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**Wren**

Wildlife & Conservation Group

**2015**  
Annual Report

# about the group

The society was formed out of an idea by George Dormer and Terry Wilkins who set up The Wren Action Group in 1972 for the local kids of Newham, particularly those George met on his milk round. He took them birdwatching locally and they met in a school in Vicarage Road, East Ham. I was asked by the local RSPB representative to attend a meeting and felt that it was a worthwhile group. When George moved away in 1974, I kept the group together and was joined by two friends Colin Plant and Hedley Morgan and we reformed the society officially as The Wren Conservation Group with our first "executive" meeting in 1975 - and the minutes exist from that time onwards!

We had the encouragement of Alfred Qvist, the then Superintendent of Epping Forest, whom we met annually at The British Queen pub in Wanstead. Our members met weekly in Wanstead Park on a Sunday afternoon for practical work with indoor meetings fortnightly in the former vicarage in East Ham. We used our contacts and brought in some well-known naturalists such as Roger Tabor and Alfred Leutscher as well as speakers from the London Natural History Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Corporation of London. The average age of our members was about 20 so the meetings could be quite lively - afterwards we adjourned to The Black Lion at Plaistow! We recruited from groups of young people using Wanstead Park so our membership total was erratic but relatively high.

In 1976, we felt we should like a Patron and we asked Sir David Attenborough who wrote he could not be an active Patron due to all his filming engagements "however, if you would still like me to accept the office even with this proviso then I do so with pleasure." We were so very pleased to have two such respected men as Patrons and delighted that Sir David remains as our Patron to this very day.

Richard Oakman  
President Wren Wildlife and Conservation Group



*“No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced”*

*Sir David Attenborough patron of the Wren Group*

# chairman's report

The past 12 months have been very good for the Group. Membership has continued to rise, now being not far short of 300. Our level of activity has also been maintained at a high level, and our ever-improving newsletter and Facebook presence reflect both of these trends. We have fulfilled our brief of continuing to evaluate the area's flora and fauna, publicising the importance of this for the local community, providing education and all the while having some fun!

Let's remind ourselves of some of the things our members have been involved with:

- The children's Nature Club has met monthly
- Regular waterbird counts have been conducted for the British Trust for Ornithology
- A breeding bird survey that located more than 1,200 bird territories
- Practical work sessions in Wanstead Park and the Exchange Lands
- Regular midweek walks around the capital
- Wildflower and fungi walks
- A comprehensive tree survey of Bush Wood
- A long weekend of bio-blitz activities that attracted 280 people
- Continued efforts to conserve the populations of ground-nesting Skylarks and Meadow Pits on Wanstead Flats
- The discovery of about 50 species of invertebrates not previously recorded in the area
- Joint activity with several local groups, including the Ferndale Area Residents Association, the Friends of Wanstead

Parklands, the Redbridge Samaritans, the TidyOurFlats group, Friends of Lakehouse Lake, the Manor Park litter pickers and the Essex Field Club

- Close cooperation with the Epping Forest keepers and conservation team
- Bat and Hedgehog recording in Wanstead Park
- Surveys of reptiles and small mammals in the Exchange Lands

This is by no means a comprehensive list but it gives an indication of the scope of activity we're involved in. Without the committee – magnificent again this year – and you, the members, this would not have been possible. In 2016 I'd like to see that activity grow. For a number of reasons, the pressure on our open spaces is increasing. We treasure them and we'd like everyone to appreciate them as we do. If they go, we'll all be poorer for the loss. Everyone has a role to play. You could tell us what wildlife you see in your garden or on one of your local walks. You could join one of our practical work teams. You could recruit some friends. You could even volunteer to join the committee. There are 101 ways to help, so if you haven't got involved with our work yet, why not take the plunge? It's a lot of fun.

Tim Harris  
Chair of the Wren Group



“Our engagement with other groups is stronger now than it has been for a while. With other new groups forming it is important that we maintain this spirit of cooperation.”

# practical work

*“Practical work is an excellent way to keep fit, get out in the fresh air, make new friends and meet nature close up.*



*We always welcome new volunteers so why not give it a try.”*



**Practical work began again in October 2015 after the summer break, meeting on the first Sunday of each month.**

We normally start the season by rowing across to Lincoln Island to manage the area of wild daffodils and bluebells. However this year for the first time ever we were not able to get across because of the low water levels in the ornamental waters. Instead we headed for Chalet Wood, the bluebell wood, and cleared further areas of invasive bramble.

November saw us work on a new area for Wren at the request of Jordan Thomas the keeper. This is the Plain, the area of grassland between the Temple and the teahut. Silver birch, oak and other trees are growing rapidly and the area is in danger of not keeping its open grassland habitat. A large group of us cut down dozens of small saplings.

We were due back on the Plain in December to do some more work, but on that very morning a large group from Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers turned up to work on exactly the same area, a bit of bad planning by the Corporation. Instead Wren switched to do further work on Chalet Wood where another area of bramble was dealt with.

The post Christmas period sees us switch our attention to the old sewage works beside the Roding and again we cleared brambles where it is invading the grassland habitat. Tim is very keen to keep a balance there that is so good for butterflies, invertebrates and other creatures.

We were there also in February. For the second year running we have been able to do midweek practical work initiated by Gill and Alan James, on a Thursday morning at 10am We have been getting up to 10 people each week (rather than monthly for Sundays) which is great. The initial focus was on Chalet Wood, but we have also worked at the top of the Glade where grassland is again being invaded by bramble and oak scrub.

Peter Williams  
Wren Practical Work officer





# treasurer's report

**The Group has had another good year financially.**

Income from subscriptions has exceeded our expenses by over £900.00 compared to last years £321.00.

This means that, once again I have no need to raise the cost of our subscriptions. With over £4000 in the bank, the group is in a very strong position.

Norman Olley  
Treasurer Wren Group



*“The group is in a strong position financially, which enables me to hold the membership fees at their current level”*





# secretary's report

Secretary? Sounds like a role for someone highly organised, precise and with a delectation for order. Me? Not many would say so. But I took it on anyway as no one else would. And it has proved very enjoyable. Why? It's designated function is the taking, typing up and circulating of committee minutes, even filing them away for posterity (!). But it offers the chance to be at committee and so chip in my thoughts, ideas, perspectives on the planning and development of Wren activities, on proposals and issues.

And if I can add some humour, that's a welcome plus. In addition I get to enjoy what others on the committee have to offer, their amazing enthusiasm, knowledge, skills and to share in their friendship and company. The year has been a busy one, with such a variety of activities and some pressing issues too. So, all in all, volunteering for being Secretary has definitely been worthwhile.

Jackie Morrison  
Secretary Wren Group



*“I am grateful to all those who have contributed to keep Wren going and growing, for their friendship and for the many events I have enjoyed - I'm glad that I am able to give something back in return.”*





*“By April 2015 this had risen to 214. New members have continued to join, and at the time of writing (mid-February 2016) our membership stands at 288, including 23 Life or Honorary Members.”*



# membership report

**The Group had another good year for membership recruitment. At the beginning of 2014/15 we had 160 members. By April 2015 this had risen to 214. New members have continued to join, and at the time of writing (mid-February 2016) our membership stands at 288, including 23 Life or Honorary Members.**

As interest in our local wildlife and environment grows, the WREN Group is attracting new members from an ever wider catchment area. We have again had stalls at a number of local events, and have also recruited at activities organised by the Group during the year. The newsletter continues to get much positive feedback, and especially for those members who can't get to Group events, both the newsletter and the regular e-mail updates are a valuable way to stay in touch.

Mark Gorman  
Membership Secretary





# Wanstead nature club

**This has been the Nature Club's fourth year. The attendance has improved since last year with an average of 8 children per session.**

Some children have come regularly for two years or more and hopefully we have some budding naturalists here. Jane Cleall has been an invaluable helper, Haydn Powell is our photographer and we have a lovely new young helper, Charlotte Thompson. We also have a number of keen parents who come and help out and learn along with their children. Highlights of the year have been Barry Chapman telling the children about the hedgehogs on Wanstead Flats, pond-dips and ducks' breakfasts around Jubilee Pond, watching the progress of frogspawn in the Cat and Dog Pond, studying worms, a fungus foray in Bush Wood, a winter treasure hunt, learning to use binoculars to look at water birds, decorating a nearby tree for Christmas, and making lots of things like insect hotels, clay creatures, leaf crowns and model dragonflies.

We are indebted to the City of London for allowing us to use the Community Room in Harrow Road Changing Rooms free of charge.

Gill James  
Wanstead Nature Club Coordinator



*“The Wanstead Nature Club was set up to encourage youngsters aged seven and upwards to take a lively interest in the natural world in the local area.”*



# Walks Coordinator



*“Regular walks with the group offer*

*members and friends the opportunity to go slightly ‘off piste’ - enjoying the nature and wildlife in other parts of our lovely city.*

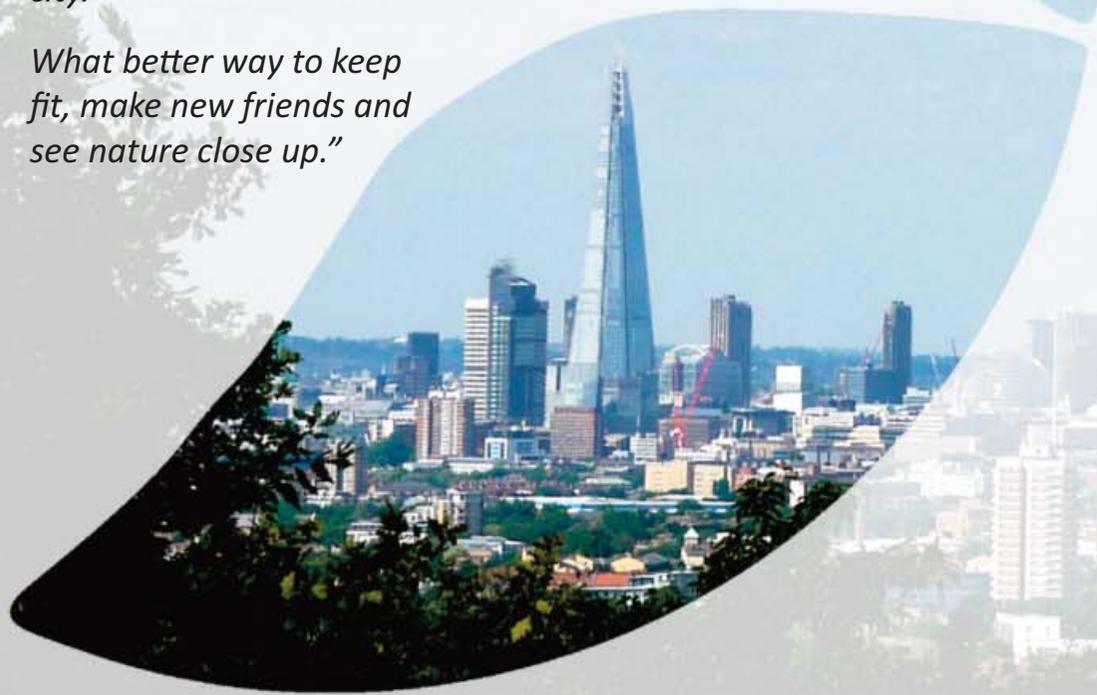
*What better way to keep fit, make new friends and see nature close up.”*

**In August we completed our series of monthly walks around the Capital Ring, the 78-mile trail that stitches together many of inner London’s finest open spaces, led by committee member and guide book author Peter Aylmer.**

It’s a very varied urban walk, from patches of woodland in hilly south London to the open spaces of Richmond Park and a hidden green corridor just yards from the North Circular. For the final stage we had a sneak preview of the Woodberry Wetlands beside the New River from project director David Mooney of the London Wildlife Trust before joining the River Lea back ‘home’.

Since then I have been leading monthly ‘Lucky Dip’ walks to other places of wildlife interest around the capital. I am currently working on a London walks guide with a wildlife theme, and each month walkers choose one of the draft walks at random. So far we’ve visited Sydenham Hill Wood, the lower Wandle, Enfield Chase and the hills and woods of Croydon - the latter finishing at Hutchinson’s Bank, a tiny patch of chalk scarp slope particularly renowned for its early-summer orchids and herbs.

Peter Aylmer  
Walks Coordinator





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