

- Page 02 - A Word from the Chair - Tim Harris with a few words
- Page 03 - Notes on the Sewage Works Site - article by Paul Ferris
- Page 07 - Angel Wing in Mute Swans - article by Tricia Moxey
- Page 08 - Winter Bird Report by Nick Croft
- Page 13 - Spring is on its way - article by Tricia Moxey
- Page 16 - A year in the Life of Wanstead - Article by Tim Harris
- Page 20 - The Skylark - poem by Christina Georgina Rossett
- Page 25 - 57 Varieties (Plus One) - walk and talk with Peter Aylmer
- Page 28 - Watching Kestrels - Poem by William Worthless
- Page 29 - Bug Life - pics and commentary by Rose Stephens
- Page 31 - Country Rambles - walk and talk at the turn of the last century
- Page 35 - Wanstead Nature Club - report from Gill James
- Page 38 - What to look for in Winter by Tricia Moxey
- Page 49 - Events Diary
- Page 40 - Useful links



# Word from the chair

May I start by wishing everyone a very happy 2017. The year ahead is one of challenges, not least because local authorities are being forced to operate with tighter budgets that will inevitably impact on their ability to care for our open spaces.

Speaking of challenges, one very serious and ongoing issue has been the state of the lakes in Wanstead Park. The Ornamental Water has lost most of its water, and mud has been exposed in large parts of it for well over 18 months now, with no throughput from Perch Pond. I recently walked across to the Fortifications without even sinking into the mud. While several species of dabbling duck have taken advantage of the low water, this is something that needs to be sorted as soon as possible.

Water levels in Perch and Heronry have also fallen. So what's going on?

Water from Perch has been prevented from passing through The Dell and into the Ornamental Water for fear of fragments of invasive Floating Pennywort colonising the latter. Epping Forest Operations Manager Geoff Sinclair told a recent Wanstead Park Liaison Group meeting that, superficially, Perch Pond now appeared to be free of the invader, which can choke the life out of a lake. Unfortunately, Geoff reported that is not yet the case. While the contractor Native Landscapes has used mechanical methods to remove some 40 cubic metres, a good deal of Floating Pennywort remains around the islands behind the tea hut. These will have to be dealt with using a herbicide. There are also large numbers of floating fragments, each with the potential to recolonise. For this reason it will probably be three to five years before water can be allowed to flow from Perch into the Ornamentals. A new source of water will be required to fill the latter.

Until recently, the management focus had been on pumping water into the Ornamentals from the River Roding during the

winter months. However, for this to happen the pump house would need to be reconstructed, and the plant replaced. This will be expensive and is now viewed by the City of London as a long-term option. In the shorter term, a spur could be added to the Heronry Pond borehole, and a pipeline run off it to bypass Perch Pond and feed the Ornamental Water. An additional problem is that the pump in the borehole supplying Heronry Pond has failed completely and needs to be replaced. In my view it should be done as a matter of urgency, and the project should also be used as an opportunity to re-flood The Dell, which is currently drying out fast.

Not all our challenges are negative, though. At the start of another year we can look forward to another year of exciting nature-watching, flushed with the success of 2016's Wanstead 1000 project (for a report, see page xx). This resulted in more than 1500 species being found locally, many for the first time. And I, for one, can't wait for the days to start getting longer so I can do it all over again. I hope you can join me.

Tim Harris  
Chair of the Wren Group



## no trees were harmed .....

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

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

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



# notes on the old sewage works site

In recent years the Wren Conservation Group has taken an increasing interest in 'the old sewage works' site, or – as it is known by the City of London Corporation – the Exchange Lands.

Local naturalist Paul Ferris shares his views on this very special landscape



General view of track looking north - pic by Paul Ferris



In modern birders' parlance, and increasingly, it seems, drifting into modern naturalists' talk, the old sewage works has been very much "my patch". I became interested in it perhaps particularly when it was still an active sewage (or sewerage) works – out of bounds to most, of course. However another local naturalist at the time – Colin Plant – had access permission to enable bird ringing there, and sometimes I would accompany him, to assist but also to have a general look around.

I arranged my own permit to visit, and began to gain some idea of the incredible amount of wildlife that the site harboured. My interests then were beginning to include plants, as well as birds.

The Redbridge (Southern) Sewage Works, as it was properly called, ceased operations in December 1977 and lay increasingly derelict for many years. During those years I continued to visit, but few others did – it was still private land and fenced off. It was during those years that the A406 Redbridge to Barking Relief Road was built, which had a severe impact on Wanstead Park, particularly adjacent to part of its area east of the Roding called Whiskers Island. As well, the Park was forever afterwards suffering from noise pollution. Other roadworks, particularly those that affected George Green in Wanstead, meant that Epping Forest actually lost some land, so negotiations began to see if the old sewage works could be used in compensation. I was involved to some extent in these negotiations as I had amassed both data and knowledge about the wildlife value of the site. Some of that data included a survey of the plant life, the results of which were published in the 1996/97 issue of *The Essex Naturalist* as "The Flora of the old Redbridge (Southern) Sewage Works".

A particular aspect of my involvement was with the

type of material that would be used to cap the site to make it suitable for visitors, and indeed the grasses that would be sown to give it a start. This involved the use of a sandy gravel mix for the soil, and six species of the finer grasses, such as may be found locally such as on Wanstead Flats and on the Plain in nearby Wanstead Park. This was to try to create a habitat more in keeping with the 'natural' surrounds, and without – if possible – too much growth of more luxuriant species that could quickly take over.



Wilderness area in 1994 - Pic by Paul Ferris

In 1994 the site – with the exception of a central section that confusingly remained the property of Thames Water Authority, but under the control of the Department of Transport and managed by the London Borough of Redbridge – became part of Epping Forest. The attempt at creating a preferable environment has, in places, been a success. Obviously the nutrients created by sewage being processed on the site has meant that in some places, and increasingly nowadays, the vegetation is all-too lush, but there are areas within the whole

where the habitat that I had hoped for is still present. They tend to be those areas where the finer plants are to be found – including orchids – and have proved wonderful habitats for smaller creatures such as the insects and spiders.

The springs and summers after the areas had been cleared, topped and seeded were glorious. For a few years the colours of the flowers were breathtaking. There were the reds of multitudes of poppies, yellows of a variety of brassicas and the whites of melilots, ox-eye daisy and others. That display is all gone now, of course, but in those barer areas – on a much smaller scale – there are still yellows and whites and reds and blues of a whole host of plant species. Some of these really need searching out, and can easily go unnoticed.



Whitlow Grass - Pic by Paul Ferris

An example of this may be the tiny Whitlow Grass *Erophila verna*, which grows at the edge of the few gravelly paths left over from the sewage works era. Even those paths, which I asked should remain, have their own distinctive flora and associated animal inhabitants. Unfortunately, as time goes by, they are beginning to be lost in resurfacing and vegetative growth. The larger hard-surface materials in the area – such as the kerbstones that lined the access roads have now all been taken away, too. These – and the concrete retaining walls of the settling tanks – were wonderful for lichens and mosses. It is often forgotten when we develop something as a park or a forest, that man-made materials can provide habitats for organisms that would otherwise not easily survive in this general area due to local geology. A great example of that are gravestones as – for example – in the adjacent City of London Cemetery.



Removing kerb stones - Pic by Paul Ferris

The site has changed enormously from when it was a sewage works and even since it first was designated part of Epping Forest. Some of the plants that were special to the area are now gone – an example of this would be Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, which used to grow a short way in from the access gate by the stables. In



Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) - Pic by Paul Ferris

spite of attempts by myself and Wren Group member Pete Saunders, we just could not keep up with the growth of brambles and it was swamped. Similarly, in more recent times, a colony of Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* which grew near there got lost in the too-luxuriant grass. At present, even that grass is being lost to bramble. Luckily, orchids can be found from time to time elsewhere on the site, where the vegetation is sparser, and this has included examples of Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.

That's why I am pleased that the Wren Group is now taking an interest in the area, and increasingly doing maintenance work there, although that needs to be done

sympathetically and with due regard to the variety of perhaps not-so-obvious things that live there.

A major change late last year took place in that portion of the whole original site which never did become part of Epping Forest. This was the central portion, where a few years ago Thames Water constructed a plant with a couple of rather intrusive buildings. They were actually on a part of the site which had been particularly successful for not being over-vegetated. Now, just across the footpath/cycle track that runs between Empress Avenue and Wanstead Park Road, paddocks have been built.



The Paddocks - Pic by Paul Ferris

These weren't on part of the site that was particularly sensitive, and I am pleased to say that I was consulted prior to them being established. I have mixed feelings about this development, however, as although the area wasn't the most important, it was still a valuable wildlife resource. I was disappointed that the notices that were put up a by the stable gates informing people of the intentions somewhat swayed the issue in favour of horses rather than vegetation. They stated that the area was "now fast being over-run with brambles and thistles", which was not at all true. There were few brambles, and those mainly along the western boundary where there is a hedge, and any thistles were mainly in that area too – and much favoured by birds such as Goldfinches and



Linnets. In fact, much of the area was simply grass-species – not particularly those finer ones that I alluded to earlier, but nevertheless, grass, and it is true to say that the area would – without management have become more and more rank.

At the south end – which I had asked to not be enclosed – however, were some of the lovely and delicate and easily-missed Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* plants. The fencing went further south than I would have liked when I was involved in discussion, so these will now be gone, but at least the pedestrian access to the area to the east known as the Wilderness has been maintained. I suspect that the presence of horses will encourage some species that might not be common here as yet (for good or ill), but to my mind at the expense of some others, and – to some extent – human access, too.



Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) - Pic by Paul Ferris

As with so many parts of Wanstead Park, rapid growth – particularly of bramble – has resulted in some long-used tracks and pathways becoming almost lost, or at least painfully just still passable. People are part of the environment too, and it was pleasing to see on a recent visit to the Wilderness that an attempt at opening up such a route had been made. I have felt that it might also be nice to see a return to those glorious years of flowers

in that part of the old sewage works, before the bramble gives way to trees and its aspect is changed completely. That may be controversial, for this would probably involve a complete removal of the existing – increasingly rank – vegetation, and a scrape of the top-soil.



Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) - Pic by Paul Ferris

As a finale, you may be interested to know that I have on my database records of some 250 species of plants in the “old sewage works site”, and there is an increasing number of insect and spider records too, I am sure.



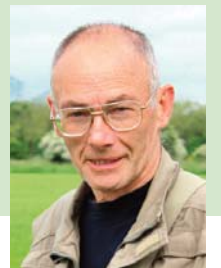
Above - picture taken in 1994 with myself and Ted Godden looking over a gate southwards across the northerly bit of the Wilderness area, and below from same position in 2007



A more detailed history of the site, and of its plants and other wildlife, is available on the Wanstead Wildlife website at:

[www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk/index.php/sewage-works-site](http://www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk/index.php/sewage-works-site)

Article and Pics by Paul Ferris



# angel wing in mute swans

by Tricia Moxey



On 18<sup>th</sup> November, on a visit to Higham Park Lake, I noticed that three of the cygnets raised by the pair of resident Mute Swans had developed Angel Wing. This is a bone deformity caused when the young birds receive an inadequate diet at a crucial time when their wings are developing. These three cygnets looked much plumper than their three unaffected siblings, but the behaviour of whole family indicated that they were used to receiving food from passers-by.

Angel Wing or Slipped Wing is a disease that primarily affects waterfowl, including swans, geese, and occasionally ducks. Normally, young birds feed on the correct diet which provides the right balance of nutrients for the proper development of bones and feathers. If young waterfowl have an unhealthy diet such as bread, which is high in calories, this can cause the wrist joint in the developing wings to be permanently deformed with the left wing more likely to be affected. The flight feathers protrude from the wings at odd angles and the birds are unable to fly.

Sadly, maturing cygnets with this deformity are very vulnerable as they are unable to fly and are more likely to be attacked by dogs or foxes. These three birds have disappeared from the lake and it is likely that this is what happened to these three cygnets.

As it is likely that diet was the primary cause of their deformity, feeding them with the appropriate food is important. Packets of quality duck food are sold at the visitor centres throughout the Forest and are also available from many pet suppliers and this will give them the right balance of nutrients all the year round too. Please do not feed them bread as this does not provide the right mix of foods to ensure healthy growth.

*Deformed Cygnet - photo by Diane Rhodes*



# winter bird report

*Report and pics by Nick Croft*





# Remember September?

No prizes for guessing what the bird of the month was? Our first, and London’s 30<sup>th</sup>, Ortolan Bunting



Ortolan Bunting - Picture by Bob Vaughan

I think we got to 93 species for the month, but I might be wrong. Otherwise, by our exacting standards it was a bit of slump. The only birds to buck the trend of down, were Pied Flycatcher and Stonechat.

	Sept 16	Aug 16	Sept 15	Aug 15	Sept 14	Aug 14	Sept 13	Aug 13
Whinchat:	62	19	79	79	60	22	80	23
Common Redstart:	23	4	34	52	7	22	7	6
Northern Wheatear:	22	10	17	24	15	25	9	14
Spotted Flycatcher:	54	28	94	60	30	49	33	24
Pied Flycatcher:	13	2	5	11	1	2	5	7
Yellow Wagtail:	40	49	55	56	77	37	33	33
Tree Pipit:	6	2	8	29	8	16	11	4
Stonechat:	13		5	18				1

The above table refers to the number of records rather than days and only refers to Wanstead flats and Wanstead Park

No Wryneck, Wood Warbler, Nightingale etc., helping the bunting to its unchallenged position. Having said that, judging by the London Bird Club’s report for the month, we appear to have done much better than other patches.

## Passerine (and near-passerine) passage

*“Wanstead Flats emerged as a prime hotspot: for example, on 11th Sep, Flats birders reported two Tree Pipits, 20+ Meadow Pipit, a Yellow Wagtail, six Redstarts, six Whinchats, a Stonechat, five Wheatears and five Spotted Flycatchers; and on other September days the site hosted up to three Pied Flycatchers.”*



Chiffchaff numbers seemed down on previous highs for the month  
Picture by Nick Croft

Lower numbers of Chiffchaff and other warblers suggest that drought-like conditions may have exacerbated things and it appears that most of the summer warblers (Willow, Common and Lesser

Whitethroat) bunked off by the 23rd - and the last flycatcher by the 26th. And we certainly missed out on the hirundine hurricane of last year.



Spotted Flycatcher - Picture by Nick Croft

## Meanwhile ...

The Great Crested Grebes had more success with raising their second brood on Heronry with four young, while the Little Grebes made do with singles for the most part, and by the end of the month these young were to be found on the river and even on the Ornamentals. The first returning Water Rail was back on the Roding by the 9th and with water levels everywhere else on the low side, this is where they (two birds noted) have stuck.

A Common Sandpiper took a liking to Jubilee for almost a week and could suggest all is not lost with this maligned pond. The new planting hasn’t been eaten yet and could mean an improvement all round next year – complementing the jaunty coloured rubbish and mouldering bread!

One story of the month was that of the disappearance of our summer visitors, the other the return of our winter staples: finches, gulls and ducks. October is the month for viz-mig, the be-there-or-you'll-miss-it-birding. I forecast highs and lows easing our way gently to the Empty Quarter of early winter.

## Octoberfest

October has to be one of my favourite months. With all our normal species accounted for, any new additions are going to be quality and October 2016 was no exception. The only issue I have with October is that I usually miss a good chunk of it by being in Shetland, thus opening myself up to some major grippage and this year was no exception – even when I got back the lads managed it too!



Great Grey Shrike - Picture by Tony Brown

Bird of the month, or decade for that matter, Tony's Great Grey Shrike. A bird, surely, at the top of every patch-workers wish-list. I just wish it had been where it should have been and not the Flats,

not on a football weekend (the Old Sewage Works has a field set aside for these birds, optimistically called the Shrike Field, if only by me!) and not on the first day I could manage to sit down without pain to catch up on some of this tiresome dribble.



Yellow-browed Warbler - Picture by James Heal

The shrike overshadowed what would normally have been in the running for bird of the year – Stu's flyover Serin, accompanying a small group of Goldfinches over Leyton.

It's been another record year for Yellow-browed Warblers in the Northern Isles this autumn and it was only natural that more would make it down south before they all evaporated. I got close to 100 individuals this year on Shetland, but have still failed to get any outside Norfolk or Scilly down south. There could be still a little sprite with my name on it in London, sometime!

- Yellow-browed Warbler: three records for the month, the first at Snaresbrook on 1st, which may or may not have been the same

bird seen at the rear of Snaresbrook Courthouse on 8th, and the third in Motorcycle Copse (in the SSSI) on the same date

- White-fronted Goose: a flock of 15 over the Flats - and the first since 2011 and my uber flock of 100 on a wintry day in December of that year. Missing them was harder than missing the YBW
- Woodlark: two calling birds this year for what, dare I say it, is an annual passage bird over the patch
- Hawfinch: a small invasion into London, with birds seen in Regents Park and Richmond, plus Stu had one the same morning as my bird flew along Long Wood – our first for a couple of years
- Jack Snipe: Tony flushes the first for two years from the shore of the Alex. Low water levels reveal a beach between the lake and the weedy margins that looks good for more of these visitors.



White-fronted Geese - Picture by James Heal





Firecrest - Picture by Nick Croft

A few lingering Ring Ouzels, a flurry of Stonechats throughout the month, the last of the summer visitors departing and the arrival of wintering thrushes early in the month, October gives you a bit of everything. In particular this month record numbers of Chaffinches and Skylarks passed through on 21-22nd (260 and 520+ for the former and two counts of 60 for the latter) in addition to a sprinkling of Bramblings and 32 Lesser Redpolls on 21st. A count of six Firecrests was a record for Bush Wood with three still there towards the end of the month.

The first autumn Short-eared Owl was a patch tick for James when I finally got him on to it in the Old Sewage Works, and we may have heard a Little Owl towards the end of the month: Mr Worsfold, who had been recently listening to them at Totteridge, was confident of what we heard, so we will wait on events. Meanwhile, in something of a waderfest, 50 Lapwing flopped through during the latter part of the month, an excellent total and more than in the last few years combined.

## November: the empty quarter is upon us

It's usually downhill from October onwards, with only the Wanstead Birders drinks and January 1st to look forward to. Some heavy rain midway through the month meant Angel was beginning to hold water again and the lake edge on Shoulder of Mutton crept behind the reeds, which is good for Water Rail. It was a good month for these quirky little birds, with a brace holding out on the Roding, despite rising water levels, another seen on the first, small, island in the Ornamentals, while another flapped across the west end of Heronry (this could be the bird seen on the Shoulder of Mutton as the month closed). Four birds on one day is pretty good for a site like this, but I suppose there could be more lurking out there.



Water Rail - Picture by Nick Croft

Regardless of the deluges this month, water levels were still below what they should have been,

though we weren't complaining – they helped the growth of our Wigeon flocks which, with Teal, had records broken (62 and 37 respectively). The freezing conditions at the end of the month saw most of these birds move on, though given more benign weather there was a hope they might return. It appeared that Gadwall numbers might break previous records, but there is an issue with any of our counts as the time taken to get between the lakes means that some lake-hopping may take place. One thing is for certain: they weren't hopping to the Basin – whatever Wanstead Golf Club had done to the lake meant that it was of no interest to virtually anything.



Goldcrest - Picture by Nick Croft

Continuing freezing conditions may mean that the Roding could be inviting to sawbills, which brings me to Mr Messenger. Mike has done the Park since he was a nipper, never the Flats, but once a week he routinely does his circuit and you know if you haven't bumped into him recently that he will grip you off over some bird or other, when he gets



*Treecreeper by Nick Croft*

round to it or remembers it. He says he now is a mobile phone owner, but has no idea how to use it so leaves it at home. No use to us, Mike! On this occasion, and after about 20 minutes, he remembered seeing a Goosander on Heronry the previous week, but couldn't remember exactly when. With help from Irish Mick, they narrowed it down to a day I had done the Park, but apparently too late for Goosander-goodness. Mike also had a Great White Egret coming in low and seemingly looking to land, also on Heronry (this was back in September: I didn't

bother trying to get him to be less vague). So good work Mr M, but please learn how to use the mobile!

Our other new bird for the month was a briefly visiting female Merlin, which appeared over Heronry (mistake) before being chased off patch by a singular minded crow. This is our fourth bird since 2009: three females and one male and not one of them has stuck around. Also in November, my attempts at identifying a raptor flying down the main ride in Bush Wood left me more perplexed than anything. Without a single wingbeat the bird glided above the ride and then stopped dead. I had presumed Common Buzzard, but the tail suggested a slight fork. Its overall appearance was dark and the way it expertly used the wind meant not only did it not flap its wings, but didn't extend its primaries. Surely way too late for Black Kite, I thought, but searching the RBA website I

have found almost yearly records for birds in November and December, including Paul Davies' bird on 20 October 2010.

Moving on: just the one Short-eared Owl at the beginning of the month, no Peregrines (weird) and a handful of Buzzards. More luck with Woodcock (three) and Tony's Jack Snipe became my Jack Snipe, became Sean Kerrigan's Jack Snipe, became a dead Jack Snipe coinciding with its visit to Belgrave Road.

The Stonechat appeared on a couple of occasions and could still be there. Still there too at the end of the year was the Treecreeper in Bush Wood, but the Firecrests were getting harder to pin down.

Report by Nick Croft



## 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.





# spring is on its way

*Article by Tricia Moxey*

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

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

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



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

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



Species such as Gorse seem to flower all year round

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



interactive map and the data collected is helping to analyse the trends and give clues as to which species are adapting well to warmer autumns and shorter winters. For more information about phenology and how to get involved with reporting signs of spring do visit the website: [www.naturescalendar.org.uk](http://www.naturescalendar.org.uk).

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

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



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



The Springy Turf Moss *Rhytadelphus squarrosus*

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

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

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

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

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/activities/2016](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/activities/2016)

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



Article by Tricia Moxey

Two new books which may be of interest.

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

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

# a year in the life of Wanstead

*Article by Tim Harris*

At the start of the year a group of Wren members began a year-long wildlife project that aimed to document as many species of plants and animals in the Wanstead area as possible. Most of our efforts focused on Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats, but sightings anywhere in the Manor Park-Forest Gate-Leytonstone-Wanstead-Snaresbrook area were eligible. Why do it? Three reasons:

- It gives us a new baseline for what we have, so next year and the year after we can see if anything disappears from our area.
- We are able to supply records to national databases, helping to build the national picture of the state of the UK's wildlife.
- It's a lot of fun!



## January

Before dawn on New Year's Day, while many were sleeping off the excesses of a few hours earlier, Wanstead's birdwatchers (well, some of them) were on a quest to see how many species they could find during the day. And what a start they had! Intrepidly working through the mud and puddles of Bush Wood, Bob Vaughan had inadvertently flushed a Woodcock and seen a Firecrest before it was properly light. Not far away on Wanstead Flats, Josh Selfe tweeted that he'd seen an owl fly up from a patch of broom. Sure enough, it soon reappeared, being mobbed by several crows: a Short-eared Owl, a local rarity.



*Firecrest by Nick Croft*

With a start like that, it was unlikely that things could get any better, and much of the day was spent finding those birds that are either resident on our manor or which just drop in for the winter. However, just when the light was beginning to go, and people were thinking of resting aching limbs after a day in the field, Jono Lethbridge and Nick Croft found a

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker by The Basin on Overton Drive. This diminutive woodpecker hadn't been seen in our area at all in 2015. The day's total of 69 bird species was the best ever achieved on New Year's Day. Two days later, Nick had a tantalisingly brief view of what is likely to have been a Great Snipe – an incredibly rare bird in this country – close to Alexandra Lake. Unfortunately, it didn't give him time to photograph it as it flew off east, so we will probably never know for sure.



*With incredibly mild weather through December continuing into January, this was likely to mean a few flowers, but nothing could have prepared us for what we discovered on the bright and sunny morning of 4 January. Picture - Yarrow flower*

Next it was the turn of the botanical team to see what they could find. At the end of 2015 I had forecast in the *Wanstead Village Directory* that "towards the end of February the first wildflowers will begin to bloom". Well, we didn't have to wait that long. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland runs a survey at the start of each year to see how many plants are in flower. With incredibly mild weather through December continuing into January, this was likely to mean a few flowers, but nothing

could have prepared us for what we discovered on the bright and sunny morning of 4 January. Yarrow was flowering in many places, yellow splashes illuminated some of the clumps of Gorse and the pale blue flowers of Green Alkanet were appearing here and there. With some careful searching, scarcer blooms were found, including both Guernsey and Canadian Fleabane near Jubilee Pond, where some flowering Alexanders were attracting a number of very unseasonal hoverflies. Wood Avens was in flower by the garages behind Belgrave Road and two different types of cranesbill were seen under the Green Man roundabout, where there was also some flowering Musk Mallow. A Hornbeam in Bush Wood was carrying a fine display of catkins. All eight members of the botany crew were amazed at the variety of flowering plants on show: no less than 37 species in total.



*Fungi was also well represented with a nice array of colours including the spectacular Yellow Brain Fungus*

One can expect to find fungi throughout the year, but in early January they are usually pretty thin on the ground. Not this year, though. If plants and birds

were leading the way in terms of diversity, the fungi representation was not too shabby, with a nice array of colours, including the spectacular Yellow Brain fungus. By the end of January we had recorded more than 250 species.

## February

Gulielma Lister, niece of Lord Lister, famous as the pioneer of vaccination, made a detailed study of the plantlife of our area 75 years ago. Her report was published in the *Essex Naturalist* (Vol 27) in 1941 as 'The Flora of Wanstead Park District'. One of the places she surveyed was the lovely, peaceful graveyard of St Mary's church on Overton Drive. Some 40 years later the Wren Group's very own Paul Ferris returned to repeat the exercise, finding some plants that hadn't been around in Gulielma's day. And on 7 February, a dozen of us returned to see how things have changed. We were pleasantly surprised.



*Snowdrops showing their flower in February - Pic by Tony Morrison*

Given that it was still officially winter, the array of plants in flower was impressive, a continuing theme this year it seems. On show were Snowdrops, Spring Snowflakes, Dove's-foot Cranesbill, a colour pantone of crocuses, Cyclamen, both White and Red Dead-nettles, Herb-Robert, Creeping Buttercup and more. In two hours or so we discovered (well, they were never lost!) more than 80 different types of plants, including mosses and liverworts. There was also a nice variety of lichens growing on dead and living wood and gravestones.



*The Caspian Gull seen before Christmas had returned to Wanstead Flats - Pic by Nick Croft*

February was not all about plants, though. It was always going to be hard to match up to the expectations of January's record-breaking month for birds, but Anne-Marie found a Treecreeper by Hollow Pond – this species is unaccountably scarce in the extreme south of the Forest. And Nick had a moment of serendipity when he realised that the Caspian Gull seen before Christmas had returned to Wanstead Flats.

Flying insects need a bit of warmth and sunshine to

emerge from cocoons or hibernation spots, and Rose Stephens found both Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies freshly emerged from hibernation in Manor Park Cemetery, and a female Dotted Border moth was resting on a gravestone. The cemetery was to feature strongly later in the spring. The moth-trap in my Belgrave Road garden attracted the area's first Spring Usher and my earliest-ever Common Quakers. At the end of the month our total was just shy of 400 species.

## March

Early March is a difficult time to make new discoveries. Most of the readily identifiable plants – trees and shrubs, and those plants that flower early – had already been seen and noted, and spring's emergent beauties were yet to appear. An area of apparently dull grassland can transform into a kaleidoscope of different coloured flowers overnight in April. But March was a little early.

Pretty much all the resident birds had been found, unsurprisingly give the very strong team of birders who live locally. In mid-March, Wanstead Park's first spring Lesser Spotted Woodpecker for several years was heard singing at the north end of the Ornamental Water. With the exception of a few Wheatears and Sand Martins, however, the spring's migrant birds didn't appear until towards the end of the month. Although we can predict more or less accurately the week that our first Willow Warbler, Swallow and Whinchat will turn up, the exact date of their respective arrivals is determined by weather conditions here and further south.

In the main, the 'miscellaneous others' – the battalions of butterflies, moths, dragonflies, bugs, beetles, bees and flies – had yet to enter the fray.



Of course, a few warm, sunny days are enough to tempt these out of their hiding places or out of their cocoons. And that is what happened briefly in mid-March, as Rose commented: "The solitary bees are coming out now, as well as a trickle of hoverflies. Male *Andrena* bees emerge first, but they are very hard to identify." A few more moths began to appear in light-traps around our area, including the appropriately named March Moth.



March Moth - Pic by Tim Harris

Vigilance when gardening is important at this time of year. Several people reported frogspawn in their gardens. While I was cleaning out the sludge in the bottom of a small garden pond, I found a pair of Smooth Newts, and when I took the lawnmower on its first outing of spring I found another very sleepy newt in the grass. By the end of the month, 466 species had been noted, and invertebrates overtook birds for the first time, taking a lead they would never relinquish.

## April

Bees made a big impact in early April. And that's a very good thing. Most people are amazed to discover that the UK has over 270 species of bees, and that bumblebees and the Honey Bee account for only about one-tenth of that figure.

Wren member and self-taught naturalist Rose Stephens has spent a lot of time looking at and photographing this fascinating, and very useful, group of insects. Already, by April, she had identified 23 different bee species in our area, including eight mining bees. One of these was the nationally scarce Red-girdled Mining Bee, found close to Capel Road. Mining bees nest in the ground or even in soft mortar. A good place to look for them is on Wanstead Flats. Without exception they are very beautiful but can be extremely tricky to identify. A Patchwork Leaf-cutter Bee that Rose photographed on Wanstead Flats in early April doesn't usually fly until June.



Tawny Mining Bee *Andrena fulva* Wanstead Flats - Pic by Rose Stephens

Those other great pollinators, the hoverflies, were also out in increased numbers in April, and there were a few butterflies: Comma was probably the most numerous, with a few Small Tortoiseshells, a Small White or two, a handful of Peacocks, and the first Speckled Wood of the year on 10<sup>th</sup>.



Small Tortoiseshell - Pic by Kathy Hartnett

Our resident birds went into territorial overdrive, with males belting out song from before dawn in some cases. Skylarks and Greenfinches performed song flights. Love was in the air. And this was prime time for migrant birds. Those that breed with us turned up at their regular patches of woodland, bramble or broom, while those bound for unknowable places further north stopped over for a while before continuing their journeys. Probably the most exciting of those birds still in transit was an Osprey seen by one lucky observer at the start of April. Much to my disappointment it did not hang around. In complete contrast, Common Redstarts were present on the 'patch' for much of early April. They are lovely birds, which in spring are en route from sub-Saharan Africa to oak woodlands in the





*Skylark on Alexandra field - Wanstead Flats - Pic by Tony Morrison*

north of England and Scotland. We usually notice one or two in April but we had an extraordinary visitation on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April with three in Wanstead Park, at least half a dozen on Wanstead Flats and even one – very briefly – in my back garden on the Lakehouse estate.

And just a word about April's wild flowers: the native bluebells in Chalet Wood (Wanstead Park) were the star attraction. Work done by Wren Group volunteers to clear scrub in this area in winter really paid off because the display was great in mid-April. And just a short walk away, in Warren Wood, there was a lovely display of Wood Anemones. The grand total pushed past 500 species during April.

## May

A walk along the track leading through Bush Wood late in the month, just after a shower, had made the green of the vegetation even more vivid than usual. The various tones of emerald were lifted by splashes of yellow Greater Celandine, pink Herb-Robert and blue Green Alkanet. Nearby, there was

an impressive show of Garlic Mustard – not the most popular plant with gardeners, but looking wonderful anyway. Another stroll in the Old Sewage Works produced loads of surprises. In several places, patches of deep blue Germander Speedwell infiltrated the grasses, while a field of Cow Parsley had shot up a metre in a fortnight.



*Bluebells in Chalet Wood (Wanstead Park) - Pic by Tony Morrison*

After the cold winds of April, it was a relief to have some warm sunshine early in the month. Green shoots appeared overnight, providing food for insect larvae, which in turn began to metamorphose into butterflies, moths and damselflies. Plants came into flower, providing food for bees and hoverflies, our great pollinators. And the last of our African migrant birds appeared. The Aldersbrook House Martin colony was occupied once more, while squadrons of Swifts – occasionally with an attendant Hobby – passed overhead. A single Cuckoo did its thing in Wanstead Park and the incessant chattering of Reed Warblers was heard once more by the Shoulder of Mutton pond. Intriguingly, our first Cetti's Warbler took up territory by the River Roding, occasionally issuing a staccato burst of song.

Hibernators emerged in April. Most of the area's Hedgehog sightings were in the City of London Cemetery and – nearby – good numbers of Grass Snakes were found in the Old Sewage Works. If the number of young snakes was anything to go by – seven were seen on a single day in mid-May – they must have had a good breeding season in 2015. There were also at least six adults in the same area. The local mice and voles must have taken a bit of a hit!



*May saw Cow Parsley shoot up a metre in a fortnight - Pic by Tony Morrison*

May proved to be a good month for a number of butterfly species. After a late emergence, reasonable numbers of Speckled Woods were seen in areas with trees, and my impression was that Orange-tips were more common than usual. The first Small Coppers, with their brilliant orange and dark brown wings, emerged in mid-May, but the real stars of the show were the Green Hairstreaks. Apparently unknown in the area until 2013, these can now be seen around brambles and hawthorns, gorse and broom in virtually any area of Wanstead Flats in May and early June. One was even watched flying across Heronry Lake, in Wanstead



Park. Their nocturnal cousins, the moths, did not fare well during the cold nights of April, but many species emerged during May, including a first record for our area: a Seraphim attracted to Tom's light-trap on Overton Drive. As of mid-May, no dragonflies had been reported, but dainty Banded Demoiselles were on the wing around the River Roding. May's finds brought the total score to more than 800, including 301 plants, 289 invertebrates (catching up fast!) and 114 birds.



*Tufted Vetch - Pic by Wiki*

## June

With June's regular – most would say, too regular – downpours, the explosion of plant and insect life in our area was even more impressive than usual. When a group of us visited the meadow north of Bush Road in mid-June, we didn't know what we'd find but were pretty confident there would be surprises. The first of these was just how lovely this little area of grassland looked, the 50 shades of green enlivened by a pinkish wash of Sheep's Sorrel in places. Closer examination revealed



*Green Hairstreak Wanstead Flats*

patches of the tiny white flowers of Heath Bedstraw, purple cascades of Tufted Vetch (which is becoming more common locally), the occasional bright magenta of Grass Vetchling and bright yellow Beaked Hawk's-beard.

Close to the underpass under the Green Man roundabout – an unprepossessing patch of land if ever there was one – was a bigger surprise. Half hidden in the long grass were ten absolutely pristine, beautiful Bee Orchids. These had been found by Paul Ferris about three years ago but nobody had reported seeing them since. Who would have thought that the top end of Leytonstone High Road would provide suitable conditions for orchids to grow? A few days later I stumbled across a few more of these plants on the other side of Wanstead Park, in the Old Sewage Works. Nearby, one of our scarcest local butterflies – a Brown Argus – was nectaring. It was not a fantastic month for butterflies, however, because so many days were dull and wet. Common Blues were seen in the Old Sewage Works and on Wanstead Flats, and during the third week of June both Large and Small Skippers emerged. While many of the spring

species had disappeared from the scene by the end of the month, we anticipated the appearance of Essex Skipper, Purple Hairstreak, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, along with second generations of some of our early species.

There were too many rainy nights for it to be a classic spring for moths, but a trapping session in the City of London Cemetery did produce a delightful moth called the Green Silver-lines. Cemetery staff noted an impressive number of Hedgehogs; this site really is the centre of our local 'hog population.



*Most hedgehog sightings were in City of London Cemetery*

While we are all familiar with dragonflies' dashing flight, the pond-dipping activities of Derek and Cathy McEwan at the Wren Group's second bio-blitz at the end of June revealed something of how these intriguing insects spend most of their life: underwater. They spend as long as five years in a larval form in the water, hunting worms, leeches, tadpoles and even small fish, before emerging to

make their amazing metamorphosis from aquatic to aerial hunters.

Aided and abetted by several dozen children (and a few grown-ups), Derek and Cathy's exploits in the Wanstead Park's Shoulder of Mutton Pond produced the larvae of several Black-tailed Skimmers, an Emperor and a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly. Nearby, an adult skimmer was found eating a Common Blue Damselfly. Other finds from the pond including 19 screech beetles, much to the delight of the assembled children, who had no idea that water beetles could be so noisy. There were also water scorpions, diving beetles, water stick-insects, pond skaters, water-boatmen and freshwater leeches.



*Black-tailed Skimmer*

## July

July and August are the peak months for dragonflies in our area. We don't see anything like the numbers that we do of their smaller and daintier damselfly cousins, but a walk around any of the

lakes in Wanstead Park or Hollow Pond on a warm, sunny day should be guaranteed to produce sightings. The ones to look out for are Black-tailed Skimmer, which often basks on the ground, Emperor, which is the biggest of the lot, Common Darter, Brown Hawker and Migrant Hawker. All bar the last of those were seen locally by early July.

With spring migration long since passed and autumn migration not quite started, avian activity was confined to breeding. Birds were quieter and less conspicuous as they sat on eggs and fed hungry chicks. Plenty of newly fledged starlings, tits and finches could be seen, but no 'new' birds were added to our list.

In contrast, another wave of wildflowers came into bloom, including Dark Mullein, Rosebay Willowherb, Wild Marjoram, Fat Hen, Common Toadflax and Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil. Several Pyramidal Orchids spiked in the Old Sewage Works, not far from where the Bee Orchids were draining of colour. And Paul Ferris found a third species of orchid – Common Spotted – in the City of London Cemetery. Always one for a new challenge, James Heal scoured Wanstead Flats in search of different grasses. He found about 30 different types, but the last I heard he was still trying to identify them all! On 30 July, a Treecreeper popped up in Bush Wood. Since this species doesn't breed in Wanstead Park, the bird had probably wandered into our area from somewhere further north in Epping Forest.

## August

Midsummer is a quiet time for birds. Literally, because with the frenzy of the breeding season over, they don't need to advertise and defend

territories in the way they do in April and May. It's still quiet in August, but also exciting – because migration is underway once more. Swifts left en masse at the end of July and in the first week of August, and early returning migrants included a Spotted Flycatcher and a Wheatear on Wanstead Flats, several Common Sandpipers in Wanstead Park and a couple of Yellow Wagtails.



*Small copper butterfly - Pic by Tony Morrison*

Good news also concerned our Great Crested Grebes which, having fledged one youngster, set out to produce another brood on Heronry Lake. A young Peregrine Falcon, the progeny of our local breeders, could sometimes be seen harassing crows over Wanstead Flats. And the Reed Warblers at the Shoulder of Mutton pond also bred successfully.

The summer of 2016 certainly won't be remembered as a classic for butterflies but there were a few Purple Hairstreaks, Holly Blues and Small Coppers on sunny days. It's also nice to know that one of our recent colonists, the Ringlet,





Spotted Flycatcher - Picture by Nick Croft

continues to go from strength to strength, while arguably our rarest local breeder, the Brown Argus, is still just about hanging on. Just one was seen in the Old Sewage Works during the spring, but Bob Vaughan found and photographed one from a second brood on Wanstead Flats in August. Another addition to the year's butterfly list was a migrant Clouded Yellow.

Meanwhile, Rose Stephens continued to find 'new' species of bees and hoverflies, with Manor Park Cemetery proving to be a very happy hunting ground. Just to give a flavour of the wealth of insect diversity in our area, astonishing totals of 110 kinds of bees and wasps, and 103 hoverflies and other flies had been recorded in our area by August, mostly down to Rose's efforts.

## September

Late August and early September are usually one of the two most interesting periods for birds locally.

This is because migrants are on the move, either flying over or stopping for a day or so in the rich habitats of Wanstead Flats and, to a lesser extent, Wanstead park. A combination of plentiful berries and insects to eat and thick cover to provide protection from predators means we can always expect to see Whinchats, Spotted Flycatchers, Wheatears, Redstarts and assorted warblers in the hawthorns, brambles and broom of the Flats. Few of these birds breed locally; they are travellers en route from northern England and Scandinavia to their winter domicile in Africa.



Manor Park Cemetery proving to be very popular with bees - Pic by Rose Stephens

Occasionally, on the move with them is something much, much rarer. And so it was on 9 September when Nick Croft found a bird he thought was a Corn Bunting. It was only later, when fellow Wren Group member Bob Vaughan managed to get some photos, that the bird's true identity was revealed: London's 30<sup>th</sup>-ever Ortolan Bunting, which breeds on the Continent but not in the UK. Although plenty of people searched for this sparrow-sized bird the following morning, it had apparently flown off overnight.

On the same day, a friend of Tom Casey brought him a moth that had flown in through his bathroom window the previous evening. Tom gave me a call and I was able to help confirm its identity as an Alchymist, another visitor from the Continent and the first ever seen in London. Unfortunately, because the moth was caught – and later released – in Stoke Newington, it couldn't be added to our total, but was great to see nonetheless.

Wanstead Park was the place to see dragonflies on the hot, sunny days of the second week of September. Both Ruddy and Common Darters patrolled Heronry Lake and the Shoulder of Mutton pond. Other highlights included the beetle *Enedreytes hiliaris*, which Tony Allen found on Wanstead Flats on 11 September. The first UK record of this rather nondescript creature was discovered on the Flats by Tristan Bantock as recently as 2014. Meanwhile, Rose's regular searches in Manor Park Cemetery produced another reward with an Ivy Bee, the latest solitary bee to emerge in the year. The dramatic spread across southern England of this pollinator since it was first discovered in 2001 is one more indicator of global warming. At the end of the month our total had surpassed 1,400. People started talking about 1,500...

## October

The potential for new additions to the list declined as the days shortened and temperatures fell. New insect species were few and far between, and most of the wild flowers had already been noted. However, there was another avian surprise: a Yellow-browed Warbler found in the SSSI sector of Wanstead Flats on 8 October by James Heal and Jono Lethbridge. This tiny leaf warbler breeds no

nearer to the UK than the Urals of Russia and doubtless had been brought in on the persistent easterlies of the first week of the month. Incredibly, it was the second in a week in our area, the other being near Snaresbrook Crown Court. That same morning, three migrant Ring Ouzels got up out of Long Wood and flew in a circle before dropping back down again, and a skein of 15 White-fronted Geese honked high in the sky. Then at the very end of the month a Great Grey Shrike was a very brief visitor to Wanstead Flats, departing before any bar three local birders had managed to clap eyes on it. This bird, a migrant from northern Europe, is by now probably hunting on some wind-blasted heath in Surrey or Hampshire – the initial appeal of the Flats not being enough to persuade it to stay.



Ring Ouzel - Pic by Nick Croft

## November

Led by the frighteningly knowledgeable Ken Adams and his able assistants Enid Barrie and Sally Gadsdon, a search of Gilbert's Slade on 7 November produced some interesting – not to

mention beautiful – mosses and grasses, though a near absence of fungi. This visit came after a pretty dry spell, but rain in the second week of the month prompted fungi to fruit and helped create a memorable day in the City of London Cemetery a week later. The lawns had Yellow and Orange Fairy Clubs, Sulphur Tufts, Chantarelles and Pleated Inkcaps, while The Birches nature reserve, which sadly hardly anyone ever visits, had another impressive array of fungi, including Clouded Agarics, Stump Puffballs, Oyster Mushrooms, Chicken of the Woods and Dead Man's Fingers. The names are almost as impressive as the fungi themselves! The often tricky identification of some fungi from this outing is still a work in progress...

When I got home from work on the evening of 15<sup>th</sup> there was a message from a neighbour, Julie Donovan, who had found what she thought was a Jack Snipe dead on her back lawn that afternoon. I popped over to take a look at the unfortunate bird, and sure enough it was a 'half snipe', with no obvious signs of injury other than a slightly bent tail. This cryptically coloured winter denizen of damp meadows and grazing marshes in the UK breeds on the tundra of far-northern Europe. It migrates to us in the autumn because the tundra freezes hard, preventing it from probing the soil in its quest for invertebrate food. How poignant that it should cover all that distance to get here, only to perish – probably having struck a window, something it would be unlikely to encounter in arctic Sweden or Russia.

## December

There was not too much more to find in December, but Parrot Waxcap fungi in the Old Sewage Works,

and an impressive list of slug and snail species from Louis, helped push us over the line, so the final total was 1,508 species for the year. But seriously, five species of fish? We need to get an angler on board next year. And as for only three different types of grasshoppers, there's something seriously awry there. Clearly, we need to do better this year!

This is how the league table stands.

- Higher plants: 413
- Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies): 296
- Birds: 133
- Hymenoptera (bees and wasps): 116
- Dipters (hoverflies and flies): 105
- Coleoptera (beetles): 95
- Hemiptera (true bugs): 74
- Fungi: 63
- Arachnids (spiders, mites and ticks): 62
- Mosses and liverworts: 47
- Gastropods (snails and slugs): 33
- Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies): 15
- Mammals: 15
- Fish: 5
- Amphibians: 3
- Reptiles: 3
- Miscellaneous: 28

TOTAL: 1506

Article by Tim Harris





# 57 varieties (plus one)

*Article and pics by Peter Aylmer*

The Wren Group continues on its 'Lucky Dip Walks' - a search to find out more about some of the other great wildlife hotspots around London, as walk leader and Wren committee member Peter Aylmer describes.





The final Lucky Dip walks saw the Wren group traverse a wide range of habitats before a memorable day on Rainham Marshes, as walk leader Peter Aylmer describes. But don't worry, another series of London walks starts in February!

I'd always aimed that the Lucky Dip walk would end with a flourish, and there was a natural choice to finish with: Rainham Marshes, something of a showpiece for restoration, easy of access from our part of the world, and chock-full of interest for even the most casual birder.



*RSPB visitor centre, Rainham Marshes*

On a bit of a chilly day a few days before Christmas, it didn't disappoint. A dozen Wren members were expertly guided round the best of

the marshes by Howard Vaughan, the RSPB's interpretation guru for this sort of thing, and indeed a good friend of Wren as he spoke to our AGM last year.



*Wren walkers Barbara, Norman and Liz at the cafe, Oxleas Wood*

It was instructive to watch Howard, and our chair Tim Harris, bring all their experience to bear for our instruction, as they teased out little vagaries of wing-shade, flight pattern and call to categorise what to many of us was just another dot on the horizon. Me, I just wanted someone to tell me I'd seen my personal holy grail, a Water Pipit; since, at that moment, there might be 200 in all of the UK, that was no given.

Even by Vaughan / Harris standards, it was a good day. In around four hours the party notched up 58 species. Even before we had reached the visitor centre, flocks of Lapwing were weaving across the river, and it was not long, out on the

reserve proper, before Howard was pointing us over to the Barn Owl boxes, replete with three Barn Owls. A little further round, a Peregrine was scaring the life out of anything else that flew, resting from time to time on one of the tall pylons that parallel the A13 and high-speed rail line.

Soon we were treated to owl displays, of the Short-eared type as well as the Barn, with Marsh Harrier, Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk also upping the raptor count. But with the circuit nearly complete, we split into two, half going with Howard to the Thames foreshore and the incoming tide, half with Tim and me up to Coldharbour Point. Our group gathered an extra mile or two (helped ward off the chill), though I'm not sure we saw anything extra, maybe a small group of Avocets. We also had a great view of the sweep of the Thames from the Point, and a bit of a panorama as we crossed the low hill of the landfill site.



*Wren walkers on Spanker's Hill, Richmond Park*



And of those 58 species, one was Water Pipit, so that was me happy.

The two previous Lucky Dip walks, to Wimbledon Common and the Green Chain woodlands of south-east London, were totally different but no less rewarding. On the Common, we concentrated on the wooded western edge, looking down into one of London's last remaining proper bogs, before briefly popping in to Richmond Park and an ascent of the magnificently named Spanker's Hill. The Green Chain has some top-notch urban woodlands, from Lesnes Abbey Woods all the way to the magnificent Oxleas Woods, with a great view back to Essex from the high point of Shooter's Hill. Indeed, it was surprising to find out just how much up-and-down south-east London actually has.



*Bostall Woods, near Plumstead*



*Wimbledon Common*

The 'Lucky Dip' sequence is ended now, as the driving force for Wren to try out some of the walks in my forthcoming Cicerone guide to London has passed now – the text is safely with the publishers. But there are plenty of great wildlife places still to discover.

Join me on our nature rambles, starting February. Same sort of distances as before – around six miles of easy walking – with the promise of a natural glory of London to be discovered along the way.

Article and pics by Peter Aylmer




In February we're starting a new 'Nature Ramble' series to replace the 'Lucky Dip' walks that ended with the Rainham Marshes visit in December. Each month, walk leader and guidebook author Peter Aylmer will take you to one of London's great natural glories - a nature reserve, woodland, heath, site of special scientific interest or similar. Like the Lucky Dip walks, expect around six miles of easy walking and at least one cafe along the way.

### **Nature Ramble dates**

Wednesday 8 February, Thursday 16 March, Tuesday 18 April.

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. Back about 4.

More information: Peter Aylmer 07884 235784 or [peteraylmer@hotmail.com](mailto:peteraylmer@hotmail.com)



## watching kestrels

i love to watch the kestrel a lovely bird is he  
flying in the wild with his life so free  
hovering overhead very calm and still  
looking out for prey swooping for his kill.

swooping with such speed landing on his prey  
with his mighty talons taking it away  
high up in the sky to his nest above  
just to watch the kestrel is something that i love

by William Worthless



# 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>



*There were quite a few of these little beauties (Chrysolina americana) on the Lavender.*



*A Common Green Shieldbug with its summer coat still on. Later it would go brown to blend in with the trees and plants as they die back. November, Wanstead Flats*

*These are beautiful fungi, Velvet Shank I think.*



*Macro shot of a fly on Wanstead Flats*

*An Ichneumon wasp, maybe Pimpla rufipes. These ones are normally quite large.*



*One of my favourite bugs, Corizus hyaosciami on Canadian Fleabane.*

*The beetle Curtonotus aulicus noshing on something in the teasel*





# 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.



*Ilford Station in the early 20th century - the start of many a country ramble at the time*

## Route 7

*From Ilford Station, Cranbrook Road, The Drive, Wanstead Park, Redbridge Lane, field path to Castle, The Drive. (About 4 miles)*

Follow the same direction as in Route 6 past the Grotto in Wanstead Park and to the end of the Ornamental Lake, where the path turns right and left. Then proceed to the left up the steep incline and out of the gate into a road. Turn to the right towards Wanstead (to the left leads back into the park and to Forest Gate).



*The Ornamental Waters in Wanstead Park.*

Opposite the gate are the grounds of "The Warren" and on the crest of the hill stands St. Mary's - the parish church of Wanstead (see Route 8). On the right is a fine view across the



*St Mary's is considered to be the finest example of a small Georgian church in the Diocese. The first church on the site was built probably about 1200 A.D. and was sited some 70 feet south of the present building. The first Rector known was in 1207 A.D. (see list of Rectors).*

*The present church was built at the instigation of the Rector, Dr Samuel Glasse, very soon after his arrival in the parish (1786). The site was given by Sir James Tylney-Long, who also provided a large share of the cost of the building, some £9,000. The church was designed by the architect Thomas Hardwick and consecrated by the Bishop of London on June 24th, 1790.*

valley of the Roding; Clay bury, Woodford, and Buckhurst Hill. The road ends half-way down Redbridge Lane, Wanstead. A little distance to the right is The Rectory, a large uncomfortable looking house. At the bottom of the hill the road bends sharp to the right and again to the left to Red Bridge over the Roding - the narrow little bridge which connects Ilford and Wanstead parishes, and of which a notice gives warning that it is "unsafe for loads of over two tons." For a long time it has been a bone of contention between Ilford and Wanstead Councils, the Essex County Council, and the occupier of a field on the Ilford side of the bridge. For over 200 years the latter has, in law, been responsible for the upkeep of the bridge, but obviously it would be unfair to enforce the liability now in view of the enormous increase in traffic since the

obligation was first made, and the road having become a county road. The deadlock was caused by the refusal of the County authorities to contribute what the other parties considered a fair share of the cost of widening.



*The 'Red Bridge' over the River Roding around 1919. With the increase in traffic a sign says 'unsafe for loads over 2 tons'.*

The view on each side of the bridge over the river is worth noting. On the Ilford side is a pumping station of the Metropolitan Water Board. There are also two pumping stations belonging to the South Essex Water Co. not very far away - one higher up the river opposite Fern Hall Farm, and the other lower down, close to Ilford Bridge). At the finger post is Wanstead Lane, which leads past Stone Hall Farm to the Castle, and which may be followed in damp weather, but if the field paths are likely to be in fair condition it would be pleasanter to continue up Redbridge Lane a short distance. Woodford Bridge Road is at the corner of the "Red House" (a little way down which on the left is a field path crossing the Roding by a plank bridge, and over several fields near to the Rectory already



mentioned - do not go along this path after much rain). Redbridge Lane ascends all the way to its termination in Beehive Lane, but half-way up on the right is the field path which comes direct from the Castle and The Drive, and is a very pleasant ending to the ramble. (A shorter field path could have been taken opposite the "Red House" to Wanstead Lane, and then by road to the Castle.)

## Route 8

*From Ilford Station, Wanstead Park, Bushwood, Blake Hall Road, Alderman Finnis's, Wanstead Church, Red Bridge, Wanstead Lane, Castle, The Drive. (5 ½ miles).*



*Wanstead Park - the rustic bridge over River Roding at the time of Tasker's walks*



*Wanstead Park - Heronry Pond (Boating Lake) with the Refreshment Chalet, which once stood on the edge of Chalet Wood, in the background.*

Follow the same direction as in Route 6 to Wanstead Park. From the rustic bridge over the Roding keep along the fence on the left, past the large lake known as the Perch Pond or Bathing Lake, past the boating lake which, after being allowed to dry up for several years, was deepened and re-filled by the unemployed in 1907-8. Near the end on the right hand was a large island – mound honeycombed with rabbit burrows, and at the other corner was a similar island-mound with trees, which was the original heronry referred to in Route 6. The latter has long ceased to be an island - the author had many times rowed round it in former days. The fencing just beyond divides the enclosed part from that which is open all night. On the other side is a road which runs from Wanstead Flats through the park past the Wanstead Golf Links and "The Warren" to Redbridge Lane (see Route 7).

Crossing the road and past the Shoulder of Mutton Pond-so called from its shape, and beloved of anglers - follow the path through a pretty copse to

the exit in Blake Hall Road. Before turning to the right to Wanstead Church (to the left leads across the Flats to Forest Gate) it is worth while walking round Bushwood, which stretches immediately in front. This wild bit of forest land is a favourite resort of Leytonstone and Forest Gate people, and its charms are added to by the fine avenues of tall lime trees, which were planted by Sir Josiah and Sir Richard Child when they were laying out the grounds of Wanstead House, at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries. Many other avenues were planted, some reaching to Forest Gate and beyond, some to Leytonstone, to the "Eagle" at Snaresbrook. On entering Bushwood from the park, and standing almost at the head of the first avenue, is a fine old oak, sometimes called the "pulpit tree."



*The 'Avenue' in Bushwood*

The Swiss Chalet on the left was known as the "Smoking Box," and stands on land which was once part of "Lake House." The latter was pulled down in the spring of 1908 to make room for modern villas. It was the old Banqueting Hall of Wanstead Mansion and contained a carved oak chimney-





*Bushwood - the Swiss Chalet or 'Smoking Box'*

piece attributed to Grinling Gibbons. At Lake House Tom Hood lived for 2 ¼ years and wrote there his only complete novel, "Tylney Hall" (which deals with the neighbourhood), and "The Epping Hunt." It is sometimes said that he also wrote here "The Song of the Shirt," but this is not so, as it was not composed till nine years after he had left Wanstead.

At the other side of Bushwood is Leytonstone and the "Green Man," and away to the right of it are



*Portland Stone pillars originally giving access to Wanstead House*

Whipps Cross and Walthamstow. Coming back through Bushwood to the keepers' cottages and Blake Hall Road, immediately in front are the large entrance gates with a tall Portland stone pillar on each side which gave access to Wanstead House. Instead of continuing to the end of Blake Hall Road and round to Redbridge Lane, follow the gravel path from the gates to Wanstead Old Church (St. Mary).

The land on the right of the path now part of Wanstead Golf Links was formerly familiar, and is still spoken of as "Alderman Finnis's Park," because it belonged to that gentleman, who lived at Park Gate, the house on the left of the entrance gates. The large house on the right is Park House (Sir John Bethell, M.P.). The fine sheet of water on the right of the path is the "Basin," at the church end of which was the terrace in front of Wanstead House.



*The Basin showing St Mary's church in the background*

The land on the left was attached to Blake Hall, once famous for its peacocks, but now given over to the builder. St. Mary's, the parish church of Wanstead, is of unusual design. It was built in 1790, and contains a large monument to Sir Josiah Child, taken from the old church when it was pulled down -

the site of which can still be traced in the churchyard. There are also several coats of arms in stained glass, memorial tablets, etc. The gallery is supported by fine Corinthian columns, and altogether the interior is very handsome. The chiming clock and three additional bells were placed in the tower in 1899 in memory of the late Rector, the Rev. Morton Drummond.



*Wanstead Park. After crossing the bridge, it is immediately evident that here is no ordinary park*

Looking over the S. wall of the churchyard, the site of Wanstead House can be seen. From the church, a field path strikes across a meadow (or what remains of it); from which many tons of excellent gravel have been extracted. At the farther end is Redbridge Lane, whence the ramble may be completed either by continuing down the lane and over the Roding and up Wanstead Lane (or by field path) to the Castle (as in Route 7); or, by turning to the right on entering Redbridge Lane, and through Wanstead Park to Ilford.

Time from Wanstead Church by either route, 35 - 40 minutes.





# Wanstead nature club

Report by Gill James

Sadly this is the last Wanstead Nature Club (at least for a while). Without a doubt one of the most important roles that the Wren Group has had. Bringing a child closer to nature means that they will grow to love it and as a result look after it. Our thanks go to Gill James and all the volunteers who made it happen. I'm sure that all the children in the group will remember them fondly and perhaps pass on their love for nature to their own children.

This picture is one of my favourite images of the group and shows youngsters racing snails on a rainy day when they couldn't get out. No snails were harmed - they were all well fed and returned to the wild. (Ed)



## October: autumn leaves

What a surprise present today: Ruduo and Menuo brought in the dried up body of a large dead Hedgehog! We had a good look at its little feet and its skeleton and spines.



Then we had a rather damp walk across the Flats to see if we could spot any Skylarks and collected lots of different shaped leaves on the way. We particularly like the big clumps of Rosebay Willowherb, whose leaves were turning a lovely deep shade of autumn red. The stalks were taller than us. Apparently some people make tea out of the leaves. Then we made Leafy Lanterns. We stuck our colourful leaves on the outside of jam jars, and made a handle and put a tealight inside. Very pretty if a bit sticky! Seven children today.

## November: a rainy day

Today it rained ALL morning. We made a giant spider's web with Charlotte in the middle. Then we

made leaf art: we rubbed the undersides of dried leaves (the veins show more on the undersides) to make beautiful leaf skeleton pictures. Then we played Big Bingo. Menuo was a very good caller and Ruduo won the game.



## December: artists at work

Little tomatoes, mangoes, squashes, holly berries sat on the table in a colourful heap. We tried really hard to paint and draw these fruits and seeds with pastels and paints.

Luckily local artist Anita McCullough was there to give us a helping hand and we painted some great pictures to take home and frame. So we are now promising artists!

We also went on a winter bird search on Jubilee Pond to see what was new and identified no fewer than 16 species, including three kinds of gull, a Shoveler, a Cormorant, some Pochards, and even a Great Crested Grebe. Well done, all eight children, on fantastic skills. We tried counting up all the water birds – and counting all those gulls and Canada Geese was challenging. We came to some amazing totals and were rewarded with lots of gold coins as it is nearly Christmas.



## Wanstead Nature Club: the future

For nearly five years local children aged seven-plus have been coming to the Nature Club in the expectation of a lot of fun and a little learning about local nature. Gill James and Rosie Williams started the Club in March 2012 and as our first session was in spring, we set the children a challenge: to make a birds' nest which was strong enough to keep an egg intact when dropped from a great height!

Some children have tended to drop in and out of



the club, according to what else is going on on that particular Saturday (Brownie days out? Or birthday parties?) But we have had a core of really bright and lovely children attending regularly for some years. One Mum, Laisve from Lithuania, has been coming since 2012 and she said that her boys now walk along looking upwards the whole time, scanning the sky for birds, and keep falling over things - all because of Nature Club.

Some great volunteers have given their time to Nature Club, notably Haydn Powell, Jane Cleall and Charlotte Thompson, who will be leaving us for Uni this year. We have decided for various reasons to discontinue the Club at Harrow Road in its present form. If there is anyone out there who thinks this is a terrible shame and would like to take on managing or supporting Nature Club at Harrow Road that would be great.

A promising new development is the Wild East Project, which is run by Sean Dillon, the Learning Project Officer at West Ham Park and

Wanstead Flats. The Wild East Project aims to connect local people with West Ham Park and Wanstead Flats. Using conversation, stories, props and activities, local people will help others explore the hidden and remarkable story of these two green spaces and how they've been beneficial for people and wildlife in East London. The amazing Wild East tricycles help people to discover nature where they least expect it, right where they are! Sean plans to visit Wanstead Flats regularly on Saturdays with his trike and this may be a good way to follow up our Nature Club with something new and different.

We also hope that Epping Forest will be able to provide some similar activities for children from The Temple in Wanstead Park and we will be discussing the possibilities with them. The Temple is well situated for Nature Club-type activities as

it can offer a wide range of habitats to explore. Epping Forest proposes opening up the downstairs room in The Temple for more community use. Watch this space...

Whatever happens next we hope that some of our children will develop their interest in nature in the future and become active supporters of the Wren Group!

Article by Gill James



## now & then

Were you right ?

*Looking south-west across Wanstead Flats at Centre Road in the early 1900s. The landscape still showing scars of local industry such as brick making and gravel mining, some 15-20 years earlier. Picture courtesy of Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest. Much the same view today, more than 100 years later. Centre Road is now obscured by trees and the local scarring is grassed over.*



# what to see in winter

by Tricia Moxey

**There is always a degree of uncertainty about the weather. Will the coming months bring high winds, crisp snow or just some long spells of overcast grey and rainy days when we will be slithering about in the muddy countryside? Being outside even for as little as 20 minutes a day is sufficient to bring health benefits, so wrap up warm and get out there!**

One of the great pleasures of being outside during the winter months is the chance to see frost on many of the fallen leaves, the dead stems of grasses or ferns. This tends to highlight their form and textures, which might be so easily overlooked, and thus the seemingly ordinary is transformed into something magical!

An instructive activity is to make a note of flowers that are actually in flower at the turn of the year as many flowers are

responding to the mildness of the current winter season. This list can include just the 'wild ones' or can include those found in gardens too! Comparisons year on year are interesting and of course there are some insects which will find them vital sources of nectar and pollen. There are several types of *Mahonia* which are in full flower at this time of the year and some of the winter flowering *Viburnums* are sweetly scented too. Primroses and Sweet Violet are now in flower from late autumn through to spring and in addition you may well find Dandelions, Chickweed and Hogweed. What will be your score? More than 25 is a good one.

Towards the end of January the catkins on Hazel start to lengthen and once fully expanded they shed their pollen grains, which can then be blown about to be caught on the stigmas of the tiny red female flowers. As the days lengthen, the leaves of Honeysuckle start to grow, to be followed by sprouting shoots on Elder bushes. Look out for the yellow flowers of Coltsfoot as they push through the barren ground of roadside verges or wasteland sites.

Those who feel the need to mow their lawns in winter may have continue to do so if the ground temperatures remain above 6°C for several days, but for many of us it is preferable to leave it slightly longer. This gives you the chance to notice

that the uncollected leaves will disappear underground as various species of earthworm remain active, pulling different leaves into their burrows. Recent research using an infra-red webcam has revealed that the 25cm long Night Crawling Earthworm, *Lumbricus terrestris* shows a particular preference for the fallen leaves of Alder, Ash and Birch over non-native Eucalyptus, Sweet Chestnut and Sycamore. Interestingly in the 1880's Darwin came to similar conclusions without the help of webcams! You could conduct your own experiments to see which leaves are preferred – some worms apparently even like chocolate!

It is easy to overlook the smaller components of vegetation, but the bright green mosses are more obvious as many species produce their seed capsules on long stalks at this time of the year. The tops of walls, fallen logs, rockeries, lawns and the tops of flower pots are all good places to find these interesting plants.

The British Bryological Society has produced a downloadable guide to *Common Mosses and Liverworts of Town and Garden*. Check out the website to download your own copy! [www.britishebryologicalsociety.org.uk](http://www.britishebryologicalsociety.org.uk)





# events diary

## February

**Early February (date to be confirmed): Wanstead 1,000: Photographic Exhibition** in The Temple, Wanstead Park. Wren members have submitted over 160 superb images of local wildlife from herons to hoverflies. 21 of the best have been selected by the Committee for the exhibition.

**Thurs 2nd Feb. 10am - 12.30. Practical Work.**

Meet at The Temple Wanstead Park. Contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07716 034 164 on the morning. All gloves and tools provided.

**Sun 5th Feb. 10am - 12.30. Practical Work.**

Meet Aldersbrook stables, Empress Ave. Contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07716 034 164 on the morning. All gloves and tools provided.

**Wed 8th Feb. Nature Ramble** The new 'Nature Ramble' series of walks replaces the 'Lucky Dip' walks that ended with the Rainham Marshes visit in December. Each month, walk leader and guidebook author Peter Aylmer will take you to one of London's great natural glories - a nature reserve, woodland, heath, site of special scientific interest or similar. Like the Lucky Dip walks, expect around six miles of easy walking and at least one cafe along the way. 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. Back about 4. Contact: Peter Aylmer 07884 235784 or email [peteraylmer@hotmail.com](mailto:peteraylmer@hotmail.com) [tharris0457@gmail.com](mailto:tharris0457@gmail.com)

**Thurs 9th Feb. 10am - 12.30. Practical Work.**

Details of meeting place to follow. Contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07716 034 164 on the morning. All gloves and tools provided.

**Sat 11th Feb. 11am-1pm: Valentine's Day Fun:** crafts and stories in The Temple for children. 12pm: storytime. £3.00 donation suggested. A Friends of Wanstead Parklands event.

**Sun 12th Feb. Waterbird count,** Wanstead Park. Meet by tea hut at 10:00.

**Thurs 16th Feb. 10am - 12.30. Practical Work.**

Details of meeting place to follow. Contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07716 034 164 on the morning. All gloves and tools provided.

**Thurs 23rd Feb. 10am - 12.30. Practical Work.**

Details of meeting place to follow. Contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07716 034 164 on the morning. All gloves and tools provided.

**Sun Feb 19th Chestnut Trail** a walk and talk led by Richard Arnopp for Friends of Wanstead Parklands.

## March

**Sun 5th March. 10am - 12.30. Practical Work.**

Meet Aldersbrook stables, Empress Ave. Contact Peter Williams 0208 555 1358 or 07716 034 164 on the morning. All gloves and tools provided.

**Sun 12th March. Waterbird count,** Wanstead Park. Meet by tea hut at 10:00.

**Sunday 12th March: 'Go Wild in Wanstead Park':** 4 one-hour workshops for children aged 6-11 run by Epping Forest keeper Alison Tapply. 10.00am: Fire lighting. 11.00am: Shelter Workshop. 1.00pm: Fire lighting. 2.00pm: Shelter Workshop. £2.50 per child. Booking in advance essential. See [www.wansteadpark.org.uk](http://www.wansteadpark.org.uk) for booking details.

**Thurs 16th March. Nature Ramble** The new 'Nature Ramble' series of walks replaces the 'Lucky Dip' walks that ended with the Rainham Marshes visit in December. Each month, walk leader and guidebook author Peter Aylmer will take you to one of London's great natural glories - a nature reserve, woodland, heath, site of special scientific interest or similar. Like the Lucky Dip walks, expect around six miles of easy walking and at least one cafe along the way. 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. Back about 4. Contact: Peter Aylmer 07884 235784 or email [peteraylmer@hotmail.com](mailto:peteraylmer@hotmail.com) [tharris0457@gmail.com](mailto:tharris0457@gmail.com)

**March 22nd. Wren AGM.** Tim Harris will give a presentation on the highs and lows of the Wanstead 1000 challenge. 7:30pm, Wanstead Golf Club. And a new Committee will be elected for 2017-18.

## April

**Sat April 1st: 11.00am - 1.00pm: Children's April Fools Day** Fun event in The Temple. Donation £2.00 per child suggested.

**Sat April 15th: joint walk with RSPB**

Contact Tim Harris for details: [tharris0457@gmail.com](mailto:tharris0457@gmail.com)

**Sun April 23rd. History Walk** in Wanstead Park led by local historian Richard Arnopp of Friends of Wanstead Parklands.



# 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>