and many of us are at least attempting to do something like that now. I try to do this whenever possible, and particularly regarding animals - however "lowly" they may be (or appear to be).

*"Take
only
photos,
leave
only footprints"*

As for collecting, there is a strong argument that it is necessary at times to take specimens,

particularly to determine species or for other scientific studies. However, I prefer to stick to the photos and try to leave the animals undisturbed - or at least not too alarmed. It is probably a lot easier to edit a photo as part of a collection than dismantle an animal to determine species or prepare a biological specimen anyway.

It's nice to know that even in this busy, populated and relatively polluted part of England, we can still find more than the "eight or ten commonplace wild flowers, and the commoner butterflies, and a dozen or so common bird" that Wells mentioned. I suspect that it is the quantity of flowers, insects and birds that we are missing. That is no longer due to collecting, but the way we are treating our land and our environment as a whole.

Paul Ferris
31 January 2016



Find out more about the work of Paul Ferris on his excellent website www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk

The latest count for these endangered songsters was eight on the last weekend of March. This sounds better than my last doom-laden posting, but this figure is lower than at the equivalent time in 2015 - that's not so good, though we still have some time. But why were our wintering numbers so low this year? And where do the other birds go during the winter months?

New signs are promised for those removed/destroyed but in truth they are a limited deterrent, and already we know there are a few new dog owners in the area who are going to be trouble, in addition to those we've had run-ins with in the past. Even the professional dog walkers have found ways around the five dog ceiling, by sending two walkers to be within the rules.

Obviously there are things that could be done to help, like closing the Centre Road car park for the duration, extending and widening the rough grass link between the brooms and the Alex, diversionary feeding of crows (which happens – unfortunately slap bang in the middle of Skylark territories), more signs and a greater CoL presence to police them (that ain't going to happen!), greater education of dog walkers and the creation of dog walking areas (the Manor Park triangle for example). All this doesn't stop disturbance by other users of the Flats, which is on the increase and unfortunately there will be confrontations (which is depressing me now just thinking about it!).

Update by Nick Croft



skylark update



wind pollinated trees

Article by Tricia Moxey

One of the welcome signs of spring is the lengthening of Hazel catkins as they respond to warmer days. This year they started to shed pollen grains in early January as this winter has been rather mild with just a few chilly nights here in the south of England.

Hazel is a wind pollinated shrub where the wind blows copious amounts of pollen from one bush to another. By chance, some of these pollen grains will stick to the red stigmas of the female flowers and fertilisation takes place with the nuts developing throughout the summer months.



It was the careful experiments by Richard Bradley, who was Professor of Botany at Cambridge from 1724 to 1732, that helped him realise the importance of pollen grains in nut production. He removed all catkins from an isolated Hazel bush which he then dusted with pollen from another bush and was pleased that this then produced nuts. He and other 18th century botanists continued to observe and discuss the processes pollination by wind or by insects and they laid the foundations for the selective breeding of plants which continues today.



The female Hazel flower (left) and The male Hazel catkin. The Hazel is wind pollinated and the pollen from the catkins blows to reach the female flowers – these are tiny individual flowers, visible only as red styles protruding from a green bud-like structure on the same branches as the male flowers.

The technical term for wind pollination is anemophily and a number of trees and other plants including grasses are wind pollinated. They are not dependent on assistance from insects to ensure the

successful continuation of their species, but they need to produce a sufficient number of pollen grains to saturate the surrounding area so that some are likely to adhere to the correct stigmas. In those species with male and female flowers on the same plant they mature at different times to avoid self-pollination. This process is referred to as dichogamy.



Birch catkin

Several other wind pollinated trees flower early in the year before the leaves appear. Alder catkins take on a purple hue as they start to expand and the small red female flowers are located on the tips of the branches. Several green cones will form increasing in size eventually turning black in the autumn and opening to reveal tiny seeds which are packed full of nutrients. Siskins find these a good source of food in the colder months.

Elms too flower before the leaves emerge. The red flowers are bisexual but the anthers mature first so

the pollen grains can be blown onto older flowers on nearby trees where the stigmas are ready to receive the pollen.

The dangling male Birch catkins mature in March or April releasing large numbers of pollen grains some of which are trapped by the short erect female flowers which will produce prolific numbers of small winged nutlets which germinate freely on disturbed ground. It has been estimated that a single Birch catkin produces about a million pollen grains!



Green Oak catkin

The yellow green Oak catkins appear as the leaves expand in April and clusters of the female flowers are in short spikes at the end of twigs. Acorns develop in their cupules or cups at the end of long stalks in the Pedunculate Oak and on short stalks in the Sessile Oak. Beech trees also produce separate male and female flowers on the same tree with the greeny gold dangling male flowers swaying like silken tassels as the leaves unfurl.

Willows and Poplars are dioecious, i.e. they are either male or female trees. Willow catkins produce nectar in copious quantities and are a useful source of energy for many insects. As pollen grains are a rich source of various proteins many insects feed on them. Some wind pollination seems to occur in Willows. Poplars are entirely wind pollinated.



Willow catkin

Ash is another wind pollinated tree which produces bisexual flowers, each with two anthers and a long ovary which may form the key in due course. However, only certain Ash trees will bear fruit.

The viability of wind born pollen grains is important and although some grains may be transported across long distances or high into the atmosphere they are damaged by exposure to ultra violet radiation. The ones that are most likely to be effective in reaching the appropriate receptive stigma are likely to be near to the parent plant.

In closely related species hybridisation can occur and many of the young Oak saplings found within Wanstead Park show intermediate characteristics as they are the result of a cross between Pedunculate and Sessile Oaks. Sometimes Turkey Oak is one of the parents and with other introduced Oak species in local gardens there is the potential for other crosses too. Birches also hybridise and as there are a number of 'exotic' Birches in local gardens, there is a greater chance of hybrids appearing nearby.

As the average daytime temperature increases the sap rises within the trunks of trees and the buds are starting to burst. Do keep a watchful eye on the appearance of these fresh leaves and if you are interested then you could send in your observations to Track a Tree to help monitor the approach of spring!

Track a Tree is a new project that is recording the progress of spring in woodlands across the UK. This project is looking for volunteer recorders to collect observations of woodland trees and flowering plants during successive springs. These records will shed light on the seasonal timing of UK woodlands, and how changes in climate could affect them.

Track a Tree is a sister project of Nature's Calendar, the Woodland Trust's recording scheme for seasonal observations. Track a Tree has been developed by Christine Tansey, a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. It is supported by the Woodland Trust and funded by NERC. This project will help in the understanding of phenology which the study of recurring seasonal events in plants and animals, and the timing of these events in relation to weather and climate. The spring phenological



Ash - male flower

events include trees coming into leaf, the flowering of plants, nesting of birds and emergence of caterpillars or first sightings of bumble bees or butterflies.

Track a Tree is a citizen ecology scheme that will record the spring phenology of individual woodland trees and the flowering plants that make up the ground flora beneath them.

Article by Tricia Moxey

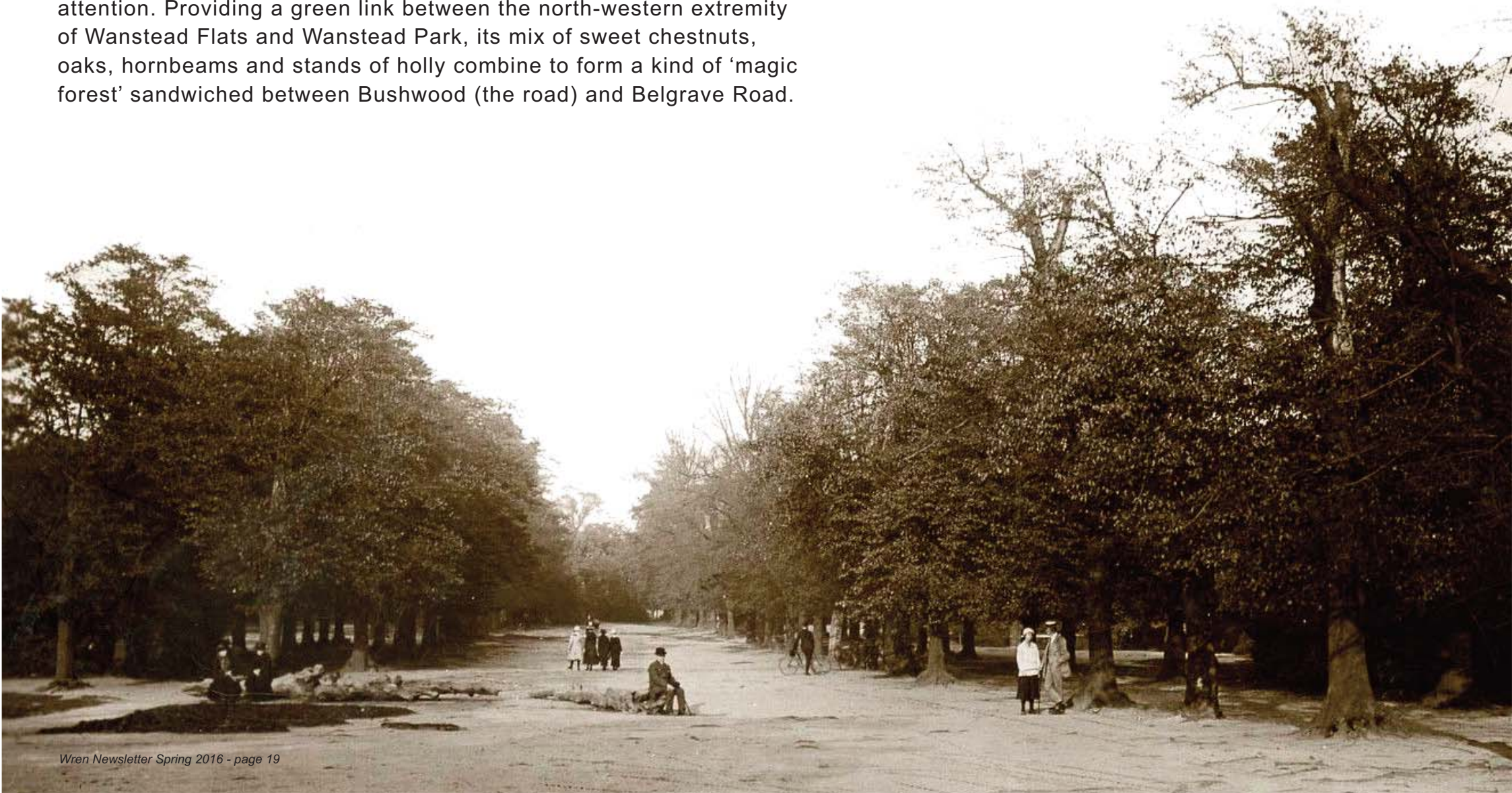


For further details check out the website <http://trackatree.bio.ed.ac.uk>

bush wood

So often ignored, Bush Wood (Bushwood) really does deserve more attention. Providing a green link between the north-western extremity of Wanstead Flats and Wanstead Park, its mix of sweet chestnuts, oaks, hornbeams and stands of holly combine to form a kind of 'magic forest' sandwiched between Bushwood (the road) and Belgrave Road.

Picture shows Evelyn's Avenue in Bushwood in 1904. Sir Josiah Child, merchant banker and head of the East India Company who purchased the manor of Wanstead in 1667, instructed builder John Evelyn to plant avenues of Spanish chestnuts radiating from Wanstead House.



James Heal is a newcomer to the Wren newsletter and one of the newer additions to the Wanstead Birding gang and is hoping to expand his knowledge of botany and butterflies among other things this year.

James was brought up in the country and has always had an interest in nature. His journey to become a birder began at the age of 19 when he saw an odd bird outside of his bedroom window and had to look it up (it was a Fieldfare) - he has had the bug to learn more about birds ever since, and has been birding on four continents so far with a highlight being finding the Royal Cinclodes (one of the rarest birds in the world in one of the rarest of ecosystems - *Polylepis* forest in the Bolivian Andes). But one of his favourite birds is the Firecrest which can be found rather closer to home.

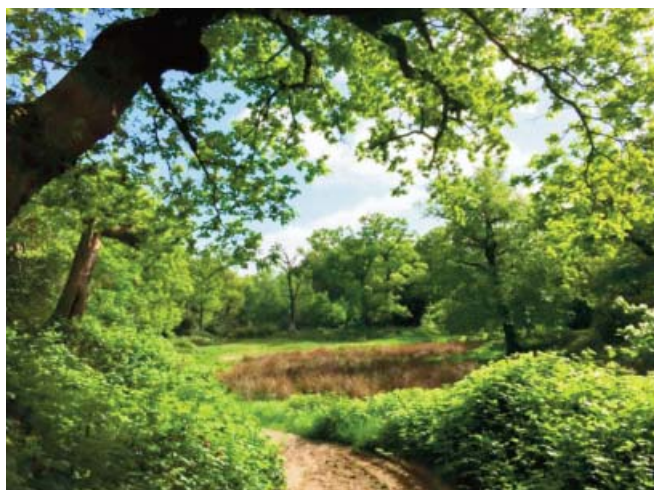
James gives us an some observations on Bush Wood, near to where he lives.

Bush Wood through the year

In 2015 I spent a fair amount of time surveying birds and trees in Bush Wood. This piece is mainly about my experience with the woodland birds this year, but it would seem mean-spirited not to mention the trees that make Bush Wood what it is (we should also not forget that this woodland is a fantastic place for fungi and invertebrates, as well as other flora and fauna).

The trees

Through the relatively quiet birding months in the Summer, I embarked upon a survey of the trees of Bush Wood, possibly even the first semi-comprehensive survey since Paul Ferris led a thorough search back in the early 1980's. I found 34 species of tree growing in the wood, although this diversity is somewhat skewed by a few odd specimens mainly found around the edges of the woodland.



Bush Wood is shaped by avenues and perimeter plantings of limes, and planes respectively, but it is filled largely by four types of tree: oak, hornbeam, holly, and hawthorn (the latter two making much of the interior of the wood - off the beaten track - largely impenetrable). Pockets and patches of birches, poplar, and even elm, can be found if you know where to look, and occasionally a hidden local gem is to be found such as the single hazel, small numbers of Goat and Crack Willow, or the maples and fruit trees on the north-western tip of the wood.

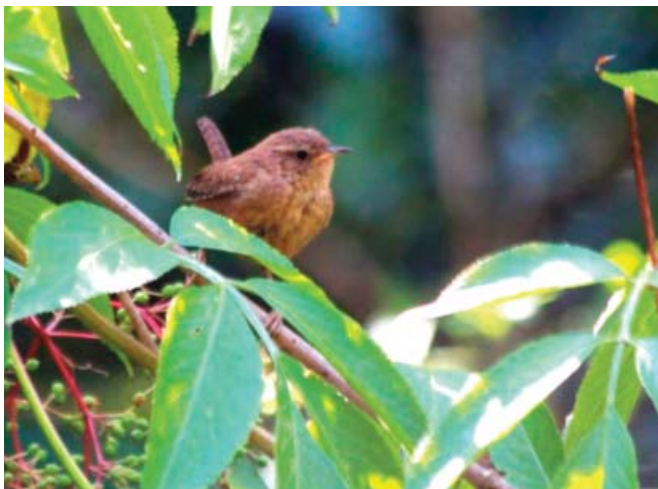
But when you are next out walking in Bush Wood, I encourage you to look for the oldest trees: almost certainly the six or seven Sweet Chestnut. All now in the twilight years of their long life, these huge specimens will have been standing since long before the rest of the wood was planted or grown naturally around them.

The birds

Apart from a few quizzical looks and the odd question from dog walkers, I was mainly in blissful solitude as I walked around just after dawn during the Spring with a clipboard recording the singing male birds (the best way to get a picture of the breeding activities in an area).

Aside from the Blue Tits and Long-tailed Tits, which are either too numerous and/or too mobile to count, readers will not be surprised to learn that the most commonly counted breeding bird was the Wren.

There were days when I heard as many as 28 separate singing males in the wood.



Bushwood - the most commonly counted breeding bird was the Wren

I counted a total of 23 species of birds that appear to breed in Bush Wood - although slightly fewer than this were surveyed by song. This includes Green and Great Spotted woodpeckers, Jay, and Stock Dove all in relatively small, but stable numbers, and then just a couple of pairs of Coal Tit that seem to cling on - all of which are present through the year.

In the spring the wood is filled with the song of migrant arrivals including two species of 'Sylvia' warblers (Blackcap and Whitethroat), and their distant cousin, the Chiffchaff. I also had a fantastic experience later in the summer of finding a full family of Sparrowhawks with two or three very noisy fledging juveniles. There are stories that Hobbies have bred in the wood, Kestrels may still do, but it was great to know that Sparrowhawks definitely do.

There are often one or two Nuthatches in the wood, although I am not sure they breed here, and I am still baffled as to why there appear to be no resident Treecreepers (although I continue to search for visitors). Bush Wood is not a major breeding area for finches, although Chaffinches, Goldfinches, and Greenfinches have all been found feeding through the year.

A bird I did not see at all in 2015 in the wood, but picked up in 2016, was another colourful finch; Siskin. I spent some time late in January almost hypnotised by the noise emanating from high in the treetops as a reasonable sized flock of at least 15 Siskin fed acrobatically and very noisily in a flock with Goldfinches. The end of 2015 and beginning of 2016 has been a good year on the patch for Siskin with at least 40 having been counted at any one single time. These birds will undoubtedly fly back north to breed as spring approaches, possibly to the northern parts of Scandinavia.



A bird I did not see at all in 2015 in the wood, but picked up in 2016, was another colourful bird, Firecrest.

I won't attempt to list here every species of bird found in Bush Wood, not to mention those simply seen flying-over, but two of my favourites are the two smallest: Goldcrest, and the even more colourful and beautifully marked and much rarer cousin, Firecrest. Goldcrest are so tiny, their song so high pitched (towards the upper frequency range of audibility for many of us), and they can be found so deep in the vegetation that they are very difficult to count, but they almost certainly breed in the wood. Whilst it is easy to walk through the wood and not see any, there were days in Autumn when the resident Goldcrests were joined by so many northern-breeding migrants that parts of the wood almost teemed with high pitched whistles and flashes of gold amongst the leaves. Another special moment for me in the wood was seeing a Firecrest. This winter we think there have been three individual/pairs of visiting Firecrest and I was delighted that at least one of them was in Bush Wood - I saw it relatively briefly deep in the holly-filled bowels of the wood very late last year.

Tawny Owls have been heard, although not by me (yet!) and another sight I long to see in Bush Wood is a Woodcock. Unless flushed, they are incredibly difficult to see during the day as they are exceptionally well camouflaged and only stir at dusk to move from woodland (like Bush Wood) to more open ground to feed.

The signature bird of Bush Wood: No, not the Turaco!

The biggest surprise for me was coming face to face with the White-cheeked Turaco in Bush Wood. This exotic escapee has been known for years in



The keepers lodge Bushwood at the turn of the last century and how it looks today



the area, but I have only come across it the once. However interesting it may be to see a bird like a Turaco, birders really want to see birds that appear naturally (whether as breeding residents, migrants, or the rare vagrants we all hope to add to our lists). While vagrants produce rapture-like joy amongst birders, it is really the breeding birds, and migrants, that are properly supported naturally in our home ecosystems, that are important from a conservation perspective.

As Wren members will undoubtedly know, it is birds like Skylark and Meadow Pipit that are almost signature birds of the Wanstead Flats (although we are all highly worried about the chances for Skylark to have a future as their numbers seem to be dwindling - this is not the place for me to dwell on this, but if Skylark stop breeding here it would be nothing short of a tragedy for London's natural history). Skylark and Meadow Pipit are not woodland birds though, so if I had to name a signature bird for Bush Wood, it would be the Song Thrush. Like Skylark and Meadow Pipit, this relatively common bird has faced almost catastrophic declines in its numbers in recent years and decades. But Bush Wood is an important local stronghold.

Despite the small size of the wood and the highly territorial nature of the Song Thrush, there were at least 6 singing males found during my survey-work in the wood. Perhaps responding to the unseasonably mild winter we have been having, Song Thrush can often be heard singing already this year. However, I would encourage anyone who has not experienced it, to walk out just after dawn on a crisp spring morning in Bush Wood and listen to the unmistakeable, beautiful, but complex song of a Song Thrush: highly varied phrases repeated two, three, or four times over like some wonderfully cryptic natural code. This great song of the wild has been written about in literature (Chaucer talked about the 'Throstle'), and spoken about far longer in ancient folk-tale and myth. The Greco-Latin name for the Song Thrush, 'Philomelos' or 'song lover', refers back to the ancient Greek tragic story of the princess Philomela who had her tongue cut out (amongst other horrible things) but was turned into a songbird when the gods took pity on her. But this song predates civilised man by a very long time indeed and would have echoed around the great

It does not compete with some other parts of the Wanstead Flats for the range of species, but Bush Wood is an important site locally for some of our breeding birds, and it has a few surprises in the trees every so often.

forest that covered almost all of the British Isles for many thousands of years, and certainly since the last great Ice Age. The fact that we have at least six territories in this tiny wooded corner of a great city is a natural jewel that should be cherished and protected.

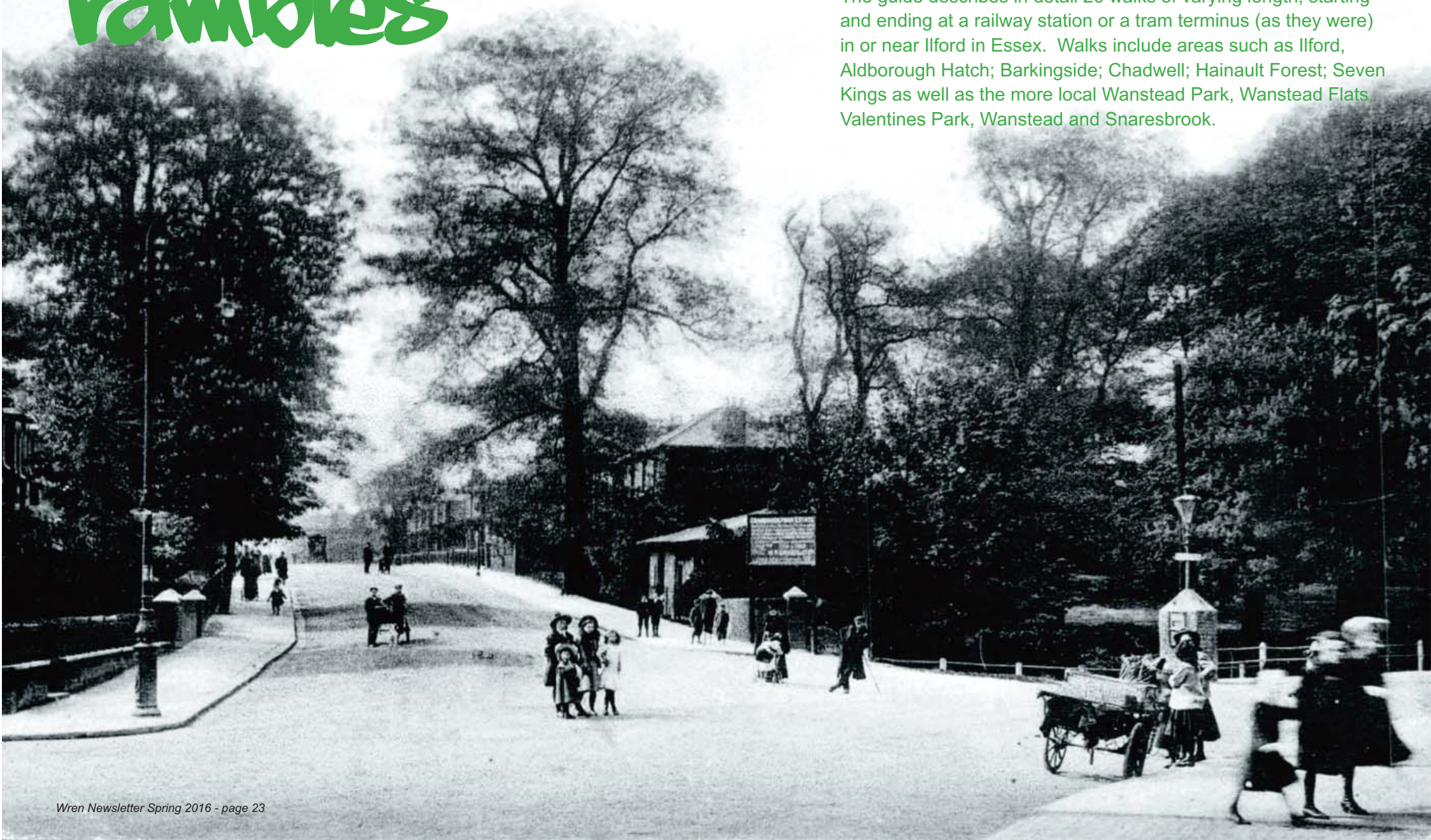
Article and pics
by James Heal



country rambles

Now well out of print, the *South Essex Recorder's Country Rambles around Ilford* was published in 1910, Its author Geo. E. Tasker recounts more rambles in our local area.

The guide describes in detail 26 walks of varying length, starting and ending at a railway station or a tram terminus (as they were) in or near Ilford in Essex. Walks include areas such as Ilford, Aldborough Hatch; Barkingside; Chadwell; Hainault Forest; Seven Kings as well as the more local Wanstead Park, Wanstead Flats, Valentines Park, Wanstead and Snaresbrook.



Route 2

From Cranbrook Wash, The Drive, Castle, field paths, Hatton Corner, Claybury, Fullwell Hatch, Gossford Green, Horseshoes, Cranbrook Road. (7 to 8 miles).



Ilford Station

Cranbrook Wash, opposite to which are the main entrance gates of Valentines (formerly Central) Park, is eight minutes from Ilford Station along Cranbrook Road, and besides being one of the most picturesque spots in Ilford, is a connecting link with the past history of the town. The iron gates of old Cranbrook Hall stretched across the foot of The Drive - which was the real "drive" to the Hall - but they were removed when building began. The porter's lodge, however, still remains. Proceeding up The Drive, past the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on the north border of the Cranbrook Estate, and past St. Andrew's (probably the best church site in Ilford), the Castle is reached. This strange edifice is a landmark for



The Drive, Ilford in 1908. The Wash, the real 'drive' to Valentines Mansions leads off to the right. The original gate house can be seen to the left of the drive where what are now Valentines Park gates would have been sited.

The hoarding to the left of The Wash advertises the new 'Cranbrook Park Estate' and gives the details and costs of housing/plots in the planned estate which would be built amidst many months of protests by the locals.

miles around, and was built in 1765 by Sir Charles Raymond, of "Valentines," as a mausoleum, but was never used for that purpose. The turrets are as high above sea-level as is the Cross on top of St. Paul's Cathedral.



The Castle 1914

At the end of the Castle path (which formerly ran by the two trees a little way in the field on the left) is Wanstead Lane - leading over Red Bridge to Wanstead Park and Wanstead. Crossing this lane and over the stile, the field path soon cuts through a shorter one connecting Beehive and Wanstead Lane, and then continues across a large field, dipping down to a rivulet crossed by a plank, to Redbridge Lane. It is possible that this end of the path has been diverted, as the continuation of it is a little way up the lane to the right, the point of diversion being just above the rivulet.



Red Bridge 1905

Crossing over the road to the stile, Shackman's Farm is on the right of the field path, which then skirts the high land of Fern Hall Farm, the house being to the left on the Woodford Bridge Road, with the shaft of the South Essex Waterworks pumping station in front of it. In a few minutes the path dips down to Hatton Corner and St. Swithin's brickfields.



Postcard shows the lodge to Cranbrook Hall. It was known as *The Old Lodge*, as well as *Cranbrook Lodge*, situated on the corner of what is now the Drive and Cranbrook Road. In the 1890s, *The Drive* was precisely that, a drive leading from *The Old Lodge* to Cranbrook Hall. The Telephone Exchange now occupies the site of the Lodge. The Hall was sited between 12-16 De Vere Gardens and 5-9 Endsleigh Gardens. The earliest mention of Cranbrook Hall was in 1347. The site was sold for property development in 1900. Cranbrook Hall has an interesting history.

The views across the valley of the Roding on a clear day towards Woodford and Buckhurst Hill are very effective. Hatton Corner is one of the seven hamlets which make up Barking-side. It probably derives its name from Sir Christopher Hatton, who lived here many years ago. Close by Carswell House several Roman remains have been found. At Woodford Bridge Road, to the left takes to the "Red House," and across a field path to Wanstead Lane and the Castle, but turn to the right and round the corner to St. Swithin's Farm. (If the road were continued to the right it would lead through Beehive hamlet to Cranbrook Road.)

Leaving the farm house on the right, proceed down the Woodford Bridge Road towards Claybury. On a triangular piece of waste just beyond the cottages at the bottom of the hill is an Ilford boundary stone.

Soon after entering Woodford parish is Hill Farm on the left. (At the bottom of the meadow in front of it is a field path leading to South Woodford, and Hermon Hill, Wanstead.) On the sloping field just beyond the farm house the author, in the spring of 1908, was interested in watching corn being sown broadcast from a semi-circular tray tied in front of the sower, a method usually associated with Biblical days rather than with the prosaic 20th century.

Soon after passing the farm the Ilford boundary is crossed again, and a little further on is Claybury Farm, formerly attached to Claybury Hall. (It is interesting to note that three other of the large mansions of Ilford had farms on their estate - e.g., Cranbrook, Clements, and Ilford Lodge.)



Cranbrook Road, Ilford showing the Super Cinema. The sign is of a silent movie around 1920. The cinema was demolished after being hit by a bomb during World War 2 around 1940. The site was occupied by C&A and more recently Wilkinson's and the Exchange Shopping Mall.

At the top of the hill rest for a moment on the stile to admire the view across the Roding valley towards Wanstead. Close by is another boundary stone of Ilford, with a bench mark of the Ordnance Survey cut on it.

Descending the other side of the stile the path goes by Claybury fence for a full mile. It would be interesting to know how many oaks were cut up to supply the planks for this long, high fence. The palings are 6 feet high overlapping each other, and rest on thick oak planks with even more substantial supports. A calculation at an average price per foot run gives the cost of this part of the fence as about £750, but as there are some 21 miles of the fencing round the asylum grounds, the cost to the ratepayers of London works out at something like £1,900.



Cranbrook Road, Ilford looking towards Valentines in 1905

In the autumn the quiet fields on the right are the rendezvous of many migrating birds, for pedestrians are not very numerous. Before crossing the last two stiles, the path skirts the fields of Dunsprings Farm and then enters a lane, to the left of which is Tomswood Hill leading to the front of Claybury, while to the right-which is now followed - is Mossford Green, Barking-side, and Holy Trinity Church. Next to the church are the schools, and then the Recreation Ground, and at the bottom of the road is the tram terminus. It is fifty minutes' walk from the church across the Recreation Ground and down the Cranbrook Road to Ilford Station.

your support is needed

Renewal of benches by the Tea Hut in Wanstead Park



Are you concerned about the poor condition of the seats and benches by the Tea Hut in Wanstead Park?

Are you fed up with drinking your tea over five worn-out benches, standing in puddles after rain?

We could replace this old stuff with something fit for purpose:

- Four brand new solid oak picnic suites, consisting of a table (8'x4') and a bench on either side
- Together with three new solid oak benches up to 8' long.
- With every seat and bench resting on a gravel base – so no longer will your feet rest in puddles

The Friends of Wanstead Parklands are applying for funding for the above from a Tesco community grant scheme called "Bags of Help".

But Tesco needs you to show your support for this new Tea Hut furniture.

So please email Peter Brimson at Tesco at peterbrimson@tiscali.co.uk and just say YES - can we please have new furniture at the Tea Hut in Wanstead Park.

We need as many responses as possible to persuade Tesco to give us a grant, so please email Peter and ask as many of your friends and family to do the same.



life in the garden

Article and pics by Barry Chapman

Living close to Wanstead Flats means that I count myself lucky to get lots of visitors from there. You will know doubt experience the same benefits if you live in an area close to the Wanstead Parklands or other parts of Epping Forest.

You might be surprised at what wildlife actually visits your garden, in this article I will relay what I have witnessed in the last couple of months in my back garden.

This January we took part in the RSPB garden bird count, which meant spending one hour spotting which of our feathered visitors came to our garden.



Blackcap during the RSPB garden bird count

We sent off for the free pack which comes with plenty of info and tells you what to do and what you might see. After an hour of observing from either the Kitchen or the Garden we had the results to send to the RSPB which we did via their website.

There was quite a turn out, which because of our proximity to the Flats helps, but even so, most of what we saw could be seen in most gardens of Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest.

Our total of 37 birds was more than we hoped for, these included a Blackcap, Goldcrest, Goldfinch and a Dunnock.

Had the count been a week earlier we may been able to add the Grey Heron which flew into visit our neighbours fish pond!



Fox observing the Blackbirds after their aerial combat

January and February are always know for the night time calls of mating urban foxes and in our garden we get our fair share. This time of their season is also mixed with territorial fights and scrapes as breeding and feeding grounds are contested. One of the regular foxes showed up limping in January, for us this was sad to see and made us concerned for its future.

Although 50 percent of foxes die by cars, this is only the second fox injury we had witness in our garden. Luckily it was

a result of a territorial argument and with the use of arnica and garlic capsules wrapped in a sausage, it started to walk again after a week or so. It's leg is now fully healed and I'm glad we could be of assistance to one of our local wildlife visitors.



Bufftail bee and sugared water

As the month of February came to an end and we all experienced a cold snap, this greatly effects life in the garden. This became very apparent to us when we found a Queen Bufftail motionless on the ground. The only thing to do was to give it some sugared water and hope that this was enough for it to make a recovery, but because of the cold weather it took longer.

The sugared water did help, but after picking some wild flowers she really made a return to her normal self, her favourite flower was the snowdrop. After almost a week in our care she finally buzzed off and I hope she managed to find a place to start her own colony.

Spring is now starting to immerse from Winter and the garden is now showing signs of more life, Rose has found an angle shade (moth) caterpillar and the bluebells are pushing through. I witnessed two Blackbirds having a territory combat, these can sometimes result in death, just like Robins, but fortunately, this wasn't the case. I'm looking forward to seeing what other joys we will observe in the coming months and hope to post our findings here.





be a wastead flats litterpicker

Article by Sarah Mbatha
Pictures by Nathan Goodison

Sorting out the house - never ending. There's always a pile of stuff teetering away somewhere demanding attention before toppling over. Child rearing - a very long term ongoing project. Definitely never ending.

Not many jobs these days have clear moments of accomplishment. The 'move that pile of stuff, when the pile is gone, you're done and you can go home' moment is non-existent in many jobs.



'Pickers' organisers Sarah Mbatha and Corporation of London Warden Nick Baker getting things ready before a recent litterpick

There are lots of things about being involved with the Wanstead Flats Pickers that give me a resounding sense of accomplishment.

1. Taking control of solving a problem is good for me. For the decade plus that I've lived here, rubbish and fly tipping on the Flats has made me

mad. Getting out there with a litter picker and managing to get so many others out with you feels just great.



2. Every month I meet new people who care passionately about our beloved green space. People of all ages, some very local, some less so. All keen to get stuck in and do something. We all get some fresh air, sometimes get soaking wet and in the often 'brisk' wind that the Flats are famous for, new friendships are formed.

“There are just not enough things in life with a nice clean start and a well-defined finishing point.”

On CofL managed property you can report fly tipping online, call 020 8532 1010 (24 hours), or email epping_forest@cityoflondon.gov.uk

There is a reward of up to £500 for evidence that leads to a successful prosecution in court.

3. I confess to being a competitive person and every month I try hard to bring new people in and increase our attendance numbers. I'm hoping that one day we'll reach a figure that means I won't be worrying at 10.45 on a Sunday that no one will turn up. When I picked up leading the group last summer, I wanted to get at least 12 people to every pick. This was a modest ambition, as my house alone supplies four pickers! That we now have around 25 to every pick is amazing and I think we can grow some more.

4. Despite what you sometimes hear about it, Twitter has been a place of huge support and encouragement and has linked us to some great





local groups and their supporters - look for us @Flats_pickers. We also recruit passers by with our laminated street posters, thanks to a small band of helpers to pin them all up and take them all down. We started with posters just on Capel and now extend down to Manor Park Station and this month into Aldersbrook.



In the last seven months alone, we've picked up almost 400 bags of rubbish, as well as an incredible range of weird and not so wonderful things that people discard on the Flats. As a group we're superbly supported by Corporation of London and I know our efforts are very much valued and our views are listened to. Thanks to the Forest keepers, we have plans to get into the Alexandra lake. Literally. Waders and a boat are promised.



Litter is not a victimless crime - it costs local ratepayers, is unsightly, spoils the use and enjoyment of our greenspaces, is dangerous for those people having to clear it up and causes pain and suffering for local wildlife.

So, if you're not yet filled with a burning desire to start litter picking, let me tell you about the mysterious and addictive pull of the litter picking stick. Once picked up, it's hard to put down. There's always 'just one more bit' to pick up. Before long, once a month won't be enough and you'll have your own litter pick stick and will be popping out to get your litter picking fix. You have been warned!

Fly-tipping is a Criminal Offence under the Environmental Protection Act (1990). Epping Forest will prosecute people who have generated the waste under s.34, 'Duty of Care', as well as the people that actually disposed of the waste illegally by fly-tipping under s.33.

In 2015, 7 prosecutions were brought to the courts and were all successful. Since the start of 2016, a further 2 cases are being brought forward and at time of writing, a further 11 are being investigated. Epping Forest is investing a lot of money in clearing the waste that could be better used in improving the biodiversity and facilities across the Forest.

These clearances have to be added to the substantial amount of litter that gets dropped across the Forest and we are very grateful for the support and help offered by local communities in helping us tackle this problem.

Epping Forest is a Registered Charity, owned and managed by the City of London.

As a charity issues around littering and fly-tipping are a significant draw on resources. Epping Forest is determined to tackle the issue by strengthening ties with partners such as Local Authority, Police and Environment Agency. Epping Forest is also working with the Chartered Institute of Waste Management to deliver enforcement training to support our investigating and prosecuting teams.

Corporation of London

If you come across a fly-tip taking place, please call 999 as it is a Criminal Offence. You can then call the Forest Keeper Team on 020 8532 1010.

If you can, and staying out of harm's way, record as many details as possible but please don't put yourself at risk.

Remember that these people aren't renowned for being smart, and what they are doing is illegal so they are unlikely to take kindly to people observing them.

Useful information includes:

- ☐ Description of the people (gender, clothes, hair colour, race, other distinguishing features)
- ☐ Vehicle details (make, model, colour, registration, signs)
- ☐ What you saw being fly-tipped (how far away were you, did you have a good view?)
- ☐ When and where you saw it happen (date, time, weather conditions)

So, the details.

Wanstead Flats Pickers meet on Wanstead Flats, Capel Road, opposite the Golden Fleece. Litter pick sticks, gloves and hi-vis waistcoats are provided by our friends at the Corporation of London. We gather at 11am and are out til 12.30. Feel free to come later and leave earlier if that suits. We usually go to the Golden Fleece afterwards, who generously provide a free hot drink for all litter pickers. Children are most welcome - my 8 year olds are always thrilled to discover that they are not the only ones pushed out the door in all weathers (I bought them waterproof trousers last time they complained about the rain - that'll teach them.)

The meeting date is usually the last Sunday of every month, but that occasionally changes if it clashes with Easter, Christmas etc, so keep an eye out for the posters, the Twitter account or join our e-mailing list wansteadflatspickers@yahoo.co.uk

Why not join us and get addicted

Future dates - Sunday 24th April, Sunday 29th May.

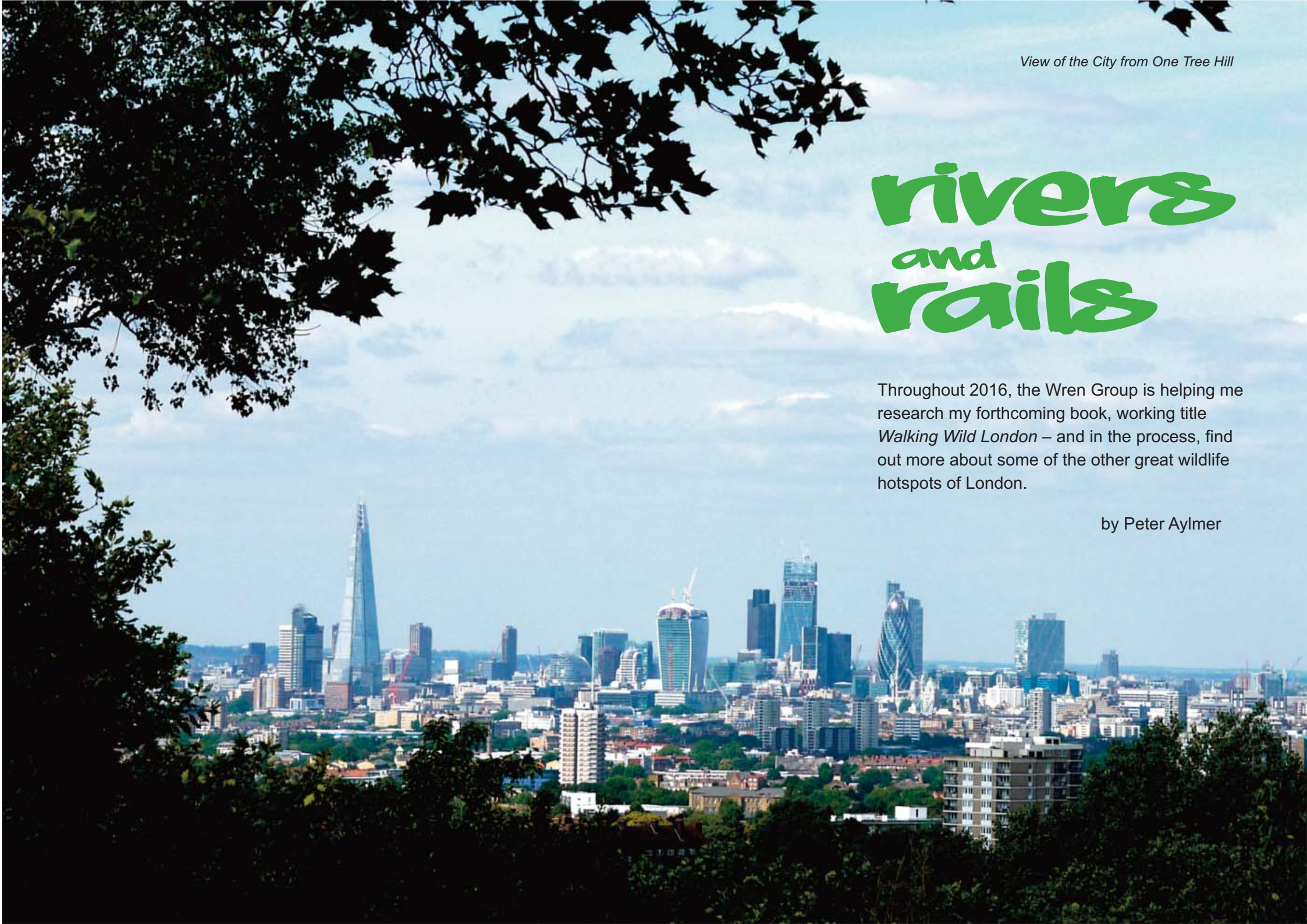
Article by Sarah Mbatha
Pics by Nathan Goodison



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.





View of the City from One Tree Hill

rivers and rails

Throughout 2016, the Wren Group is helping me research my forthcoming book, working title *Walking Wild London* – and in the process, find out more about some of the other great wildlife hotspots of London.

by Peter Aylmer

The Wren Group continues on its search to find out more about some of the other great wildlife hotspots of London, as walk leader and Wren committee member and walks coordinator Peter Aylmer describes.

We've made two visits to south London at the start of 2016, first to the lower stretches of the River Wandle, and then to Sydenham Hill Wood and other wildlife sites linked by the old High Level railway to Crystal Palace.



Sydenham Hill Woods

The Wandle is barely ten miles long, from Croydon to the Thames at Wandsworth. It's famous for the strength of its flow, once powering 68 water mills that manufactured everything from tobacco to textiles. South of Earlsfield, industry still remains, though the river is willow-fringed. Kingfishers are rumoured to hunt here, though we weren't lucky to spot one. Not far away is Wandle Meadow Nature

Park, once a sewage works, nearly the Wimbledon football ground, but since 1988 a nature reserve. Soon we crossed into Wandle Park, owned by the National Trust and a good lunch stop. A local asked if we were bird watching – one of our number had the bins – so we swapped a few tales about our east London patch and his. He lamented the clogging of a side-stream in the park, no longer



Watermill on the Wandle

cleared owing to 'austerity' – another victory for Mr Osborne; this one keeps the herons away.

There's still a waterwheel at Merton Abbey Mills, where William Morris once had a workshop. The path led us past a city farm to the walk end at Morden Hall Park, also National Trust. Though it's mostly manicured, and in summer a wonderful spot for families to come, there are still some wetlands here. We'll come back later in the year to find out what the upper Wandle has to offer.



Morden Hall Park

February saw a false start – your walk leader was stricken by a bug on the appointed day, so it was cancellations all round, but Diane and Mary were keen to walk so were given the directions to a trail following the New River from Clerkenwell to Haringey. This took them to the Woodberry Wetlands, where last year we were memorably shown round the London Wildlife Trust's new project here – alas they found that the 'unofficial' opening hasn't happened yet (it will now be 1 May).

One week later, the postponed walk saw us on our way to Nunhead. Wren group secretary Jackie Morrison was delighted – this was to take her both to Sydenham Hill Wood, which she was keen to revisit, and Nunhead cemetery, high on her to-do list. This is one of London's 'magnificent seven' cemeteries, established in early Victorian times to cater for the mortal needs of a growing population. All now have large areas where nature is slowly reclaiming its territory.



Dave and Jackie on One Tree Hill

We climbed up One Tree Hill. It's deeply wooded, but the 'one tree' is an oak of 1905, successor to an oak under which Queen Elizabeth I is reputed to have rested. There were grumbles at the steep ascent, but not at the view: it opens suddenly and with drama, perhaps the best view of the City there is to be had.

Soon we picked up the trackbed of the old High Level railway to Crystal Palace, which closed in 1954. One stretch is now the Horniman Nature

Trail – it's just below the eponymous museum – and moth and dragonfly are promised, but we were well out of season.

Another stretch of the line runs through Sydenham Hill Wood, managed by the London Wildlife Trust and part of the once-extensive Great North Wood of Surrey. A footbridge bears a reproduction of a view painted by impressionist Camille Pissarro in 1871, showing almost no trees! Things are very different now. Bamboo, cedar of Lebanon and rhododendron are some of the more exotic species, but oak and hornbeam predominate, as they should. There are plenty of roosting boxes for owls, and the railway tunnel mouth is great for bats. Dulwich Wood adjoins the site, so this was quite an extensive woodland stretch, in the middle of busy south London.



Morden Hall Park

Crystal Palace Park, familiar to us from the Capital Ring, wasn't far now – we knew exactly where to go for coffee and tea-cake, before home time.



Wandle Park

More Lucky Dip Walk dates

Tuesday 12 April, Wednesday 25 May, Thursday 23 June

Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Just turn up, no need to book.

Bring a snack, drink and Oyster or Freedom Pass. Walks chosen at random from a selection. All are around six miles, gentle pace. Check Wren Facebook page for updates.

Article and pics
by Peter Aylmer



look out for

Early April

Birds: Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs are early summer visitors whose voices join those of resident Wrens, Robins and Blackbirds. If weather conditions are poor, look for Sand Martins feeding over Heronry Lake. The first Swallows pass through our area, but they won't stop. Listen for Meadow Pipits in song on Wanstead Flats.

Butterflies: On sunny days, look for Small Tortoiseshells, Commas, and Peacocks pretty much anywhere. Brimstones can be seen in Wanstead Park, while Holly Blues will visit gardens around the area.

Damselflies and dragonflies: On a warm day look for Large Red Damselfly, the first of our 'damsels' to appear in spring.

Late April

Birds: The big arrivals of summer migrants take place. Common Whitethroats will be back on territory in the SSSI and the old sewage works. House Martins reappear, and Skylarks should be song-fighting over Wanstead Flats. Listen out for a Cuckoo!

Butterflies: The first Small Coppers should emerge on The Plain and in the old sewage works; Orange tips may be seen in Wanstead Park.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Early Common Blue and Azure Damselflies emerge to add a bit of colour to lake margins.

Early May

Birds: The late arrivals of spring finally turn up: Hobbies and Swifts. Listen for the descending lilt of a Willow Warbler or the tuneless rattle of a Lesser Whitethroat in the Old Sewage Works or on Wanstead Flats; they may attempt to find a mate for a few days but will probably move on.

Butterflies: Green-veined Whites and Small Whites can be seen in gardens and in Wanstead Park. Look for Green Hairstreaks on Wanstead Flats: a colony was discovered there last year. If we are lucky a Brown Argus or two may be in the Old Sewage Works, but this species is notoriously fickle, appearing one year and disappearing the next. Small Heath should appear in areas of rough grassland on The Plain and on Wanstead Flats.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Large Red Damselflies should be visible around the lakes in Wanstead Park. Hairy Dragonfly is one of the first of the 'dragons' to appear in spring; it may be on the wing in April, but early May is a good time to look for it.

Late May

Birds: With 50 species of birds breeding in our area, the dawn chorus now an in early June is worth getting up for. Mind you, they're not all great songsters. Egyptian Goose anyone?

Butterflies: Large Whites in Wanstead Park and in gardens. Hopefully, the first Common Blues should be flying near Long Wood and in the Old Sewage Works. Small Heaths still on the wing.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Large Red Damselflies will still be visible around the lakes in Wanstead Park. Common Blue and Azure

Damselflies and Blue-tailed Damselflies can be seen with them. Look on lily pads for Red-eyed Damselflies; later in the year these can be confused with Small Red-eyed Damselflies, which emerge later.

Early June

Birds: The dawn chorus is starting to peter out as birds get down to the business of raising chicks.

Butterflies: Many of our regular species will peak around now but for some it is still too early.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Banded Demoiselles should be flitting around aquatic vegetation along the banks of the River Roding. The sluice by the old sewage works is a good place to watch them. A few Emperor dragonflies will probably put in an appearance. Broad-bodied Chaser and Black-tailed Skimmer dragonflies may be seen around Heronry Lake; the latter often bask on the concrete rim of the lake.

Late June

Birds: Bird song seems like a distant memory, but plenty of young birds will be begging for food or making their first flights.

Butterflies: Large Skippers appear on Wanstead Flats. Several species of whites will still be on the wing. Early Purple Hairstreaks breed in oaks; now is the time to look for the first of the summer, especially flying around the canopy in Bush Wood.

Damselflies and dragonflies: Emperor dragonflies patrol powerfully over the lakes in Wanstead Park; good luck if you try to photograph this species – it rarely stays still!

Wanstead nature club

Report by Gill James



DECEMBER 2015 - ROBINS AND TREE DECORATIONS

Seven children today for our seasonal celebration. First we visited the birds on Jubilee Pond and took them some presents in the shape of peanuts, fresh grapes and fatballs. This was all gratefully hoovered up by the swans, tufted ducks, pochard, mallard and lots of Canada geese. There was also a cormorant there diving to catch fish. Some of these birds are migrant birds which come from far up north where the water is now frozen so they can't find food in winter.

Then we dressed a tree! We chose a little apple tree and draped its branches with the bunting we had made by tying things like feathers, bunches of dried yellow grasses, and branches with red and white berries on to pieces of coloured wool. All these things will rot in time as they are all natural so we can leave them on the tree.



The last thing we did was make some robins with pine cone bodies and plane tree seed heads and we stuck on wings and a red breasts. The robin is a popular bird because it is so friendly to humans but not to other robins which might try to invade their territory to steal their worms!

JANUARY 2016 - SQUIRRELS & WINTER TREASURE HUNT

Squirrels collect nuts like acorns in the Autumn when there are lots about and they bury them in the ground so that they can find them again when it is cold and miserable in the winter and

they are hungry. They can smell them out as they have such good noses! We pretended to be squirrels and we hid some chocolate gold coins in the wood in secret places. Then we went back later to find them. This was very hard as we do not have such a good sense of smell! We also spotted a squirrel drey high up in the trees where they go to keep warm and have their babies. It looked like a large football made of twigs and grass.



Then we went on a treasure hunt. We had three different teams and we got points for finding things although it is hard to find flowers and insects in winter. We had to find five different coloured flowers, some seeds, a live insect and a feather around Jubilee Pond. Then we had to identify the flowers and we were very good at naming the flowers. The yellow ones were dandelions, sowthistle, mustard, ragwort and gorse. We found a millipede, a spider, a hoverfly, a snail, a beetle and a woodlouse. The Nutty Team won but we were all brilliant!

FEBRUARY - HEDGEHOGS

Hedgehog expert Barry Chapman told us loads of facts about hedgehogs and how we can help them to survive. There are some on Wanstead Flats and if we ever see any we should let Barry know. They are hibernating now in little burrows and nests in secret places like piles of leaves because it is winter



and it would be hard for them to find any slugs and worms and beetles to eat. They need lots of space to roam around on summer nights and so we have to make sure they can get into and through our gardens. We played a game where we pretended to be hedgehogs smelling out worms under the ground, and then we pretended to be predators, foxes and owls, trying to catch hedgehogs in the dark. Then we made spikey chocolate hedgehog cakes. Yum yum.

Report by Gill James



The group meet at the changing rooms, Harrow Rd, Wanstead Flats, E11 3QD every month. Sessions are planned for 9 April, 14 May and 11 June. The group is run by Wren committee member Gill James and volunteers.

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. Only £1.50 a session. To find out more about the group or to register contact gilljames@btinternet.com

A photograph of a Ring-necked Parakeet perched on a bare, snow-covered branch. The bird is bright green with a red beak and a black ring around its neck. Its long, yellow-tipped tail feathers are spread out. The background is a soft-focus white, suggesting a snowy environment.

not such a pretty boy then

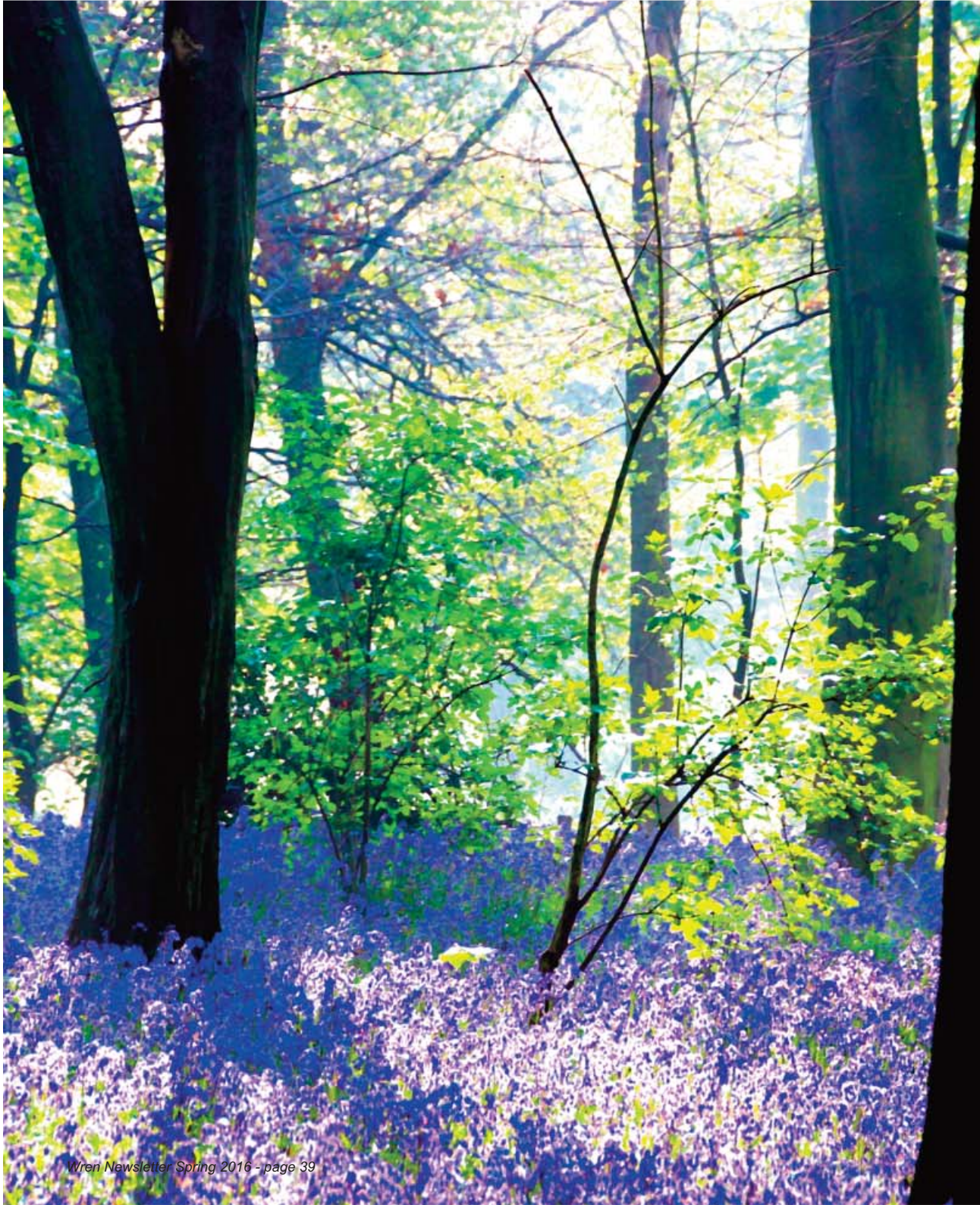
The Ring-necked Parakeet is the UK's only naturalised parrot - it is large, long-tailed and green with a red beak and a pink and black ring around its face and neck. In flight it has pointed wings, a long tail and very steady, direct flight. Often found in flocks, numbering hundreds at a roost site, it can be very noisy.

The picture to the left is a Ring-necked Parakeet in Wanstead Park, clearly showing snow on the tree branches. It has proved to be an adaptable species and its adaptations to cold winters where it originates in the Himalayan foothills allow it to easily withstand winter conditions over here.

Gregarious and living in large flocks, the birds are an agricultural pest in parts of continental Europe. This, say their detractors, is only part of the problem. Parakeets are crevice-nesting birds. They make their nests early in the year and choose holes in tree trunks favoured by native species, including Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, owls and Willow Tits. Some conservationists fear that with such rapid expansion they are out-competing and, possibly, eradicating rare native birds by nabbing their nesting sites as well as their food, rather like the grey squirrel has decimated populations of the native red in the last couple of centuries. It seems likely that any such population explosion would upset delicate ecosystems and there have been several instances in our own backyard of native birds being ousted by this cheeky newcomer.

View by Tony Morrison





The Bluebell Woods

Hush! ...

The heart slows down, the mind is cast aside.

Let silence, only silence be your guide

Through the amethyst torches of this temple:

The bluebell woods! So delicate, so gentle!

Hands joined together in sisterly compassion,

They share tales and dew and a procession

Of petals and almighty crowns of trees.

Inside these woods, your greatness cannot cease.

Perfume fills the air, perfume soft and white.

It's the primordial smell, flowing from light.

An endless floral sea – below and above...

The bluebell woods: Spring's promise of love.

Embroidered in grace, the small bells chime

A healing melody from once upon a time.

The choir of leaves echoes; your spirit is in trance.

Inside the bluebell woods, all you can do is dance.

By Nadia Norley

events diary

April

Sat 9th - Reptile Workshop on survey and identification run by Froglife at The Temple. 10 - 12. Free. N.B. Sixty felts put down in Old Sewage Works.

Sat 9th - Wanstead Nature Club for Children. Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats - 10.00 a.m. Cost: £1.50 per child. Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Sun 10th Joint Walk with St Gabriel's 11.30 from outside the church to include a skylark walk.

Tues 12th - Wren Group's Lucky Dip walks - between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Bring a snack lunch and drink, Oyster/Freedom Pass etc. Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Peter Aylmer on peteraylmer@hotmail.com or 07884 235784.

Sun 17th - Joint walk with Friends of Epping Forest. Meet Jubilee Car Park 10.30. Talk and book signing at 1pm at the Temple, Wanstead Park by Geraldine Roberts author of "The Angel and The Cad" a tale of the decline and fall of owners of Wanstead House.

Sun 24th - Joint walk with local RSPB group. Meet Jubilee Car Park, 08:30. £2. Dog owners skylark walk to follow at 2pm, meeting at Centre Rd Car Park.

May

Sun 1st - Essex Field Club course on bee identification at The Green Centre, Pitsea. Members are encouraged to go. Cost is £10 but may be reclaimed from Wren fund for courses. Booking is essential contact Tim Harris tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk

Sat 14th - Wanstead Nature Club for Children. Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats - 10.00 a.m. Cost: £1.50 per child. Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Sun 15th - Spiders survey Wanstead Flats led by expert David Carr. Meet 10 at Centre Road car park. Places are limited so necessary to book via Tim Harris.

Wed 25th - Wren Group's Lucky Dip walks - between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Bring a snack lunch and drink, Oyster/Freedom Pass etc. Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Peter Aylmer on peteraylmer@hotmail.com or 07884 235784.

June

Sat 11th - Wanstead Nature Club for Children. Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats - 10.00 a.m. Cost: £1.50 per child. Enquiries: 020 8989 4898 e-mail gilljames@btinternet.com

Thurs 23rd - Wren Group's Lucky Dip walks - between five and seven miles, gentle pace. Bring a snack lunch and drink, Oyster/Freedom Pass etc. Meet 10am at Stratford station, outside Jubilee line platforms 13-15. Peter Aylmer on peteraylmer@hotmail.com or 07884 235784.

Sat 25th & Sun 26th - Bio Blitz weekend.

links

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/>

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

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

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

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

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



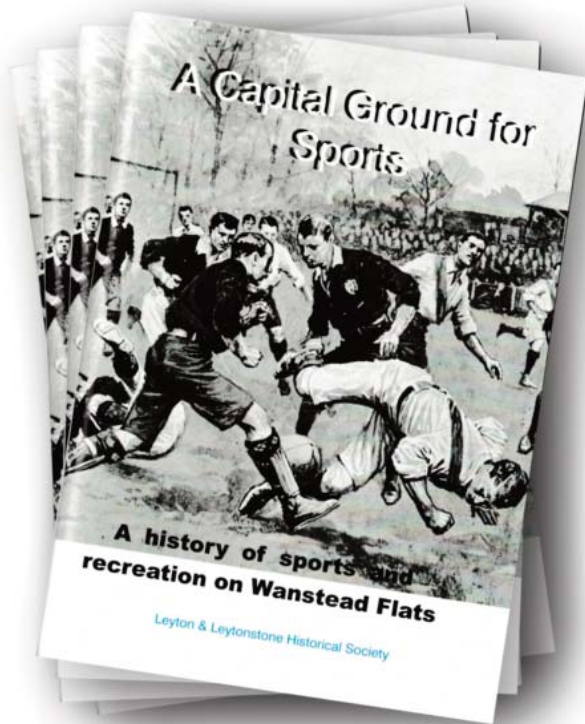
and finally

New publication on Wanstead Flats: Wren members Mark Gorman and Peter Williams are involved in the second of a series of booklets on the flats covering how sport and recreation developed 1878-1914.

This new publication tells the story of how football, cricket and other organised sports arrived on Wanstead Flats after the City of London took over as conservators. It mixes sport and social history to tell a little known and fascinating story – read about one of the oldest model aero clubs in the country, hurling and the levelling of the rough ground as part of a Edwardian job creation scheme. Price £3.00

ON SALE AT NEWHAM BOOKSHOP, 745 - 747 Barking Rd, London E13 9ER

Tel: 020 8552 9993 or EMAIL wrengroup.distribute@gmail.com



now & then

Were you right ?

Woodgrange Road - site of the old 'Forest Gate'. The old picture was taken in 1904 and shows the Midland Railway Bridge in the distance. When the line went through in 1894 there was a great deal of public outcry about the building of the viaduct and local house prices dipped for a short while.

Below how it looks today with housing and the Woodgrange Clinic replacing original shops

