



<http://www.wrengroup.org.uk/>

Wren

Wildlife & Conservation Group

annual report



2014 2015





about the group

This is the era of large natural history organisations, organisations with offices, full-time staff and multi-million pound resources. The RSPB boasts over a million members, several county wildlife trusts have memberships running to five figures, and pretty much every faunal group – mammals, amphibians, butterflies, dragonflies, even earthworms - has a national group advocating its study. Big societies have the clout to influence political parties, even governments. And national groups are needed to coordinate recording and conservation efforts. Their efforts are commendable.

The Wren Group has no staff and limited resources. Everything we have comes from the contributions of our own membership. Our study area stretches no further than the London boroughs of Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest (though we do occasionally stray outside of that area!) So what's the point of a relatively small, local group of amateurs? Firstly, we care passionately about our local environment because we live in it. We can contribute to the group just by stepping out of our homes and taking a look at what's around us. We can have a say in what the group does just by picking up the phone or sending an email. And we can share our experiences with people who have taken up an interest in nature for the first time – or with people who were around 40 years ago when the group was founded. Surely those are pretty good reasons to get involved?

The Group lobbies on behalf of our local environment, linking up with other local groups – from residents' associations to the Woodcraft Folk – to provide a louder voice. We are constantly striving to get a better understanding of the biodiversity around us; every year our members are responsible for discovering new species in the local area, and passing the information to the relevant authorities.

We also believe in the value of education. Through presentations, guided walks, our newsletter and blog – not to mention countless personal conversations – we pass on information about identification, ecology, conservation and habitats. If someone comes to us with a question about the natural world we will try to answer it. Carrying the message of education to the next generation, our members also run a Nature Club for children.

“It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.”

Sir David Attenborough patron of the Wren Group

We get our hands dirty! Our practical work team opens up paths, ensures the bluebell wood in Wanstead Park is kept clear of scrub, and contributes to the management of other parts of Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats. Last but not least, we enjoy ourselves, and many friendships have been forged through our varied activities programme. If you're not already a member, why not join us!

Tony tells me I write too much, so this has to be a short report - which is a shame, because it's been a very full year. So here are just a few of the highlights. As part of our 'hearts and minds' strategy, 50 people attended three Skylark walks on Wanstead Flats in March and April. Our first stall at the Saturday market in Forest Gate in May – run jointly with Misty from TidyOurFlats – was a great opportunity to meet the people, and recruit several of them! Tricia Moxey's midsummer evening wildflower walk was as popular as ever and at the end of July 30 people turned out for the first of two summer bat walks. A month later, Darren Tansley from the Essex Wildlife Trust led a session on small mammal trapping in the Old Sewage Works. Everyone agreed it was a fantastic morning.

As summer turned to autumn, joint practical work with the Woodcraft Folk and Women's Institute carried out some important scrub clearance in the SSSI, and a few days later there was another bumper turnout for the September bat walk before a joint meeting with Friends of Wanstead Parklands on the Historic Gardens of Wanstead Park with Dr Sally Jeffery as the guest speaker. In early October our first bio-blitz produced some species never previously recorded in the Park, courtesy of pond-dipper extraordinaire, Derek McEwan;

more than 30 people participated. A similar number enjoyed Tricia's return a couple of weeks later to lead a search for fungi (to look at, not pick!) in Bush Wood, and there was another good attendance to hear keeper Thibaud Madelin speak on the deer of Epping Forest at the end of November, a meeting also noteworthy for producing our 200th member.

Entering 2015, an 'awayday' trip to Rainham Marshes was blessed with sunshine and a Marsh Harrier, while Gill, Jackie and David shared their knowledge of Wanstead Park's trees in February. Being a bit of a numbers geek, I actually add up the number of people who attend our events: the total for the 2014/15 season was more than 500.



chairman's report



“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.”



The year ahead promises to be every bit as exciting. The LDA Design regeneration plan for Wanstead Park is now up for discussion, and I hope everyone has pitched in with their views on it. Four more Skylark walks are scheduled for the spring; we are organizing a breeding bird survey of Wanstead Flats and Wanstead Park; and in late June we hope to build on the success of last October's bio-blitz with a bigger and better one.

Finally, many thanks to the committee who have been magnificent this year.

Tim Harris - Chairman



The time required for secretarial matters has certainly increased this year. And whilst this is a demand, it is also very positive because it reflects the energy and growth of the Wren Group. Committee meetings have fuller agendas and from these flow the ideas and efforts that generate a much fuller programme of events, improve and administer membership and sustain and widen communication of the group's activities.



This March there have been two special meetings; one to develop this year's bio blitz and another to formulate the committee's response to the Wanstead Park Plan proposals. I was back at work as Planner writing up the latter but, as to advising on recording all creatures great and small, I will definitely be relying on the expertise of others.

That said, the job of joint leading the Winter Tree Identification walk, demanded I recall all I could from my early career when I was given Tree Preservation to look after. Given this was precious little I had to set about a very speedy revision and into a steep learning curve. Luckily participants were all very helpful and, ever since, I have been enjoying guessing tree species whilst rambling along. We are all learning.

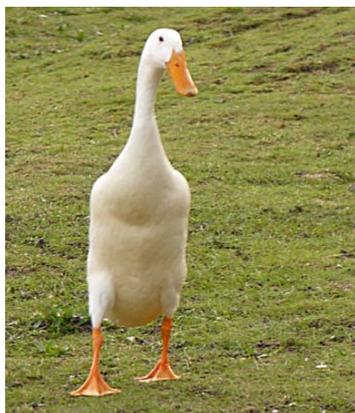
Jackie Morrison - Secretary

secretary's report



“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.”





Treasurers Report for the Year ended 31st December 2014.

We have had an excellent year. Subscriptions are up by over £500. Raffles & admissions to Talks made £300 and the City of London kindly reimbursed our Insurance thus giving an overall gain of £320.90

Compared to a loss last year of £371.41. Our bank balances have correspondingly increased and I have to report the Group is looking very healthy indeed.

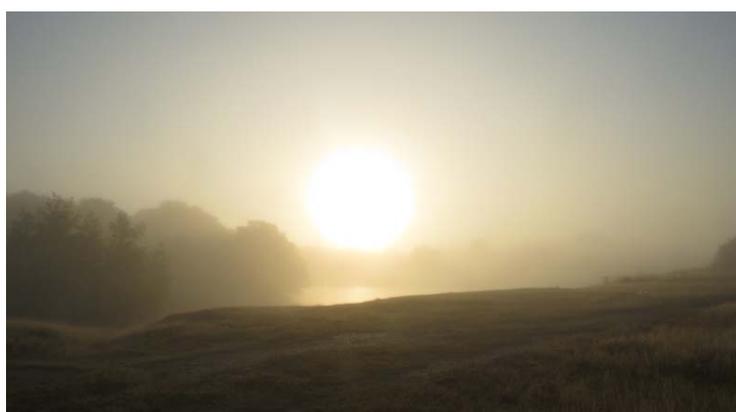
Once again I am indebted to Alan Simpson for auditing the accounts and propose that a vote of thanks be recorded in the minutes.

Norman Olley - Treasurer

treasurer's report



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



Work began again in October 2014 after the summer break, meeting on the first Sunday of each month. As usual work began with a task on Lincoln Island to cut back undergrowth to allow the Bluebells and wild Daffodils to come through in the Spring. There was a good turnout on a day of great weather, and the same morning there was a bio blitz elsewhere in the park. We managed to clear some fallen logs from the water in front of the island that block the view.



In November we were asked by the keepers to tackle the area at the top of the Glade. There is a small but important patch of acid grassland here but a few years ago the Corporation planted some oak trees adjacent to the grassland. The trees were planted too densely and had not been thinned, so were taking over. Some oaks had self seeded in an area where there should not have been trees. We removed the unwanted oaks and cleared a large patch of bramble that was also encroaching. We were also asked to take out one large oak that was interfering with the main path down the glade. Wren does not normally cut down interesting trees but this was a specific request from the keepers. The morning was very wet but we had an excellent turnout and got a lot done. We had some new volunteers who have continued to turn out regularly since.

practical work

We were back there in December with a small group just to finish off group in better weather. The rest of the group that morning cleared undergrowth, especially bramble, in Chalet Wood building on the work we have done in previous years. This will allow a Bluebell display in the Spring. Then, post Christmas, a group led by Alan and Gill James used Thursday mornings to define the paths in the bluebell wood to try to stop trampling and cleared further bramble.

“March saw us complete the year’s work by clearing further areas in the old sewage works. We will be back in action the first Sunday of October.”

In January we began a couple of sessions on the old sewage works site with its varying habitats. We have been cutting back bramble and other plants encroaching on the more open grassland to try to maintain its diversity over the last year or two. February we were back on the sewage works site with a small group of volunteers on a bitter morning but we soon got warm tackling large bramble banks.

Peter Williams - Wren Practical Work officer





“The past year has seen a further significant growth in membership. Two years ago the WREN Group had a membership of just under 70. By March 2014 that number rose to over 160. Membership has now passed the 200 mark for the first time”



membership report

The Group had another good year for membership recruitment. At the beginning of the 2014/15 year we had 160 members. We welcomed 41 new members last year, including 5 new Life Members and as of late February 2015 have added 5 more. As interest in our local wildlife and environment grows, the WREN Group is attracting members from right across the area.

Members have been recruited at the large number of events and activities organised by the Group during the year, as well as through having a stall at Forest Gate's Saturday community market .

The newsletter is also attracting a lot of positive comment, and especially for those members who can't get to Group events, is proving a valuable way to stay in touch.

Mark Gorman
Membership Secretary





“Just wanted to say thanks for a brilliant nature club on Saturday - Holly (Manning, there with my aunt) had a fantastic time and we all went out in the Wanstead Park woods and did it all over again on Sunday with her little sister, finding 13 types of fungi (we think) including a great fairy ring and some red ones (forgotten the name).”

Marianne Manning



This has been the Nature Club's third year and the attendance has improved, with a reasonable number attending during the colder months. Some children have even stayed for the full three years. We have all had a lot of fun, especially the grown-ups!

Some of the things the Nature Club have seen, heard, climbed on or poked this year on Wanstead Flats: foxholes and mouse nests, anthills, dewy spiders webs, a 200-year-old sweet chestnut tree, pink plums and custard fungi, pochards flown all the way from Russia, banks of white comfrey flowers, bluebells, Emperor Moth caterpillars, skylarks singing, skipper and gatekeeper butterflies fluttering, terrapins creeping, and waterboatmen rowing...

Gill James
Wanstead Nature Club

Wanstead nature club

