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LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter

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Contents

Notes for Contributors 2

Save the date - Thursday 10th December - Society AGM 3

Can you help to run your society? 3

Changes in membership administration 4

Letter to the Editor 5

Meet the author: Isobel Charman 6

Misumena vatia: investigating the ecological outcomes of a potential arachnid-plant commensalism 8

Brixton's backstreet botany 9

Fulham Cemetery 11

Allen's Gardens, Hackney 12

Entomology in a small suburban garden 13

Staines Reservoir 16

Alexandra Palace 16

Ruislip Lido and Woods 17

Russia Dock Woodland and Stave Hill Ecology Park 19

Cover: The leafhopper *Orientus ishidae* (Stuart Cole; see p. 13)

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Please send your photos, letters, news and field reports to the editor by 20th January 2027 for inclusion in the February 2027 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

Save the date - Thursday 10th December - Society AGM

The LNHS Annual General Meeting will take place at 6:30pm on Thursday 10th December 2026. The meeting will be held online using Zoom. AGM papers, including booking details, are enclosed with this newsletter. The AGM will be followed by a talk about *Mostly Bees!* from Tony Madgwick, our President. Please sign up to attend via Eventbrite.

One of the functions of the AGM is to appoint officers and council members for 2027. This is an opportunity for members to join the Council and get involved in the day-to-day running of the Society to help deliver what the members want. If you think you may be interested please contact the LNHS Secretary, Annie Wilson (secretary@lnhs.org.uk)

Can you help to run your society?

We are very grateful to all our members who support the society with their membership fees. If you have a few hours to spare and think you might like to get involved, there are lots of opportunities to keep the society running. There are administrative and organisational roles as well as natural history focused opportunities. Don't worry about lack of experience or knowledge - training and support will be provided.

Our virtual talks continue to prove very popular, for both attendees and subsequent YouTube viewings. We are looking for people to join the team to allow us to keep running the talks. Alternatively, you may like to write up one of the talks for the newsletter.

If you enjoy the field meetings and sharing your nature knowledge with others you could consider helping to plan and lead a walk.

If you are interested in nature writing why not contribute an article to one of our publications or become a species account writer. Alternatively, if you are a keen photographer we are always on the lookout for bird photographs for the London Bird Report.

We are looking for an Events Organiser to help us to attend and promote the society at events and, hopefully, recruit new members.

There are vacancies on the Council and the sub-committees, and we are looking for a President Elect to take over from Tony in 2028. If you are not ready to take a big step you could join one of the sub-committees or attend as a guest.

Don't forget that the society is run entirely by volunteers so please consider if you can lend a hand. If you would like to help please contact Annie Wilson (secretary@lnhs.org.uk), for more information.

Changes in membership administration

The Society has now started using membership software provided by a company called membermojo. If we hold an email address for you, you should be able to access your own details by entering membermojo.co.uk/lnhs into your internet browser. Click on the Sign In box and follow the instructions. You will receive an email with the link needed to reach your details; check your spam folder if it doesn't appear to have arrived.

This should allow you to see information including your address, phone number and email address and update them if necessary. Some, such as landline phone numbers, may have been collected a long time ago and be out of date, and we are sorry if any errors have crept in over the years. Members cannot see each other's data using the system, except people like me who need access as part of their LNHS role.

If you cannot get access to the system, it probably means that we don't have an email address for you at all or that we have an old one. If you would like to get access, please contact me at details@lnhs.org.uk. I can add your preferred email address to the system and you should then be able to get in. If you prefer not to use the internet, that is fine. We are quite happy for you to contact me by email or post and I can make any updates needed.

Details shown for you on the system include whether we think you pay your subscription by standing order. If you don't, you can click on the Renew option and pay through PayPal using a credit or debit card or PayPal account. Alternatively, you can still pay by bank transfer to the LNHS bank account or by posting a cheque. It is likely that our identification of standing order payers is not complete; if unsure, please check your own online banking system or other records.

If you pay by standing order or bank transfer, there may be a delay between your payment leaving your bank account and your being shown on our membership system as having paid. This is because we have to wait to be notified of the payment by our bank and then record the payments on the system (a few hundred each January). Do bear with us during this period. During the period from 1 January until you are shown as having renewed, you may only be able to access your details by clicking on the Renew option.

The membermojo system will also show whether you currently receive the Newsletter by email link or by post and whether you receive The London Naturalist and the London Bird Report. You can use the system to change your options. It does reduce costs for the Society and our environmental impact if people opt out of receiving publications by post.

You should be able to change your Gift Aid status on the online system. If your details on the new membership system show Yes against Gift Aid, we have had a declaration from you at some point and have not identified that you have subsequently cancelled it. You can change this to No if you no longer pay enough tax or if you wish to cancel your declaration. We are sorry if we have overlooked a previous cancellation. If your details show No against Gift Aid, we are not currently including your subscriptions in our Gift Aid claim. If you would like us to do so and you pay sufficient tax, we would be pleased if you could change the No to a Yes.

You may be a member of another organisation which uses membermojo software; if you find yourself looking at your details for that other organisation, please click on the dropdown menu next to your name and you should be able to switch to the LNHS.

Our Data Protection policy has been updated to take into account our use of membermojo software. It can be found on our website from the About Us dropdown menu or a copy can be obtained from me.

One of the features of the membermojo software is that we can send emails through it to groups of members. If you receive an email including the terms membermojo and lnhs it should be from us and safe to open.

Robin Blades Assistant Treasurer details@lnhs.org.uk

Letter to the Editor

Dear Mark,

Thank you for editing the excellent LNHS Newsletter. At the risk of straying into "*taxonomic botany*" but hopefully with the spirit of "*the close and thoughtful observer*" (Newsletter 282, August 2026) I would like to alert readers to a couple of clarifications/corrections to the botany section Meeting Report for Hackney Downs Park on 11th April 2026.

I know the trees in this park well having participated in planting around 300 of them. The Acer pictured is a Creten Maple (*Acer sempervirens*) not a Montpellier Maple (*Acer monspessulanum*) as labelled. The species are quite similar, and the latter may vary in form, but Creten Maple is distinguished by its very small leaves with side lobes pointing forwards. Montpellier has larger leaves and the side lobes are more horizontal. The samara differ in being slightly more open on Creten. On both species these can turn a remarkable bright crimson.

Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is a north American species so is unlikely to have been collected from seed wild in Kashmir. There is a single Black Walnut on Hackney Downs (NE of the centre circle) but the tree referred to is indeed a Common Walnut (*Juglans regia*). There are eight in various places on the Downs. The two species are quite distinct and can easily be distinguished by leaf morphology and bark.

Best wishes,

Russell Miller

Meet the author: Isobel Charman

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne interviews Isobel Charman, author of *The Zoo: The Wild and Wonderful Tale of the Founding of London Zoo* published by Penguin Books.

Izzy Charman is an award-winning TV producer, writer and research consultant. She read history at Bristol University and graduated with a first class degree and the History prize. Since then she has worked in TV and film, developing and making documentaries and drama-documentaries for UK, US and European broadcasters, as well as feature documentaries for international cinema release. In 2014, she wrote her first non-fiction book to accompany the BAFTA-nominated ITV series she produced, The Great War: The People's Story, *and published* The Zoo *a few years later. A long-time resident of London, she has recently moved to Gloucestershire..*

How did this book come about?



Isobel Charman

I somehow came across the story of Obaysch, London Zoo's first hippo (and the first hippo seen in Europe since prehistoric times) who was gived to the Zoological Society by the Pasha of Egypt in 1851 and somehow had to be transported to London. P and O fitted a 400 gallon bath onto one of their steamships and a whole herd of cows made the voyage with Obasych so he'd had enough milk. It was a pretty bonkers undertaking, and when I started to dig into the wider history of the ZSL in its early years the bonkers stories just kept on coming!

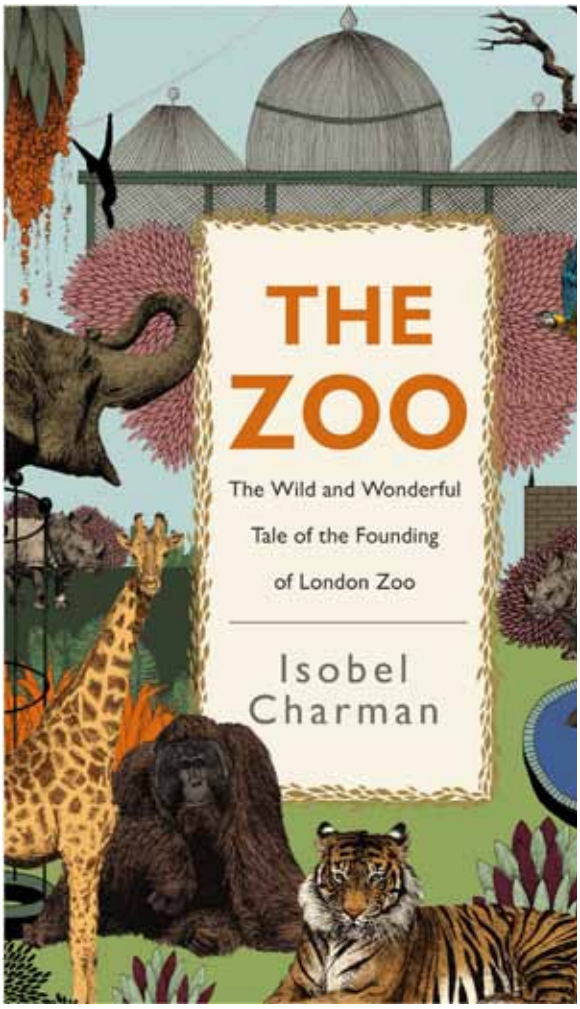
Such as that of Tommy the chimpanzee, who was captured in The Gambia by an enterprising ship's captain, who sold her to the zoo when he arrived at Bristol docks. He was escorted to London as a passenger on the horse-drawn night coach by the head-keeper and then he lived in the keepers' cottage at the zoo, and used to wear a little sailor's hat. Or there was an Orangutan called Jenny who inspired Darwin's theory of evolution; Darwin used to hang out with her in her enclosure, observing her relationship to her keeper and doing little experiments on her to gauge her intelligence. Then I realised that these crazy anecdotes were actually much more than that; they were a way into the big stories of the early nineteenth-century: Empire, science, technology, even social and political change.

How many years was this book in the making?

It was about 18 months from pitching it to publication, which is quite a fast turnaround. I spent lots of that time buried in the ZSL archives, which was an amazing source of information and inspiration. There were so many records from the time that I could use to piece together exactly what was happening: the minutes of all the council meetings, the veterinarians' journals, the ledgers listing everything that happened each day in the gardens, from important visitors to the animals that arrived or died. They were a window into a lost world.

What do you want to achieve with this book?

As an historian, I love making important stories engaging and understandable for a wide audience. I felt the story of the origins of the ZSL epitomized the age and was a great way into the bigger themes of the era. As a writer, I wanted to experiment with using character-driven, narrative prose to take readers into the historical world that I had uncovered in my research; I wanted to see how far I could blur the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction. This was such a cracking story and I wanted to make it a cracking read. I hope I've achieved that, and that readers will also learn quite a lot along the way.



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

So many it's hard to choose just one! One thing that struck me early on in my research was how many incredible characters were involved in this single endeavour. Lots of the people who played a big part in the Zoo's early history were incredible pioneers or major players in the broader changes that were taking place in Britain at this time from the British Empire to the redesigning/rebuilding of London, to pioneers in sciences like comparative anatomy, veterinary science, zoology, evolutionary theory. The history of this single institution takes in people from Charles Darwin to Queen Victoria, the artist/writer Edward Lear to the architect John Nash… it's quite incredible.

Another thing that really stuck with me was how little was understood about the human, and animal, body at this point. Initially, I was shocked by the horrifying nature of the zoo veterinarian's techniques in this era, but then it was pointed out to me that it was the same for humans too! There was no anaesthesia and most medicines were actually poisonous, like foxgloves and mercury. It's not surprising, really, that in the beginning so many of the animals that arrived in the zoological gardens didn't survive that long. It's pretty heartbreaking.

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

I went on a taxidermy course to try to put myself in the ZSL taxidermist's shoes. I was very squeamish!

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

The ZSL libraries and archives was where I did most of my research and there is some information online too at: https://www.zsl.org/about-zsl/organisation/history-of-zsl

Misumena vatia: investigating the ecological outcomes of a potential arachnid-plant commensalism



The flower crab spider, Misumena vatia (Clerck, 1757), is a classic character in spring and early summer invertebrate communities in the south of the UK. These spiders, notable for their colour-changing camouflage spend their days hiding out atop open flower heads, legs outstretched ready to ambush unsuspecting flower visitors.

Misumena vatia are masters of camouflage, lying in wait on flower heads to ambush visiting insects. But what does their presence mean for the flowers they occupy? Are they friends, protecting plants by eating pests; foes, preying on valuable pollinators; or simply freeloaders, benefiting without affecting the plant?

Researchers at Newcastle University are investigating this relationship through Spider Spies, a community science project combining public observations with molecular research. Photographs of flower crab spiders can help reveal which flowers they use and whether they prefer particular species, while donated spider specimens can be analysed using DNA metabarcoding to identify what they have been eating.

The project has already received records and specimens from across England and Wales, as well as observations from further afield. However, more records are needed.

If you spot a flower crab spider, take a photograph and submit your sighting to Spider Spies. You can also volunteer to collect a spider for dietary analysis, with sample kits and return envelopes available from the research team.

Find out more, submit your sightings and request a sampling kit:

https://foragingecology.com/spider-spies

Rosy Christopher

2nd July, 2026

Brixton's backstreet botany

Emilio Demetriou-Jones

As the cultural heart of South London and probably the entire capital itself, a trip to Brixton can often mean basking in the delightful medley of booming sound systems and bustling market stalls. The objective was slightly different on the warm and sunlit evening of 2 July, when I met with LNHS members and botany enthusiasts to explore a mix of exotic flora growing on pavements, in gutters and inside walls.

After some warm introductions, we promptly sunk ourselves into the backstreets behind the railway station and immediately encountered some Guernsey Fleabane (E*rigeron sumatrensis*), which despite its name is native to South America. Underneath a microscope its furry leaves appeared magnificently, with its silver edges lending it an ethereal, almost shiny Pokémon card-like quality in the sunshine. Some non-native Butterfly Bush *Buddleja davidii* took our eye next as we further followed the rail line, noticing how it had appropriated a good chunk of the station arch façade.

Our eleven-strong group was led by Roy Vickery, who spotted intriguing plants and weeds with ease and encouraged discussion. It was very quickly evident how many plants evaded easy identification, with the huddle engaging in healthy back-and-forth over slightly atypical features and the viability of other adjacent species. During the almost two-hour session we found 81 different species in total and of those we could fully identify, a total of 48% were native. Meanwhile, neophytes made up 30% and the remaining 22% were archaeophytes.



Tobacco (all images Roy Vickery)

Perhaps the plant that generated the most interest was a *Nicotiana*, otherwise known as tobacco, found just outside of Pop Brixton. As we discussed its sticky leaf feel, lack of flowers and general origins to the tune of Vybz Kartel's *Only Gets Better*, we stopped short of narrowing it down and so it remained identified only to genus. The identification of a Norway Maple *Acer platanoides* was swift, the group recognising its distinctive white sap oozing from its leaf stalk when snapped, differentiating it from the clear sap-producing Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus.*

As we skirted Wyck Forest Garden, we came across a Crape Myrtle *Lagerstroemia indica* with white flowers, which despite being a planted tree and thus not the intended species we set out to find, was a very welcome sight. Roy noted how rare it was to discover a white-flowered version of the southern Asian plant, rather than its typical bright pink, and after some healthy debate over whether it belonged to the Myrtle family (Myrtaceae), it was subsequently identified as being part of the Purple-loosestrife family (Lythraceae). This species is now being planted across Lambeth and neighbouring Wandsworth.

The evening flew by, with all attendees staying until the very end. It felt communal, warm and full of enjoyment and curiosity, and left us all very excited for the next walk!



Butterfly Bush



Crape Myrtle

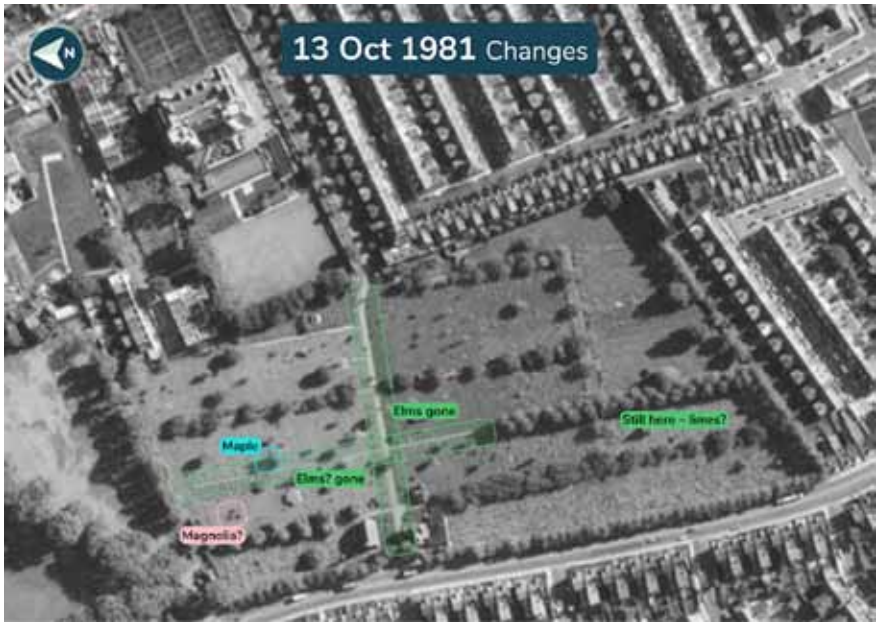
25th July 2026

Fulham Cemetery

Bettina Metcalfe

Francois Jordaan from the Friends of Fulham Cemetery introduced 22 of us to the history and diverse tree planting of the cemetery. The cemetery was established in 1865 in a rural area of orchards, market gardens and nurseries.

Francois showed us a number of historic arial photographs which he used to explain the development of the tree planting. His comprehensive website: fulhamcemeteryfriends.org.uk gives lots of information both about the cemetery and its trees. It includes an interactive map trees.fulhamcemeteryfriends.org.uk which allows visitors to find the identity of trees they are standing next to and also to find the location of trees from a filterable list.





In the 1950s, the cemetery was closed for burials and turned into a public park. The grid of paths was lined with ornamental fruit trees, in particular cherries and crab apples. Two avenues were lined with elms, but these disappeared in the 1970s and were eventually replaced by cedars, lime, and ash. The cherries and crab apples are gradually dying off and the Friends have planted replacements to continue their legacy, as a nod to the time when the area had many orchards.

Today, the cemetery hosts a number of interesting conifers as befits a Victorian cemetery. A good variety of older deciduous trees form a canopy above the new plantings. The cemetery has a relatively small area of nearly 13 acres (just over 5 hectares), but is home to an impressive 88 different tree taxa.

The Friend's Group was set up in 2024 to help with watering but are now very active in developing the site and caring for it. The challenge for any Friend's Group is to juggle the interests of the residents, the Council and the contractors who carry out the works. The Friends of Fulham Cemetery made incredible progress in the span of about two years and have clearly helped to breathe new life into the site.

20th September, 2026

Allen's Gardens, Hackney

Nic Young

On 20th September, 2026 I hosted a tree identification walk in Allen's Gardens, Hackney, just north of Abney Park Cemetery.

During prior tree walks, I had got into the habit of starting with a philosophical musing on observation: in essence, that we benefit from suspending the resolution of knowing in order to remain in the open act of observation, and that tree identification is a beautiful arena in which to practice this. I'd reference Goethe's *zarte Empirie* (delicate empiricism) and point out the moments when we truly looked at a tree. These moments usually occur when we have some knowledge but not certainty, and they nicely reflect the tension between knowledge and observation. I'd note the richness of our observational remarks, and how we spent more time with these trees than with the ones we'd decided we knew. But these musings were largely abstract, so on this walk I decided to try a new format, one that would elicit the desired behaviour directly instead of merely labelling it. I invited a host of new faces and presented the walk as assuming no prior knowledge. The group was roughly half experienced tree walkers and half newcomers.

Instead of mapping out a route, I chose a garden that was reasonably contained and held a good representation of different morphological traits. I prepared a handout with diagrams covering some fundamental morphologies:



leaf arrangement (opposite or alternate), venation (pinnate or palmate), leaf composition (simple, compound, double compound, etc.) and margin (entire, serrate, *etc.*). I then tasked the group with finding trees with specific morphologies, such as palmately compound leaves (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), or both compound and double compound pinnate leaves on the same tree (*Gleditsia triacanthos*). I introduced a few knowledgeable attendees who could help, and roamed between groups to offer support. Otherwise, I stepped back and let people observe for themselves and discover species names incidentally.

It was very rewarding to see people so engaged in the act of looking. The feedback was very positive, with attendees noting how gentle and engaging the day was. I certainly don't think all walks should take this format but I do think that, for beginners and experienced tree walkers alike, there is immense value in honouring observation as a skill, recognising that it can be put at risk by the desire for knowledge, and structuring an outing around actively eliciting it.

I'm grateful to everyone who attended and joined me in this successful experiment.

2nd July, 2026

Entomology in a small suburban garden

Stuart Cole

This is a brief account of some of the more notable insects found in a small garden in Hampton in Richmond upon Thames, south-west London. The house, into which we moved in 2000, is semi-detached, situated in a *cul de sac*. The rear garden is just 20 feet wide by 18 feet. To the front there is a small lawn. The rear fence is overhung by cypress, rowan and birch trees growing in an adjacent garden.

It seems to me that the garden is unusually productive, although it being the first garden we have owned, I am unable to compare it with other gardens. Of course, most species found in it are transients, not resident in the garden. Many of those encountered must have their origins, not just from surrounding gardens but by the presence, within a kilometre radius, of Bushy Park (an SSSI), the River Thames and the Longford River but it illustrates the potential for any outer London garden.

The intimacy of a garden allows one to observe, at leisure, the activities of inhabitants eat leisure, of the predators, parasites and nest parasites. Among them, the wasp *Philanthus triangulum* hunting honey bees around lavender flowers, the black pompilid wasp *Auplopus carbonarius* amputating the legs of a spider before storing it in her earthern nest cells by the garden shed, and the tiny flies *Cacoxenus indagator* lingering around the bamboo tubes containing Mason Bee (*Osmia bicornis*) nests in which they lay their eggs. Once I observed an ichneumon wasp (possibly a *Polysphincta sp*.) walking boldly across the orb web of the spider *Zygiella x-notata* that was hiding in the corner of a window. Once the wasp reached the corner she thrust the tip of her abdomen forward, presumably depositing an egg on the unseen spider.

Of the 556 animal species so far recorded, 469 are insects. Many other species have been encountered but are beyond my expertise to identify, *e.g.*, small



The garden in Hampton (all images Stuart Cole)

Hymenoptera and Diptera. Among the insects are a number of scarce and local species, three of them past or present subjects of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP): Rusty Click Beetle (*Elater ferrugineus*), Small Heath butterfly and the fly *Dorycera graminum*. Other highlights include Deaths Head Hawkmoth, a male Violet Carpenter Bee (*Xylocopa violacea*) that was possibly the first London record for the species, the scarce tenebrionid beetle *Pseudocistela ceramboides* and the big stratiomyid fly *Stratiomys potamida* that dropped down to drink at a drop of rainwater on the lawn.

Little effort has been made with the express purpose of attracting insects to the garden other than installing a small basin of water sunk in the earth for a pond, placing an oak log in a corner and hanging the bundle of bamboo tubes on the fence. A small light trap was used at intervals over 4 years. Once, I placed a dead roadkill rabbit in the garden. I was surprised how quickly this attracted insects, in particular, four of the histerid beetle *Saprinus semistriatus* that appeared within 2 hours. It is a common beetle on carrion, but preys on carrion feeding insects. It suggests that the species is resident in the vicinity of the garden close enough to catch the scent of putrifying flesh, yet I have not encountered the species in the garden before or since.

The Death's Head Hawkmoth was in the form of a full grown caterpillar found on the lawn. The next day our cat came into the garden carrying another *Acherontia* larva in her mouth and I realised that she must have found both in an adjacent garden wandering in search of a suitable pupation site.



The pompilid wasp *Auplopus carbonarius* with spider victim



The leafhopper *Orientus ishidae*

When I placed the larvae in a tin of compost they immediately started to burrow into the material and successfully pupated. Unfortunately, I was away when the adult moths emerged so I missed seeing them. Other hawkmoth species encountered, most of them in the light trap, were Elephant Hawkmoth, Small Elephant Hawkmoth, Pine Hawkmoth, Lime Hawkmoth and Humming Bird Hawkmoth. The fine ichneumon-wasp *Amblyjoppa proteus*, a parasite of Elephant Hawkmoth larvae has been spotted on two occasions.

Among 133 other moth species are two Australian micro moths: *Tachystola acroxantha* and *Epiphyas postvittana*. Although native to Australia, *Tachystola* can be found here from March to December. Another surprisingly hardy insect is the leaf beetle *Chrysolina americana*, which despite its name, is native to southern Europe. The larvae of this were feeding on lavender one cold January with snow on the ground. Altogether, 21 recorded insect species are non-native. Most from Europe, including the tiny bark beetle *Scolytus pygmaeus* from the Caucasus area, others originating from as far as East Asia (the leafhopper *Orientus ishidae* and the Harlequin Ladybird) and New Zealand (the weevil *Euophryum confine*). Several of the latter were discovered in rotton wood at the base of the garden fence.

Rose Chafers were annual visitors for a few years, none since 2015. A related species, the non-native black chafer *Oxythyrea funesta* once landed briefly on a cistus flower. One or two Greater Stag Beetles turn up each year and an interesting find in April 2018 was an earth cocoon dug up inadvertently from under the small oak log. The cocoon, about 10 cms long, formed of dark soil had quite thick walls and a smooth sided cavity in the centre in which lay an overwintering adult male stag beetle. Wakened from his torpor, he had difficulty walking although unharmed. I placed him in a shelter from which he emerged in May.



Larva of the moth Toadflax Brocade *Calophasia lunula*

The house itself has not been without interest. Two nymphs of the assassin bug *Reduvius personatus*, both covered with grey dust-like material, have been found and a real surprise was a female, with ootheca, of the native Tawny Cockroach (*Ectobius*

9th August, 2026

Staines Reservoir

Andrew Peel

Four of us met up on a hot and sunny day. There were large numbers of Tufted duck, Coots and Great Crested Grebes. Amanda had a brief view of a Common Sandpiper which we all saw on the return leg of the walk. A small flock of House Martins fed in the mid distance, and Linnets frequently flew calling between the banks and the causeway in flocks of 10-20 birds. Common Terns were heard and then seen, with nine on a raft, and juveniles on the banks. Around 50 Cormorants, some fishing as a flock. We finally got good views of two of the annual Black-necked Grebe flock (we saw four in total), a Red Kite perched on a reservoir post, a Dabchick, Pied Wagtails and a Clouded Yellow butterfly. The group saw a total of 11 bird species.

30th August, 2026

Alexandra Palace

Andrew Peel

A total of 13 people met at Wood Green, a mixture of new, younger bird clubbers and 'old-timers'. En route at the New River, a Great Crested Grebe. On the boat pond a female Pochard was among the Black-headed Gulls, Coots, and Moorhen. The path to the Deer enclosure was quiet save for two Jays, with a young Grey Heron flying around as we looped back up the hill. The mini golf trees and scrub were also quiet, but at the cricket pitches we glimpsed and heard Chiffchaff, a small flock of Greenfinches and House Sparrows. Butterflies enjoying the sun included Small Copper, Clouded Yellow, Common Blues and Small Whites. Other butterflies seen on the walk included Speckled Wood, Green-veined White and Red Admiral.

On the reservoirs another Great-crested grebe with two noisy stripey-headed juveniles, Herring and Lesser-blacked Gulls, Heron, Cormorant, a thirsty Stock Dove, and a Fox sleeping on the bank. A Blackcap called in the woodland, and the ponds were surprisingly full: we watched a Ruddy darter ovipositing, and Migrant Hawker dragonflies. We finished with good views of two young Willow Warblers and a female Great Spotted Woodpecker and seeing/hearing a total of 27 bird species.

5th September, 2026

Ruislip Lido and Woods

Neil Anderson

Seven of us assembled at the meeting point off Reservoir Road on a pleasant sunny morning that became progressively warmer as the day went on.

We walked down to the southern end of the Lido. The site had been in the news the preceding week for not good reasons. There had been a substantial die-off of fish due to substantially depleted oxygen levels, due to a mass algal bloom brought on by the summer's heatwaves. The Environment Agency had intervened with aeration equipment to restore oxygen levels.

Fortunately, we didn't see any dead fish and there were quite a few piscivores about. Around the margins were five Herons and three Little Egrets, while a couple of Cormorants were on the partially submerged raft. Most numerous were the Great Crested Grebes with 11 present, including two adult sized juveniles and two small stripy youngsters that were later seen getting a free ride on one of the parent's backs.



Small Copper (all images Stephen Dungay)

The pair of Mute Swans was still present with their four offspring and surprisingly only one duck species, the familiar Mallard with less than twenty seen. Normally I might have expected the first Gadwall, Shoveler and Tufted Duck to have been present by now. The only goose was a single vocal Canada Goose flying over before the group met up.

When we arrived, there was no sign of any hirundines but we soon witnessed a small number of Swallows and fewer House Martins passing through. We later saw a second small group of Swallows heading west.

As we scanned the Lido, I spotted a Sparrowhawk circling over Park Wood by the northern end. We had just literally watched this bird when a second individual flew low directly behind where we stood.

We saw several whites flitting amongst the Purple Loosestrife and as we started to move, Harry spotted a Clouded Yellow on the bank below us. Luckily for us it briefly settled on some Ragwort very close to us. This migrant butterfly has been having a phenomenal season with the highest numbers I've ever seen in the London area, with multiple sightings at numerous locations.

Near the exercise area we could hear a Nuthatch calling in the canopy of a tall poplar. We only saw it when it decided to fly out!

As we headed north up the western side of the Lido, Harry heard a Goldcrest, while Steve heard a second bird. We peered through the Aspen and Harry picked up not only Goldcrest but also a Treecreeper, which everybody eventually had a view of. In the same area Ros spotted a Comma imbibing what it could from a dried-up blackberry.

From a fishing raft we saw a Red Kite and had a close view of the young Great Crested Grebes.

Several Migrant Hawkers patrolled up and down by the Reedmace. I'd seen a small butterfly on the Michaelmas Daisies but never had a good view, but Kathryn then spotted it again and identified it as a Brown Argus. There was also a hunting Hornet (the first of several seen).

We did have a brief view of a Buzzard over the trees before we crossed the track into Poor's Field. Much of the ground here was still brown from the arid conditions but Dwarf Gorse was still looking good while much of the Heather was now past its best.

There were not many butterflies here, though we did see several Small Coppers. By a dried-up Post Pond, full of Water Pepper and fruiting Water Plantain, we did find four Willow Emeralds, a basking male Ruddy Darter, several Common Darters and a male Southern Hawker. A second Southern Hawker was seen by the wooded path on the golf course. There were also several Green-veined Whites here.

We briefly entered Copse Wood where a Blackcap had been heard. A second Comma was also on old bramble fruits.

As we headed back through Poor's Field, I spotted a male Blackcap in a hawthorn and then we realised there was quite a mixed flock with Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits as well as four Goldcrests.



Clouded Yellow



Great-Crested Grebe with Young

This side of the field had more butterflies. Harry spotted a second Clouded Yellow which settled on some Autumn Hawkbit and a patch of Devil's-bit Scabious yielded a tatty female Meadow Brown, Small and Green-veined White and a couple more Small Coppers.

We passed a vista with views across to Park Wood which I mentioned could be a good spot for seeing raptors. Less than a minute after my sentence a small falcon came into view which proved to be a Hobby. We then watched this for a few minutes as it was catching and eating dragonflies.

As we reached the southern part of Poor's Field I pointed out a couple of patches of flowering Harebell.

Having reached the end of the walk we briefly saw a second Hobby over the car park- a fitting finish to a pleasant few hours in good company. A Hairy Shieldbug landed by our feet as we went our separate ways.

11th October, 2026

Russia Dock Woodland and Stave Hill Ecology Park

John Cadera

It was a fine autumn morning when we met our group at Onega Gate. The plan this morning was to try and get up to Stave Hill with enough time to find some migrants; there has been a good movement of Meadow Pipit over the last couple of days.

As we headed up through Russia Dock Woodland, we were soon hearing Goldcrest around us, we estimated at least five within a short distance of each other. Most of the group got excellent views of one foraging close by. Although resident, autumn and winter is a good time to find these active little birds. A Jay was found and again everyone got to have a good look at this colourful Corvid. Robin, Dunnock, Wren, Blue Tit and Great Tit were seen by most of the group. A small group of Long-tailed Tit remained mostly out of sight, and we did not find the main flock. The star bird here was a female Great Spotted Woodpecker, that foraged above the path. She moved around a fair bit but always in view, even when we walked out on to the edge of The Green where we watched her for several more minutes.



Great Spotted Woodpecker (Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)

Along the edge of the trees around the Hop Garden, we found a party of at least five Chiffchaff; we get a decent passage through in the autumn with one or two staying during the winter months. We also found two Red Admiral making the most of the sunshine basking high up in a tree.

At Bea Pond, we found Robin and Wren, sadly 'pond' doesn't apply here at the moment; this small, sheltered pond has suffered terribly over the long hot summer. The drought has left it little more than a slightly damp crater with few birds to offer.

Downtown Pond, on the other hand, is in good condition, with plenty of reed around the edges providing cover for Moorhen. The resident pair raised one brood this year, usually by September/ October we find an assortment of young from three broods. Four Blackbird were tucking into a few

red berries in one of the bushes and along the track toward Globe Pond we encountered a Fox and our first Speckled Wood of the morning.

At Globe Pond we found the usual array of Mallard, Feral Pigeon and Moorhen. We also found a Grey Heron in the tree opposite the path as well as one or two Common Darter, a Migrant Hawker and another Speckled Wood. A couple of Goldfinch went over but were missed by most. It seems that despite our efforts, the Kingfishers had moved. However, a single call overhead turned out to be a far rarer bird here, a Jackdaw gave a very brief view to some of us as it passed overhead. It was, rather oddly, picked up by someone's Merlin app which ignored a couple of closer species! Jackdaw is an autumn drop in with only two other records at Stave Hill. So, we considered ourselves lucky to find two at Southwark Park a week ago, and more so that they have hung around, being spotted at Bermondsey, Greenland Dock and now at this site.

We checked out Central Meadow near the turbine, with all the berries eaten by Woodpigeon, we only had Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit and a Chiffchaff here. However, I was successful in finding two Common Frogs for one of our visitors who missed out on the spring walk.

After a check of the Stave Hill Pond area where we found another Red Admiral sunning itself on a post, we headed up to the Stave Hill. We said goodbye to a few people here and then spent some time scanning. Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and plenty of Magpie were seen. Great Spotted Woodpecker, once again, put on a bit of a show with several low flyovers; distracted by woodpeckers we almost missed the first group of distant Meadow Pipit picked up by a keen-eyed observer! Eventually we counted over 20 moving west, it has been a good season for Meadow Pipit; few days earlier we had over 60 through in the early hours. Some years we hardly find any and very few ever land. As we prepared to wrap up and head for home we had one last good find; a Clouded Yellow spent a few minutes flying back and forth in the new fenced-off flower meadow area.



Goldcrest (Isabelle Kiff)



Speckled Wood (Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)