

Summer 2016

# wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

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## Word from the chair

Much has been written about 'Citizen Science', the idea that amateur naturalists – that's us - can make a valuable contribution to understanding the state of the nation's wildlife. By motivating an army of tens of thousands we can get a better appreciation of the status of everything from butterflies to stag beetles. That's what the Wren Group has been doing all year with our Wanstead 1000 challenge. And it's what we did on the last weekend of June with our second midsummer bio-blitz.

The results of the latter were impressive, with more than 200 on our activities, and there is a full report inside this newsletter. And the challenge to record more than 1,000 species in our area was achieved in mid-June. Is it possible to hit 1,500 by the year's end? What a great achievement that would be. Two things really struck me about the bio-blitz weekend. One was the number of children who were attracted, both to Derek and Cathy's pond-dipping and to the great activities organized by Gill, Jane and Anita. The other was the knowledge that we can still find new species in our area. In the space of just three hours spider-finder extraordinaire David Carr discovered three nationally rare arachnids in a scrubby part of the Old Sewage Works. Perhaps a case should be made for it to be designated an SSSI?

And talking of scrub, Epping Forest ecologist Andy Froud has drawn up a plan for the management of the broom, gorse, bramble and hawthorn of Wanstead Flats. The aim is to preserve the biodiversity of the area by retaining some scrubby patches while allowing the acid grassland – so important for ground-nesting Skylarks and Meadow Pipits - to 'breathe'. The City of London's management of our open spaces has come in for criticism but this is a great example of them consulting with and listening to local naturalists to produce a formula that benefits our wildlife. Long may it continue!

Tim Harris

Chair of the Wren Group



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

**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](mailto:wreeditor@talktalk.net)

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



# bio-blitz 2016

Report by James Heal



Following the success of last year's activities, the Wren Group held another annual BioBlitz weekend from 24-26 June. A whole range of activities were held - free and open to everyone of all ages - including pond dipping, wildlife walks, bat recording, moth trapping, and a very early dawn chorus walk.



As many of you know, 2016 has been an important year for wildlife recording in our local area. Under Tim Harris' leadership, we have been counting all the living things we can find this year and have already smashed our target of 1000 species recorded!

The dedicated weekend of Friday 24th - Sunday 26th June, was a great opportunity to add some new finds to this list. Around 50 children took part in the activities, and well over 200 people participated in some way overall - and everyone had fun. Over the weekend, hundreds of species were identified, from plants and mosses through to insects, birds and even mammals. It would take too long and too



Some children preferred to sit down and quietly draw and paint at the art table. Younger visitors enjoyed wielding a brush whilst mud painting. All in all we saw about 50 children and parents and enjoyed an idyllic afternoon sitting in the lovely Temple Garden.

much space to list every species we found here, and so I have instead listed the highlights (sent in from a range of contributors) from each activity as well as two slightly more in-depth sections covering some of the things we discovered about the Wanstead Flats and Wanstead Park respectively by looking more closely than perhaps we normally would.

## Bat Walk

A warm, pleasant evening with flying insects galore meant the bats were due to make a huge appearance. And they did not disappoint! Using bat detectors to locate them via echolocation, our 20+ volunteers, led by Francis Castro, were immediately greeted by the noisy Noctule bats flying over the usually quiet Perch Pond. They were also accompanied by the Common and Soprano Pipistrelle bats, which chose to shy away around the nearby trees instead, leaving the Noctules to steal the limelight of the night. Whizzing through the air in spectacular fashion, they occasionally gave a noise a bit like someone blowing a "raspberry" through the detector, which meant they had caught an insect. It was quite the show leaving the volunteers with smiles all around. Though we didn't get the chance to see the rare Daubenton's bat, the UK's only water specialist, there's one thing we all learnt for sure. We also learned that our bats mate in the autumn and then hibernate over the winter to give birth to their young in spring. These young pups are fed on milk while the adults live on insects. We then headed back with towards the Temple

where another set of nocturnal creatures, the moths, were being lured in by bright lights.

*Thank you Tim and the Wren Group for organising such a great range of events, it was pleasure taking part and a great service to the borough's wildlife enthusiasts (current and budding). Very well done!*

*Francis Castro*

## Moth Trapping

The Group ran three light-traps in the grounds of The Temple, from before 10 pm until just after midnight: a small battery powered model, a deluxe actinic trap loaned by Jono Lethbridge and Tim Harris's home-made, lighthouse-bright mercury vapour beacon. With a breeze sweeping across the park all evening, it was far from classic mothing conditions, but dozens of grass veneers were attracted, as well as several heart and dart moths, an L-album Wainscot and a beautifully marked Common Swift. Several angry cockchafers found their way into one trap, but the highlight of the

evening was a Maple Prominent, which turned out to be the first record for Wanstead Park. Twenty people came along to witness the traps in action, and despite the absence of last year's star turns - Red-necked Footmen and a Leopard Moth - it was still a worthwhile exercise.

*What struck me was the enthusiasm of those attending and their delight at being able to view so many different plants and other forms of wildlife and learn how they interact with one another.*

*Tricia Moxey*

## Arachnid Search

Arachnologist David Carr conducted a search for our eight-legged friends in the upper part of the Old Sewage Works. This was the first time David had visited the site and he was mightily impressed. In fact, he made the most dramatic discoveries of the weekend in an area only about 100 metres square. Star billing went to two female *Philodromus rufus*

(making the Old Sewage Works only the third UK site for the species). David also uncovered *Philodromus longipalpis* (59 previous records) and a female *Nigma puella* (with just 228 previous). On his last visit to the area, in May, he found *Philodromus rufus* on Wanstead Flats, so two of the UK's three known locations for this small spider are in Wanstead! Might these discoveries warrant SSSI status for the Old Sewage Works?

## Dawn Chorus Walk

Nick Croft led a walk at an eye-watering 5am on a Sunday morning supported by Bob Vaughan and James Heal. Arguably, June is one of the worst months to find interesting birds and many breeders have finished their singing and are focused on rearing broods. However, there was still real value in the walk. The Old Sewage Works proved to be the most fruitful location, with lots of singing Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Greenfinch, as well as bursts of song from the ubiquitous Wren. There was also an air of disappointment in the sky as Little Egret flew straight over the swollen Roding river, unable to fish there due to how deep and full it is currently, and a small flock of Black-headed Gulls returning north-west - clearly having failed to breed successfully on the coast. The group also got to see Bee Orchids and a range of other wild flowers. The walk ended by watching a very greedy Great-crested Grebe continue to emit loud begging calls to its mother, a matter of seconds after swallowing a huge perch on Shoulder of Mutton pond. We also watched reeds

move, heard a few juvenile calls, and finally heard a short burst of adult song from one of our breeding Reed Warblers.

## Pond Dipping

The pond dipping was such a success that some of the finds are still being examined as this article was written and so a fuller summary is not yet ready. But let's just say that it involved leeches and water scorpions!



## Gastropod Quest

Although they found no rarities, Penny and Nick Evans led a successful hunt for slugs and snails in the same area. In addition to the common Brown-lipped Banded Snails (*Cepaea nemoralis*) and



Garden Snails (*Helix aspersa*), there were Vineyard Snails (*Cernuella virgata*), Amber Snails (*Succinea putris*) and three different kinds of water snails. Slugs included the marvellously named Cellar Slug (*Limax flavus*).

*After heavy rain on Saturday, we thought we had ideal conditions for our gastropod hunt. Unfortunately the animals thought otherwise and had disappeared from the places we had found them before. However, we persevered and ended up with a good number of slug and snail species, including some shells of water snails. Nick explained some of the genetics, especially of the brown-lipped banded snail (*Cepaea nemoralis*), which comes in 3 colours and several different banding patterns. Our favourite was the amber snail (*Succinea putris*), which is small and conical and found in damp places. Its body is too big to retract fully into its shell like most other snails.*

*Penny Evans*

## Nature Walk with Ferndale Residents Association

A great opportunity for the Wren Group to reach out to another local community group. The walk was well attended with around twenty people walking up Evelyn Avenue in Bush Wood and into Wanstead Park. It won't be a surprise to many that the best wildlife spotters in the group were young children who enthusiastically engaged in finding critters in the grass, but were disappointed to learn there were no venus fly-traps growing locally. We learned about the history of Bush Wood and how it is one of the most complete examples of natural re-wilding on the patch with oak, hornbeam, holly, and almost 30 other species of tree filling in the gaps around the old avenues and ornamental plantations from the days of Wanstead House. The best find of the walk



A great opportunity for the Wren Group to reach out to another local community group - a Nature Walk with Ferndale Residents Association

was probably a Ringlet butterfly as this was the first time this species has been seen on the patch this year, making it a new addition to the 1000+ list.



An enthusiastic group joined local botanist Tricia Moxey on Saturday morning to walk along the edge of Wanstead Flats and look at the varied assemblage of plants growing there

## Bird and Insect Walk

An enthusiastic group joined local botanist Tricia Moxey on Saturday morning to walk along the edge of Wanstead Flats to look at the varied assemblage of plants growing there. The assorted shades of purple, yellow and white flowers contrasted with the subtle greens of grasses and these attracted a range of insects which were closely examined and photographed. Tricia was able to discuss the changing nature of the vegetation here as nutrient enrichment is encouraging certain species to invade the naturally occurring acid grassland which still

covers a greater proportion of the Flats. Some interesting galls were noted on a Small-leaved Lime tree and James captured a Yarrow Plume moth on its food plant.

## Wanstead Flats: Connections and Edges

We are so lucky to have a range of habitats across the Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park and other local sites. Some of the habitats are well recognised, large, and protected, like the acid grasslands found across the Flats. Other habitats are less obvious, act as frontiers between the urban and wild, and contain a mix of features from different habitat types. Increasingly conservationists and ecologists are recognising and encouraging the benefits of hedgerows and road verges, for example, as important habitats in their own right.

The science of the 'edge effect', where the boundaries between habitats exhibit elements of both, is still in its early stages of being understood.

On Saturday morning, Tricia Moxley treated us to some fascinating insights into this concept and we explored the important unkempt fringes between the grassland and the road verges. I would like to share some small snippets of the things we discovered.

The pretty yellow flowers of Black Medick or Hop Clover (*Medicago lupulina*) and the white clusters of Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) are classic 'edge' plants. Both can cope with being mown, but also benefit - as low-growing plants - from the fact that paths, fringes and verges often don't allow plants to grow as high which would block out their light. They were both found right next to Centre Road car park and are common along the verge. Time and again, we got to witness how ecological webs function in front of our eyes and how specialist some species can be. For example, it wasn't long after finding Yarrow growing that we also encountered the Yarrow Plume moth (*Gillmeria pallidactyla*) which feeds on the plant it is named after. Carefully trapping one in a container, we were able to study the distinctive T-shape wing formation of the moth. Oddly, one of the reasons road-side verges are so important is the very fact of their proximity to roads - as well as splashes of water and mud there are also nutrients from the car exhausts that benefit the verge-growing plants. Giant specimens of Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), Ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*) and Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) - listed here in declining order of toxicity were all found in quite large concentrations, with some specimens encroaching into the acid grassland (anyone who has visited the Old Sewage Works recently will have seen how Cow Parsley - another umbelliferae - has almost taken over large sections of the grassland).

Buddleia was just one of the plants found that would have been introduced - probably blown as seeds - from nearby gardens, as they are certainly not native plants. As many will know, Buddleia is also



Anyone who has visited the Old Sewage Works recently will have seen how Cow Parsley - another umbelliferae - has almost taken over large sections of the grassland



known as the butterfly plant. We were lucky to see several species of butterfly including Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) with specimens courting and flitting around us as we walked (and also in its larval stage as a caterpillar). We also found three species from the Skipper family amongst the grasses and flowers: Large Skipper (*Ochlodes sylvanus*), Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*), and the very similar (to small) Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) - all three of which feed on Cock's foot grass (amongst one or two other types of grass) as caterpillars which is abundant on the verges and which collect nectar from the thistle species and other flowers we also found nearby. We also found some super day-flying moths ranging from: the rather nondescript micro moth without an English name (*Homoeosoma sinuella*) - like the plume moth, a specialist, being found near Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) that its larvae feed on; to the large and brilliantly Five-spot Burnet moth (*Zygaena trifolii*) which, in turn, feeds on Bird's-foot-trefoil which is commonly found on the patch. Hopefully it is clear that the plants and insects we found are linked together quite vitally (in the original literal sense of the word).

As we wandered deeper into the Wanstead Flats, the messy but wonderful variety of the 'edge' gave way to the more uniform acid grassland. As storm clouds gathered and the wind picked up, the pink hue of the Wavy-hair Grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) lived up to its name and rippled like liquid. As many will know, the grass contains hidden treasure - it is the breeding ground for the declining Skylark and Meadow Pipit (the reason it is so

important not to allow dogs to stray off the leash and path and into the long grass). During our walk, both species of bird displayed their remarkable song flights. But it would be misleading to suggest that the acid grassland is a pristine monoculture. In amongst the grass and by the flattened paths, were pools of white: Lesser Stichwort (*Stellaria graminea*) - their little flowers dancing as raindrops hit them; and yellow: Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*).



As storm clouds gathered and the wind picked up, the pink hue of the Wavy-hair Grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) lived up to its name and rippled like liquid across plains of Wanstead Flats

High above, the Swifts scythed through the sky and, lower down, we were accompanied throughout our short stroll by several House Martin which landed in the puddle-strewn car park to collect mud, perhaps for their nest repairs.

Everyone returned a little wetter due to the rain at

the very end of our walk, but all having learned a lot about the wonderful variety and interconnectedness of the wildlife on these boundary lands.

## Wanstead Park: Wildlife reclaimed

On Sunday 26th, Tricia led her second walk of the weekend. This time in Wanstead Park. Tricia's extensive knowledge of the history of the park, coupled with her knowledge of flora and fauna, meant the group got a real sense of how the park has changed over the years, for the better and worse for the wild inhabitants. From the smallest to the greatest of plants, their history and place in the park was explained: Bird's Foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*) - not to be confused with the trefoil of the same common name - was so tiny under our feet on the mown lawn that it took careful inspection



An enthusiastic group joined local botanist Tricia Moxey on Sunday morning to walk through Wanstead Park and take a look at the varied assemblage of plants growing there



with a magnifying glass to see the stunning white flowers. At the other end of the spectrum is a Californian redwood (I have forgotten the species) tree planted by Clementine Churchill to commemorate her husband. Unlike the bird's foot which are tiny and thriving, this huge species of tree is struggling to grow in East London soil and is sadly stunted - clear evidence that we should focus on encouraging native species, not introducing alien specimens.

*Apart from of us all benefitting from Tricia's immense knowledge I was particularly fascinated by the way that she related the historical background to the planting of trees, including those planted by past inhabitants of Wanstead House and a tree not far from the Temple which commemorates Winston Churchill, MP for Woodford from 1924 until 1964.*

*Kathy Baker*

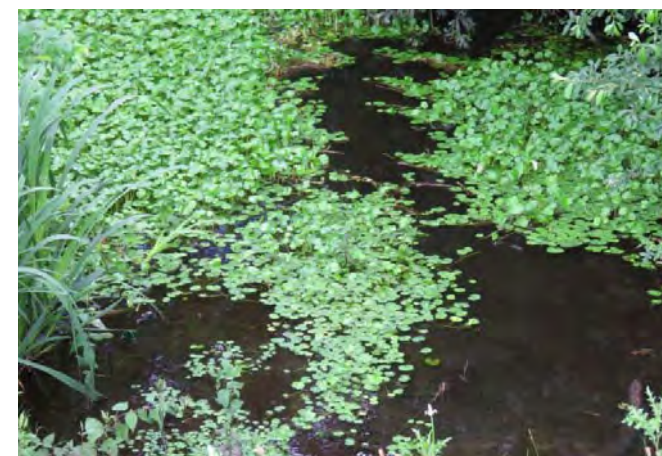


Some of the younger art enthusiasts preferred to sit it out with a bit of mud painting - more than 50 children joined in the activities over the weekend

Tricia unlocked some other secrets in the trees as well. She showed us strange lines running vertically down the trunks of the huge planted Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*). The impatient owners of Wanstead house wanted impressive trees quickly in their grounds and so several saplings were bound together and eventually conjoined naturally to grow huge but with the appearance of a single specimen. Some of the oldest growing trees in Europe are specimens of Yew (*Taxus baccata*). Anyone who has seen a particularly old yew tree will note that they are often hollow in the middle. Tricia showed us some fungi called Chicken-in-the-woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) growing on a yew which causes a type of rot which can be a cause of the hollowing out of trees.

The greatest damage to habitats is obviously caused by humans, and one factor is the

introduction of invasive species. Sometimes introduced for aesthetic reasons, such as rhododendron, we were shown an example of a pretty lupin-like flower called Goat's Rue (*Galega officinalis*) which spreads quickly and is very difficult to remove. But surely the prize for an invasive that spreads quickly has to go to Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) which has now been cut right back but was recently choking Perch pond in the park. This pernicious plant can grow at 30cm a day (!) and, despite expensive removal measures, is still there and is believed to be spreading to other water ways locally.



Floating pennywort has been present on Perch Pond, Wanstead Park since at least 2014 - this invasive plant can grow at 30cm a day !!! Despite expensive removal measures it's still there.

Far more welcome by the Perch pond is Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*). A medicinal plant used since the days of the druids, Water Mint has a subtle but beautiful smell. Even stronger is Pineapple Weed (*Matricaria discoidea*) which smells like its larger fruit namesake. There is less of a pleasant odour



from the brilliantly named Black Horehound (*Ballota nigra*) one of our many 'dead nettle' species, which, despite its nasty smell, has been used to treat stomach complaints for many years.



Gill James briefing a group of young naturalists on how to fill in their recording sheets before sending them out into Wanstead Park to see what ducks and waterfowl they could identify in the lakes..

Wanstead Park is still 'managed' far more intensively than the Wanstead Flats; there were signs of many trees and habitats having been cleared as we made our way around. However, there were also signs of nature fighting back. Young, self-planted Yew trees are starting to appear now that the area is no longer used for grazing, helping to take the woodland closer to how it would have been without human interference. Similarly, on a smaller scale, Tricia showed us some scarce wild grasses that grow in the park such as Heath Grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) and Early Hair-grass (*Aira praecox*).

Sometimes nature's fightback is better described as a desperate clinging on. Butterflies brighten

anyone's day, and on the walk we saw Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Essex Skipper, Comma, and Common Blue, but each one as an odd single or pair. These would once have fluttered in their thousands in places like Wanstead Park; the butterflies' fragility in body and wing is increasingly also a symbol of their far greater fragility as species in our damaged ecosystems.

*Several young Duck Detectives were dispatched from the Bio Blitz children's activity zone in the Temple Garden on Sunday with a pencil, a bag of duck food, a spotting sheet and a recording sheet to count and identify the ducks in nearby lakes. Scores of mallards, geese and swans etc were allegedly seen and prizes were suitably awarded. Thanks*

*Gill and Jane Cleall for duck instruction and to City of London for donation of some excellent activity materials.*

*Gill James*



There's no age limit to being a good naturalist - over 200 people young and old(er) took part in the various activities over the weekend.

## Summary

The Bio-blitz weekend was a great opportunity to use crowd-power to add some species to our year list. However, the weekend was never just about increasing a list length. It was also an opportunity to learn about history, our local area, wildlife, and the interrelationship between humans and the thousand plus other species we share this wonderful area with. It seemed to me that everyone had an opportunity to make new friends, and feel a little more closely connected to the habitats on our doorstep. I am already looking forward to next year!



Article by James Heal





# spring bird report

*Report and pics by Nick Croft*



## March: Migration side-step

82 species for the month, well down, I reckon, on what we should expect for the year and the early spring—ha! It got colder and windier from totally the wrong direction.

Migrant March didn't even kick off till the last week of the month – 22 days of hopes dashed, patch birding at its cruellest! March winds favoured the west of the British isles, as last year, and that's where the Wheatear, Sand Martin and other things migratory, ended up. Our (only) Wheatear (a female) squeaked in just before the end of the month beaten by Swallows and more predictably Sand Martin. As I write it is still the only Wheatear we've had.



*Hooded corvid sighted by Bob Crow got March off to a good start*

Bird of the month: Bob Crow's Hooded corvid – an illustrated record that brought congratulations from none other than Bob Watts, chairman of the London Rarities Committee – an excellent find, which also brought up the ton for James H on the patch.

Having broken the glass ceiling March got a bit better.



*Redwing - a flock of more than 100 noted going west*

## Highlights:

- ❑ Cat & Dog's wintering Stonechat held on till the beginning of the month, while other birds were seen on the 19th, 24th, and 27-28th
- ❑ The Firecrest stuck it out in the west end of Long Wood till the 13th then seemingly went AWOL, while Stu had more success with his birds at the Crown Court and Gilbert's Slade
- ❑ Lesser Spotted Woodpecker heard on Lincoln Island (Ornamental Waters) on the 13th
- ❑ Just the three Woodcock sightings, we would have expected more, but two on the 24th
- ❑ Water Rail: a bird was seen carrying nesting material, or just as messy eater, on the Shoulder of Mutton on the 20th, but have subsequently not been seen

- ❑ Mipits on the move: two days of 30 + birds moving north on the 22nd and 29th
- ❑ The first (3) Sand Martin on the 24th, and Swallows two days later
- ❑ While Stu beat us to Red Kite for the year, they became slightly regular after the 24th
- ❑ A young Rook on the 24th and two adults the next day, which actually landed before being pestered off by the local crows
- ❑ Of course Bob's Hooded Crow on the 23rd, which, unlike the Rooks, was largely ignored by the local crows round Alex. A far cry from the treatment last year's bird received from them in the SSSI
- ❑ The last Redwing, a flock of 100+, noted going west on the 26th
- ❑ First winter Mediterranean Gull on Alex on the 27th
- ❑ Two Shelduck on the 30th and Jono spots an acceptable Yellowhammer (to him at least)
- ❑ Finally a female Wheatear brings the pining to an end on the 30th



*Red Kite*

Chiffchaff numbers began to rise towards the end of the month, mainly in the park, and even a few Blackcap were noted singing. Siskin numbers were on the way down not helped by them spreading out from their usual haunts in the dell and the alders in the park. A few Redpoll lingered till April, while the fair finally did for the poor numbers of Linnet in the area of Jub.



*Blackcap*

Skylark numbers did rise, slightly, and we now have 8 + birds, still way down on last year. The signs have been replenished and screwed down to deter even the most determined, disgruntled dog walkers.

Teal and Shoveler made the most of the low water levels, but with repairs done to the Heronry it is now being refreshed and bang goes our hopes of a wader fest. The pair of Great Crested Grebe thought about a pad on Perch but then thought better of it and returned to SoM, and here are the only pairs of Little Grebe – though two birds were at opposite ends of the Perch at the end of the month.



*Moorhen chick*

A few can still be seen on the Roding, not ideal for them but a short hop to Heronry if they want.

The gulls have all but gone, bar the ugly crèche of Herring Gull on Jubilee, and a few pairs of Lesser Black-backs waiting for the Coots to start providing their annual buffet. A number of Great black-backs have been seen going over most days and small flocks of Black-headed Gull get you interested before revealing themselves to be Black-headed Gull.

## April: Not much to show for all the effort

Only one day without a report is the testament to how much work Bob and I put in this month, and with 14 new species, how utterly lacking in reward it all was. Tony B smacked in a good percentage of those that were found on his weekend forays, but hey that's the thing about working a patch—sometimes it's good, sometimes it's very good, but

for the most part it's a thankless routine. We miss Dan and his pre-school blizzard through the western flats and the park - Bob and I tried to compensate by splitting up - him taking the park, OSW, while I took the flats. We might cross somewhere along the way as we tried to cover all the possibilities. With 89 species in total, which is just one down on the brilliance of last year it didn't feel anything other than a very lackluster month.

It felt colder than March, and the strong westerlies grew tiresome as we waited for a change in the weather. We ended up on 106, well down on 2011, '13, '15 - hmm odd years! - and with not much to come: Common Tern, Pied Flycatcher, Tree Pipit and any of Wryneck, Jack Snipe, Yellow-legged Gull, Golden Plover, Woodlark – it's not looking good, but then we always say that.



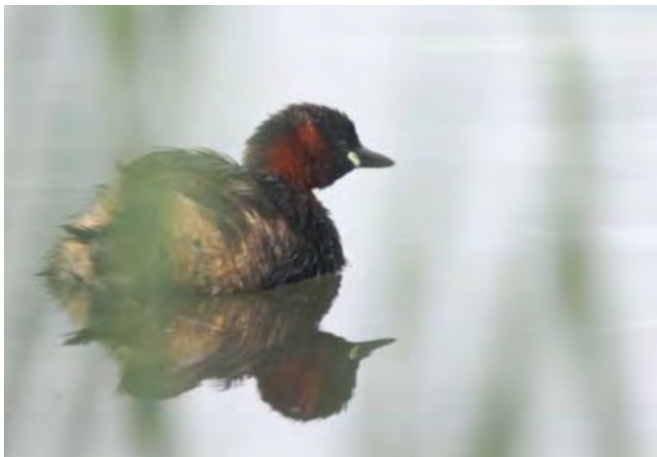
*Common Redstart*

No waders except a surprise and surprised Snipe flushed from the Shoulder of Mutton, no mass movement of Mipit, very little movement at all come to think of it. No good warblers, no lost partridge,



no flyover diver, almost no Whinchat. What we did have, in common with most of London, was a good Redstart month with a high of 9. Wheatear disappointed, but they always do unless we are wading in them.

There are 3 pairs of Great Crested Grebe in residence on nests (Shoulder of Mutton and the Basin), Little Grebe are confined to Alex and Shoulder of Mutton with around 6 pairs (one bird on Perch)—at the time of writing the SoM GCGs have one chick. Our wintering ducks dwindled and were gone by early May (Teal, Shoveler), while a pair of Gadwall held on in the Ornamentals. Up to 8 Pochard and twice that of Tufted Duck are playing their usual game of will they won't they breed. Shelduck became more frequent and we've given up counting the Egyptian Goose as their numbers are increasing, especially on Jubilee.



*Little Grebe*

The wintering gulls too have moved off leaving just the resident Lesser blacks and a motley collection

of young Herring Gull who move around following the bread. The last Fieldfare were spotted in the first week of the month, the Redwing having already departed. Another poor spring for Ouzels with a female on the flats and more surprisingly a rather fine male on the path between SoM and Heronry.



*Ring Ouzel*

After a slow start with just Chiffchaff making the running, Blackcap numbers began to grow and on the 13th were joined by both Whitethroat, with a few Willow Warbler sprinkled around the place, The Willow-Chiff is back in the SSSI this year, which by my reckoning is its 3rd year at least (how many miles has this little bird traveled in that time?), the Garden Warbler was back in Motorcycle Wood by the end of the month, Stu having beaten us once again with this wonderful singer. He's was still getting singing Firecrest round by Snaresbrook Court, while a singing bird was found in the Brickpit copse, which may or may not have been the overwintering bird from Long Wood. The winter's

Goldcrests departed leaving our small number of residents. Both Reed and Sedge Warbler sang from the Alex, the latter lingering for a number of days at the end of the month and even into early May.

Two or more Linnet are holding on and fingers crossed they might decide to take the plunge and breed, there are, however Greenfinch everywhere. Goldfinch numbers too are still good, yet we still don't know whether they breed on site - one bird was seen carrying nesting material. Reed Bunting too—there are 2 males and one female—are looking like they may nest again.

All the hirundines were present and correct by the 3rd with a House Martin passing through on a pretty good raptor watch day (Osprey, 6 Common Buzzard, 2 Red Kite, Peregrine Falcon, 4 Kestrel, 3 Sparrowhawk) from a reclined position in the SSSI. Swift arrived by the 21st.



*Garden Warbler - back in Motorcycle Wood*

No mass movement of Mipit and only 3 (outside chance of 4) singing males, while a trickle of Yellow Wagtail started on the 9th, as for Skylark 5 singing birds is our best estimate, but with only 8 birds counted that's not good.



*Skylark - only 8 counted birds. Not good !!!*

Then there were the “must try harder” birds in the form of a probable female Garganey flying out of the ornamentals, and an interesting grey warbler down by the Roding, which I initially estimated to be the size of a whitethroat, showing a nice white super, and very white underparts. It fed continuously as it flitted quickly through the canopy before flying up the river.

## A little wading in May

May tried its best to resolve what April had delivered, and it started rather brightly with the first Cetti's since 2009 and one that may yet herald the colonisation of the patch with these loud yammerers. After initially liking the Alex it was

relocated in the much more suitable habitat by the Roding and was often heard moving up and down its new home. As to be expected it didn't give itself up to photographs, though James H managed something, or too many views for that matter. The same day a Cuckoo sang near the Shoulder of Mutton and proved just as elusive, but it's the first I've heard conclusively—Peter B got one calling on the flats towards the middle of the month. May also saw the first Raven this century high over the flats, and with less persecution of these birds we can hope to have more sightings in future—the nearest nesting birds being as close as the Rainham area. Finally we got some wader action in the form of 3 Common Sandpiper, 2 Dunlin and 2 Greenshank—OK not that many but when you consider that Woodcock has been our commonest wader this year this is mega!



*Hobby*

Spotted Flycatcher were seen on two days, both in the park, and continuing its downward trend, a Common Tern was seen on Perch and the day before a rather smart drake Red-crested Pochard.

Finally a gull I snapped a few weeks/months back, which had a yellowy leg, now has two, and has passed muster as a first summer Yellow-legged Gull, which means I don't have to look at gulls till the new year, hooray! Just prior to finding the YLG I took a picture of a gull wearing a green ring, which our budding sleuth, Mr Brown, discovered to be rung in Germany and supposedly a Caspian Gull!



*A green-ringed gull*

Somehow 90 (91 if the Caspian is to be believed) species were seen this month, which makes it the best month this year, and that's wrong, and that doesn't include Tawny or Little Owl which could have been added if someone had been slightly adventurous.

As for migrants it has to be said it was pretty awful: The female Whinchat hang on till the 4th (the only bird of the Spring), there was a sighting of a Wheatear and another just off patch, Swallows trickled through till the end of the month, a few sightings of Sand Martin, but better news for the House Martin with 12 counted over Heronry on the



30th. Swift have yet to get into the hundreds, and if you're a Swift is advisable not to fly solo as the Hobbies will gang up on you.

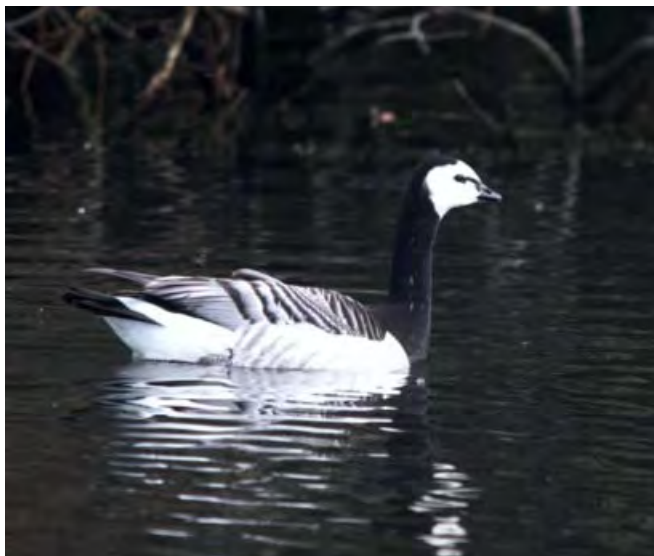


*Reed Warbler*

The Reed Warbler is back in his reedy kingdom and is already paired up, but fairing less well are the 3 other singing birds around the Shoulder of Mutton, while also playing solitaire are the Garden and Willow Warbler in the SSSI. There were up to 4 Garden Warbler on the 13th in the area, but hopes off a breeding expansion came to nothing. Quite a good spring for Sedge Warbler, or just the one on and off and on Alex.

A few Yellow Wagtail reported in the early part of the month, and promising news for Meadow Pipit with one pair collecting food for hungry mouths somewhere—and there could be 4 birds on territory. Not such good news for Skylark with no pick up in numbers, so we are stuck on, I believe, five territories with only 8 birds.

Apart from the RCP, the month has been quiet on the duck front: a pair of Gadwall held on in the Ornamental Waters, while all the other winter birds departed. A pair of Shelduck were often seen flying somewhere else. A few Pochard and Tufted Duck are still loitering and hopefully will surprise with a few little ducklings in due course, while away from the bread dumps Mallard broods are bigger for example on Perch and on the Roding. Best looking of all was the Barnacle Goose that visited the Alex on the 11th, sadly more plastic than the RCP, and the first for a couple of years—I wonder where the Red-breasted Goose has gone to?



*Barnacle Goose*

All the big raptors put in appearance or two during the month, and the Hobby are doing their usual trick of not being seen too often, even Sparrowhawk are to find at the moment, but at least Kestrel are a daily occurrence—could 3-4 pairs in the vicinity. More unusual was the 2 sightings of Short-eared Owl, neatly book-ending the month.

The Little Grebe on Alex have 3 young so far, more to come from here and perhaps even on Herorny where a pair has returned since the water level has risen and the single Great Crested Grebe chick on the Shoulder of Mutton is doing well despite the fact the father has bunked off.

Not a lot to look forward to in the next couple of months, but you never know: last year a Black Kite was a surprise. I like surprises.

Now go away until August!

Article and pics by Nick Croft




Nick has just had a brief run in with fame. He discovered London's third-ever Blyth's Reed Warbler on Wanstead Flats almost exactly two years ago.

The paper he wrote detailing the amazing find is now in the London Bird Report. Click on the following link to take a look.

[http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/LBR2014\\_Publicity\\_200-202\\_Blyths-Reed-Warbler\\_Nick-Croft.pdf](http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/LBR2014_Publicity_200-202_Blyths-Reed-Warbler_Nick-Croft.pdf)

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





Epping Forest, Warren Wood by Tony Morrison

# epping forest

a local habitat with international importance

*article by Mark Gorman*

As well as forming a unique and extraordinary local landscape, Epping Forest's ancient beech trees are part of a much larger web of forests on Europe's Atlantic edge. Considering Epping Forest's part in this bigger picture allows us to understand its importance.



In an article in this summer's Epping Forest newsletter Forest Focus, Dr Jeremy Dagley, Epping Forest's Head of Conservation, says 'ecologists divide the world into biogeographical zones on the basis of climate, topography and other factors that influence the adaptations and specialisations of plants and animals. Within the EU nine such zones are represented, including the Mediterranean, Continental, Alpine and, of course, the Atlantic Zone'.

*In May 1992 European Union governments adopted legislation designed to protect the most seriously threatened habitats and species across Europe. This legislation is called the Habitats Directive and complements the Birds Directive adopted in 1979. At the heart of both these Directives is the creation of a network of sites called Natura 2000. The Birds Directive requires the establishment of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds. The Habitats Directive similarly requires Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to be designated for other species, and for habitats. Together, SPAs and SACs make up the Natura 2000 series. All EU Member States contribute to the network of sites in a Europe-wide partnership from the Canaries to Crete and from Sicily to Finnish Lapland.*

Over the last 24 years, European countries within the EU have set out to protect the most valuable and threatened species and habitats across these nine zones. In doing so they have now created the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world.

This ecological network is called Natura 2000, a network of protected areas across the European Union, which aim to protect habitats and species of wild fauna and flora 'of Community interest'. Within these protected areas certain measures must be implemented to ensure that the condition of the natural habitats and species populations which are of particular importance are maintained and/or restored in order to ensure their survival. A site may be proposed as a Natura 2000 site when it supports natural habitat types and habitats of species of Community interest.



Ancient beech Trees in Epping Forest. Pic by Tony Morrison

These sites protect vulnerable habitats ranging from wetlands to forests like Epping, which in turn safeguards the animals and plants which need these places to survive. Across the EU a diverse range of habitats are protected, from forests to flower-rich meadows (which have almost disappeared from the UK) and estuaries, including not only natural habitats but also human managed ones such as some kinds of grasslands.

Epping Forest is one of nearly 450 sites in the 'Atlantic beech woodlands on acid soils' habitat. Jeremy Dagley reminds us that 'These Atlantic woodlands

*The Forest covers around 2,400 hectares – that's over 3,300 football pitches – and stretches from Manor Park to just north of Epping.*

*Two thirds of the Forest has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).*

with their holly under-stories, bluebell and moss carpets, are quite distinct from the more expansive beech forests of continental Europe'. Although these 450 sites all include some of this habitat, fewer than half of them contain more than 100 hectares and only 107 sites are accorded global status by scientists. Epping Forest is one of the most important sites, due to its size and the variety of its habitat. As such it is one of the 100 key sites in the world for protecting this type of beech woodland. Only the New Forest contains a larger area of this habitat in the UK. With its large number of pollards Epping Forest contains more ancient beech trees than anywhere else. Thinking about this environment, which is locally unique but one which fits into a wider fabric of European ecology, helps us to truly appreciate the value of Epping Forest locally and internationally.

Article by Mark Gorman



For more on this story and other news about Epping Forest go to <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/>





Our largest snake, the Grass Snake, particularly likes wetland habitats, but can also be found in dry grasslands and in gardens, especially those with a pond nearby. Lays eggs in rotting vegetation, often in compost heaps. Like all reptiles, Grass Snakes hibernate, usually from October to April. During the summer, they can be found basking near favourite ponds or even swimming.

## ssssnakes

alive and well in the Exchange Lands, Wanstead

Last year a group of Wren Group members, with support from the City of London Corporation, set out to find which reptile species were present in the Exchange Lands (Old Sewage Works) between the Empress Avenue allotments and the River Roding. At the beginning of September 2015, some 40 dark coloured roofing felt refugia were laid in the area by Thibaud Madelin and Alison Tapply. The felts were about 60 x 60 cm in size. Most (30) were placed on open grassland or at the margin of grass and hawthorn or brambles in the western section of the Exchange Lands, with the other 10 in the lower part of the area, closer to the River Roding. Some of the latter were in some very long grass though others were sited on shorter grass close to the cycle way running to the bridge over the river.

The rationale of using dark-coloured felts that absorb the sun's heat is a tried-and-tested method. Once warmed by sunshine the felts become attractive to reptiles needing to increase their body temperature, since they are ectotherms (cold blooded).

Last month Wren Committee member Gill James took a look at the Exchange Lands to see how our local grass snakes were doing and managed to take these pics to show that they were thriving.



# hedge-laying in east ham

a traditional country craft

Wren Group member Peter Williams writes about some work he has done recently at East Ham Nature Reserve. He is grateful to Penny Evans who directed the work and taught him the basics, having done a hedge laying course at Field Studies Council (FSC) at High Beech in Epping Forest and features in the photos in the article.





The East Ham reserve is in the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene, a Norman church circa 1130AD. It is one of the largest churchyards in London. In 1977 the 9.5 acre site was turned into a Nature Reserve and was managed by Newham Council until 2009 when it was taken over by Community Links as the council's managing agent. In 2015 it was taken over by ActiveNewham as agent after Links pulled out. Newham Green Gym, which began in 2004 is the only conservation group regularly maintaining the grounds, meeting every Wednesday and the last Saturday of every month throughout the year.

The reserve has a significant hedge made up mainly of hazel and hawthorn. Prior to this recent work it had got a bit out of hand and was proving hard to maintain by Green Gym. Hedge-laying is a country skill typically found in England and is used to achieve a number of goals:-

- ❑ To form a livestock-proof barrier.
- ❑ To help rejuvenate an ageing hedgerow by encouraging it to put on new growth and by helping to improve its overall structure and strength.
- ❑ To provide greater weather protection for crops and local wildlife.
- ❑ To provide a pleasing screen to a garden or field.

Laying hedges is just one of the techniques which

can be used to manage hedgerows. Other techniques include trimming and coppicing. Coppicing involves cutting stems off at ground level to encourage the hedge to regenerate. Left unmanaged a hedgerow will continue to grow upwards and outwards and will eventually become a line of trees.



The hedge before laying – note the large gaps and the high vertical growth, hard to cut and manage (February 2016).

Where farmers keep cattle or sheep a good hedge is essential - although barbed wire fences can easily be erected they do not provide shelter like a hedge. Hedges are important for our wildlife, environmental, heritage and scenic value. A well managed hedgerow is thick and bushy, an impenetrable barrier to sheep and cattle and a haven for wildlife.

Cattle will lean against a hedge and make gaps whilst sheep push through the base, hedge laying prevents this. Cut stems are bent over at an angle, secured with stakes and in some styles

binders along the top, so creating a living, stock-proof barrier.

Hedge-laying is the only hedgerow maintenance method currently available which promotes regrowth from ground level and which will ensure the health and longevity of the hedgerow. Once a hedge has been laid regular trimming will keep it in good order for up to 50 years when it may be appropriate to lay the hedge again.

Below are various pictures that hopefully illustrate the theory behind laying a hedge and what it should look like when it's finished;

Stage 1: involves taking out any surplus material including previously poorly done attempts to lay this hedge. You get rid of a lot of verticals you don't want but keep a small number that are then cut in a special way and then bent over very carefully. This is called laying the hedge.

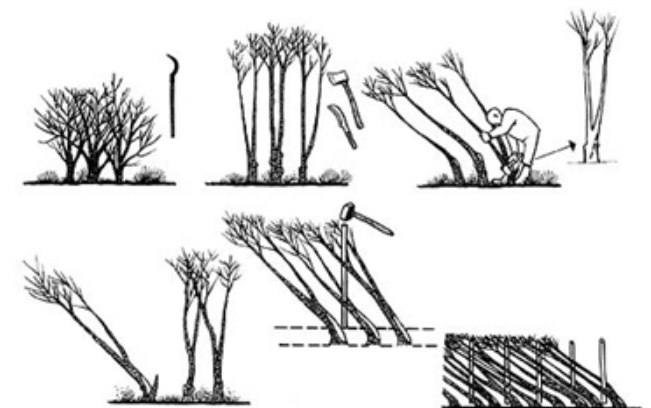


Diagram 1 - Hedge laying basics



The basic idea behind pleaching is chop down the back side of the stem using a bill hook (see tools below). The next stage is then effectively bending the stem over until it's resting either on the floor or the last stem to be laid. Doing this keeps the tree alive; however once it has been laid it will throw up a lot of shoots thus making a very thick hedge.

Great care needs to be taken making these cuts – cut too little and the branch is very hard to bend over. Cut too much and there is a tendency for it to be too weak and to snap. The idea is to leave a thin joint that is alive and allows the plant to regenerate. It is rather like a hinge of living material. The thicker hawthorns proved hard to cut to a good hinge and we lost one or two in the process.



*Hedge pleaching - the first cuts from the base of the hawthorn or hazel – note the billhook painted yellow bottom left, and the axe. The mallet like tool is used to insert temporary vertical stakes to hold some of it in place. Note the graves on the left as this is a churchyard. There is a lot of ivy that had to be cleared first.*



*Another, closer view of the cuts*

Stage 2: having cut and laid down the hedge to one side it is then important to weave the living strands round one another, to achieve a dense texture that will be stock proof and have a pleasing visual aspect as well. This is called “making the hedge”.



*Sharpening the stakes which was done in February 2016. The poor state of the hedge when we started can clearly be seen in this picture. Surplus and dead material has already been cut out here.*

### Stage 3

Having laid and made the hedge it is then important to put the vertical stakes in placed spaced about 18 inches apart, as they give the hedge strength and support. The final stage is to weave in non-living

wood at the top of the stakes to give added strength and resilience. These are called weavers. Finally the stakes are trimmed off to an even height to look neat and tidy.



*Making the hedge – again note the temporary stakes to hold it in place. Because the early spring in 2016 you can clearly see the hazel and hawthorn coming into leaf – the cutting and laying to the side does not kill the plant as long as you keep the hinge in place (March 2016)*



# Conclusion

A well laid hedge is a wonderful site in the English countryside. It is a labour-intensive process (this short section took Penny and Peter's unskilled hands about six weeks at 2 hours a session). There are different traditions and techniques in different English regions, and hedging was a key winter activity for generations of farm labourers in the season where there was not much field work. It created a living barrier to control stock but an accidental by product was increased biodiversity and the unique appearance of the English countryside with its small neat fields and wonderful hedgerows. Indeed field boundaries in this country can be dated by counting the diversity of species in the hedge and it is now known that some of the boundaries go back hundreds if not thousands of years especially in western and upland areas on Britain untouched by the parliamentary enclosures of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Peter and Penny hope to be back in 2017 to lay another section of East Ham's hedge.



Article and pics by Peter Williams

## References

<http://www.hedgelaying.org.uk/about-hedge-laying.php>  
[http://www.shropshirehedgelaying.co.uk/what\\_is\\_hedgelaying.php](http://www.shropshirehedgelaying.co.uk/what_is_hedgelaying.php)

## Dating hedges

<https://hedgebritannia.wordpress.com/2011/04/08/how-to-date-a-hedge/>

see also a classic "The Making of the English Landscape" by WG Hosking



The finished hedge - any unruly side branches are tidied up and smaller branches are encouraged to grow downwards rather than create new and rapid vertical growth. This hedge should now require minimal maintenance for a number of years (early April 2016).

The Wren Group has its origins in this part of East Ham in the early 1970s when a local postman was concerned that local lads were collecting birds eggs. He persuaded them to become bird watchers instead. The Wren Committee agreed in March 2016 that we should show some solidarity with this small conservation group who have had some bureaucratic difficulties getting grant funding out of the site's owner Newham Council. Green Gym have been looking after this disused churchyard, the largest in London, since 2004. In return Wren Group will get access to the site to do some survey work.



Picture shows Wren's President Richard Oakman presenting Newham Green Gym with a cheque for £300 to support Green Gym's work at East Ham nature reserve. They intend to use it to buy new tools and other supplies.

On the very morning of this presentation Wren member Peter Williams found a slow worm on the site. There have been many sightings of this legless lizard at the reserve which covers 9 acres in a deprived part of Newham.



# on the trail of the lonesome poplars

*Article by Peter Aylmer*



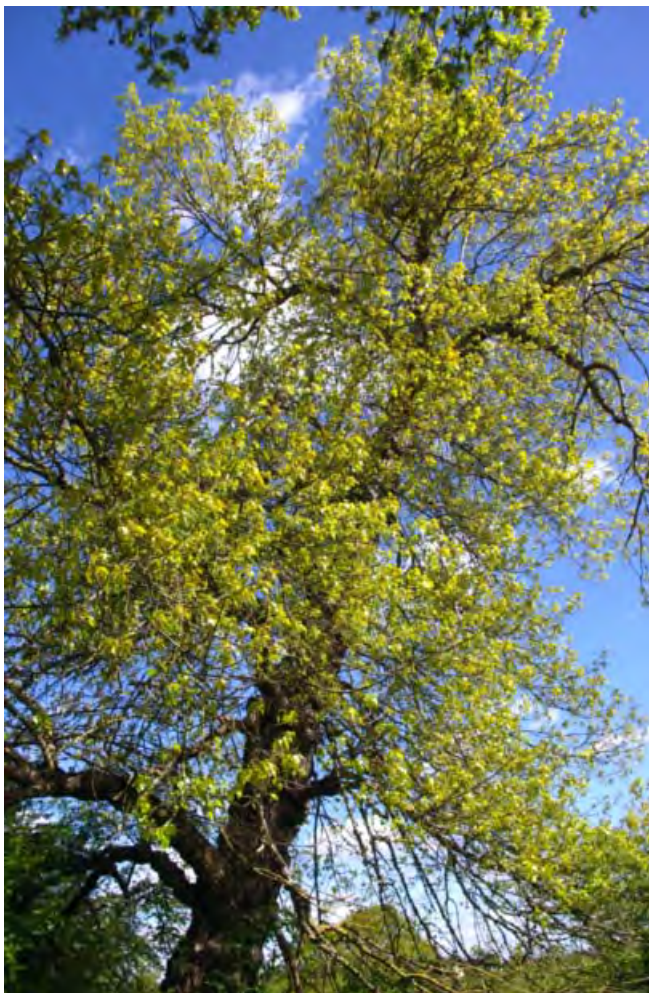
The Wren group continues on its search to find out more about some of the other great wildlife hotspots of London, as walk leader and Wren committee member Peter Aylmer describes.

Ah, spring time in London! A bit chilly though, this year. Nevertheless intrepid Wren walkers have ranged from east to west in search of the finest that the capital has to offer.

And where better to start than Dagenham. Have you ever wondered what happened to the houses as you rattled on the District line to Hornchurch? Well, we found out in March. There's a little chain of country parks that stretches from Becontree to Rainham, one of which is home to one of Britain's rarest trees.

There are perhaps 6,000 black poplars left in the country, of which one in ten is female. (Like the willow and holly, and if they were trees humans too, the black poplar is gendered or 'dioecious', and male and female need to be in close proximity to reproduce.) And of those 600 females, six are in a cluster in The Chase country park, on a little bank above the River Rom. There are no males anywhere close, Hackney Wick perhaps, so maybe they are, er, pining.

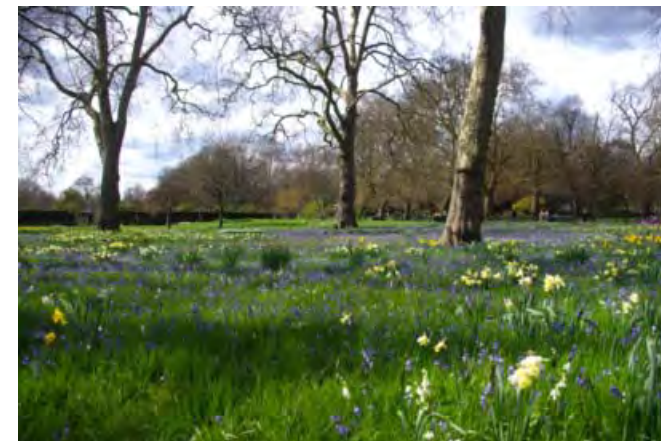
Our little walk took in not just The Chase but also the adjoining Eastbrookend and Beam country parks, and as a bonus we went back through 'God's little acre' (it is in fact two), alas before its early summer riot of wild flowers took over the one-time village churchyard.



Black Poplar, Dagenham

We launched ourselves on another chain of parks in April, but the contrast could not have been more stark. For these were the Royal Parks, that great glory of central London and indeed an envy of great cities across the globe, stretching from Regent's Park through Hyde Park and Green Park to St James's Park. Our focus was again a tree, this time the London plane, which lends such an air of grandeur to so many of London's open spaces.

The name is a bit of a misnomer, for while the tree may help to symbolise London, it's a popular tree for urban planting across the world – it soaks up traffic fumes with barely a second thought. What it cannot do, alas, is resist the fungus *Ceratocystis platani*, which in the last few years has led to the felling of half the London planes shading the Canal du Midi in southern France. The fungus is of American origin, but is now endemic in Italy too, and known to be spreading north. The Channel may be a barrier, at least for a while – for the shape of our capital, let us hope so.



Regent's Park

Finally, May saw us back on the River Wandle. At the start of the year, we'd tackled the downstream half of the river, which flows into the Thames at Wandsworth; this time, we were headed towards its source in Croydon. We began where we had earlier finished, Morden Hall Park, a National Trust oasis in the heart of south London, with a very pleasant National Trust café for the coffee we like to preface our strolls with. There is a surviving water wheel in the park, one of the 68 that once drew power from





Grey Wagtail on the Wandle (Pic by Dave Playford)

the strength of its flow – and over the next few miles we had plenty of time to marvel at how this was still present, despite a recent dry spell.

A highlight of the riverside trail is Wilderness Island, a London Wildlife Trust nature reserve at the confluence of the Carshalton and Croydon arms of the river. We'd spotted a little group of grey wagtails shortly before, and we were mightily encouraged by a

photographer who was leaving the island as we arrived. Clad in camouflage gear – not just him, his camera and long lens were wrapped in it too – he gave us rough directions to nesting kingfishers. We had a slow, quiet tread past where we thought he meant, but alas not with success. Perhaps a quick visit to army surplus might have helped.

Where to next? That will be up to you. Possible sites include Bushy Park, Wimbledon Common, Chislehurst and Yeading Brook. Join us and help us choose!

Article by Peter Aylmer



## Lucky dip walk dates

The next planned walks are for Tuesday 19th July and Wednesday 17th August.

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.

## 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.



*I've never seen a Snipe Fly before but they have such a distinctive look it didn't take me long to find out what it was. This Rhagio scolopaceus was next to the canal in Walthamstow Marshes.*

# bug life

*Pictures and commentary by Rose Stephens*



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.

You can like Rose's work on her Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/TheNatureofWansteadFlats>





This *Megachile centuncularis* (Patchwork Leaf-cutter bee) was on a Dandelion on Wanstead Flats, which isn't in itself unusual - except that I saw it on 11 April, a few months earlier than these are expected. These are such interesting bees to watch. They make a very skilled circular cut from a leaf or petal, then carry it back to the nest and use the leaf in the construction of the nest. I watched one building a nest construction in my front garden wall, going away to collect a leaf piece from a neighbour's garden. The leaf-cutting operation was very quick and the cut very precise, with the bee flying back and forth to the nest quite a few times.

*Anthophora quadrimaculata* (Four-banded Flower Bee) The eyes were the most striking feature of this bee, they were glistening like little jewels even though I was quite a distance away at first.

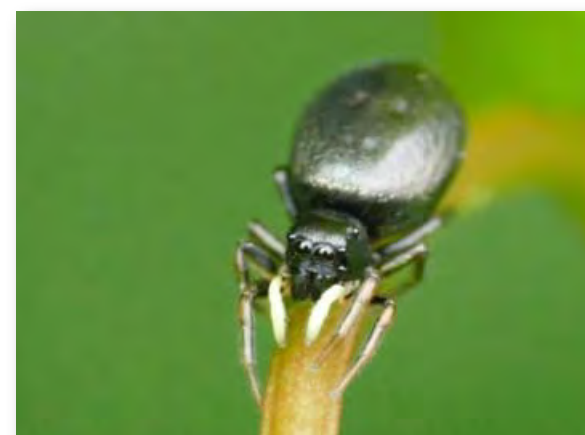


Looking in the Daisies and Dandelions, where normally I find an array of interesting and unusual insects, I noticed the *Oedemera nobilis* beetles were out in abundance a few weeks back. This isn't unusual at this time of year but one in particular had a tiny little insect attached, so I took a few photos. I asked around a few experts and found it to be of the fly family so I sent the photo to Del Smith, a fly expert and member of the Essex Field Club. Del explained that it was a Ceratopoginid (biting midge) which was sucking the juices out of the female *Oedemera nobilis* beetle. Their biting mouthparts are inserted into the inter-segmental membrane of the beetle and the fluids imbibed. I was certainly surprised at this knowledge and thought it really interesting.



A moulting Earwing on Nettles. Nature is amazing sometimes. It's lovely to capture parts of nature that normally goes unnoticed.

This was quite a big *Heliophanus* spider on the lookout for lunch



# going on a plant hunt

Article by Tricia Moxey

The naturally occurring vegetation of Wanstead and Leyton Flats fits into the category of dry acid grassland where wiry grasses such as Early Hair Grass, Mat Grass, Wavy Hair Grass, Red Fescue and Bent grasses make up the bulk of the species present. There are patches of short growing Sheep's Sorrel and areas of Gorse and Broom. This is a scarce habitat within the Greater London area and requires specific management to ensure that its special features do not disappear.





We tend to take plants for granted but they are essential in supporting life on this planet. A few weeks ago a scholarly report, the *State of the World's Plants 2016* was produced. This has been compiled by a large team of scientists at Kew Gardens and the report is in three sections. The first part describes what is currently known about plants: how many plant species there are and considers plant evolutionary relationships and plant genomes. The second part of the report assesses the current known global threats to plants while the third part gives details of the international trade in plants, as well as policies and international agreements that are in place to deal with some of the identified threats.

The report is full of fascinating and surprising facts and is worth dipping into and it can be downloaded from <https://stateoftheworldsplants.com>. In this report the authors comment that some 369,000 flowering plants are known to science.

This total includes 20,000 species which have been identified in the past decade as intrepid plant hunters sought new species specifically from the under recorded tropical rain forests and other plant rich habitats. Some 1,771 regions of the world are identified as having fantastic assemblages of plants, but very few of these locations are protected in any way and in many places the diversity of the

vegetation is being degraded from multiple threats. Some of these are edge habitats which are fascinating as they seem to be locations where there is active evolution of new plant or animal species in response to changing abiotic factors such as an increase in temperature or a decrease in rainfall.



Bird's Foot - pic by Tricia Moxey

Documentary evidence about 31,128 species has been collated specifically to demonstrate the useful properties of such plants from a human perspective. This reveals that 5,538 species can provide food for us, 17,810 have medicinal properties, some 1,621 can provide fuel and 11,365 produce useful materials such as fibres, glues or timber. Some 2,503 are poisonous.

Within the UK some 2,500 or so plants are considered to be native. Many have a widespread distribution but some of these are restricted being found in specific habitats such as mountain scree, bogs or salt marshes. The natural vegetation within Britain is described in great detail in the 4 volumes

of *British Plant Communities* published between 1991 and 1995. A more concise description of habitats is provided in *Britain's Habitats: A Guide to the Wildlife Habitats of Britain and Ireland* by Sophie Lake and others which was published in 2015. This gives brief notes with illustrations of the different habitats and what plants and animals occur within them.

The naturally occurring vegetation of Wanstead and Leyton Flats fits into the category of dry acid grassland where wiry grasses such as Early Hair Grass, Mat Grass, Wavy Hair Grass, Red Fescue and Bent grasses make up the bulk of the species present. There are patches of short growing Sheep's Sorrel and areas of Gorse and Broom. This is a scarce habitat within the Greater London area and requires specific management to ensure that its special features do not disappear.



Wanstead and Leyton Flats showing patches of Gorse and Broom - a scarce habitat in the London area - pic by Tony Morrison

However, much of the Forest is fragmented by roads or is surrounded by the back gardens of houses. Such boundaries suffer from an obvious



edge effect with a very different species mix which may extend some distance into the Forest proper. This diverse margin is decreasing the area of the 'natural vegetation' and the smaller the site, the bigger the impact. This margin often contains unwanted plants which are dumped and become established. Birds spread seeds from trees such as Rowan, Cherry, White Beams, Yew and acorns too. Furry mammals spread Burdock and Wood Avenas and ruderals like Dandelions, various thistles and docks have effective dispersal mechanisms ensuring their survival. Along many of the roadside margins where the soil is disturbed it is possible to record Alexanders, Green Alkanet, Cow Parsley, Hemlock, Hogweed, Stinging Nettles and many other ruderal weeds already listed. These can spread several metres into the Forest, obliterating the wiry grasses. The extent of these mixed marginal areas is quite obvious alongside the roads round Wanstead Flats and in the area around the Green Man Roundabout. Most of the species noted are

native but there are a few non-natives as well.

Seventeen years ago the underpass at the Green Man roundabout was sown with an appropriate mixture of native species and on a recent plant hunt by Wren Group members, many were found to be still flourishing. A few additional species have arrived naturally. One is the Bee Orchid which appears to be increasing!

To the east of the Green Man Roundabout is a fascinating area which is becoming floristically more diverse as a result of disturbance to the ground as well as the increasing levels of nutrients from car exhausts and dog walking. More vigorous grasses such as Cock's Foot, False Oat Grass and Rye Grass are replacing the fine leaved ones and various legumes such as Grass Vetchling, Common Vetch, Bush Vetch and Red Clover are becoming established, along with Oxeye Daisy and Cow Parsley.

Regular plant hunts to monitor these changes are important and it is vital to check on the survival of specific native plants or to discover new arrivals! Plant hunting is fun and is a useful exercise as it helps to



*Flowers at the Green Man roundabout - pic by Tricia Moxey*


reinforce identification skills and find species previously un-recorded. On recent hunts in the City of London Cemetery we discovered that some plants were easier to locate than others but a diligent search did reveal the minute plants of Birds Foot, a plant first recorded in the Wanstead area many years ago.

Sophie Lake, Durwyn Liley, Robert Still and Andy Swash. (2015) *Britain's Habitats: A Guide to the Wildlife Habitats of Britain and Ireland*. Princeton University Press.

Article by Tricia Moxey







*Red-eared Terrapin Wanstead Park - terrapins have been a feature of UK waterways since the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle craze in the late 1980s prompted a rush of people to buy them as pets, only to dump them in ponds and rivers when they grew too big for fish tanks. Pic by Tony Morrison*

# loving the alien

*Article by Barry Chapman*

**Are environmentalists commonly prejudiced?**

**Do they practice environmental cleansing for the sake of environmental purity?**

I hear from people who are knowledgeable and those who are not in the nature community about the culling of certain species because they don't fit their criteria of what is native to these shores and will destroy our local flora and fauna. Yet those same people seem to welcome other species with open arms, especially if it ticks a box on a list. They preach to others what should be eradicated, normally because of biased reporting or to follow the crowd.



Top of the hit (or hate) list are Parakeets and Grey Squirrels, both of which can be seen in the areas of Wanstead Park and Flats. Currently Grey Squirrels are being culled across the country. To my knowledge the City of London Epping Forest have begun doing this in West Ham Park. Time will tell whether Wanstead Park/Flats will experience this.

As for the Parakeets, the RSPB does not currently suggest a cull, but like the squirrels they are fair game as they are not native. The government body Natural England have added four non-native species to the list of birds that can be shot without having to apply for an individual license: Ring-tailed Parakeet, Monk Parakeet, Canada Goose and Egyptian Goose.



Ring-necked Parakeet - was Jimmy Hendrix really to blame?? Pic by Tony Morrison

If you believe the romantic story of Jimi Hendrix releasing two Parakeets from Carnaby Street in the sixties as the beginning of the Parakeet invasion, you really are living in a green, not purple haze! Several stories abound about the start of ring-necked mania, but the earliest record of a breeding pair in Britain dates from 1852 in Great Yarmouth,' says naturalist and writer David Lindo (the Urban Birder). 'In the past they would've hopped aboard ships, but the ones today are probably all descendants of escaped pets.'

But the good news, says Ben Andrew, Supporter Advisor (Wildlife) for the RSPB is that although Parakeets are 'a nuisance at the bird table,' there is 'no evidence that they are having a detrimental effect on any of our native bird species'. In fact, most garden birds that eat the same food as Parakeets, such as Blue Tits, are thriving, although if people can't bear the sight of the Parakeets, they should try Squirrel proof feeders.

It has also been suggested that Parakeets, as hole-nesting birds, might drive out other cavity nesters such as Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and Starlings. A recent Belgian study found evidence of competition between Parakeets and Nuthatches but the researchers concluded that this was unlikely to have much impact on Nuthatch populations.

While Parakeets may not be threatening other birds, It has observed that the larger roosts, 'can kill trees with their droppings,' although this is a natural process that is also caused by other roosting birds such as Starlings.

Until recently, Parakeets have been unchallenged by birds of prey, but Peregrine Falcons, which regularly predate on Pigeons, have begun acquiring a taste for Parakeet, while there is also evidence of

Sparrowhawks and Tawny Owls taking them down - although only time will tell if this provides a natural control.

Much of the reason we are expected to despise Grey Squirrels (who were imported from America some 140 years ago for their 'ornamental' value) is because they have supposedly stolen the territory of the cherished, native Red Squirrels, and lethally infected them with the parapox virus. Yet, between 1900 and 1925, it was the red we humans were slaughtering by the thousand - and for the same supposed environmental vices that were subsequently hung around the neck of the greys: reds were woodland pests who stripped bark, robbed birds' nests and raided gardens.



Grey Squirrels originally imported from America some 140 years ago for their 'ornamental' value

While the parapox virus has played its part in reducing red numbers, the source was not grey Squirrels. The virus was scything through red populations in the first two decades of the last century in several parts of the country into which greys had never ventured. As for the greys' alleged



devastation of British songbirds, in 2010 researchers from the British Trust for Ornithology and Natural England published the results of a study on the effect that grey Squirrels were having on 38 woodland bird species. Taken in the round, no negative impact was found.

*Little Owls, Little Egrets, Painted Lady's, Muntjac, Chinese Deer, Egyptian Geese, Canadian Geese, Domestic Cat, Mandarin Duck, House Mouse, Common Wall Lizard and Large Copper Butterflies are all non-native species.*

The truth, of course, is that we human beings are incomparably destructive when it comes to the natural world. But rather than face this awkward truth, we scapegoat, among other 'pests' and 'vermin', the robust, adaptable, intelligent and very appealing Grey Squirrel. Much of the anti-grey sentiment is whipped up by Pheasant-shooting and forestry interests, on whose activities the greys dare to modestly intrude. The rest of us must resist their hateful propaganda, serving as it does as a prelude to the pitiless maiming and killing of animals whose presence in the British countryside we should be celebrating.

An attempt to remove the species from Anglesey alone has so far cost £440,000. A conservative estimate puts the cost of a similar programme across Britain at £850m.

They have fitted into our ecosystem and like Parakeets and Canada geese, they are here to stay whether we like it or not.

Dubbed the "butterfly bush", the buddleia's fragrant, purple blooms are a favoured source of nectar for the UK's butterflies, especially in urban areas where many natural habitats are gone.



*The buddleia's fragrant, purple blooms are a favoured source of nectar for the UK's butterflies. Pic by Tony Morrison*

Butterfly bushes remain a popular choice with insect-loving gardeners, the familiar garden bushes are consistently at the top of the list of most commonly used nectar sources by butterflies in the Butterfly Conservation organisation's garden butterfly survey Big Butterfly Count. The most popular buddleia species, *Buddleia Davidii* was introduced to the UK from China in 1896. However this tenacious plant can become

problematic when it escapes gardens and takes root in pavement cracks, railway lines and buildings, costing hundreds of thousands of pounds' each year to control, according to the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS).

Invasive rhododendron shrubs provide protective "shields" for native wood mice from predators, according to research carried out by Dr Malo and colleagues at Imperial College London.

The rodents "prefer" to live under the cover of the alien plants, and even compete for the territory, scientists monitoring the animals found.

Rhododendrons cause major problems in some parts of the UK, Introduced to Britain in the late 1700s, *Rhododendron ponticum* grows a leaf canopy so dense it blocks out sunlight, but also protects mice from becoming easy pickings for birds of prey.

Rabbits were introduced to Britain by the Romans, are hated as pests and celebrated in children's



*Rabbits were introduced to Britain by the Romans, are hated as pests and celebrated in children's books. pic by Tony Morrison*



books. Britain's estimated 40m rabbits cost the economy more than £260m a year including damage to crops, businesses and infrastructure, a report says today. However, rabbits are now so established in the UK that they present an important source of food to the UK's predators, especially birds of prey, foxes and stoats.

No need to panic over the arrival of the harlequin ladybird. The fact that 90 per cent of the ladybirds in some London parks are harlequins does not mean that the actual numbers of the other species of ladybird are reduced.

Instead we are presented with speculation as fact. Harlequin Ladybirds might even have some benefits as they prey on a variety of smaller insects, especially aphids which can damage crops and garden flowers, but the extent to which they protect plants is undetermined. There is also evidence to suggest that native insects, like

the Lacewing and House Spiders may now have adapted to prey on the harlequins, helping to keep numbers in check.



*Harlequin Ladybird - does their arrival mean the decline of the home-grown species. Pic by Tony Morrison*

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Little Owls, Little Egrets, Painted Lady's, Muntjac,  
Chinese Deer, Egyptian Geese, Canadian Geese,  
Domestic Cat, Mandarin Duck, House  
Mouse, Common Wall Lizard  
and Large Copper  
Butterflies are  
all non-

native species. These species don't seem to get the negative publicity that the species mentioned earlier do, but us humans are always ready to create villains. You just have to look at the media, it's not just the tabloids, the broadsheets are worse in a number of cases. Who's agenda are they supporting. I'm no expert by any means, but I do read up on the subject and make an informed decision.

## So stop fretting about alien species. They are all part of the great scheme of things.

Evolution has no game plan. What happens is what works and not what we think should work. Whether we are looking at species or the climate the concept of "stability" does not apply. Everything is constantly changing. That is what drives evolution.

Article by Barry Chapman



Editor Note – views are those of author and not necessarily the Wren Group - up for discussion.

some people see a weed  
others see a wish



Floating pennywort has been present on Perch Pond, Wanstead since at least 2014. Epping Forest soon became aware of the problem and began further investigations.

Successful control methods were researched and a programme of control work was implemented. The City of London agreed to fund the project "Control and Eradication of Floating Pennywort on Perch Pond" during 2016. The company Native Landscapes were chosen through a tendering process to assist in the project in May 2016.

Manual removal of Floating pennywort on Perch Pond was carried out by volunteers during 2015.

This work was successful in its aim to reduce the overall amount of plant material. Following the work favourable weather conditions contributed to fast re-growth of plants which had not been removed. Overall growth levels were approximately the same at the end of 2015 as they were before manual removal had been carried out.

Epping Forest, funded by the City of London, chose Native Landscapes to assist with the contract "Control of Floating Pennywort on Perch Pond" during 2016. A programme of manual removal followed by herbicide applications was agreed. Native Landscapes carried out manual removal of Floating pennywort from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of June. Work was carried out by two teams of two people (four people in total) in waders and by boat. In total approximately 40 cubic metres of Floating pennywort was removed from the main pond. The work was successful in its aim to reduce the amount of plant material. Fragment clearance was carried out following operations to help reduce the spread of plant material.

Floating pennywort was not removed from the margins of the main pond. Plants in these areas were found either rooted into the silt and / or intertwined with other marginal vegetation. Herbicide applications were scheduled to be carried out in these areas towards the end of June 2016.

Floating pennywort was not removed from the western end of Perch Pond. Plants in this area were found growing in dense mats which were very difficult to remove. Staggered herbicide applications are scheduled to be carried out in this area between June and September 2016.

Native Landscapes will draft and send a final report upon completion of operations in September 2016. This will include details of work carried out along with conclusions and recommendations.

Source Native Landscapes

*NB. According to bye-laws dogs must not be allowed to go in the Perch Pond. However this is particularly important for the safety of your pets following/during the herbicide works. Epping Forest is looking at having a Keeper in attendance during the works to undertake community liaison for the first couple of treatments. Please keep an eye on your dogs.*



floating pennywort  
in perch pond



# 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.



*Valentines Park, Boating Lake early 20th century*



## Route 3

*From the Wash, Valentines Park and American Gardens, Cranbrook Road, field path to Beehive, (a) Beehive Lane, Cranbrook Road to Wash, or (b) field path to Redbridge Lane and field path to Castle and Wash. (About 3 miles).*

Starting from The Wash (or any of the entrances to Valentines Park on the town side), proceed alongside the boating lake. There are three things to be noted by the Cranbrook Road entrance, viz., (1) the rose beds on the right, which are worth inspecting if it be the time of roses, (2) the row of fine willows bordering the lake, and (3) the rookery and the clock tower. The clock itself was originally over the stables at Cranbrook Hall, and is about 150 years old. On the right is St. Clement's Church, which supplanted St. Mary's in the High Road as the parish church in 1902.



*The Wash, Cranbrook Road 1906. Frederick Rees delivers milk in churns for W. Harris Dairy, Albert Road. That's The Drive in the background.*

The walk round the lake is Ilford's Sunday morning church parade. Cross over the rustic bridge at the end of the lake, noting on the right the pretty bit of wooded dell which extends on either side of the Cranbrook to the E. boundary of the park by Brisbane Road. At the time of the acquisition of the old Central Park, the opponents of the scheme designated this charming dell "the swamp" - that reproach is no longer justified. The view from the bridge across the lake is worth noting. Leaving the Refreshment Pavilion on the left strike across the grass to the clump of 55 fir trees in the right corner and follow the path to the American Gardens (10 acres), the gift of Mr. Holcombe Ingleby in memory of his mother, the late Mrs. Ingleby, of "Valentines," of which the "Gift" formed the ornamental gardens.



*Valentines Park - The Cedar around 1910*

They are very fine, and contain some splendid specimens of oak (particularly one at the entrance) and other trees, including the magnificent cedar of Lebanon at the N.E. end, which is several hundred years old, and is considered to be the best of its kind in Essex. It has lost some of its massive limbs, but those which remain are more than sufficient to show its huge proportions; 16 people can sit



*Valentines Park - Clocktower - 1910s*

comfortably round the trunk. Some years ago there was a tall tulip tree which grew to a height of 77 feet, but this has been succeeded by a smaller tree by the side of the outer path from the cedar to the lake-it bears wry pale flowers like tulips. At the end of the lake is a beautiful weeping-willow which always attracts special notice. In the spring the rhododendrons and azaleas on this N. side of the





*Valentines Park - Bishop's Walk - early 1900s*

Gardens are a blaze of colour, while in the summer the bank of the lake is lined with yellow iris. The ornamental waters are full of fish, and water lilies are plentiful. On the N. side between the canal and the lake is Jacob's Well, which supplies the water to the former. From the well a path leads to the Bishop's Walk - an avenue of tall yew trees which is

said to have been the favourite walk of, and to have been planted by, Archbishop Tillotson, whose son-in-law built "Valentines." The height of the trees at this part of the Gardens should be noted.



*Cranbrook Road with the gates of Valentines Park to the left - 1910s*

On the S., or Ilford, side of the lake are 12 arches of climbing plants, which have a very pleasing effect, and at the E. end of them is a large urn, sometimes wrongly described as Roman. Leaving the Gardens by the W. gate in the Cranbrook Road (the Wash is about 15 minutes' walk from here), turn to the right up the road towards Barking-side, passing on the right a wooded dell (a remnant of Sparks Wood-see Route 1) and a row of chestnut trees, to the first stile on the left, then follow the field path by the hedge to where four paths meet - those to the right and left are sections of the path from Gants Hill Cottage to Beehive Lane (see Route 5) - follow the path in front across Valentines fields to a short lane past Gearies Cottages to Beehive Lane, close to the mission church, whence a turn to the left takes past Beehive Schools to Cranbrook Road by "Valentines" gates and The Wash (about 25 minutes). If desired, the walk may be prolonged by



*Ilford Station around 1906 - often the starting point for city dwellers visiting the 'countryside' at the time of Tasker's rambles*

turning down the lane (Silver Street) by the side of the Beehive Hotel and along the edge of a field to New Road on the right, then turning down a narrow passage on the left and across a field path to Redbridge Lane by Shackman's Farm, turning to the left down the lane for about 1 mile to the field path on the left, which leads to the Castle and The Drive (see Route 2).



*Ilford - The Drive around 1908 with The Wash off to the right*



## Route 4

*From Cranbrook Wash, The Drive, Castle, Wanstead Lane, Redbridge Lane, Beehive Hamlet, Valentines, Cranbrook Wash. (3 ½ miles).*



*Red Bridge (Redbridge) - early 1900s*

Proceed up The Drive and past the Castle to Wanstead Lane, as in Route 2, turn to left down the lane, round the sharp bend to the right, and then again to the left, passing Stone Hall Farm on the right. This is one of the old farm manors of Barking, but since the Reformation it has been attached to the manor of Wanstead. The road affords some fine views in the direction of Woodford, Buckhurst Hill, and Chigwell, and being downhill all the way, is a favourite run with cyclists. It ends in Red bridge Lane close to the Roding. To the left leads to Wanstead, but turn to the right past the "Red House" Inn, then straight up the ascending road with open country on each side.

Nearly at the top, on the left, is Shackman's Farm, and a little farther on the lane ends in the Beehive Lane by the blacksmith's. (A few minutes may be



*Shackman's farmhouse, near Redbridge Lane in 1905. The weather boarded building was situated on the site of Grangeway Gardens.*

saved by crossing the field path on the right nearly opposite the farm to the cottages, then to the left down a narrow passage to New Road, then to the right and along another short field path to Beehive Schools.) The farm road in front of the blacksmith's leads to Hedge-man's farm (see Route 1). From the corner of Redbridge Lane turn to the right through Beehive Hamlet to Valentines and Cranbrook Road, and so to the Wash. A pleasant hour's walk when field paths are muddy.



*The Castle 1914*

*For more than 150 years there was a building perched on top of a prominent mound at the top of The Drive, Ilford. Known locally as Cranbrook Castle it dominated the landscape and in later years became a pleasant resting place for ramblers.*

### *But it never was a castle.....*

*It was in fact built in 1765 as a mausoleum or burial place for Sir Charles Raymond and his family. It was a triangular shaped building with a round castellated tower at each corner. It consisted internally of three storeys. First there was the burial chamber or vault, containing 14 semi-circular compartments or cubicles. Above this was the chapel and above that another room in which the mourners would possibly gather for refreshments. A spiral stone staircase took up a large amount of the space inside the building. However the chapel was never consecrated following a dispute with the bishop and the building was never used for its intended purpose.*

*The three turrets provided commanding views of the area and the Ordinance Survey people often used the south turret (that nearest Ilford) for survey purposes. The building was connected to Highlands Farm and was occupied as a dwelling place until 1914 when it was taken over by the Admiralty in the early days of the 1914-1918 war. Its position on high open ground made it one of the most important observation posts for spotting enemy aircraft on their way to the capital.*

*In the latter part of the war years, it was unused and empty and started to fall into ruin. Around 1922 the Castle and surrounding grounds were purchased by the Port of London Authority for use as a sports ground and in spite of protests from the local residents it was pulled down in 1923.*



# Wanstead nature club

Report by Gill James



*Drawing pigeons - April 2016*



## March: Clean Water for Wildlife!

We did a scientific test on the water quality of the two ponds we know well, Jubilee Pond and Cat and Dog Pond. We used clean water kits to test how polluted the water was with two nutrients, nitrate and phosphate, which can be bad for freshwater plants and animals. We found that the Cat and Dog Pond, which is a natural reedy pond with lots of frogspawn in it, had almost no nitrates and phosphates. This kind of water pollution is more common in farming areas. Jubilee Pond, which is much busier with people and bird life like ducks and geese, had slightly more nitrates and phosphates so is not so rich in wildlife. Afterwards Gill submitted our results to the Clean Water for Wildlife survey. We did a nice collage of the two ponds showing what plants and animals rely on them.



*holding up nitrate test tube - March*



*Jubilee Pond pigeons - April*

## April: London Pigeons

Today we took a closer look at a very familiar bird: the pigeon! We looked at two bird's eggs to compare their sizes and worked out that the larger white one was a pigeon's egg. Then we looked at pictures of different kinds of pigeons, some of which we might see in the garden like the wood pigeon and the collared dove - and we listened to their songs ( 'two teas please Louise....') and Anya told us about when she dissected and ate a (cooked) wood pigeon! We saw an amazing film of a huge flock of racing pigeons being released on Wanstead Flats. Then we went out and found our own flock of pigeons near Jubilee Pond, chose one pigeon (they are all different) and carefully drew it. Our pigeons were called Alphie, Mr Hoo, Sharon, Polly, Jimeela, Honko and Percy. Then we went to find where they roost at night - it was easy to find the roost under

the railway arches because of the piles of poo underneath!

Then, because it is spring, we planted some dwarf bean seeds in pots to take home to grow and, we hope, eat one day.

## May: Pond Dip and Water Survey

We followed up the Clean Water Survey we did on our two ponds in March when we tested for water pollution. This time we thought about what wildlife we might find in spring in our ponds and we looked at some sedge plants, dried up yukky dead frogs, some live toadlets, water snails and even a newt borrowed from Gill's pond to remind us what to look for.



*Retrieving pH strip - May*





Studying pond dip finds - May

We did three tests on Jubilee Pond as part of the national OPAL survey. First we tested to see how clear the water was by collecting the pond water in a plastic bottle and working out if we could see the spots on the Opalometer disc in the bottom. The water was nice and clear and slightly

green. Then we tested to see if the water was acid or alkali by dipping ph. test strips in the pond and seeing what colour they turned. They turned greeny-blue, which told us that the water was not too alkaline which is good for wildlife. Finally we did our pond dip! It was quite cold and we only found small things such as beetles, lots of water boatmen, tiny bugs or fleas, and damselfly larvae and other larvae, which told us that the pond was a good place for wildlife and has a high Pond Health Score.

The ducks, swans and geese already knew this as there were lots of them there and they hadn't done any of the tests! We had thirteen children today and several parents too.

The group meet at the changing rooms, Harrow Rd, Wanstead Flats, E11 3QD every month. Sessions are planned for July 9th, Aug 13th, Sept 24th, Oct 8th, Nov 12th and Dec 10th. 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](mailto:gilljames@btinternet.com)



## now & then

Were you right ?

Wanstead Flats tram terminus, 1905 in Woodford Road.

The trams stopped where the houses ended, just at the borough boundary. The turning on the left is Forest Road. When larger numbers of passengers began to use the route, additional lengths of track were laid in Forest Road and then to here at the western end of Capel Road





# blackbird

*THE nightingale has a lyre of gold,  
The lark's is a clarion call,  
And the blackbird plays but a boxwood flute,  
But I love him best of all.*

*For his song is all of the joy of life,  
And we in the mad, spring weather,  
We two have listened till he sang  
Our hearts and lips together.*

*by William Ernest Henley*





# events diary

## July

Saturday 9th, 10am-12pm

Wanstead Nature Club: For children aged 7+.

Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats. Cost £1.50 per child.

Contact: Gill 020 4898 [gilljames@btinternet.com](mailto:gilljames@btinternet.com)

Tuesday 19th - 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](mailto:peteraylmer@hotmail.com) or 07884 235784.

## August

Saturday 13th, 10am-12pm

Wanstead Nature Club: For children aged 7+.

Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats. Cost £1.50 per child.

Contact: Gill 020 4898 [gilljames@btinternet.com](mailto:gilljames@btinternet.com)

Wednesday 17th - 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](mailto:peteraylmer@hotmail.com) or 07884 235784

## September

Sunday 18th - Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) Counts

Meet 10:00 at the tea hut in Wanstead Park

contact Tim Harris [tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk](mailto:tharris@windmillbooks.co.uk)

Saturday 24th, 10am-12pm

Wanstead Nature Club: For children aged 7+.

Meet: Harrow Road Pavilion, Wanstead Flats. Cost £1.50 per child.

Contact: Gill 020 4898 [gilljames@btinternet.com](mailto:gilljames@btinternet.com)





# links

## Links

Got any links to go on this page? Get in touch  
[wreneditor@talktalk.net](mailto: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>