No. 278 August 2025 ISSN: 0955 861

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter

Web: lnhs.org.uk; Facebook: LNHSocGroup; Twitter: @LNHSoc, @LondonBirdClub

Contents

Cover: Carion Crow, Hampstead Heath (Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)
(*Note*: cover of last issue was a Broad bodied Chaser not a Four spot Chaser)

Contact details

Newsletter editor:
Mark Burgess, edlnhsnews@yahoo.co.uk

Publicity enquiries: press@lnhs.org.uk

Website enquiries: web@lnhs.org.uk

Membership enquiries:
Robin Blades, 07507 446688
details@lnhs.org.uk

Printed by Henry Ling Limited, The Dorset Press, Dorchester DT1 1HD

For additional copies (or limited copies of back issues) send an A4 SAE to Catherine Schmitt, 4 Falkland Avenue, London N3 1QR

Please send your photos, letters, news and field reports to the editor by 20th October 2025 for inclusion in the November 2025 issue.

Notes for Contributors

The editor of the newsletter is always happy to receive announcements, news stories and reports. As a general guide, announcements should be 50–100 words and news stories 100–300 words. Reports of meetings should have a minimum length of 350 words and a maximum of 1,000.

Please provide pictures wherever possible (even if only of the site or the group); a report is duller without them. They should be at 300 dpi (**NOT 72 dpi from a phone**) and at least 1,800 pixels wide; cover pictures need to be at least 2,800 x 2,800 pixels.

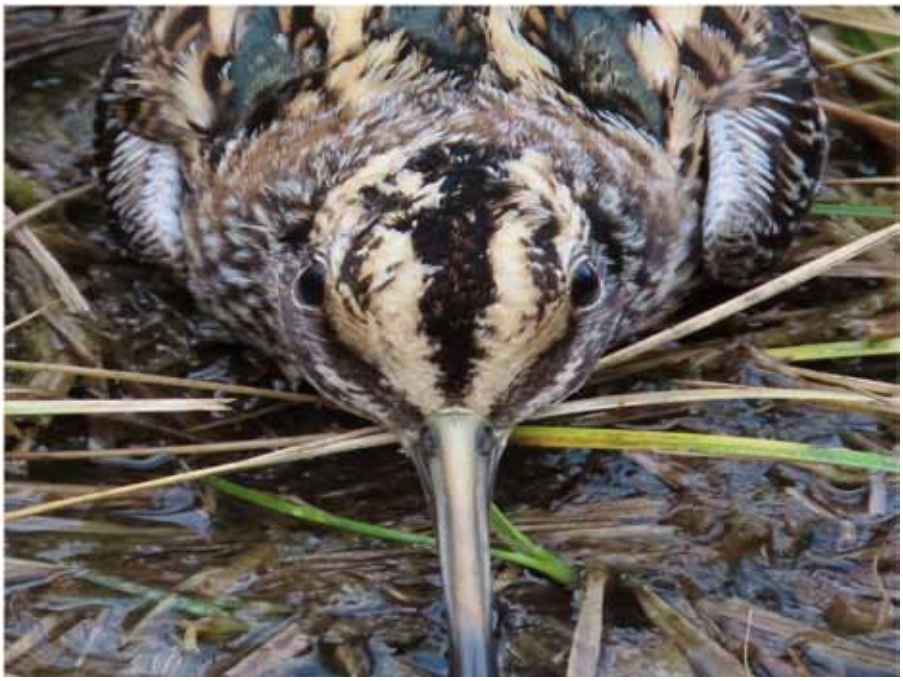
Mark Burgess, Editor

Easier access to the LNHS Library

The grounds of the Natural History Museum, where the LNHS Library is located, have undergone extensive renovations in the last few years. The remodelled gardens officially opened earlier this summer. This has been good news for visitors to the library as those wishing to use it for either research or for borrowing books and journals may use the museum access on Queens Gate and walk through the Nature Discovery Garden to enter the Natural History Museum. Upon entering, glance to your right and you will see the glass doors to the Angela Marmont Centre and the LNHS Library. Library visitors no longer need queue on Exhibition Road and wade through the museum visitors all the way to the opposite side of the building but should still book a day ticket (Free) for entrance to the Natural History Museum. The library contains over 4,000 natural history books including species lists by area with a focus on the LNHS recording zone. It has in depth guides for identification of plants, invertebrates, and vertebrates plus smaller sections dedicated to geology and archaeology.

Jack Snipe Research Group: Call for citizen science contributions

Would you be interested in contributing to the Jack Snipe Research Group's study? The group is based at University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) (accredited by University of Portsmouth). Currently two PhD students, Jolene Orlowski & Kevin Clements, are investigating the species' over-wintering and migratory behaviours. This project is overseen by their PhD supervisors: Dr. Claire Cresswell, Dr. Andrew Hoodless and Dr. Francoise Cabada-Blanco. To expand on this knowledge and bring together anyone that has an interest in Jack snipe, they are releasing a citizen science questionnaire that will aid their investigations into:



Jack Snipe (Kevin Clements)

1. Day roost and feeding locations
2. Population numbers
3. Habitat usage
4. Detection/survey methods

If you would be interested in contributing and being a part of this study, to answer their questionnaire please use this URL: https://forms.office.com/e/XtrG0PP18A

If you would like more information, please contact them at jacksnipestudy@gmail.com.

Author of 'Review of the Year' for The London Bird Report (LBR) 2023 onwards

We are seeking applications for the above position to take over from our previous author, who has retired. The successful applicant should have a keen interest in birds and a good knowledge of the birds of the London Area, and be able to summarise a large quantity of data into concise, readable form.

The Review of the Year has been written for the LBR by Nick Rutter every year from LBR 2009 to LBR 2021. Nick has now stepped down from this role, and we are looking for someone to take over.

The Review of the Year is a six-page section of each issue of the *London Bird Report* (about 3,500 words in length). The usual format to date has been to have three sections: a short introductory section covering the main highlights of the year; a section covering the seasonal highlights; and then, the longest section, a month-by-month summary of highlights. This information must be produced using the Birds of London section of the *LBR*, once that is completed.

The writing of the Review is quite time constrained, as it can only be started once the draft copy of the Birds of London section of the LBR is ready. This is usually about the third week of January. The review will then need revising once the final version of the Birds of London section is ready (about the third week of March).

So, we are looking for someone who could work on this during the period from about January 2025 to late March 2025 – and annually thereafter.

If you would like PDF files (for reference) of the Review of the Year and the Birds of the London Area sections from LBR 2021, please email Mike Trier: LBRdesign@lnhs.org.uk. To apply for this position, please email the LBR Secretary, Annie Wilson: secretary@lnhs.org.uk.

LNHS Information Leaflet and Membership Application Form

Mike Trier

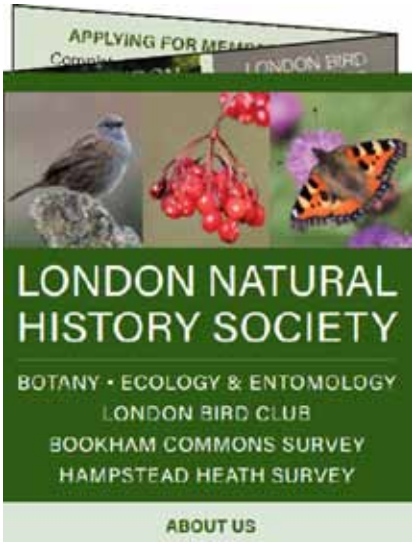
The Society has commisisoned the design and printing of a new Membership leaflet for section representatives to distribute to the public.

This Newsletter gives the opportunity for all members to enrol a friend or two! Carefully remove the centre double-page from the staples and separate the two pages (a scalpel or craft-knife and a straight-edge are ideal). Then fold each page in a Z-shape (as in the diagram on the right) to produce the 99mm-wide leaflet.

The folded leaflet will fit easily into a pocket, so carry one with you when you are out and about!

Use of the Membership Application form is optional, as newcomers can equally enrol online; but it does include the annual rates for reference.

Visit www.lnhs.org.uk and click on **Join**



Delve into Nature's Stories with the LNHS Book Club

Do you enjoy reading books about natural science, ecology and the environment and would like to discuss them in an informal and friendly setting with fellow nature enthusiasts? If so, why not join the LNHS book group? The group welcomes everyone, including newcomers, to share their thoughts, ask questions, discuss and reflect upon the issues raised in the books.

Book titles are chosen by the group; we aim to select titles with varied appeal, and which are easily accessible in the LNHS and/or local libraries.

Previous books discussed:

Darwin Comes to Town - How the Urban Jungle Drives Evolution by Menno Schilthuizen

The Lost Rainforests of Britain by Guy Shrubsole

Silent Earth - Averting the Insect Apocalypse by Dave Goulson

Entangled Life - How Fungi Make our Worlds, Change our Minds, and Shape our Futures by Merlin Sheldrake

Otherlands - *A World in the Making* by Thomas Halliday

Upcoming book club dates:

Wednesday, 27 August 2025 - *Rebirding - Rewilding Britain and its Birds* by Benedict Macdonald

Wednesday, 29 October 2025 - *The Sea Around Us* by Rachel Carson

Wednesday, 7 January 2026 - *Murder Most Florid Inside the Mind of a Forensic Botanist* by Mark Spencer

Wednesday, 25 March 2026 - *An Immense World How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* by Ed Yong

Dates and book choices are also posted on the Activities Calendar on the LNHS website (www.lnhs.org.uk). Bi-monthly meetings are generally the last Wednesday of the month, from 10:30 – 12:00. At the LNHS library, located in the Angela Marmont Centre of the Natural History Museum (West Entrance – no need to queue)

Enquiries: E-mail Cathy Ching (lbcfieldmeetings@lnhs.org.uk)

Collecting advice LNHS

Henry Miller and Mark Carine
henrythemiller@gmail.com

A recent report in *BSBI News* (Pearman, D. *BSBI News*, 2025, Edition 159) highlights a significant decline in the collection and deposition of specimens in herbaria. Alarmingly, only around 10% of new botanical records collected since 1980 are supported by a physical specimen. Although many modern records, particularly those submitted via platforms such as iRecord and iNaturalist include accompanying images, these are not always sufficient for accurate identification or redetermination should taxonomic concepts change over time. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that where it is possible to do so, herbarium specimens are collected for all new and potentially new vice county records and deposited in an accessible collection.

Importance of specimen collection
Collecting and depositing specimens ensures their availability for verification and future study. Physical specimens enable botanists with different taxonomic expertise to confirm or revise identifications, thereby improving our collective understanding of the flora of London, particularly alien and naturalised species.

Specimen deposition at the Natural History Museum (BM)
The British and Irish Herbarium at the Natural History Museum (NHM) is willing to accept specimens that meet certain criteria. To facilitate this, I am happy to collect and deliver specimens on behalf of members on an annual basis. Specimens can either be posted to me or handed over during one of my LNHS plant walks.

Submission criteria for specimens

Required Information:

- A clear statement on the naturalised status of the plant. Many neophytes are also widely cultivated; it must be explicitly stated that the plant was not cultivated at the site it was found.
- Precise grid reference, site name, and vice-county.
- Date of collection.
- Name of the recorder and the determiner
- We also require confirmation that the specimen was collected in accordance with the BSBI Code of Conduct and that you agree that the specimen will be donated to the Natural History Museum. This can completed using a standard email available from myself (contact details above).

The BSBI code of conduct for specimen collection

Key points from the BSBI code of conduct available online include

- Do not collect from sites of special scientific interest without permission
- Do not collect from Schedule 8 species

Specimen preparation guidelines:

- Whilst flowering and fruiting material is ideal, vegetative material may also be acceptable.
- The plant's life form (annual or perennial) should be noted; if unclear, the base of the plant should be included to help determine this.
- Collected plants should be pressed in paper (newspaper works well) as soon as possible and weighted to flatten. The paper should ideally be changed daily until the specimen is fully dry.
- Specimens should not be mounted. To protect them use a large envelope with card added inside for support.
- All associated information should be written clearly on paper and tied to the specimen using string or placed in the envelope. If a record of the specimen has been submitted to a database such as iRecord or the BSBI DDb (through the BSBI app) the record's URL should be added.

Additional information:

- Proximity to potential parent plants (e.g. cultivated specimens nearby).
- Estimates of abundance at the site.
- Observations on regeneration—whether the plant is reproducing via seed or vegetatively.

To support the accurate documentation of London's changing flora, and particularly to improve our understanding of alien species, it is vital that we reverse the declining trend in specimen collection. All members submitting new Vice County records are encouraged to contribute by collecting and submitting specimens following the guidelines above.

Meet the author: Klaus-Douwe Dijkstra

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne interviews Klaus-Douwe Dijkstra on his book *Dragonflies and Damselflies of the World: A Guide to their Diversity* published by Princeton University Press.

Klaas-Douwe 'KD' B Dijkstra developed an interest in natural history as a child living in Egypt. Working independently for most of his career, he spent more time exploring Africa's dragonflies than anyone ever had, encountering 85% of the almost 800 species known in over 2,000 days in the field, while describing 80 as new to science. Aside from his European books, he authored a handbook for eastern Africa (2014), an odonata website for the entire continent (2017), and a guide for Madagascar (2021). His website (www.kddijkstra.nl) shows his multiple roles as ecologist, conservationist, author, illustrator, educator, taxonomist and consultant.

How did this book come about?

The book is part of Princeton's series *A Guide to Every Family*, showcasing animal and plant groups' global diversity. Each group has very different numbers of species and families (a manmade and thus arbitrary unit), with different stories to tell and different authors, so while the books are similar in size and layout, they vary incredibly in approach. Having dreamt for a while to write a book that allows readers to understand dragonfly and damselfly diversity better, I saw an opportunity when asked to contribute to the series. Actually, fitting that idea into the format required quite some thought and rewrites, but luckily I was given enough leeway (and even extra pages) to do so.

How many years was this book in the making?

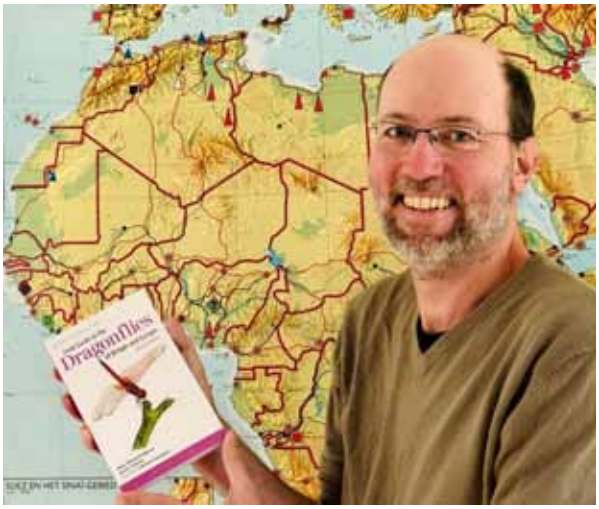
We started work in August 2022 and wrapped up last December, so more than two years and a third.

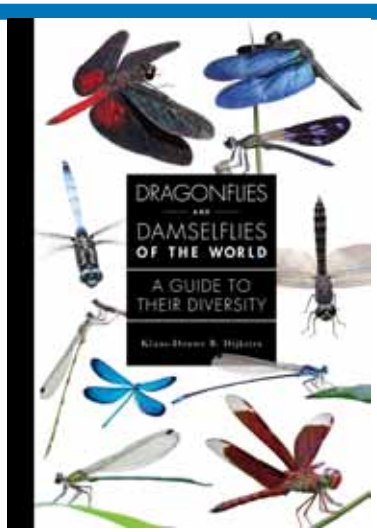
What do you want to achieve with this book?

Diversity is how the living world expresses itself. As colourful emissaries of Earth's richest environment, freshwaters, few groups can teach us that language better than dragons and damsels. Unfortunately, I can't explain in 256 pages how all 6,400 species known today were shaped by their characteristics and surroundings to live as they do. Nor how their varied appearances, allowing us to appreciate that diversity so easily, came about. Still, by profiling each of 120 distinct groups, some with just one very disparate species and others with many similar ones, I can give an idea of the forces at play. As part of that, it's also important to show how we translated this diversity into our own language. How are the species studied, defined, named, classified? That, after all, tells readers how they can develop that language further and thus improve everyone's access to these expressive beings.

Is there a fun fact or something amazing you learnt during the writing of the book?

Most fun was to ponder. I kept asking myself what made each group of species unique. What's special about them and why? As no two groups are the same, many questions can never be answered definitively. That's especially true for the group as a whole. They're often presented as living fossils, although today's species are nothing like those 300 million years ago. Ecologically, however, they've barely changed. Somehow, they're equipped so exceptionally as both aquatic hunters (as nymphs) and aerial ones (as adults) that they always stayed ahead of the pack.





Still, with a global view on all those unique groups, you see informative patterns. Many unrelated damselflies on streams are big with fancy-winged males. Many on open ponds, on the other hand, are small and blue-bodied. Wondering why allows us to grasp how the interactions between the animals themselves, and with their habitats, led to the variety we see.

It's also intriguing that, while most families favour flowing waters, among both dragons and damsels only the two most distantly related ones dominate standing waters. Just those four encompass almost half of the species, though! Indeed, the convenient dichotomy between rivers and ponds, and between dragons and damsels, is another reason why this insect order, called Odonata, is so well-suited to fathom the diversity of life: one-on-one comparisons are simply the easiest way for us to understand things.

Why are there even dragonflies and damselflies? They share a unique blueprint, yet this also differs fundamentally between them. Why could just these two models conquer freshwaters all over the globe? And how could they do so always side-by-side? Can it then really be a coincidence that their diversity is so similar, with both over 3,000 species?

A popular book gives an author much more freedom for such musings than a scientific publication would. Ironically, however, it can introduce lots of ideas for further research.

Were there any memorable moments during the course of writing this book?

This was the most fun but also the hardest to write. I had done field guides and handbooks before, which was fun because it's a puzzle to best explain how species can be separated. But compared to this that's like writing a novel about the clothes people wear. Now I needed to wade through research papers, books and photographs, link my characters' looks and diversity to their habits and homes, to get an inkling of their past and future. Although the subject seems scientific, it's more like storytelling. Unfortunately, the desk is an uninspiring place, so often I'd have to get out into nature before I saw the story and sentences started flowing.

For anyone who wishes to pursue this topic more, are there any online resources you would recommend?

Shout-out to iNaturalist and all the odonate enthusiasts that use it! This recording platform was my go-to for finding photographs and a major source for drawing the distribution maps. When you upload a photo, the site suggests an identification. This is based on image recognition trained on already available records. As records of rarer species in remoter areas are still scarce, you shouldn't trust this blindly, but for countries such as South Africa it works remarkably well. And the more records we all contribute and the more we help verifying them, the better the identification and range information become. Thus, we can collectively reconstruct what each species effectively is: a story of life.

Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner, *Cameraria ohridella*

Bettina Metcalfe

The Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum* is native to the Balkans namely Albania, Bulgaria, mainland Greece and North Macedonia. It was introduced to Britain at the beginning of the 17th century and has become naturalised. In parks, gardens and the urban landscape, it is considered an amenity tree which could be understood as a tree "that contributes to the physical, psychological, or material comfort of people" and "which facilitates happiness, pleasure, enjoyment, and contentment" (urbanforestrysouth.org). In other words, it is charged with emotional value. It is therefore not surprising that the disfiguration of the trees by the leaf miner has been of great concern to people.

The Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner was first described and named *Cameraria ohridella* by Yugoslav scientists in the mid-1980s. It spread rapidly and was initially spotted in the UK in July 2002 in the Wimbledon Area. It is now very common especially in England and is moving into Wales and further north into Scotland where it has already been sighted.

Aesculus hippocastanum Leaf Miner, (Bettina Metcalfe)

Four-stage life cycle:

1 The adult moth is a very pretty small insect which can be spotted moving upwards on the trunks of Horse Chestnut trees in the spring, usually from April onwards. They are about 3–4 mm long, with shiny orange-brown forewings that have four silvery white stripes. The legs are equally striped. The darker hind wings have long grey fringes and the head has an orange tuft. The antennae are about as long as the forewings.

The moths, emerging after over-wintering (as pupae) in leaf litter, will mate during the early mornings. The adults live only for a few days, and do not seem to feed at all.

2 Each female moth lays about 20–40 eggs singly on the upper surface of leaves. The translucent whitish eggs are flattened, elliptic, and ~0.25 mm long and hatch between 4–21 days later.

3 The larvae usually have five feeding or instar phases. This development normally takes up to 4 weeks. The first stage is sap-sipping, the later stages are tissue feeding. Sap-feeding instars are very flat and legless. The following instar phases have a triangular head with strong mandibles and create curved mines or tunnels of roughly 8 mm

in diameter. They live between the two outermost epidermis layers of the leaf feeding on the leaf tissue including chlorophyll.

4 Two further non-feeding, spinning stages introduce the pupal phase. The pupae are just over 3 mm long and up to 0.7 mm wide. The pupal stage lasts 2–3 weeks after which the adult emerges.

One whole life cycle takes between 6–11 weeks and 4 cycles per year have been observed in Britain. The adults can be seen up to the end of summer. In the autumn, the last generation overwinters in the fallen leaves as pupae. These are very tolerant of frost and can survive temperatures as low as -23°C.

Once the larvae start feeding on the tissue and create mines, the leaves show whitish patches, the translucent tunnels clearly visible. With each cycle of the moth, the leaves can become more fully covered in mines. The blotches turn brown, starting in the lower canopy of the tree, moving upwards, until the whole tree appears sombre and autumnal. The darkening of the canopy can happen as early as August, depending on the severity of the infection. Eventually the leaves shrivel, die and drop off.

The infestation is not thought to damage the trees significantly and does not lead to the death of the tree. We can observe that effected trees will re-flush the following year. However, photosynthesis is reduced and the trees seem to become weakened after numerous infestations. Long-term health becomes compromised and trees are more susceptible to other pathogens.

The fungus *Phyllosticta paviae* (syn. *Guignardia aesculin*) causes Horse Chestnut Leaf Blotch, which looks similar to the effects of the leaf miner. The patches are reddish-brown, but they often have a yellow margin around parts of them. It is considered unsightly but harmless to the tree.

Cameraria ohridella Beaune (Claude Debrauer; licensed under CC

Cameraria ohridella dorsal (Adrian Tync; licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.)

Bleeding Canker caused by the bacterium *Pseudomonas syringae* pv *aesculin* is a much more serious threat to the Horse Chestnut and there is no cure for it. Thankfully, it doesn't affect all trees in any given area; some trees seem to be resistant to it. Once it strikes, Bleeding Canker tends to attack trees that are already under stress. The signs are a sticky black substance oozing from dark vertical lesions on the trunk. Later the inner bark is typically discoloured orange. When the bacterium girdles the trunk, it cuts off the water supply to the crown, the tree then shows signs of die-back, the leaves drop and the tree dies.

In light of this, it becomes important to limit the spread of Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner. It is highly recommended to clear the leaves in the autumn and burn them where possible to reduce the number of moths. In the future, more natural predators might develop a taste for the pest. It has already been recorded that Blue Tits, Great Tits and Marsh Tits eat the larvae.

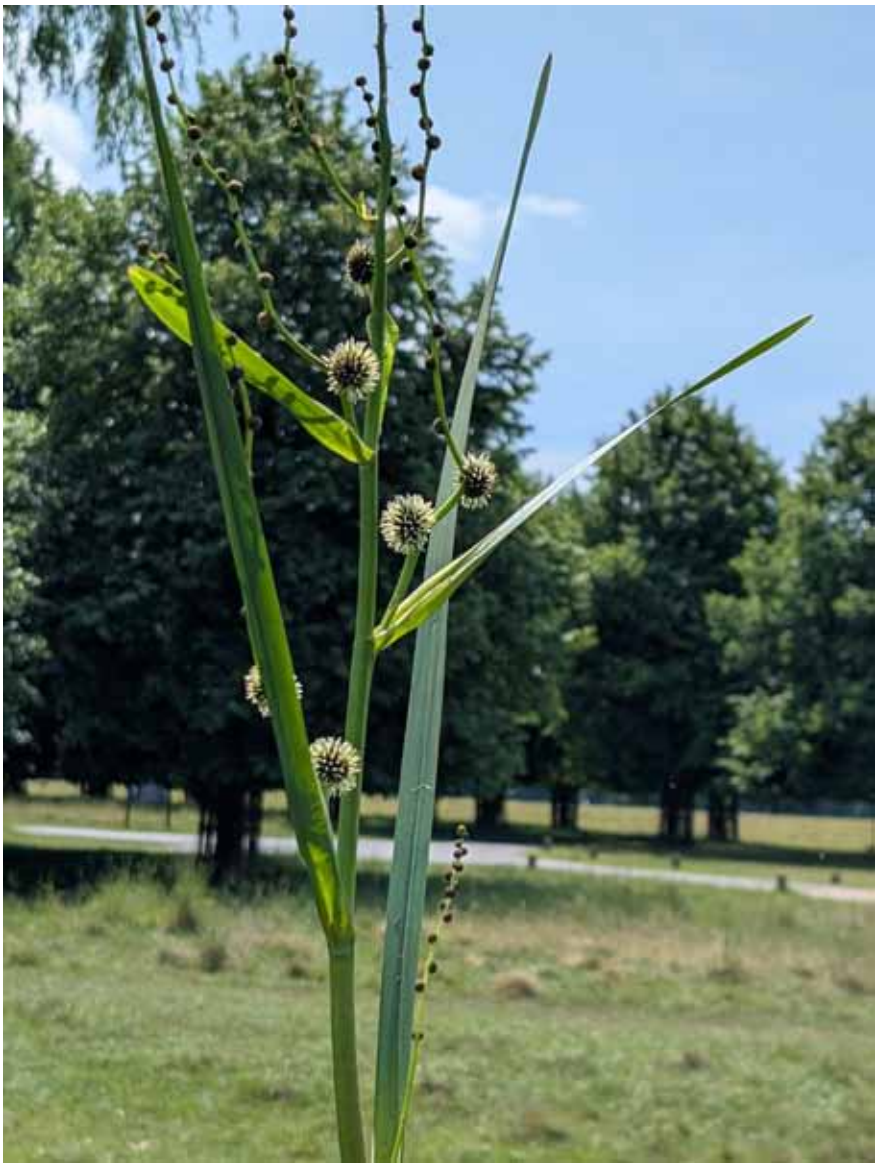
31st May, 2025

Home Park Botany Field Meeting

Maria Roberts

A group of just over 20 LNHS and BSBI members met our leader Henry Miller at Hampton Wick War Memorial and then headed into Home Park. We explored several Middlesex monads today and recorded a species list for each one. Henry introduced us to a wide range of plants giving us lots of identification tips and we keyed out a few of the more challenging plants. We found a good number of species on what proved to be a warm and sunny day.

We began by exploring the monad TQ1769 that covers Hampton Wick Pond and the adjacent area, including the boundary wall of the park. Plants around the pond margin included *Iris pseudacorus*, Yellow Iris, with its rich yellow flowers and *Sparganium emersum* Branched Bur-reed with quite similar leaves that are less flattened. Forming an understorey were plants such as *Mentha aquatica* Water Mint whose scent filled the air, *Eleocharis palustris* Common Spike-rush, and *Ranunculus sceleratus* Celery-leaved Buttercup with its shiny leaves. *Juncus effusus* Soft Rush and *J. inflexus* Hard Rush both grew here. The former has smooth stems and continuous pith. The latter has ridged stems and interrupted pith. We also found other waterside plants including *Lythrum salicaria* Purple Loosestrife, *Persicaria hydropiper* Water-pepper with its peppery taste, *Lycopus europaeus* Gipsywort with its deeply toothed leaves, *Scutellaria galericulata* Skullcap with its bright blue flowers in pairs, *Typha latifolia* Bulrush and *Glyceria maxima* Reed Sweet-grass with its leaves that end in a boat shape and a pointed ligule.



Sparganium erectum Branched Bur-reed in full flower (Maria Roberts)

We found two *Equisetum* species; the common *E. arvense* Field Horsetail and the less common *E. fluviatile* Water Horsetail with large hollow centre to the stem and short black teeth. There was also *Nymphaea* x *marliacea* Coloured Water Lily which presumably has been introduced. These plants are horticultural hybrids between *N. alba* and other species. In grassy areas near the pond we found plants, such as *Lathyrus pratensis* Meadow Vetchling and *Galium palustre* Marsh Bedstraw. At the far end of the pond, we found some more plants of pond margins; *Nasturtium* sp. Watercresses, *Juncus articulatus* agg Sharp-flowered Rush, as well as a

Myosotis Forget-me-not. When we looked at this again on the train home, we found it had features of both *M. scorpioides* Water Forget-me-not and *M. secunda* Creeping Forget-me-not so needs further investigation.

We did not find many aquatic plants today, the ponds generally seem to be too nutrient rich, but our first find was *Lemna minor* Common Duckweed. With his grapnel, Henry managed to land *Ceratophyllum demersum* Rigid Hornwort with its once-forked leaves and a plant that was probably *Stuckenia pectinata* Fennel Pondweed.

An interesting find amongst the grass near the boundary wall was *Rumex pulcher* Fiddle Dock which did show the waisted leaves. It's not one we see that often in London. We found several *Carex* species too including *Carex hirta* Hairy Sedge with its hairy leaves and the common subspecies *pairae* of *Carex muricata* Prickly Sedge which we keyed out. On the wall were three *Asplenium* species; *A. adiantum-nigrum* Black Spleenwort, *A. scolopendrium* Hartstongue and *A. ruta-muraria* Wall-Rue. We found two more ferns by the pond; *Dryopteris filix-mas* Male Fern with a mid-green blade and no black at the junction with the pinnae and *D. dilatata* with pinnules that are crimped over and petiole scales with dark centres and paler edges.

We found our first *Trifolium* here, *T. dubium* with small yellow flowers and a short stalk to the end leaflet, and continued recording a range of plants including *Galium verum* Lady's Bedstraw, *Plantago coronopus* Buckshorn Plantain and *Stellaria graminea* Lesser Stitchwort with its bright white star-like flowers.

We stopped for lunch by the pond before setting off into our second monad, TQ1768. Some new plants here were *Spergularia rubra* Sand Spurrey, *Juncus bufonis* Toad Rush and *Ornithopus perpusillus* Birdsfoot which wasn't in flower though. We also found a *Taraxacum* Dandelion that we were able to ascribe to the *Erythrosperma* section as it had small flowerheads and was a slender plant.

At the second small pond, the Overflow Pond, that we explored we added two plants with distinctive smells! *Acorus calamus* Sweet Flag smells like tangerine when the leaves are crushed while the smell of *Hypericum hircinum* Stinking Tutsan is supposed to evoke billy goats. We also found *Rumex hydrolapathum* Water Dock with its large leaves as well as *Sparganium erectum* Branched Bur-reed in full flower; the branched spike of flower heads was very striking. There was *Spirodela polyrhiza* Greater Duckweed in the water here as well as more *Ceratophyllum demersum* Rigid Hornwort and the invasive *Elodea nuttallii* Nuttall's Waterweed with its leaves in whorls and with pointed tips. We also peeped into the end of the Long Water and saw the dark leaves of *Impatiens capensis* Orange Balsam amongst a few other plants.

From here we walked to Rick Pond partly in the same monad and partly in TQ1767 where we saw *Tanacetum vulgare* Tansy (another plant with a distinctive smell) and *Oenanthe crocata* Hemlock Water Dropwort as well as *Carex acutiformis* Lesser Pond Sedge. This pond proved to be the best for aquatics as we were pleased to identify some definite *Stuckenia pectinata* Fennel Pondweed with distinctive long sheaths below the leaves and also *Potamageton trichoides* Hairlike Pondweed with narrow pointed leaves.

By now we had seen three *Trifolium* species; *T. dubium* Lesser Trefoil, *T. pratense* Red Clover and *T. repens* White Clover, though not any less common ones. Our final stop in the fourth monad TQ1667 was in the area at the edge of the golf course close to Hampton Court Palace. This is the site where *Scilla autumnalis* Autumn Squill can be found later in the year. Here we spotted *Allium vineale* Crow Garlic and Galium verum Lady's Bedstraw with its gall *Geocrypta galii* caused by a fly. The meeting officially ended here and most of the group left through Jubilee Gate to take the river path but a few of us stayed on to search in the shorter grass for other clovers. We were pleased to locate *Trifolium striatum* Knotted Clover with its pink flowers just about to open and identifiable from the leaves which are downy on both sides. Not far away was *Trifolium subterraneum* Burrowing Clover with white flowers and its fruiting heads already burrowing into the ground.

Then we made our way towards Hampton Court station for either a train or bus homewards deciding *en route* that the walk along the Thames Path would make a good field meeting for another day. We continued plant identification on the train towards Waterloo before making our separate way home. Thanks to everyone for coming along, participating and doing plenty of walking! And thanks to Henry for leading an excellent trip and to Billy for keeping the species lists for each monad.

8th June, 2025

Barking Riverside

Jon Agar

This botanical field meeting, led by Mario Maculan, was initially planned to be a visit to the Ripple, a Local Nature Reserve in Dagenham where, because of the deposit of alkaline ash in the past, has held a population of orchids. However, a preliminary reconnaissance by Mario the week before found that the reserve was now completely fenced and closed. Despite efforts to gain access via contacting the rangers, we were unsuccessful. Undisclosed safety issues were mentioned.

Nevertheless, Mario decided to go ahead with an exploration of the area, starting from our meeting point, the new Barking Riverside overground station. This station opened a couple of years ago and is the terminus of the Suffragette line. It is on ground that used to be industrial, dominated by the now demolished Barking power station. It is a mix of brownfield sites, new housing developments, and a stretch of amenity land running along the North bank of the Thames.

Nine of us gathered on a sunny Sunday. It was immediately clear that the area is of great interest not only for plants but for birds and insects too. From the boat pier we could see Common Terns fishing in the Thames, as well as family groups of Canada Geese and goslings. A stop by a large Oleander bush (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), smelling sweetly in the warm sunshine, revealed plenty of ladybirds, as well as a Green Hairstreak butterfly and a hornet mimic hoverfly. From there we combed the edge of a long brownfield fence, and were soon counting many plant species, including Hoary Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), some wild (or escaped) Asparagus, Goat's-Rue (*Galega officinalis*), two similar but different *Festuca* grasses (Squirrel-tail Fescue *F. bromoides* and the Rat's-tail *Fescue F. myuros*), and a rather desiccated group of Broomrapes (*Orobanche* species, probably *O. minor*).

A grassy bank, which at first sight looked less rich, proved to contain more and more species as we inspected it on our hands and knees. The sward contained three mallows, tiny plants such as Thyme-leaved Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia*), Common Cudweed and Scarlet Pimpernel, and extensive patches of two unusual clovers, the Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*) and Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*). It was a good spot for lunch.

Refreshed, Mario led us into the saltmarsh that flanks the bank of the river. Barking Riverside, despite all the development, is still an area where the defenses against the tide meet the river mud allowing the survival of some typical and interesting estuary plants. Amongst the extensive Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), a tall plant with sedge-like flowerheads, we found Spear-leaved Orache (*Atriplex prostrata*), Wild Celery (Apium graveolens), Lesser Sea-spurrey (Spergularia marina), Sea Couch (*Elymus athericus*), and the diminutive but rather beautiful pale-pink Sea Milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*).

Scrambling back up the bank, we followed the footpath along the Thames as far as where a small valley and brook, known as The Gores, meets the main river, before cutting inland to circle back to our start. Along the way, accompanied by the sound of Skylarks and Linnets, we saw Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and Dittander (*Lepidium latifolium*). By my account we found 87 plant species.

The delicate beauty of Hare's-foot Clover (Jon Agar)

APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP

Complete the Membership Application Form overleaf, enclose your cheque, made payable to

The London Natural History Society

and post to:

Robin Blades
LNHS Membership Secretary
8 Chapman House
Chapman Square
HARROGATE
North Yorkshire
HG1 2SQ

Alternatively, visit our website www.lnhs.org.uk
There are links to membership forms that can be emailed or printed off.
Payment may be made by card through PayPal or by bank transfer.

LIBRARY

The LNHS Library is located in the Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity in the Natural History Museum and new books and periodicals on natural history are added each year. The LNHS library is run by a volunteer librarian and is available for reference by both members of the LNHS and the general public. In addition, books can be borrowed by LNHS members.

COACH TRIPS

The LNHS no longer runs its own birding coach trips but recommends those organised by the Marylebone Birdwatching Society and the RSPB Central London Local Group.

JOIN

Annual membership rates are very reasonable at £20 for full membership and £5 for students. The full range of membership options and details on how to join are online.

< Or apply for Membership using the application form overleaf.

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

BOTANY • ECOLOGY & ENTOMOLOGY
LONDON BIRD CLUB
BOOKHAM COMMONS SURVEY
HAMPSTEAD HEATH SURVEY

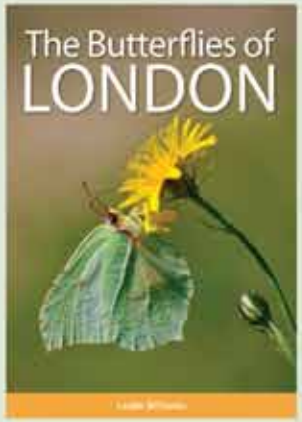
ABOUT US

The London Natural History Society (LNHS) is a local natural history society concerned with recording the wildlife of London, covering a circular area of a 20-mile radius from St. Paul's Cathedral. The society's aims include fostering the appreciation and study of London's wildlife and natural environment and assisting in the conservation of wildlife in the London area by helping to record it. This recording activity is co-ordinated by a number of dedicated and hard-working recorders each of whom takes responsibility for a particular taxonomic group.

ACTIVITIES

NATURE WALKS • TALKS • WORKSHOPS
FIELD SURVEYS

The LNHS has five active sections including two long term survey projects. This results in a highly varied programme of talks, organised nature walks, workshops and other activities. The variety and number of events organised for members, make the LNHS one of the most active nature societies in the world run entirely by volunteers. Whether it is purely for enjoyment and recreation, or in order to develop field skills for a career in conservation, the LNHS offers everyone a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities. Beginners are welcome at every event and will gain access to the knowledge of some very skilled naturalists.



PUBLICATIONS

The LNHS also has a raft of publications provided free to members. **The London Naturalist** is its annual journal with scientific papers as well as lighter material such as book reviews. The annual **London Bird Report** is an important compilation of bird records during a year; it also carries ornithological papers. Furthermore, there is a quarterly **LNHS Newsletter** which carries many trip reports, features and useful announcements; and a six-monthly **Programme** of events. The LNHS maintains its annual membership subscription at a very modest level representing fantastic value for money.

Join today

to enjoy free access to the field and indoor meetings in the Programme and to receive our journals and quarterly *Newsletter*. Subscriptions are renewable on 1st January; however the first subscription of a new member joining after 1st October will cover the whole of the following year.

Your details (BLOCK CAPITALS, please)

Name

Title

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Email

Borough you live in

Name(s) of Family member(s), if applicable

Membership categories & annual rates:
(please tick) ✓

- ☐ Ordinary £20.00
- ☐ Family £4.00
  (all at one address, in addition to Ordinary membership)
- ☐ Student £5.00
  (under 18, or over 18 and in full-time education)
- ☐ Corporate £20.00

Payment details

Please send your cheque, payable to **The London Natural History Society**, to the address overleaf. Signing the **Gift Aid Declaration** below will increase the value of your subscription.

"I would like any subscription or donation I make to the London Natural History Society from the date of this declaration until further notice to be under the Gift Aid 2000 scheme. I know that I must pay an amount of income/capital gains tax at least equal to the tax the Society reclaims in each tax year."

Signature Date

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

London Natural History Society
Registered Charity No. 206228

www.lnhs.org.uk
www.lnhs.org.uk

APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP

Complete the Membership Application Form overleaf, enclose your cheque, made payable to

The London Natural History Society

and post to:

Robin Blades
LNHS Membership Secretary
8 Chapman House
Chapman Square
HARROGATE
North Yorkshire
HG1 2SQ

Alternatively, visit our website www.lnhs.org.uk
There are links to membership forms that can be emailed or printed off.
Payment may be made by card through PayPal or by bank transfer.

LIBRARY

The LNHS Library is located in the Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity in the Natural History Museum and new books and periodicals on natural history are added each year. The LNHS library is run by a volunteer librarian and is available for reference by both members of the LNHS and the general public. In addition, books can be borrowed by LNHS members.

COACH TRIPS

The LNHS no longer runs its own birding coach trips but recommends those organised by the Marylebone Birdwatching Society and the RSPB Central London Local Group.

JOIN

Annual membership rates are very reasonable at £20 for full membership and £5 for students. The full range of membership options and details on how to join are online.

< Or apply for Membership using the application form overleaf.

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

BOTANY • ECOLOGY & ENTOMOLOGY
LONDON BIRD CLUB
BOOKHAM COMMONS SURVEY
HAMPSTEAD HEATH SURVEY

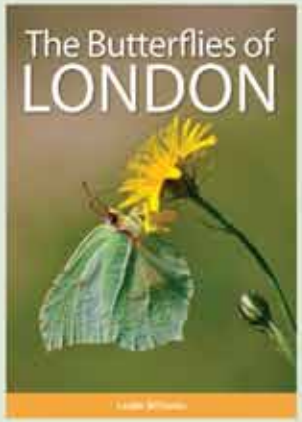
ABOUT US

The London Natural History Society (LNHS) is a local natural history society concerned with recording the wildlife of London, covering a circular area of a 20-mile radius from St. Paul's Cathedral. The society's aims include fostering the appreciation and study of London's wildlife and natural environment and assisting in the conservation of wildlife in the London area by helping to record it. This recording activity is co-ordinated by a number of dedicated and hard-working recorders each of whom takes responsibility for a particular taxonomic group.

ACTIVITIES

NATURE WALKS • TALKS • WORKSHOPS
FIELD SURVEYS

The LNHS has five active sections including two long term survey projects. This results in a highly varied programme of talks, organised nature walks, workshops and other activities. The variety and number of events organised for members, make the LNHS one of the most active nature societies in the world run entirely by volunteers. Whether it is purely for enjoyment and recreation, or in order to develop field skills for a career in conservation, the LNHS offers everyone a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities. Beginners are welcome at every event and will gain access to the knowledge of some very skilled naturalists.



PUBLICATIONS

The LNHS also has a raft of publications provided free to members. **The London Naturalist** is its annual journal with scientific papers as well as lighter material such as book reviews. The annual **London Bird Report** is an important compilation of bird records during a year; it also carries ornithological papers. Furthermore, there is a quarterly **LNHS Newsletter** which carries many trip reports, features and useful announcements; and a six-monthly **Programme** of events. The LNHS maintains its annual membership subscription at a very modest level representing fantastic value for money.

Join today

to enjoy free access to the field and indoor meetings in the Programme and to receive our journals and quarterly *Newsletter*. Subscriptions are renewable on 1st January; however the first subscription of a new member joining after 1st October will cover the whole of the following year.

Your details (BLOCK CAPITALS, please)

Name

Title

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Email

Borough you live in

Name(s) of Family member(s), if applicable

Membership categories & annual rates:
(please tick) ✓

- ☐ Ordinary £20.00
- ☐ Family £4.00
  (all at one address, in addition to Ordinary membership)
- ☐ Student £5.00
  (under 18, or over 18 and in full-time education)
- ☐ Corporate £20.00

Payment details

Please send your cheque, payable to **The London Natural History Society**, to the address overleaf. Signing the **Gift Aid Declaration** below will increase the value of your subscription.

"I would like any subscription or donation I make to the London Natural History Society from the date of this declaration until further notice to be under the Gift Aid 2000 scheme. I know that I must pay an amount of income/capital gains tax at least equal to the tax the Society reclaims in each tax year."

Signature Date

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

London Natural History Society
Registered Charity No. 206228

www.lnhs.org.uk
www.lnhs.org.uk

14th June, 2025

Thames Path to Tripcock Ness

Maria Roberts

This joint meeting for the LNHS and the BSBI was led by Mark Spencer who is always a fount of knowledge which he shared today with his customary good humour and enthusiasm. The weather was hot and dry for our meeting although we had had some welcome rain the night before. We met at Woolwich station on the Elizabeth line and made our way through the Woolwich Arsenal complex to the Thames where Mark introduced us to the environment and the route.

Mark Spencer hunting for plants on the banks of the river Thames. (Maria Roberts)

Eagle-eyed Mario had already spotted an interesting plant. On the steps leading up to the walkway was one of the prostrate *Euphorbias* which have been introduced through horticulture. This was probably *Euphorbia maculata* Spotted Spurge but examination of the fruits and checking against a key is necessary to separate it from *E. prostrata* (Ground Spurge). The university of California has a key to *Euphorbia* https://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/eflora/eflora_keys.php?key=9260 which describes the fruit of *E. maculata* as evenly strigose (with short, stiff adpressed hairs) and that of *E. prostrata* as hairy only along the lobes. The seeds are also wrinkled in the former and ridged in the latter (N.B. Mark later checked material of this plant and confirmed it as E. maculata).. Mark mentioned how useful *Flora Gallica* (Tison & Foucault, 2014) for identification too and it's a good resource for any serious botanist.

As we walked along the Thames Path we looked at some of the ruderal plants and Mark pointed out some key identification features and discussed changing distributions. We attracted some attention from passers-by who asked what we were doing and were interested to find out that we were surveying the plants. A nice find in this section was *Chaerophyllum temulum* (Rough Chervil) which is no longer common in inner London. The most distinctive feature is its swollen nodes and it usually has purple spotted stems too.

Our first plant found in salt marshes was *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima* (Sea Beet) though this is quite adaptable and can turn up inland. The Thames starts to get brackish in this area with the Greenwich peninsula to the west largely holding the salinity back. Mark described research by Ian Titley based on changing seaweed distribution which has shown that the Thames has been getting saltier over the last few hundred years.

The jetty out into the Thames caught our interest but it is inaccessible. However, we could see *Sedum album* here. Nearby was *Juncus bufonius* (Toad Rush) with the inner tepals pointed (unlike in *J. ranarius* (Frog Rush) where they are rounded). We watched Shelduck on the mudflats before continuing eastwards with a discussion about pollination/

pollinator syndrome which describes how floral features, such as colour, smell and nectar vary according to the pollinator that visits the flowers.

Saponaria officinalis (Soapwort) was not yet in flower but will probably be the double-flowered (c.v. 'Flore Plno') form, which is far more abundant than the single flowered plant. It's an ancient introduction and was used for making soap – hence its name. Mark also pointed out *Hirschfeldia incana* (Hoary Mustard). This may be the most common yellow crucifer in London now and possibly plays an important role for invertebrates, though this is not something that has been researched.

Our next plant of saline conditions was *Tripolium pannonicum* (Sea Aster) with its fleshy leaves. Mark explained that the form found in saltmarshes often lacks ray florets while plants on rocky coasts are usually radiate. However, the one we found in flower a little later did have rays. One of the plants we were looking out for was *Apium graveolens* (Wild Celery). It can grow amongst *Oenanthe crocata* (Hemlock Water-dropwort) though it has smaller umbels and feathery foliage. We did find *O. crocata* but failed to spot any *A. graveolens* today. We did find a number of other saline-adapted plants though. The Couch with greyish leaves was probably *Elymus athericus* (Sea Couch) and we also found *Sagina maritima* (Sea Pearlwort) with round fleshy leaves each with a tiny bristle at the tip. As we ventured down the bank above the river, we located *Spergularia marina* (Lesser Sea-spurrey) with small deep pink flowers. Nearby were the superficially similar *Plantago maritima* (Sea Plantain)

A colony of *Sagina maritima*, Sea Pearlwort, growing amongst granite sets and a green algae on the uppershore-line of the Thames. (Mark Spenser)

and *Triglochin maritimum* (Sea Arrowgrass), both with fleshy narrow lanceolate leavesand long dense inflorescences (the distinctive fruit of *Triglochin* make it easy to identify).

Back by the path, we looked at *Rumex cristatus* (Greek Dock) and Mark described its main features – the large fruits with big warts and the long narrow tips and heart-shaped bases to the lower leaves. We also stopped to look at the *Viburnum trilobum* (American Guelder-rose) often planted mistakenly as the native *V. opulus* (Guelder-rose). The terminal lobe of the leaves were distinctly long and narrow.

A couple more plants were examined before lunch. *Medicago sativa* nothossp. *varia* (Sand Lucerne) is the common subspecies in London with the flowers varying widely in colour. *Anisantha diandra* (Great Brome) has long lemmas – Mark demonstrated how to measure these - and a lax panicle. We ate lunch around the entrance to Gallions Reach Park before continuing towards Tripcock Ness. Several butterfly species were seen including a Painted Lady before we paused briefly for Mark to introduce *Senecio inaequidens* (Narrow-leaved Ragwort) to those who didn't know it. This plant from South Africa is rapidly expanding in London and across the South-East and beyond. Another non-native – this time from Europe –

A large plant of *Plantago maritima*, Sea Plantain, growing on the Thames strandline at Tripcock Ness. (Mark Spenser)

was *Galega officinalis* (Goat's-rue) which can be quite invasive but supports pollinators.

We stopped for longer by the river to examine a Poplar. It lacked any sessile glands at the top of the flattened petiole and the leaves were only slightly balsam-scented so this was *Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia* the native Black-poplar. Ken Adams' site has useful information about these including the fact that the presence or absence of burrs is not definitive in identification. http://www.kenadams.org.uk/esb/BLACK%20POPLARS%20IN%20UK.htm Soon afterwards we saw both *Populus tremula* (Aspen) and *P.* x *canescens* (Grey Poplar) and Mark described the ways these are found in zones across a geographical (and altitudinal) range – in a cline. *P. alba* (White Poplar) has leaves with white hairs on both sides and is found in the south as this is an adaptation to sunlight and heat. Further north, it's replaced by Grey Poplar with the leaves greyish beneath and further north again by Aspen. These distributions are very likely to shift with climate change.

A small patch of *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed) was a hint of the grazing marsh which would once have covered this area before we found another relatively unusual plant, *Securigera varia* (Crown Vetch) with globular heads of pink and lilac flowers. This has been introduced from Europe and there are scattered records in Britain. We had now reached Tripcock Ness where there is another small section of saltmarsh and Mark climbed down to find *Bolboschoenus maritimus* (Sea Club-rush) and to collect a specimen of a *Cochlearia* (Scurvygrasses). We keyed this out and it was definitely *C. anglica* (English Scurvygrass) with large flowers, flattened fruits with a septum (the wall between the chambers in a fruit) that is longer than wide, and with leaves that gradually narrow to the petiole.

Back on land *Oenothera glazioviana* (Large-flowered Evening-primrose) was readily identifiable as its style is much longer than the stamens and *Carex spicata* (Spiked Sedge) turned out to be readily identifiable too thanks to An upgraded key for identifying all native species, subspecies and varieties of the genus Carex (Cyperaceae) in Europe and the Caucasus https://nsojournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/njb.04640 which describes the finely toothed edges of the beak of the utricle. We examined these through our hand lenses and were delighted to see how distinctive this feature was.

Unfortunately, a great swathe of the land to the south of the Thames Path is fenced off here. Mark surveyed this many years ago and said it was a very interesting habitat but it is now completely inaccessible. It's the only area along this stretch that remains undeveloped and its future seems uncertain. It was good to see that there are still saltmarsh plants hanging on by the river itself but these are tiny remaining fragments of a rare habitat. Sobered by these thoughts we began retracing our steps looking at some planted *Crataegus* (Hawthorns) which varied considerably in leaf lobing; some plants had characteristics of *C. rhipidophylla* (Large-sepalled Hawthorn), which is

A profuse flowering of *Securigera varia*, Crown Vetch growing along the Thames Path at Tripcock Ness. (Mark Spenser)

A rear view of the ligulate florets and phyllaries of *Lapsana communis* subsp. *intermedia* growing in tall herb vegetation under trees in West Thamesmead. (Maria Roberts)

Flowers and fruit of *Cochlearia anglica* (English Scurvygrass (Maria Roberts)

widely planted; other plants appeared to be the cross with *C. monogyna* (Hawthorn) – *C.* x *subsphaerica*. Ideally, fruits should also be examined for definite identification.

We took a different route back passing first through Galleons Reach Park where the plants included a group of *Lepidium latifolium* (Dittander) perhaps surviving from a drainage channel. This was an important culinary herb in earlier times and has a peppery taste. As we walked through a housing estate, we spotted mounds of *Polycarpon tetraphyllum* (Four-leaved Allseed) still described in most floras as very rare but now frequently found on paving in many urban streets perhaps introduced with horticultural plants such as specimen olive trees. A similar change in status is true of the plant we found nearby as we followed the path above the waterway - which did not look very inviting probably due to the abundant Mallards and Canada Geese. *Laphangium luteoalbum* (Jersey Cudweed) is still a protected species but it is ubiquitous in many London streets these days.

One plant, people might look out for is the very rare hybrid between *Malva sylvestris* (Common Mallow) and *M. neglecta* (Dwarf Mallow) – *M.* x *decipiens*. Mark has only found this once. It's intermediate in appearance but the key distinction is that the fruit do not develop. We looked hopefully at some plants here but they were simply *M. sylvestris* with paler flowers.

Not expecting to see anything new before we reached Woolwich station again, we were very pleased to find our final plant of the day displaying a very large panicle with many branches. This was *Lapsana communis* (Nipplewort) but not the common ssp. *communis* but the much rarer, non-native, ssp. *intermedia*. This is a more robust plant – perennial rather than annual – and with larger flower heads, longer ligules and upper stem leaves not or hardly toothed. It is known from a few sites – including Mudchute Farm – but it is unusual and was an interesting end to the day. We were back at Woolwich station soon afterwards where we said our goodbyes. Thanks again to Mark for leading a fascinating walk and to everyone who came along and shared their interests and expertise.

21st June, 2025

Cannizaro Park Trees

Maria Roberts

A dozen of us spent an excellent midsummer day at Cannizaro Park in Wimbledon. We met Bettina Metcalfe at the entrance to the park before setting off on a clockwise route sticking to shaded areas as far as we could as the day was a hot one. The name of the park dates back to 1832 when Count St Antonio, who lived in what was then Warren House on the west side of the Common, became Duke of Cannizzaro (with two 'z's) in Sicily. The park has one of the most diverse collections of trees in Greater London with a good number recognised as 'Champions' for Greater London by The Tree Register of the British Isles. Bettina has compiled an extensive list of trees and today we only looked at a fraction of them (plus a few shrubs).

Our route took us round the sunken garden, through Connoisseurs' Corner, around the edges of the main lawns into Lady Jane's Wood with a pause for lunch at the Belvedere and then along the western edge of the park and continuing close to the perimeter before arriving back at the main gate. Here I describe some of my personal favourites of the day. *Nothofagus antarctica* (Antarctic Beech) is native to southern Chile and Argentina. It has small crinkled shiny leaves with serrations while *Phellodendron amurense* (Amur Cork Tree) in the Rutaceae family is from north east Asia. It also has leaves that are glossy above but they are compound and in opposite pairs. The buds in *Phellodendron* are hidden by the base of the petiole.

Citrus trifoliata (all images Maria Roberts)

Colletia armata

Xanthoceras sorbifolium (Yellowhorn) is in the Sapindaceae. The name of the genus comes from the Greek words 'xanthos' meaning yellow and 'keras' meaning which refers to yellow hornlike growths between the petals. The species' name refers to the leaves which resemble those of *Sorbus aucuparia* (Rowan).

Some of the trees we examined next have interesting fruit. *Maclura pomifera* (Osage Orange) has a distinctive fruit rather like a textured orange that is bright yellow-green by autumn. *Citrus trifoliata* (Japanese Bitter Orange) has compound leaves and pubescent fruit and we found plenty on the tree we examined. *Acer triflorum* (Chosen Maple) had the samaras typical of the genus but they were very downy. *Malus trilobata* (Maple-leaved Crab) also had fruits but more striking were its alternate and lobed leaves.

Colletia hystrix (Bristly Colletia) in the family Rhamnaceae is another native of South America and its stems and branches are covered with green spines rather than leaves. *Nyssa sylvatica* (Tupelo) is another tree we don't see very often. Its leaves are glossy and we were delighted to see the two curled styles from each female flower. Rather poetically, they were described as resembling a pair of swan necks.

One of the many Champion trees is the *Sassafras albidum* (Sassafras). This species has leaves of varied shapes. Several members of the *Diospyros* genus are also found in the park. The most unusual is *Diospyros virginiana* (Persimmon) from the south east of the USA. *Kalopanax septemlobus* (Castor Aralia) is another tree we don't see very often. Its leaves are alternate and have triangular lobes and the tree carries large heads of flowers and then fruits. *Clerodendrum*

Lyonothamnus floribundus ssp. *asplenifolius*

Nyssa sylvatica

Ptelea trifoliata

trichotomum (Harlequin Glorybower) is also known as the Peanut Butter Tree. When the dark green leaves are crushed, they release a scent like peanut butter.

New planting of interesting trees is continuing in Cannizaro Park to this day and one of the newer trees is *Asimina triloba* (Pawpaw). This promoted a discussion about the name which is used to describe the fruit of more than one tree. Another recently planted tree which we found a little later is the conifer *Sciadopitys verticillata* (Japanese Umbrella Pine) with striking foliage of leaves in whorls.

As usual, there were several trees to smell today. One we encountered in the afternoon was *Pistacia chinensis* (Chinese Pistache) with its mango-like scent. Interestingly, like *Mangifera indica* (Mango) it is in the Anacardiaceae. It is native to central and western China.

Not particularly rare, but looking stunning today covered with mustard yellow flowers, *Koelreuteria paniculata* (Golden Rain Tree) was certainly worth a look and a photo. The pinkish bladder fruits will also be eye-catching later in the year.

There were still more plants for us to examine and admire. The fruits of *Ptelea trifoliata* (Hop Tree) resemble those of *Ulmus* (Elm) and most of us were only certain of the genus of *Quercus phillyreoides* when we spotted the catkins and acorns. *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aspleniifolia' has beautifully lobed and incised leaves while those of *Tilia henryana* (Henry's Lime) have elegant extended bristle-like teeth. *Pterostyrax hispida* (Epaulette Tree) has large leaves and gets its common name because the flowers resemble the decoration on the shoulders of uniform jackets. *Ulmus glabra* 'Pendula' also with large leaves is another rare tree with branches descending to the ground.

If I had to choose my favourite tree of the day, I think it would have to be Lyonothamnus floribundus (Catalina Ironwood). This is an evergreen in the Rosaceae family with peeling, red-brown bark and the fern-like, deep green leaves are very striking. It's endemic to the Channel Islands just off the coast of California, where it grows in the rocky coastal canyons.

However, it's not easy to choose a favourite when there were so many delightful trees to select from. There were spiders, moths, lichens and more to spot as well and time to discuss the terminology of varieties, cultivars, subspecies and more. Some of us stayed for a chat in the sunken garden before we wended our separate ways home. Thanks as always to Bettina for an excellent day and to all those who came along and contributed their thoughts.

12th July 2025

Hackney Street Trees Walk

Brittany Pugh

On a very hot and sunny Saturday, nine people joined a street tree walk led by local street tree enthusiast Nic Young, and supported by Bettina Metcalfe. Hackney has a very diverse range of street tree species and cultivars, with an openly accessible map available online (https://hackney.gov.uk/trees), which is even sorted by tree size!

Meeting at the lower end of Windsor Terrace, we first learned a useful four step method for getting to grips with tree observation and identification:

- What is leaf arrangement e.g., are the leaves arranged oppositely or alternately along the branch?
- What is leaf composition e.g., are the leaves simple or compound?
- What is the leaf structure e.g., are the leaf veins pinnate or palmate?
- How is the leaf margin composed e.g., is the edge of the leaf smooth (entire) or does it have teeth?

These steps help to narrow down tree types into a smaller set of options for identification, and more importantly, encourage the participant to actively observe and ask questions about tree features. With the method laid out, it was time to put it to the test!

The group decided that the first beautiful tree of the day had (1) an alternate leaf arrangement, (2) simple leaves, (3) palmate veining structure and (4) entire leaf margins. Alongside these four important characteristics, we noted that the tree had very rounded leaves, long pea-pod fruits and very unusually, cauliflory (where fruits grow directly from the trunk). The identity of the tree was *Cercis siliquastrum*, which is known for its edible and eye-catching burst of pink flowers during spring.

Next, we were guided across to a tree with alternate, compound, pinnate, and toothed leaves which turned out to be *Gleditsia triacanthos* 'Rubylace'. Under closer observation, we realised that this tree actually had pinnate leaves only on the upper parts of the branches, with bi-pinnate leaves at the branch terminals. By using growth (girdle) scars on the branches, it was possible to see that roughly each year new leaves were added along the branch, leading to more leaves higher up on each branch.

Assessing girdle scars to estimate annual growth was helpful later when observing a healthy-looking individual of *Styphnolobium japonicum,* which, alongside having alternate, compound, and pinnate leaves with entire leaf margins, had green stems up to 4 years from initial tree growth.

In addition to its focus on observation, the four-step method was also useful for categorising trees into similar groups, another key skill for plant identification. On this walk, we practiced informally grouping together trees which had alternate, compound, and pinnate leaves leading to a charismatic set of trees in the family Fabaceae including the previously mentioned *Styphnolobium japonicum, alongside Cladrastis kentukea* and *Robinia pseudoacacia*.

While highlighting tree characteristics such as the fast growth of *Paulownia tomentosa,* there was some interesting discussion over how UK councils in Hackney and beyond choose species and cultivars of street trees to plant, and how these decisions have generally changed over time. Some key reasons that we identified for choosing certain species are shading properties, non-invasive root systems, whether they are likely to need maintenance *e.g.*, certain female trees may produce fruits which require clearing. Importantly however, we raised some possible concern over the sustainability of street tree choices under climatic changes, changing pest patterns and average life spans of selected trees.

The importance of street trees for creating cooler urban microclimates was evidenced very clearly when we searched for a shady spot to eat lunch and escape the 30 degrees Celsius heat, part of a series of recent record heatwaves to hit London in 2025.

Very sadly we did see some evidence of street tree vandalism with a young individual of *Carya cordiformis* having multiple broken branches, indicating the importance of educating people on the importance of street trees for their wide range of benefits to people and urban ecosystems.

All in all, I would say that the most important takeaway from this walk for those like myself who are not already botany experts, was that careful observation is more important

than accurate ID. Thank you to all of the participants, and of course to Nic and Bettina for an informative and very enjoyable walk!

Cercis siliquastrum
(all images Brittany Pugh)

Styphnolobium japonicum

Gleditsia triacanthos 'Rubylace'

Cladrastis kentukea comparative photo

Robinia pseudoacacia
comparative photo

11th May, 2025

Wood Farm, Stanmore Country Park and Pear Wood (Greater Stanmore Country Park)

Marian Rastelli

The wardens of Greater Stanmore Country Park were delighted to host LNHS at Wood Farm, Stanmore Country Park and Pear Wood (Greater Stanmore Country Park). The green belt site is a few minutes' walk from Stanmore Station, the end of the Jubilee Line. The sixteen walk attendees met at the station and were escorted to the Kerry Avenue entrance to SCP where they were met by the volunteer nature wardens from the three sites.

After introductions we made our way up the hill passing through 40-acre field where the bright yellow Creeping Buttercup was just starting to burst into bloom. We heard our first Blackcap and Chiffchaff here but seeing them proved more challenging. Continuing up the ride we reached Ant City, an area of acid grassland full of mounds created by the Yellow Meadow Ant. Here the lemon-coloured Mouse-eared Hawkweed predominated.

Passing through woodland we emerged into bright sunshine on Wood Farm. This is a very different habitat of scrub, tussocky grassland and wildflower meadow. A Chiffchaff obligingly sang high on a dead branch giving all the opportunity to view. We heard the scratchy song of Whitethroat and it wasn't long before we saw one performing a display flight from the top of the Hawthorn. These birds nest in good numbers in the thick Bramble cover. The

Common Buzzard (all images Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)

Whitethroats weren't the only bird full of the joys of spring. The Dunnocks were performing their own wing flicking courtship dance. A male Blackcap gave excellent views perched on a tall dry stem of last year's Hemlock. They have a beautiful warbling song which can be confused with that of the Garden Warbler. Garden Warblers are also regular summer visitors to the site and were soon heard.

London bird club

Stanmore Country Park

We headed up to the London viewpoint with good views of a pair of Buzzard and a distant Kestrel and then a Hobby flashed over, its red trousers just visible.

After lunch at the Old Dairy, it was time to head back down the hill. We took a route through Pear Wood in the welcome shade of this area of ancient woodland. Passing the fishing lake, we were treated to a colourful display of mating and ovipositing Large Red, Common Blue and Red-eyed Damselfly. This is Nuthatch and Treecreeper territory but it tends to go quiet during breeding season.

Four-spotted Chaser

Birds

Buzzard, Kestrel, Hobby, Sparrowhawk, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Dunnock, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Wren, Robin, Starling, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Nuthatch, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Parakeet, Wood pigeon, Stock Dove, Swallow, Linnet, Mallard and Herring Gull. 32 species.

Insects

Small, Large and Green-veined Whites, Orange-tip m/f, Peacock, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Comma & Brimstone Broad-bodied Chaser, Common Blue Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly and Large Red Damselfly, Yellow Meadow Ant and Wood Ant.

13th April, 2025

Lee Valley Nightingale walk

Andrew Peel

A total of 25 people, a pleasing mixture of new people and old timers, including a knowledgeable 8-year old boy, met at Cheshunt station on sunny day. There were numbers of singing Chiffchaff and Blackcaps. On the pits: Egyptian Geese, the long staying Wood Duck, Great crested Grebes, Mallard, Coot, and Moorhen.

Along the path, singing Goldcrest, Chaffinch, and Dunnock. On the tern rafts the Black-headed Gulls had taken up (very) vocal residence, on the water, a lone male Pochard, and an immature Herring Gull on a post. We heard the first of several Cetti's Warblers, and the youngster found a Little Egret on the river; at the hide, lunch, a Reed Bunting and some saw a brief, scurry-between-the-reedbeds Water rail. After Fishers Green car park we heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming and saw a Jay, a Fox, and a Muntjac Deer, and several butterfly species: Orange Tip, Comma, Peacock, Small White, Speckled Wood; also Bee-flies. After the electricity grid station we heard and then got close to a Nightingale. We listened for several minutes, enjoying the rich variety of its song: scales, croaks, bass notes, whistles: beautiful and sensuous, rough and smooth: a virtuoso display of melody *and* technique rather than the empty look-how-fast-I-can-play of a Liberace or Joe Bonnamasa. We all saw it fly along the edge of the scrub. At the weir we saw a distant flock of *c* 30 fallow deer on a hill, Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall on a small lake and an Oystercatcher. We finished hearing a Common Whitethroat and three people saw/heard a flyby Kingfisher. We saw 42 bird species in total.

2nd August, 2025

Footscray Meadows

George Kalli

The walk through the first part of the wood gave us a calling Wood Pigeon, Magpie and the powerful call of a Wren. Goldfinch and a Blue Tit were also heard. Moving out into the wide expanse of the meadows proper a Carrion Crow flew over and the many squawking persistent calls of Ring-necked Parakeet were heard and seen.

Areas in the grassland where flowers were profuse had butterflies flitting about. Gatekeeper were the prominent fliers with a few Meadow Brown, a Speckled Wood and a small group of four Common Blue together and a single Large White.

A Great Spotted Woodpecker called plus calling Jackdaw. A welcome single Swallow flew over and a stock dove called from the adjacent woodland. Moving through the gap in the hedgerow we started our way along the path beside the River Cray. The Crays clear running water is very relaxing and therapeutic and this chalkland stream and diversity is very valuable worldwide. A Chiffchaff, one of three counted today, was heard calling and a juvenile Grey Wagtail was spotted bobbing and feeding on top of the many fallen logs. Up to three Grey Wagtails were seen today with at least two flying together – evidence of local breeding. A Pied Wagtail also flew overhead.

We crossed the over the river by the small bridge and on our return by the river we heard the typical pipping call of a Kingfisher. A couple of the group got eyes on the Kingfisher diving in and catching a fish. A Sparrowhawk flew overheard putting a lot of the other birds into a frenzy. A Song Thrush with worms in its beak was feeding on the ground alongside a juvenile Robin – the latter with a speckled red chest. Butterflies seen included a Comma and Red Admiral. A large Red Darter, both male and female Banded Demoiselle and a Common Darter were also seen.

Reaching the weir and the Five Arches bridge Coot, Moorhen and Mallard were seen. Further along there were four juvenile Mute Swan together in the water. A noisy Jay flew over. Leaving the Meadows our return to the station gave us a Collared Dove on one of the houses and a Herring Gull and Red Kite overhead.

A total of 29 birds were identified with the highlights being the Kingfisher, the Grey Wagtails, the Sparrowhawk and Red Kite. The six butterflies and odonata added extra diversity.

18th May, 2025

Hampstead Heath

Pete Mantell

Our group set out from Hampstead Heath overground station and soon arrived at the first Hampstead Pond where we heard the recent coloniser, Cetti's Warbler, belting out his unmistakeable song from the south edge of the pond. We also clinched the first of half a dozen Reed Warblers here, one of which climbed just high enough up a reed stem to be visible. This has already been an excellent year for the species, with up to nine singing males. The planting of Phragmites clumps after the Pond dredging seems to be paying off. Hampstead 2 was rather quieter, so we continued to the Mixed Pond where a female Mandarin nervously marshalled a flotilla of ducklings near the walkway; however, human swimmers were swelling in numbers too, so we started the steady incline up Parliament Hill.

Carrion Crow (all images Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)

A breeze developed as we reached the crest, and screeching Swifts and a passing House Martin soon disappeared. We decided to cross downhill following Hedge 2 towards the Men's Pond. Earlier, a Nightingale had been heard here, and a small crowd of expectant faces was gathered on the off chance it might do so again. There were nods, smiles and raised eyebrows. Then it sang, not just a few notes but a full-on performance. Although none of us saw it, unarguably bird of the day. Joining the tarmac path we turned left at Parliament Hill Fields and began checking clumps of brambles and elder for anything new. A restless male Whitethroat, sportingly came out from a tangle of stems, remaining still for just long enough for most of the group. A little further along we reached the Boating Pond, where a Cormorant was fishing and a pair of Great Crested Grebes briefly stared into each other's eyes and shook their heads. It was rather late for display, so I assumed the pair had failed in their first attempt at nesting. Although pairs have had success in recent years, the species has a rocky history here, suffering flooding, stolen eggs and avian brutality.

At the Sanctuary Pond we heard more from the breeding Reed Warblers and ticked our first Grey Heron of the day. A little further up the path we saw Chiffchaffs and Nuthatch in an ivy-covered tree. Then, a high pitched song was identified as a Firecrest, which after some cat and mouse eventually showed himself rather

Female Mandarin duck with chick

View from Parliament Hill

well. Days later a family party of Firecrests was seen on the Heath, the first confirmed breeding since the 1990s. After a gravelly walk past the Ladies Pond we reached the Stock Pond where a Kingfisher was spotted by Milo perched on a reed stem. After circuiting the pond several times it perched helpfully to much appreciation, then was gone.

28th June, 2025

Ruislip Woods

Dick Middleton

Six of us met on a day that started with complete cloud, a light SW breeze and a temperature of 21˚C but gradually the sun came out, initially at intervals and then completely with the temperature rising to about 26˚C by the end of the walk. A good sign that it would remain dry was the height at which the Swifts, House Martins and the occasional Swallow were feeding. The only Red Kite of the day had drifted over before everyone had assembled and a juvenile Robin was feeding near the fence.

As usual, we made our way to the dam in front of the Boathouse. *En route* Great Tit; Woodpigeon; Pied Wagtail; Starling; Chiffchaff and Blackbird got on the list.

The regular, post breeding, flock of Canada Geese, probably 50 or more, were present along with a pair of Egyptian Geese. The latter had produced five goslings earlier in the year but none appeared to have survived.

The wildfowl present included the ubiquitous Coot; Mallard and singles of Tufted Duck and Great Crested Grebe. A Black-headed Gull stood on a nearby rock and a juvenile Grey Wagtail was spotted. Out in the middle of the lake the resident pair of Mute Swans were closely guarding their four cygnets.

Retracing our steps the group headed for the fishing platforms at the top end of the Lido. As we passed the toilets the opportunity to check the external lights for moths was taken – nothing on the day but they can be quite productive. The area at the fishing platforms was similarly unproductive – not a dragonfly or damselfly in sight.

Moving on to the rough grass area at the far end of the Lido the focus turned to butterflies. Here Small Skipper; Common Blue; White; Green-veined White; Gatekeeper; Meadow Brown and Peacock were all seen. Common Blue Damselflies and an Emperor Dragonfly were noted as was the many Cinnabar moth larvae on the Ragwort.

On entering Poor's Field a discussion ensued as to the identity of a nearby bird singing. Opinions of either Blackcap or Garden Warbler were expressed and, thanks to Merlin, the latter confirmed. Heading into Copse Wood the Leader's target was White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies. However, the rest of the group remained focused on birds and Nuthatch; Green Woodpecker; Long-tailed and Blue Tits and a sharp pair of eyes spotted a Treecreeper which were all to be seen/heard before the two butterflies deigned to put in an appearance.

Next stop was Post Pond, a Buzzard soared over us as we approached the pond. Little was to be seen initially except for a possible Broad-bodied Chaser which, when perched, faced us head on.

With now only three of us left we went around to the back of the pond where we could view it from above. The chaser was now duly confirmed but now the presence of a Moorhen (the first of the day); a Chiffchaff and a male Grey Wagtail were noted. Presumably they had all decided that it was safe to come out. It is tempting to think the Wagtail was the same as that seen on Neil's walk in May. A bird then dropped into the branches of the tree that overhangs the pond and it immediately became apparent that we had a female Crossbill. She dropped down to the edge of the water, had a drink and departed. Unfortunately, not a decent camera among us to record the event.

This was to be the grand finale and another day not to be forgotten. With now full sunshine and a rising temperature we departed to find somewhere shadier and cooler. A total of 36 birds were seen.