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summer

a word from the chair

Hello, everyone.

It's been a time of great change for the Wren Group. We have a newly designed newsletter, a new website (www.wrengroup.org.uk), a new programme of activities, new faces on our committee ... and a lot of new members.

First, I'd like to thank former committee members Richard Oakman, Valerie and Pete Saunders and Kathy Hartnett, who decided to step down at our AGM in March. Valerie and Pete have played a leading role in the Group since the 1980s and Richard since the 70s, and I'm sure they'll be involved for many years to come. In the three years that Kathy was editor of the newsletter she transformed the effectiveness of the Group's communication, firmly establishing the production of this newsletter on a professional basis and building our cohesiveness with regular email notices.

We intend to continue this good tradition, with Tony Morrison now producing the newsletter and Peter Williams sending out notifications and reminders of events. Our website will also be vital in attracting new members, informing the world at large of the beauty and interest of our local area, and communicating with our own members. The site has been redesigned and Natalia and Sofia Benajeh have taken on the responsibility of developing it. Please be patient while the redevelopment work takes place: it will take a few weeks.



Jackie Morrison is the new Group secretary, with Norman Olley and Mark Gorman remaining in post as treasurer and membership secretary, respectively. Membership is our lifeblood, and I'm pleased to be able to report that we've just gained our 100th member, who will receive a book to mark the happy event. New members are attracted by increased activity. The triple ethos of our activities programme is education, evaluation and enjoyment. People come to learn and share their knowledge, but they also want to have fun. And, of course, there should be an end-product, which is the data we send to the relevant bodies about our area's natural history. Take a look in the next London

Bird Report (published by the London Natural History Society) when it comes out later this year and you'll get an indication of the impact that Wanstead's amateur naturalists are having. But it doesn't stop with birds: mammals (not that we've got many!), invertebrates and the area's changing flora are all under scrutiny, with analysis on the Wanstead Wildlife website (www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk). If you'd like to get more involved in survey work, please get in touch with any committee member.

What of the next generation of naturalists? Much has been said about how young people are too tied to computer games and social networking to get out and enjoy nature. Well, positive steps have been taken by new committee member Gill James and her team to build a Nature Club to involve children between the ages of eight and thirteen. The response has been very good, with ten children attending the most recent Saturday morning session. In years to come it would be good to see some of them leading our activities.

As the title of this piece is "A word from the chair" I think I'd better shut up now. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Tim 



practical work planning

Peter Williams, our practical work officer, and Tim Harris met up with Epping Forest volunteer co-ordinator Martin Whitfield, ecologist Andy Froud and keeper Jordan on 22nd May to plan some tasks for the next season, starting in the autumn. It is important that the Wren Group maintains good relations with staff working for the Forest and we were able to discuss our approach to various practical conservation tasks. For example, we talked about the best ways to promote the bluebells in Chalet Wood and the daffodils on Lincoln Island whether we can extend our scrub-clearance programme; and the possibility of creating wood piles with dead wood.

Pictures. Above - Sofia Benajeh helps with the clearance of Lincoln Island. Below - Tim (left) and Peter (centre) pretend to be hard at work for the camera in one of the many practical sessions in the Wren study area.



a quick word from the editor

Hello everyone,

My name is Tony Morrison and I have taken over from Kathy Hartnett as editor of the Wren newsletter. Looking at what's been produced by Kathy in the past her act will be hard to follow. I would like to echo the Chair's thanks for the work she has done in the past and the support she has offered me in producing this newsletter.

I'm lucky enough to be joining the group at a very exciting time. A fresh new committee, a dedicated website and a membership of more than a hundred for the first time in years - and in addition we have a 'new-look' newsletter.

As you probably know, the group operates on a very limited budget and in order to offer you such a lengthy newsletter it will be impossible to produce printed copies. Instead the newsletter will be e-mailed to members as well as placed on the website for you to read at your leisure. Not printing the

newsletter will also save trees and the environment which is what the group is about – although I suggest you might want to print out the puzzle page so that you can complete it.

I understand that some may have problems accessing e-mail and for those people I will be sending out a shorter printed version by post. If you have any difficulties receiving the newsletter by e-mail or on the website please let me know.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. I think the most important thing I would like to say as its new editor is that it is your newsletter and can't be produced without your contributions and support. If you have any views, news or stories please let me know. Similarly, if you have taken any interesting photos please send them in – I will put them in the gallery in both the newsletter and on the website. You can get in touch with me by e-mail at editor@wrengroup.org.uk

On a visit to Wanstead Park on Thursday 17th May, I was delighted when the swan couple that reside on Perch and Heronry Ponds swam towards me, with eight little cygnets in tow – almost as if they were saying proudly “Look what we’ve done!” Some of you may remember that last year the male swan – known to all as ‘Hannibal’ – from the then Perch / Heronry Ponds swan couple died (of natural causes). His demise was followed shortly afterwards by the death of the female swan from the Shoulder of Mutton Pond pair – unfortunately, her death was of a violent nature, caused by a suspected dog or fox attack (also killing all, except one, of her cygnets). However, the story eventually had a happier ending when, only a couple of weeks later, ‘Mrs Hannibal’ got together with the male swan

top of mum’s back! The remaining cygnets were all tucked away out of view, also on mum’s back, but hidden by her feathers. After a while, a few more heads popped out on top, but one cygnet in particular seemed to be enjoying the view from his ‘best seat’ on top, just behind mum’s neck. Occasionally, a cygnet or two dropped out into the water from mum’s cosy feathers.... only to be seen trying desperately to scamper back inside again.

At the time of writing two of the cygnets have disappeared but it is to be hoped that the others will survive. At this stage, being so small, they are very vulnerable to predation by gulls and other creatures. That’s probably why our water birds tend to have such large broods; it’s nature’s way of trying to



from Shoulder of Mutton Pond, who then acted as a good step-dad to Mrs H’s brood.

An hour or so after my first sighting of this new swan family recently, I went back to Perch Pond to look for them again. I located the two adults – but where were all the cygnets? As the pair swam nearer to me again, I could see just one cygnet swimming close behind mum.

Then as they came nearer, I saw another little cygnet – hitching a ride on the

ensure that at least some of them stand a chance of reaching adulthood. For instance, Coots are normally very prolific in the park, but the Wren Group’s Water Bird Counts have shown in the last couple of years that there are not as many of their young to be seen as in previous years. That’s why such recordings of all our wildlife are important – if numbers are on the decrease, it can be noted, and perhaps reasons can then be found as to what is happening, and what (if anything) we can then do about it.

Story by Kathy Hartnett



impressions of an early morning bird walk

I'm writing this too late to remember the details but not too late to record impressionist images in my mind, Turner perhaps or Monet. The early morning moon was startlingly white against a monochrome grey sky as I drove to meet the others.

The Jubilee Pond car park was deserted when I got there, except for a white car, dull in the morning's dusk. I parked next to it, for company, changed shoes and waited, a little worried that I might have come to the wrong place. I'm not known for being early. Should I ring Paul before 6am – again! Perhaps not.

Then the people began to gather – like the birds on Jubilee Pond – two ladies smiling a greeting as they walked through the trees, a man striding from the other direction. 'Where's Tim?' we asked as the last patches of mist - slow grey earth clouds – rose and melted as the earth exhaled.

The sky lightened, filtering streaks of bright colour, reds, oranges and yellows, into the soft grey gloom. We noticed the nip, the chill in the air and laughed gently, congratulating ourselves on getting up so early, despite the sodden forecast. We buttoned up jackets, tucked in scarves and tugged hats around our ears.

Tim had arrived, complete with giant telescope on a tripod. He must have been a scout. Eight of us set out (a goodly number) to enjoy an early Wanstead morning and look for birds. Would we see a Redstart or a Red Kite. We were sure to see a Blackcap but what about owls?

Will I ever stop being surprised by the variety of habitat in Wanstead Park? I think not. We walked such a relatively small distance, over the Flats but this little world contains gentle hillocks, groves of trees and open land with grasses and plants of different heights and textures. And the birds did not disappoint. We didn't see a Redstart or an owl but we did hear Blackcaps in the bushes and saw Skylarks singing high in the sky and even from the ground. We saw a Meadow Pipit perched on a twig near the model aircraft site, and a Whitethroat, singing loudly, which looked gigantic through the scope. How could such a small creature produce such an amazing sound and so consistently? Is it me or are the birds more tuneful than ever this year?

We were even joined by a Kathy bird, who called Tim on the phone to say she was catching up. She kept disappearing as we looked for her through the trees, like a Blackbird playing games, but she reached us before we reached Alexandra Lake.

The walk around the lake was undertaken with enthusiasm. It was to be followed by feeding time in the Cemetery café.

For a few the morning walk was enough – they had more pressing things to do. The rest of us joined a veritable gaggle of others (outnumbering by far the geese on the Heronry Pond) for the second half of the walk. The day was fully fledged by then, early morning impressions.... a fading dream. Wanstead Park was already populated with different varieties of *Homo sapiens*, eager to enjoy an unexpected dry spell in a wet, wet spring.



Again, the flora, fauna and birds did not disappoint. A Little Egret greeted us, flying skilfully through the trees by the Ornamental Water. We had a lovely view of a pair of Mandarin Ducks on the other side of the water. Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were spotted. Ring-necked Parakeets flew overhead. A Great Crested Grebe sat on its nest. With all of this, who could wish to be anywhere else on that lovely, chilly, but bright April morning, from dawn until mid-afternoon. Thanks, Tim.

Story Pamela Gamesby. Picture Kathy Hartnett



the may nature walk: plenty to see despite chilly weather

About 15 of us attended the first of this summer's nature walks on 20 May, led by Tim Harris and Paul Ferris. The weather was cool and breezy but the rain held off and Wanstead Park was looking fresh and green after the recent rainfall. At the start of the walk we saw a pair of Great Crested Grebes on Heronry Pond, one on the nest

with its brown ruff blowing in the breeze. Close to the pond Paul showed us some sorrels, several grass species and the flowers of the one of the plantains. He also pointed out how human activity had reduced the variety of grasses where a new path had been worn close to a new cycle path.

Initially, the ponds looked empty, the wintering waterfowl having departed. However, on closer examination we were able to see Little Grebes, which were making their distinctive calls and appeared to be skirmishing. At the west end of Heronry we saw four of them, with one on a nest. Despite the weather, spring was in evidence with goslings of Canada Geese, Mallard ducklings and a Mute Swan with cygnets on its back.

Over Shoulder of Mutton pond we saw about 40 Swifts shrieking and swooping over the water, with a scattering of House Martins flying among them, while a Sparrowhawk soared above. The pond looked fresh and clear after the recent rains, with some borders of rushes and yellow water irises.

We had hoped to see dragonflies and damselflies but Paul explained that they were behind in their emergence due to the cold spring. However, one newly emerged damselfly was spotted, looking thin and spindly, perched on the edge of a reed near Perch Pond.

During the walk we heard a Lesser Whitethroat singing from the depths of some gorse, as well as the rich warbling of Blackcaps and the song of several Chiffchaffs. We did manage to see one Chiffchaff perched at the top of a tree. Other sights included a Crow chasing a Heron in mid-air and a slim gold Longhorn Moth, with its long antennae. The butterfly transect did not take place due to the chilly weather: sadly, there were no butterflies to count.

Mary Jane Rawlence. Picture Kathy Hartnett



kitchen sink birdwatching

I began as an armchair birdwatcher twelve years ago. A serious accident had left me house-bound for a few months, and for the first time I had the leisure to look out of the window. Previously home had been simply a dormitory between shifts at work.

To my surprise the garden was full of birds. At the time I couldn't tell a Blue Tit from a Great, so I bought binoculars (even though my garden is tiny), a bird book, feeders, and joined the RSPB. I enjoyed watching considerable numbers of Blue and Great Tits, Greenfinches, Starlings and House Sparrows – 27 of the latter on one memorable occasion – as well as Robins, Blackbirds and Chaffinches in lesser numbers. I saw my first Long-tailed Tit the first time I took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch – it appeared in the 59th minute of my hour!

However, my kitchen sink proved to be a better vantage point than the armchair. The branches of the hawthorn came within three feet of the window, which gave me a wonderful view of nine newly-fledged Blue Tits lining up to take their first flight. The hawthorn once hosted a Reed Bunting. It was at dusk when I saw what I thought was a House Sparrow in the tree. Then I noticed its white collar. It was kind enough to stay put until I'd fetched the binoculars and discovered its true identity. On another occasion I was startled by a huge crash: a Sparrowhawk had dived into the tree, scattering about 20 small birds.

Sadly the hawthorn is no more – it suffered during the hot summer and drought of 2003 and its lingering death spanned four years. Other mature trees in the vicinity have also gone in the last few years, and this, coupled with an increase in the cat population, may well be the cause of the sharp decline in the number of birds visiting my garden.

Very few were seen between 2007 and 2009, but there has been a slight improvement since then. In April this year a Blackcap surprised

me as it popped out of the ivy and flew into a neighbour's garden. Goldfinches are regular visitors, along with Blue and Great Tits, Blackbirds, Robins, Starlings, Wood Pigeons, Collared Doves, Magpies and Carrion Crows. Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Long-tailed Tits, Wrens and Dunnocks come occasionally, and have been rare sightings of Pied Wagtail, Jay, Kestrel and Great Spotted Woodpecker.



Madeline complete with rubber gloves at her kitchen sink

Living as I do under the flight path between Wanstead and Valentines Parks, commuting Grey Herons, Cormorants, Mute Swans and geese are sometimes seen. Lesser black-backed and Herring Gulls occasionally land on the roofs of the houses opposite.

I won't say that washing up has become a pleasure, but it certainly takes longer when there are birds to watch.

Story by Madeline Seviour



local history group and Wanstead flats

A subgroup of the Leyton and Leytonstone Historical Society including Wren Group members Peter Williams and Mark Gorman, is carrying out detailed research on aspects of the history of Wanstead Flats during the Second World War. It has long been known there were a lot of military installations, especially to the east of Centre Road, but recent research has shown how the area to the west near Jubilee Pond and Dames Road was requisitioned by the War Office halfway through the war for at least two prisoner of war camps. We have been able to obtain a detailed digital copy of an RAF aerial photo from 1944 showing the extent of the camps. Newsletter editor Tony Morrison is hoping to overlay this digitally on the modern geography of the Flats to give us unprecedented detail. Eventually we hope to publish a booklet on our findings and it will inform future guided walks on the Flats.

Historical research like this shows there is nothing new about the state controversially requisitioning land on the Flats as they are doing to build the police muster centre on the modern fairground site. Ironically, this is exactly the same piece of land where Italian prisoners were housed in 1942, as the digital image clearly shows. In fact some of the trackways in the POW camp are still visible on the site today.

The largest tide mill in the world

One of the good things about the Olympics in Stratford is that it is attracting all sorts of fringe events. One of the most interesting is Architecture at Three Mills, E15. <http://www.eventbrite.com/org/2237933639>

Stratford has the largest surviving tidal mill in the world, the magnificent Grade 1 House Mill. This is a large wooden building with four water wheels originally driven by the tide in the River Lea which still runs under the building. Full restoration of the wheels is due shortly.

The New London Orchestra is performing classical music in the mill in June but this is no traditional concert - the musicians will be scattered round the mill and the audience will circulate around. Intrigued? We would be delighted to see you there.



Three Mills and its surrounding waterways is a beautiful conservation area for industrial heritage and astonishingly abundant wildlife. A meander alongside the river channels and canals offers tranquility, and a living lesson on an era of huge technological and social change. The River Lea nearby also attracts a surprising variety of wildlife.

Keep up to date with other events at Three Mills over the summer including craft exhibitions at our website <http://www.housemill.org.uk/>

There is a cafe and guided tours.

Come and discover one of Stratford's most intriguing, hidden delights on the River Lea waterways.

Peter Williams, Trustee, Three Mills



Wanstead park indian runner duck runs no more

In the previous newsletter (Spring 2012 edition) I wrote an article about a new 'resident' of Wanstead Park, a delightful Indian Runner Duck. Sadly, I am now following this up to inform readers that Jemima (as she was known amongst the Wren Group) passed away at the end of April. Even more awful is the news that the suspected cause of her death is a possible attack by a dog. In fact, some of you may have read about this in the local *Guardian* newspaper (Wanstead edition), except they named the bird 'Duckzilla'. I feel WG member Jackie Morrison's original suggestion of 'Jemima' was a more appropriate name, ie 'Jemima Runner Duck', as a parody of writer Beatrix Potter's fictional character 'Jemima Puddleduck'.

Whatever her name, this lovely Indian Runner Duck is a sad loss to the many people who visit Wanstead Park and took enjoyment in seeing her.

Story by Kathy Hartnett



footnote on the house mill

(continued from Page 8 - by Peter Williams)

As mentioned there are plans to restore the four mill wheels and the Heritage Lottery Fund have made a provisional award of £2.6m, subject to the Trust raising another £1.6m. There is a comprehensive plan to make the House Mills into a major visitor attraction and education centre, partly to demonstrate the way the tide in the tributaries of the Thames was used to power what amounted to a small factory grinding grain for a gin distillery. The project wants to install an Archimedes screw electricity generator to show people how

power can be generated from the tide and talk about sustainable energy. Plans have had to be modified at the mill as a couple of years ago the European Union introduced laws to protect eels. The original turbine specified did not comply with these laws as the netting to keep the eels away from the mechanism would have seriously compromised its generating performance, and the income available from the feed in tariff to the National Grid. So, it's eels 1, mill restoration 0!



have you seen any hedgehogs?

On a recent visit to Wanstead Park, I was pleased to find evidence that hedgehogs are trundling about there. I did not see the animal itself, but found its distinctive droppings full of chewed beetle parts in the grass. Although this spiny mammal is widely distributed across the country, surveys have recently been carried out by the Peoples Trust for Endanger Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society which indicate that there are fewer hedgehogs about than in the 1960's.

It is now estimated that in the last decade hedgehog numbers have declined by over 40% within the Greater London area, but some are still around in cemeteries, parks, along railway embankments and scrubby wasteland. They are nocturnal so maybe overlooked, but a number do survive in private gardens. The increase in hard standing, gravel beds as well as extra buildings within gardens has reduced the amount of vegetation within them. Plants provide shelter for hedgehogs and food for their prey. Their main sources of food are ground beetles, worms and caterpillars, plus some molluscs and they are a welcome predator of pests in any garden or allotment. Although they can climb, high walls around properties prevent easy access to different gardens, and as many as 10 hedgehogs may pass through a garden in one night.

Hedgehogs have inch long spines covering their back and flanks, but the rest of its body is covered with coarse, grey-brown fur and they have a

small tail. They usually curl into a ball when threatened by danger, but sadly this tactic does not work well in the middle of traffic. However, monitoring such road kills is one way of gathering information about their distribution.

A female hedgehog can produce a litter of up to five young in June or July, but infant mortality is high and a second litter may be produced if there is sufficient food available.

If you are lucky to have hedgehogs in your garden then you can help them in various ways. Keep an area dense vegetation in a corner, preferably growing some native plants to give good cover. A decomposing heap of vegetation will also supply worms, beetles and molluscs as their favourite food, but check such heaps for resident hedgehogs to minimise disturbance to them. Do not use slug pellets in the garden and provide a shallow dish of water during dry summer days. Make sure they can climb out of water features by leaving a plank for them to clamber up.



As our summers become warmer, hedgehogs seem to be breeding later in the year, but this can mean a lean time for the hoglets as they should weigh 600gms in order to survive the rigours of hibernation. Additional food can be offered in the form of meaty cat or dog food in the autumn if you see young underweight and hedgehogs in your garden.

Do please pass on any information about hedgehogs that you see locally. If you wish to find out more about these shy mammals then I would recommend *The New Hedgehog Book*, written by Pat Morris and published by Whittet Books Ltd in 2010.

Story by Tricia Moxey





bird report

A Peculiar Spring

By Tim Harris

A very strange spring impacted in a major way on bird migration locally. A warm dry March was followed by some truly miserable conditions — wet, windy and cold — through much of April and early May. Consequently, while the earliest spring migrants arrived on time, the second wave were held up somewhere south of the UK. This produced some unusual sights. For example, on the morning of 7th May large numbers of Swallows (and some House and Sand Martins) could be seen migrating over Wanstead Flats at the same time as large numbers of Swifts. The peak arrival of the latter is usually several weeks after the Swallows and martins, and it is very unusual to see such big parties of Swallows that late in the spring.

Local birders consider Wheatears to be the true heralds of spring. This year, they did not disappoint. The first four were on the Flats on 16th March. We didn't know it then, but this was the start of a tremendous run of form. There followed 117 bird-days (the sum of all the daily maxima of the species) until the end of spring passage on 11th May. Few London sites can compare with these numbers. On a few days there were 10 or more birds feeding on the paths and shorter-cut areas of grassland east of Centre Road, flitting short distances if approached.

Other passage birds that dropped in (or flew straight over our area) before moving on included up to six Red Kites, about 20 Yellow Wagtails, three Common Redstarts (all males), three Whinchats and five Ring Ouzels. Most of these birds were on Wanstead Flats but lucky observers in Wanstead Park witnessed up to four Red Kites passing over on one afternoon. However, some of those birds we have grown used to putting in a spring appearance — notably Tree Pipit and Garden Warbler — failed to show at all.

On 23d April, Group member Nick Croft saw 33 Whimbrel migrating



Wheatear - A robin-sized chat, the wheatear is a summer visitor, arriving here in early March and leaving in September for its African wintering grounds. The wheatear frequents open rocky country, pasture, moorland and heath. Mainly a ground-dwelling bird, it can be seen running or hopping along the ground. It breeds mainly in western and northern Britain.

over Forest Gate. As far as I'm aware, this is the biggest-ever flock of the species to be seen in our area. First dates for other spring migrants included the following: Common Sandpiper (the only one was on 27

May); Common Tern (28 May), Swift (25 April), Sand Martin (21 April: late), Swallow (1 April), House Martin (14 April), Yellow Wagtail (13 April), Common Redstart (11 April), Whinchat (1 May), Ring Ouzel (7 April), Reed Warbler (14 April), Lesser Whitethroat (21 April), Common Whitethroat (13 April), Willow Warbler (30 March), Spotted Flycatcher (11 May, the only one).

Breeding successes

Of course, it's not all about migrants. Early breeding successes included a brood of Mute Swan cygnets on Heronry Lake, and Canada Goose, Mallard and Coot young by several ponds. Great excitement was generated by the Great Crested Grebes on Heronry. After one aborted nest-building effort they managed to construct a more robust structure, which duly housed three eggs and launched three chicks.

In late May these could be seen nestled on the backs of their parents as they swam around Heronry Lake. Hopefully, all three young birds will reach adulthood since it's several years since we've had successful breeding in the Park.

There were at least nine Skylark territories on Wanstead Flats in late May, and several of our scarcer passerine breeders were on territory at that time: Lesser Whitethroat, Reed Warbler and Willow Warbler. Common Whitethroats are once again present in good numbers on the Flats and in the Old Sewage Works, and they could be seen taking food to young on late May. Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps seemed to be plentiful in more wooded areas.

Finally — and topically in view of proposals to start the experimental culling of the species in some parts of the country — sightings of Common Buzzards continue to increase. Exceptionally, eight migrants were seen on the weekend of 24–25 March, but other birds are probably local residents. It makes you wonder if they'll start to breed in our area. But first, maybe we need a few rabbits!

now & then



Report by Tim Harris



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 invertebrate report

Perhaps with the sighting by Tim Harris of a few Red Admiral butterflies on Wanstead Flats on 26th February, spring could be thought to be near. There were even hoverflies about, with an early *Eristalis tenax*, and a number of Harlequin Ladybirds as well as our native 7-spot Ladybirds all sunbathing on rhododendrons in Wanstead Park on the same day, 23rd February.

This year, Tim Harris set up a moth trap in his garden on the Lakehouse Estate and caught an Angle Shades moth and two Small Brindled Beauty moths in late February. This was followed on other nights by a selection of different moth species, and the Lakehouse trap was later supplemented with one near Wanstead Flats in Capel Road.

The 1st day of March was fine, with temperatures up to around 15.C. A walk to the City of London Cemetery enabled me to spot a Brimstone butterfly by Alexandra Lake - interestingly in the same location as my first Brimstone last spring. As with that one, this year's made just as rapid an un-photographable getaway, as did the Red Admiral some half hour later in the Cemetery!

Bees were more obliging, and the heather-beds in the cemetery provided a good feeding ground for Honey Bees and others, including the Tree Bee *Bombus hypnorum*. On the smooth bark of a tree were a number of very small black ladybirds with red markings which were Pine Ladybirds, *Exochomus 4-pustulatus*. Spiders were also evident, including a number of Zebra Spiders and possibly two species of Wolf Spider.

The Capel Road moth trap was set out on 1st March, and I looked forward to what may have been in it in the morning. It should be noted that these traps catch the moths live, and they can settle quite cosily into supplied egg-boxes, to be examined in the morning and carefully released so as not to get bird-eaten! Overnight temperatures in my garden - which is between Wanstead Flats and Manor Park Cemetery - fell to 5.C and it was mostly cloudy. Only two moths were present in the morning, and both were Hebrew Character. Tim Harris' trap in the Lakehouse area had Pale Brindled Beauty, Small Quaker and the Plume Moth *Emmelina monodactyla* - a slightly better catch

which may have been influenced by the fact that it is a new trap and my trap-light is old. This could mean that it does not have the attractive pull of a younger model.

A Red Admiral butterfly was reported from Wanstead Flats on 11th March, and by the end of the month there were reports of Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue from the area.

On Wanstead Flats on 30th March, many of the "volcanoes" produced by mining-bees *Andrena* sp. were evident along the dry track on the Flats adjacent to Capel Road and by Alexandra Lake. Also by the Sandhills were the first Bee-flies (*Bombylius major*). This looks like a furry bumble-bee, but is in fact a fly.

April

At the beginning of April there were a number of (real) bees about as well as hoverflies, including *Melanostoma scalare*, *Eupeodes luniger*, *Eristalis tenax* and *Syrphus torvus*; most hoverflies don't have English names. The night of 1/2 April was cold, and the moth catch in Capel Road was just two Hebrew Character, and in Lakehouse just one Hebrew Character. The temperature during the day was a bit warmer, of course, and in Aldersbrook Exchange Lands there was one Peacock and a number of small White butterflies (at least five), including a Green-veined White. On 10th April, two Speckled Wood butterflies were circling each other in a courtship ritual in my garden. On the 14th, a male Orange Tip butterfly was seen in Wanstead Park during a British Naturalists' Association walk.

Between 15th April and 20th April there was a lot of rain and lowish temperatures at night, so the moth trap was not put out. A day-time reprieve from rain, together with some sunshine and temperatures just reaching 13.C, brought out a Holly Blue butterfly in my garden as well as three species of ladybird: a Harlequin, a 7-spot and a few 22-spot. There were also a selection of hoverflies, a Zebra Spider and a *Pisaura* spider.

On 21st the day was much brighter than of late, and in Wanstead Park I there were a few Longhorn Moths *Adela reaumurella* - albeit not doing their usual dance amongst the leaves, but just sitting still. There was quite a bit of insect activity around the patch of Yellow Archangel by Reservoir Wood, however, with numbers of bees including the Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes* very active. On 22nd, another visit to the Park added the tiny Horse-chestnut Leaf Miner moth to this year's new entrants, with a few on the trunk of a horse chestnut, of course. Butterflies seen were a Green-veined White, an Orange Tip and a Speckled Wood.

May

The beginning of May was not May-like at all, with lots of rain, although on the night of 8/9th May the Lakehouse moth trap attracted twelve moths of six species and a large caddis-fly. Up to and beyond the middle of the month I didn't see many invertebrates at all; those that had been out and about had probably been so when I wasn't - mainly because when it hadn't been raining it had looked as though it might. There were many rainy nights and other reasons why neither of the moth traps could be put out, but butterflies seen during the first two weeks of May did include a number of Orange Tips, Small White, Speckled Wood, Peacock and Holly Blue.

On 16/17th the Capel Road trap attracted - among a few other species - a small, dark moth that had me stumped until it was suggested that it may be a partly melanistic form of a Least Black Arches. The following night I caught a more typical form of this species which helped decide the identification. This was one of a number of moth species caught this year that are new records for the area.

On the 20th May the Wren Wildlife and Conservation Group organised a walk looking for butterflies, dragonflies and flowers. The weather was not May-like: somewhat overcast and temperatures just about reaching double figures, so butterflies and dragonflies were hardly at their peak. In fact, so far off their peak were they that apart from one damselfly and one micro-moth we had no sightings of either of those groups. The one damselfly was a Large Red, *Phyrrhosoma nymphula*, newly emerged and hanging on to a Flag-Iris in Perch Pond. There were a few damselfly exuviae - which are the empty larval-cases - on Flag-Iris, indicating that some at least damselflies had emerged. There were quite a few of the micro-moth *Adela reaumurella* - commonly called a Longhorn Moth. The longhorn-moths are so-called because of their particularly long antennae. The term "micro-moth" is a commonly used term for one of the smaller moths, of which there are many and which can be particularly difficult to identify. *Adela reaumurella* is one of the easier ones: its antennae and bronze colour makes it quite distinctive.

A few other invertebrates were noted during the day, including spiders, slugs, flies and bees, some ladybirds and just a couple of hoverflies, including the Marmalade Hoverfly, *Episyrphus balteatus*. Some of the group visited the Gatehouse Pantry at the City of London Cemetery afterwards, and a Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes* was seen on the Solomon's Seal in the garden there. We also noted that some of the leaves of this plant had been eaten, and it is likely that this will have been the work of the larvae of the Solomon's Seal Sawfly, *Phymatocera aterima*. Worth keeping an eye on this one.

Of the other invertebrates, the spider was also on the Flag-Iris leaves: a Long-jawed Orb Weaver, *Tetragnatha extensa*. This likes damp places, and if alarmed sits with its four front legs and its four back legs stretched out fore-and-aft in line with its body. It also has the capability of walking on water, which apparently it can do faster than on land. Nearby was a crane-fly, possibly *Tipula vernalis*.



The Tree Bee is interesting because it is only eleven years since this species was first reported in England. It is now becoming so common as to sometimes being called the new garden bumblebee!

It was only on Monday 21st that the weather seemed to change, and it changed drastically - to hot. It continued pretty much that way until the end of the month.

A walk across Wanstead Flats on 22nd saw the first two Small Coppers; in Wanstead Park a pair of Speckled Wood butterflies were dancing in dappled shade by Perch Pond, and in Aldersbrook Exchange Lands the second species of damselfly this year - a Banded Demoiselle - was seen. There were also some shield-bugs including the Dock Bug *Coreus marginatus* and a pair of Bishop's Mitre *Aelia acuminata*. There was a noticeable increase in invertebrate activity, much due to a warming of the weather and a

bright, sunny day.

In my garden there was the annual visit of the Large Red Damselflies - about three - a courting Speckled Wood couple and, by the pond and seeing off everything the hoverfly *Helophilus pendulus*. Also in the garden was a new species of hoverfly for the area: *Merodon equestris equestris*. There were also - incidentally and doubtless feeding on invertebrates - ten basking Common Frogs by the pond and an uncounted number that jumped in as I approached.



Brimstone Moth - A common and widespread species in Britain. The larvae feed on a range of trees and bushes, including Hawthorn and Blackthorn.

The 23rd May was - like the day before - a hot one, with temperatures up to 25.C. Wanstead Park produced a number of insects, notably a Brimstone butterfly which - as usual - didn't stop for a photograph. Other butterflies included a number of blues, plenty of Orange Tips, Speckled Woods and two Small Coppers on the Plain. Moths seen included another new species for the area *Alabonia geoffrella* on tree-leaves at the edge of Northumberland Avenue and a Mother Shipton on the Plain. This last is so-named because part of the wing-pattern is said to resemble a well-known Yorkshire witch (of old). There were also plenty of damselflies in evidence at last, many freshly emerged of

course, and these included Blue-tailed, Azure and Large Red Damselfly *Pyrhosoma nymphula*. Beetles noted were *Gastrophysa viridula* by Perch Pond and *Malachius bipustulatus* on May-flowers on the Plain.

During May, new species of moth for the area included Grey Pine Carpet, a Spruce Carpet and a White-spotted Pug.

On 25/26 in the Capel moth trap was a moth of the *Oligia* species. This could have been a Marbled Minor, a Tawny Marbled Minor or even a Rufous Minor, the difference really only ascertainable by examination of the genitalia - which I am loathe to do. It would annoy the creature and be fiddly for me.

The 27th May was another very warm day, with temperatures above 25.C. A walk in Wanstead Park in the latter part of the morning proved rather disappointing, as fewer insects were to be seen than expected. There were plenty of damselflies by Heronry Pond, including Common Blue, Azure and Large Red, but almost no butterflies, apart from a white and some Speckled Wood. Even in the garden, not much happening save for the rapid appearance and disappearance of a blue butterfly, one or two Speckled Wood, and the same three damselfly species as in the Park. Then what I at first took to be a Hornet appeared, and flew off. When it returned it was clearly a female Broad-bodied Chaser, which posed for a nice picture.

In the garden on the 29th it was cooler - up to about 22.C - cloudier, but still invertebrate-quiet; a few Speckled Wood, one bright Red Admiral - the first of the year - and a few of the common damselflies. Quite a few bees, and just one Marmalade Hoverfly. A tiny, pale blue flying creature landed on my foot and stayed long enough for a photo-shoot. I assume it was a species of Woolly Aphid. This prompted a look for some other aphids, which were quickly found on the leaves of roses. These were green ones. The first Red-eyed Damselfly on Alexandra Lake.

Overnight 29/30th, Capel Road there was yet another new moth species for the area: a Waved Umber, and the month ended with the Capel Road moth trap on 31st May/1st June containing a Currant Pug, 2 Willow Beauty, 2 Pale Mottled Willow, 1 Large Yellow Underwing, 1 Lychnis and a couple of micro-moths.

As an introduction to April, a walk in Wanstead Park saw my first grasshoppers - but reports on those when they grow up a bit...



cockney sparrow

The RSPB are about to embark on the next phase of the study into London's House Sparrows and they need your help. Below is some basic information and links to forms. As ever all help is much appreciated.

Help London's house sparrows and take part in the RSPB Cockney Sparrow Count 18 June to 12 July!

In the summer of 2002 the GLA and RSPB launched the 'Where have all the sparrows gone' survey, which asked residents of London to tell us if they had house sparrows in their gardens or local green spaces. Over 10,000 responded, giving us valuable information about where they were still to be found, as well as highlighting the plight of this

once prolific bird. The results painted a sad picture, with a stark absence of sparrows in the centre of London. We're now repeating this survey to see how the sparrow is faring and we'd welcome your input, and that of your friends, family and neighbours! It's simple, quick to do and negative results are just as important. The survey can be done anywhere in Greater London. The information you give us will help inform our conservation efforts to help save this iconic London bird.

Simply tell us how many house sparrows you see, or don't see, in Greater London between 18th June and 12th July by using our simple online recording form. Why not spread the word to anyone else in Greater London who may be interested? The more people that get involved, the better the information!

For further information – www.rspb.org.uk/sparrowcount or email – CSC@rspb.org.uk





Wanstead nature club

For children aged 7-13 years

Bring your youngster along to have fun with others learning about our local nature - birds, plants, trees, butterflies, pondlife, insects etc.

We meet at the changing rooms building, Harrow Road, Wanstead Flats E11 3QD the forth Saturday of every month 10 a.m. - 12a.m.

Run by local volunteers. Only £1.50 a session
To find out more and register to join please contact
Gill James 0208 989 4898

[e-mail gill.james@btinternet.com](mailto:gill.james@btinternet.com)

Supported by The Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group
and the City of London

Wanstead nature club

Lots of enthusiastic volunteers arrived on a bright March morning for our first Nature Club meeting.

Our meeting place is the cheerful and well-appointed Community Room in Harrow Road Changing Rooms on Wanstead Flats (courtesy of the City of London). Nearby is a small piece of mixed woodland, the playing fields, and Jubilee Pond across the road. We can hear the distant shouts of the footballers mixing with traffic sounds from Harrow Road and the competing singing of the birds.

We start off listening to and learning four different common birdsongs. Then we are confronted with a pile of paper, cotton wool, twigs and some hen's eggs. The aim is to make a nest which is going to protect the egg when we drop it from a great height. A couple of eggs do survive being dropped onto the concrete patio by some excited children! Then we go for a walk via the Cat and Dog Pond, to inspect the enormous pile of frogspawn in a tiny pond of water. This is rapidly shrinking due to the drought (remember that?). Some of the frogspawn is still alive and we find an active frog.

We watch a Long-tailed Tit flying backwards and forwards to its nest site in the nearby bright patch of flowering gorse, and we try out our binoculars. Then we wonder over to the Jubilee Pond where we see lots of water birds. We collect from the pond an unexpected haul: a coconut, a muddy but functional child's scooter, and a set of blinds still in its packet. We also collect some more nesting material for the next challenge.

We go back to the little piece of woodland near the Changing Rooms and attempt to make more nests in the bushes, this time with one hand tied behind our backs - well, birds don't have any hands, do they?

Finally, we all shout out our versions of the birdsongs we have learned and try to Find our flock. There were some very fine renditions to be heard of the Great Tit, the Mallard, the Green Woodpecker and the Gull, and a great time was had by all.

Update by Gill James



skylarks and pond dipping

Six children from a spread of different schools in Wanstead and Forest Gate arrived at Harrow Road Changing Rooms for the second Wanstead Nature Club Meeting in April - two up on the first meeting, so the fame of our new club is spreading.

After a quick game of Home Sweet Home - painstakingly created by Rosie with pictures of different creatures which had to be posted into their correct habitat boxes - we set off on a very drizzly day across Wanstead Flats to find the Skylarks' favoured area amongst the rough grass. Fortunately Tim Harris had briefed us enthusiastic amateurs with information about the habits of the Wanstead Flats Skylarks beforehand.

The ground was exceedingly squelchy and the sky was exceedingly grey after a week's intense rain and we were a little apprehensive that the Skylarks would be hiding away. But no, we were greeted by glorious singing coming from a little speck way up in the sky. Both children and parents were thrilled to see several birds fluttering around the gorse bushes and grassy tussocks and the children enjoyed finding them with our new binoculars.

Then we squelched our way back to the Jubilee Pond for our first pond-dipping session. After all the rain the water in the pond was up, but brown and muddy, and if you weren't careful your wellies got stuck in the mud.

The children used nets which were kindly donated to us by Jean at the Tea Hut in Wanstead Park. Sadly we did not find much life in the pond -

a few water fleas, leeches, water boatmen, nymphs, snails and a beetle or two; and a coconut, presumably thrown in by fair-goers. However, despite cold wet feet the children enjoyed themselves messing about with water, mud and nets - what's new!

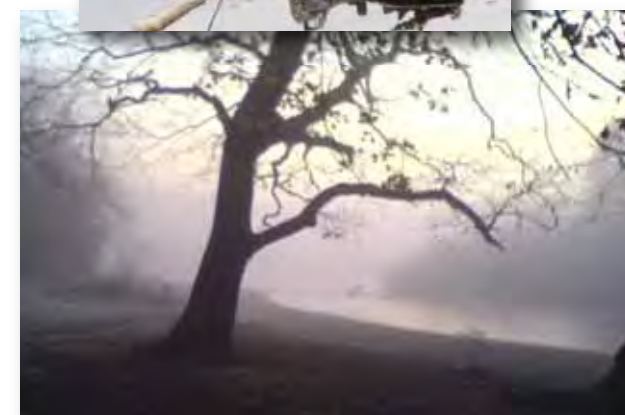
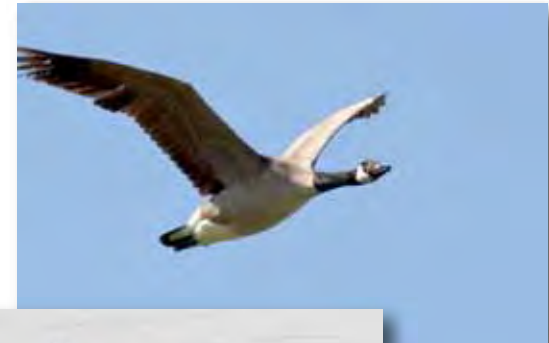
When we got back to the Changing Rooms we just had time for a quick look at our finds. There were cries of astonishment when we put a tiny water flea under the microscope and this weird creature appeared before our eyes! You will be glad to hear that Pam took him and his companions back to his watery home afterwards.

Below two pond-dipping pictures: one of Catherine, who tried very hard and came up with a coconut; and the other of Jacob, examining his catch.

Gill James



gallery

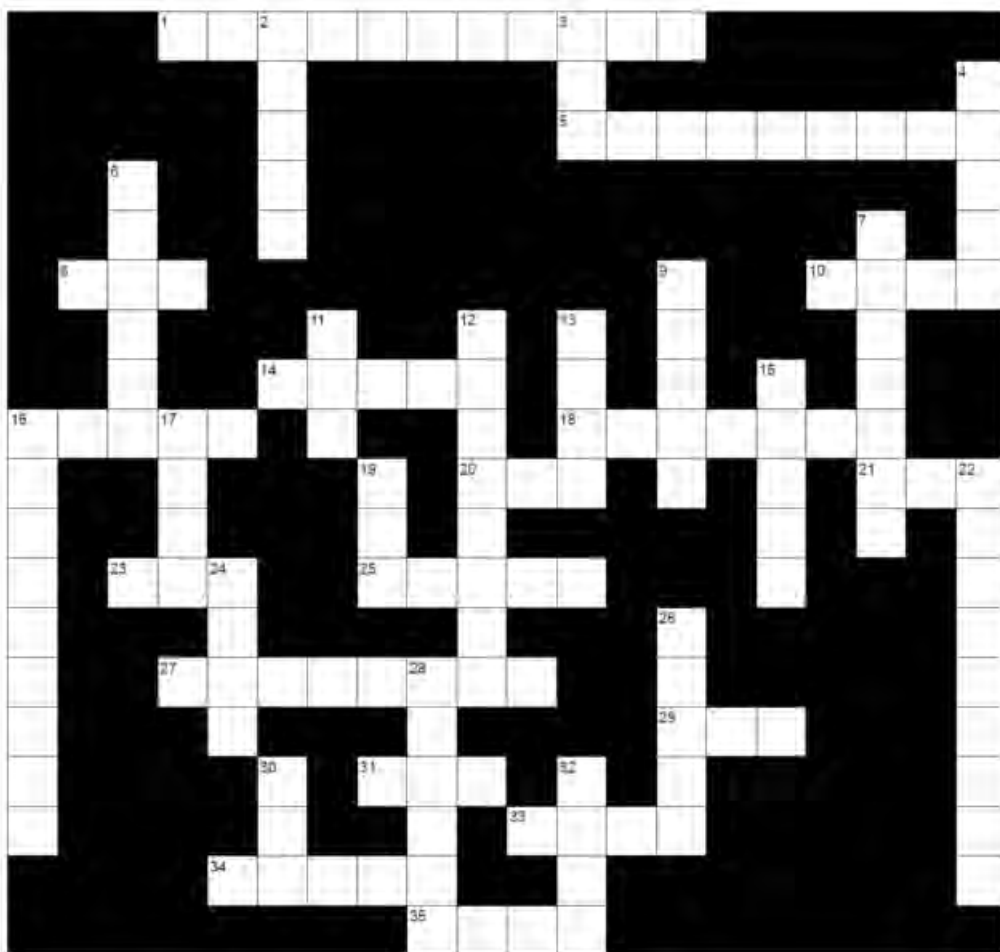


Speckled Wood butterfly (Tim Harris)
Canada Goose in flight (Tony Morrison)
Indian Runner Duck (Kathy Hartnett)
Mallards (Tony Morrison)
Silver-washed Fritillary in Wiltshire
(Tim Harris)

Great Crested Grebe (Sofia Benajeh)
Small Copper butterfly (Sofia Benajeh)
Hedgehog (Tricia Moxey)
Wanstead Flats at dawn (Tony Morrison)
Grey Heron (Kathy Hartnett)
Robin (Tony Morrison)

Please e-mail your pictures to editor@wrengroup.org.uk

Wren crossword



ACROSS

1. THIS BIRD BLOWS A WIND WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN (11)
5. SOMETHING A BIT LIKE A FROG SITS ON THIS (9)
8. MAN'S BEST FRIEND (3)
10. THE DOG _____ FLOWERS IN MAY/JUNE AND HAS FRUITS CALLED 'HIPS' (4)
14. HAS RED BERRIES AT CHRISTMAS (5)
16. HAS SILVERY BARK AND IS WHERE CATKINS COME FROM (5)
18. BABY FROG FOUND IN YOUR POND (7)
20. THIS TREE HAS FRUITS CALLED KEYS (3)
21. THE COLOUR OF ROWAN BERRIES (3)
23. A WISE OLD BIRD (3)
25. SLOES ARE THE FRUITS OF THE BLACK _____ (5)
27. OFTEN FOUND IN HEDGEROWS WITH FLOWERS TURNING INTO BLACKBERRIES (8)
29. THIS PLANT GROWS UP THE TRUNKS OF TREES TO REACH THE SUN (3)
31. WHERE ACCORNS COME FROM (3)
33. A BIRDS HOUSE (4)
34. THESE BIRDS SOMETIMES COME ALL THE WAY FROM CANADA (5)
35. A BIG WHITE BIRD (4)

DOWN

2. NOT ALWAYS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE (5)
3. THIS INSECT IS A REGULAR LITTLE SOLDIER (3)
4. A SINGLE PIECE OF GRASS SHARP AS A KNIFE (5)
6. IF YOU ARE LUCKY IT WILL HAVE FOUR LEAVES (6)
7. FUN TO PLAY FROM THE HORSECHESNUT TREE (7)
9. WHAT'S INSIDE FRUIT TO HELP THEM REPRODUCE (5)
11. LIKE A SLY OLD DOG (3)
12. IT'S SEEDS SPIN LIKE HELICOPTERS WHEN THEY FALL FROM THIS TREE (8)
13. KIND OF LIKE A BUTTERFLY BUT ONLY COMES OUT AT NIGHT (4)
15. CHEERFULL GARDEN GROUND-FEEDING BIRD LOOKING FORWARD TO CHRISTMAS (5)
16. DRINK FROM A VERY CREAMY KIND OF FLOWER (9)
17. THIS BLACK BIRD'S A BIT OF A SQWARKER (4)
19. HANGS UPSIDE DOWN AND COMES OUT AT NIGHT (3)
22. THIS BIG CAT IS A REAL FLASHY DRESSER (9)
24. CAN BE SEEN UP IN THE SKY HAVING A LAUGH (4)
26. A SIGN OF SUMMER THIS BIRD IS REALLY FAST (5)
28. GROWS BACK ON TREES EVERY YEAR (6)
30. A BUSY LITTLE INSECT (3)
32. NO FLOWERS ON THIS PLANT - ONLY LEAFY FRONDS. GIRLS NAME (4)

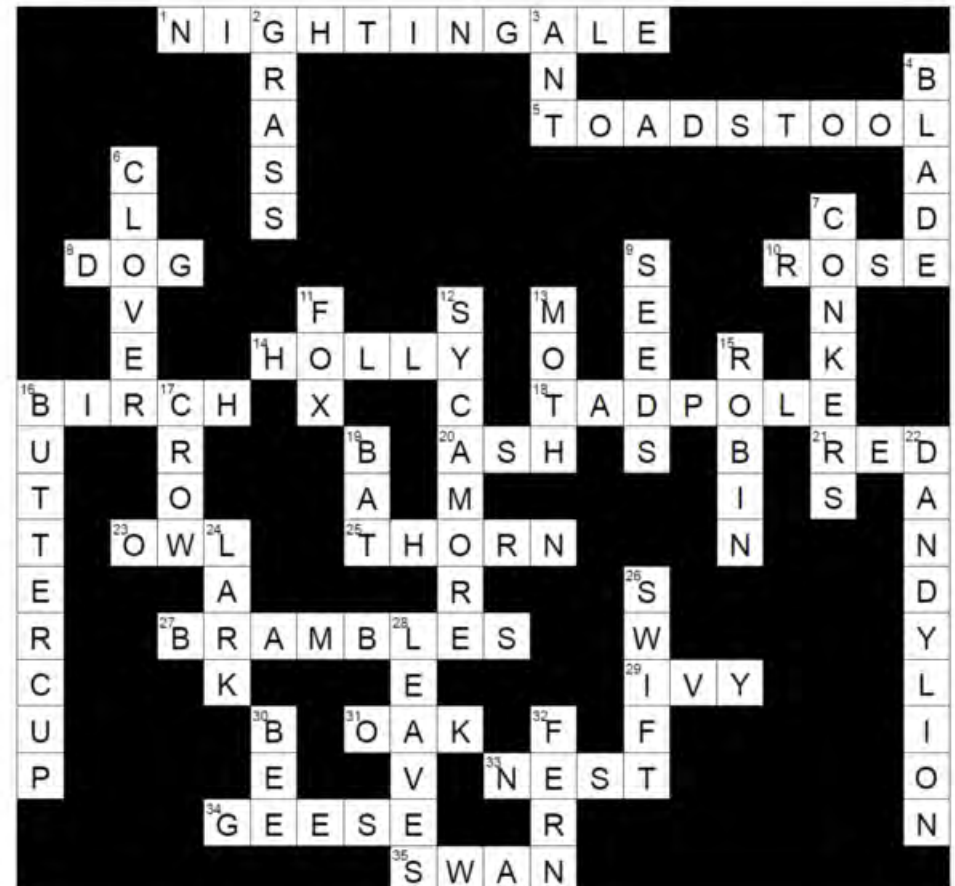
find the word

Can you find the following words hidden in the box below. Answers on following page - butterfly, bee, primrose, ash, clover, oak, goose, reed, grass, duck, wasp, spider, blackbird, acorn, dog, conker, fox, buttercup, clover, magpie, toadstool

A	I	E	L	C	N	G	R	A	K	O	T	B	P	A	Q	F	Q	C	D
Q	H	Z	T	O	A	D	S	T	O	O	L	U	N	J	O	Z	E	X	O
C	W	F	F	O	K	T	D	Q	X	A	D	L	R	S	P	I	D	E	R
N	P	Z	O	G	Q	C	U	S	C	L	Q	Q	E	H	Q	G	O	A	P
B	H	C	Q	P	A	K	G	G	I	O	K	J	T	C	Q	N	G	Y	U
U	I	S	B	U	T	T	E	R	F	L	Y	F	Y	G	R	P	C	U	D
T	N	H	Z	O	Q	E	Y	A	U	B	Z	M	K	P	Z	F	O	T	P
T	U	K	G	A	R	U	U	S	W	P	R	A	X	A	H	Q	M	C	X
E	Y	C	M	U	Y	D	C	S	F	Y	S	G	G	O	J	W	F	O	X
R	N	P	C	S	I	T	L	A	Z	Q	C	P	Q	S	A	F	P	N	P
C	F	P	R	I	M	R	O	S	E	K	R	I	P	Z	R	P	O	C	I
U	Q	D	R	Z	B	U	V	N	Z	T	P	E	T	Y	C	N	X	K	Z
P	C	Z	P	I	Q	T	E	T	W	B	Q	G	W	R	U	U	M	E	Y
Q	K	W	A	S	P	W	R	H	P	G	O	O	S	E	F	U	S	R	P
I	A	Q	S	H	C	J	Y	A	Q	X	A	U	M	E	Y	M	C	O	F
W	Q	I	H	G	N	Z	Y	A	I	T	K	T	G	D	U	C	K	X	R
X	O	D	U	T	L	X	H	C	Z	T	P	N	U	P	N	U	R	A	H
C	R	A	F	Y	G	W	E	O	M	L	T	F	R	A	Z	I	Q	P	U
J	B	L	A	C	K	B	I	R	D	D	K	T	S	C	L	O	V	E	R
P	F	B	C	J	R	G	M	N	N	J	T	C	Q	U	H	E	D	W	I

teaser answers

A	I	E	L	C	N	G	R	A	K	O	T	B	P	A	Q	F	Q	C	D
Q	H	Z	T	O	A	D	S	T	O	O	L	U	N	J	O	Z	E	X	O
C	W	F	F	O	K	T	D	Q	X	A	D	L	R	S	P	I	D	E	R
N	P	Z	O	G	Q	C	U	S	C	L	Q	Q	E	H	Q	G	O	A	P
B	H	C	Q	P	A	K	G	G	I	O	K	J	T	C	Q	N	G	Y	U
U	I	S	B	U	T	T	E	R	F	L	Y	F	Y	G	R	P	C	U	D
T	N	H	Z	O	Q	E	Y	A	U	B	Z	M	K	P	Z	F	O	T	P
T	U	K	G	A	R	U	U	S	W	P	R	A	X	A	H	Q	M	C	X
E	Y	C	M	U	Y	D	C	S	F	Y	S	G	G	O	J	W	F	O	X
R	N	P	C	S	I	T	L	A	Z	Q	C	P	Q	S	A	F	P	N	P
C	F	P	R	I	M	R	O	S	E	K	R	I	P	Z	R	P	O	C	I
U	Q	D	R	Z	B	U	V	N	Z	T	P	E	T	Y	C	N	X	K	Z
P	C	Z	P	I	Q	T	E	T	W	B	Q	G	W	R	U	U	M	E	Y
Q	K	W	A	S	P	W	R	H	P	G	O	O	S	E	F	U	S	R	P
I	A	Q	S	H	C	J	Y	A	Q	X	A	U	M	E	Y	M	C	O	F
W	Q	I	H	G	N	Z	Y	A	I	T	K	T	G	D	U	C	K	X	R
X	O	D	U	T	L	X	H	C	Z	T	P	N	U	P	N	U	R	A	H
C	R	A	F	Y	G	W	E	O	M	L	T	F	R	A	Z	I	Q	P	U
J	B	L	A	C	K	B	I	R	D	D	K	T	S	C	L	O	V	E	R
P	F	B	C	J	R	G	M	N	N	J	T	C	Q	U	H	E	D	W	I



and finally

Jackie Morrison has sent in a pic (right) of what looks like a caterpillar emerging. Can anyone help Jackie out and tell her what the mini-beast is? She can't sleep at nights anymore.



now & then

Were you right ?

Answer
Tram Terminus on Wanstead
Flats. Junction of Capel Rd and
Woodgrange Rd taken around
1906 and how it looks today.