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NEWSLETTER

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Cover: Grey Squirrel, Russia Dock (Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)

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Please send your photos, letters, news and field reports to the editor by 20th April 2026 for inclusion in the May 2026 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

David Bevan

Robin Blades

LNHS members will be very sorry to hear of the death of David Bevan over the New Year at the age of 85. David made a huge contribution to the LNHS, particularly its Botany Section, and to conservation and the study of natural history in London generally. He was LNHS President for 1991 and 1992 and was subsequently an Honorary Vice-President. From 2000 to 2021 he chaired our Botany Section and for many years he was the LNHS Conservation Officer. Professionally he was Conservation Officer for Haringey Council. He led many field meetings to sites in the borough, more widely in North London and also to the Ashdown Forest in Sussex. Those lucky enough to have attended these will remember his great knowledge of plants and the skill and enthusiasm with which he communicated this. A full obituary will be published in *The London Naturalist*.



(Image: Mark Spencer)

Ash dieback – a response

As detailed in Bettina Metcalfe's article 'Ash Dieback or Chalara caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*' in Newsletter 277, Ash Dieback or Chalara is a serious threat to ash trees in this country, but perhaps not as dangerous as the writer suggests. A few years ago there was hysteria in some parts of the popular press when a fresh Dutch Elm Disease disaster was predicted. It was claimed that 'over 90% of ash trees in Denmark' were dying of Ash Dieback and that the British countryside was about to be denuded.

At the time I was invited to a meeting of interested parties chaired by John Vidal of *The Guardian*. Suspecting that the situation in Denmark was not necessarily the same as here in UK I personally called the Danish Forestry HQ and, as I suspected, they confirmed that over 90% of ash trees in Denmark were planted as a timber crop with very little if any genetic diversity, selected as they were for straight growth. As a result, when an unfamiliar pathogen arrived there was very little resilience in the trees.

Ash trees in these islands are quite different; although some ash seedlings are planted from nursery grown stock, ash is almost exclusively a wild tree with considerable natural diversity – although until now there has been little attempt to nurture this variability in live collections as it is not a priority species for timber growers. At the meeting Professor Richard Buggs (Queen Mary University, now at Kew Gardens) predicted that there natural resistance would occur here in the countryside and his studies have subsequently proved this to be so. Ash trees, like other living organisms, are affected by new pathogens regularly – as they have been for thousands of years – and wild populations have the genetic diversity to cope, or they don't survive.

What makes ash trees here different from English elms (virtually no genetic diversity) and the ash plantations in Denmark is that the genetic diversity of wild trees enables natural selection to correct temporary disruptions like new pathogens – although clearly some planting from identifiably resistant trees can accelerate this process. We are losing some ash trees, that is true, but Ms Metcalfe's worry that without human intervention we can't 'ensure healthy and stable woodlands that are fit to adapt to pests and diseases' is perhaps an exaggeration.

Edward Milner

(*Trees of Britain and Ireland*: 2011 Natural History Museum)

Meet the author: Dale Forbes

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne interviews Dale Forbes, lead author of *Habitats of Europe* published by Princeton University Press.

Dale Forbes is a lifelong naturalist and conservationist with an MSc in Biogeography. He works in strategy and marketing at Swarovski Optik, is a member of BirdLife International's Advisory Board, and is the regional coordinator for eBird in Austria. He loves creating soundscapes that capture the essence of being immersed in nature <https://soundcloud.com/capepolly>

How did this book come about?

Following the success of *Habitats of the World* (2021), we have been working on producing guides to each of the world's regions. These regional (roughly continental) guides are able to cover more habitats and dedicate more space to each of them.

How many years was this book in the making?

Habitats of Europe took about 3.5 years to put together – we spent an extensive period researching the European context. That scientific foundation then needed to be re-written to make it engaging and easy to read. We wanted to create a book that would be easy to turn to any page and discover something fascinating about Europe's wildlife and nature.

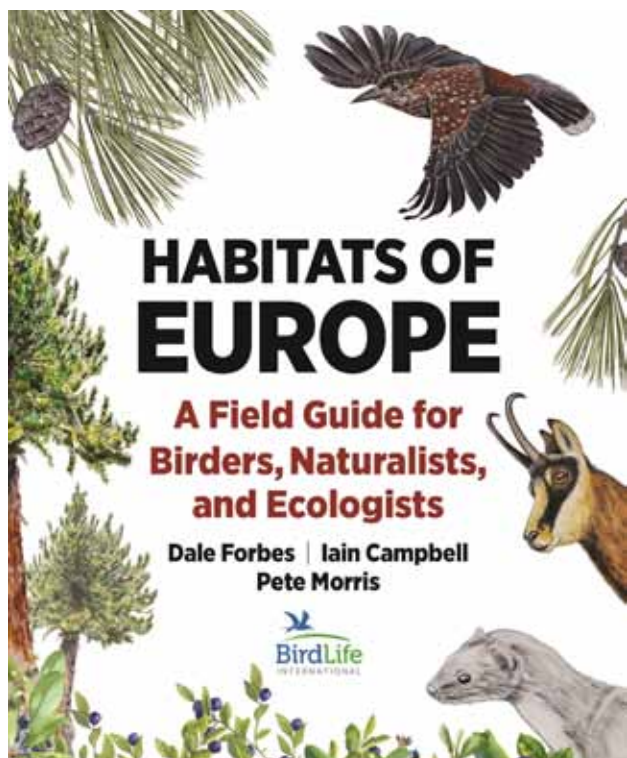
What do you want to achieve with this book?

We have two major aims. The first is to help naturalists see our natural environment from a range of different perspectives. Geology, climate, botany, and wildlife assemblages are all intricately intertwined. At a simple level, by starting to understand how all of this fits together, it is so much easier to find special birds (and other wildlife).

The second aim was to tie it into the larger scientific work that we are pursuing in the background. Habitat mapping is often based on the extrapolation of climate and geology. This is, however, far from accurate. By understanding the associations of wildlife assemblages with habitats, we can use citizen science data to significantly improve both habitat and wildlife distribution maps.

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

For the longest time, I did not feel like I was really getting to



grips with why European habitats had the wildlife species assemblages they do. It was only after I started to see the continent through the lens of the Pleistocene, that things started to make sense. So many of our species have evolved (and survived) through tumultuous climate change and alongside megaherbivores. I would have loved to have seen a natural Europe with lions, elephants, rhinos, Irish Elk, and bison, but unfortunately our predecessors got here first. It is phenomenal that Türkiye still had Northern Lions in the late 19th century and Caspian Tigers into the 1990s!

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

I was at a Paleo-ecology conference and one of the presenters shared a paper on Pleistocene beech refugia. My head exploded as I realized that these corresponded rather neatly with the distribution of Fire Salamander subspecies. I suspect that these ice age changes in beech distribution drove the diversification of Fire Salamanders and, more specifically, that the distribution of Fire Salamander subspecies could contribute to our understanding of beech refugia and spread through Europe in the Holocene.

Chalk downlands and chalk streams, which are important habitats in the UK are absent in your book. Is this due to constraints of space or because they did not qualify under the criteria for distinctiveness you have set out in the introduction?

The chalk grasslands and heathlands of southern England have some incredible plant and invertebrate biodiversity, but they are not particularly distinct in their vertebrate assemblages. The Temperate Grassland and Savanna habitat covers a wide range of ecosystems, geology and plant communities – and we debated long and hard about how to deal with this diversity – but ended up leaving them lumped together in order to remain true to the vertebrate-led distinctiveness criteria outlined in the introduction.

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

Find out more about the various Habitats of the World on our website <https://www.habitatsoftheworld.org/>. We are continually working on improving it and including more information as we work across the globe and further the science that underpins our guide books. In addition, the European Nature Information System (EUNIS) database maintained by the European Environment Agency (EEA) is an incredible resource on the habitats of Europe. It is a hierarchical classification system which covers all terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats across Europe. Another good site is FloraVeg.EU. This is an online database of European vegetation, habitats and flora data.



LNHS Represented at Amsterdam Bird Festival (UrBI 2025)

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

In the summer of 2024, while serving as a general board member of the Amsterdam Bird Working Group, Piet van der Werf visited London. There, at the invitation of chair of the London Bird Club's (LBC) chair Gehan de Silva, he participated in a LBC Walk in Regent's Park led by Dave Clark. Contact details were shared, and a rendezvous in Amsterdam was discussed. This planted the seed for an international collaboration, which would ultimately lead to an invitation to Dave Clark to attend the symposium that took place in Amsterdam on September 25th and 26th. The idea of an urban exchange on issues relating to urban birds was expanded to include several cities. Initially, it would be part of the Bird Festival, organized by the working group in the spring of 2025 in the context of 750 years of Amsterdam.

The topics the organizers considered were divided into macro-issues, such as infrastructure, urban green spaces and water features, light pollution, glass collisions, and micro-issues concerning what residents can do for birds, for example, through facade gardens, nesting boxes, and food supply. How can city dwellers be involved in the fate of birds in the city? And what effect does recreational pressure have on bird habitats? The topics would be presented in preliminary discussions to participating speakers, who would also provide their own input.

The geographical location (along the East Atlantic Flyway and the presence of active bird working groups) were considered. This resulted in a panel being formed comprising Hany Alonso of Spea Lisbon, Jesper Toft of Dansk Ornitologisk Forening (DOF, the Danish Ornithological Society) Copenhagen, Dave Clark of the LBC, Ewout Huibers of the VWGA (Vogelwerkgroep Amsterdam, the Amsterdam Bird Working Group) and Peter Stimmler a glass collision specialist from LBV Bayreuth, the Bavarian State Association for Bird and Nature Conservation. The event had a great panel from five cities.

From the London Bird Club, a section of the London Natural History Society (LNHS), Dave Clark brought the human dimension into the debate. He spoke about the increased interest in birds since the coronavirus pandemic. According to him, real protection of urban nature does not come from regulations, but from social engagement: Protection comes from the bottom up, not from the top down'. Clark's visit was partly self-funded and partly supported by the event and BirdLife International.



Amsterdam Bird Festival (image: Luna Bongers)

9th September, 2025

Fraxinus workshop

Bettina Metcalfe

Fraxinus (Ash): Opposite or subopposite pinnate leaves, broad terminal buds, twigs flattened at nodes

Species	English name	Origin/introduced	Bud	Leaves	flowers	Characteristics
<i>angustifolia</i>	Narrow-leaved Ash, most commonly grown as cultivar 'Raywood'	Mediterranean 1800	brown black	7-13 slender leaflets sharply toothed, hairless, rachis kinky	raceme , hermaphrodite, few ♂ flowers at base	feathery canopy
<i>americana</i>	White Ash	E Canada, Central + E USA 1724	brown	7-9 lanceolate leaflets, acuminate, sparsely toothed, 1 cm long petiolules , glabrous	dioecious female flowers lack petals	Stately upright tree Leaves yellow, pink and mauve in autumn
<i>excelsior</i>	Common Ash	native	black	9-13 serrated leaflets	panicle , male, female, hermaphrodite, can change sex annually	tall domed , open canopy, ridged bark. last to leaf out, first to drop leaves
<i>latifolia</i>	Oregon Ash	W Canada to Oregon 1872	brown	5-9 leaflets unstalked pubescent at first entire to irregularly serrate, green above and paler below, leaf large to 30 cm, leaflets to 10 cm	dioecious	twigs olive-grey to grey-brown, hairy
<i>ornus</i>	Manna Ash	Southern Europe Mediterranean Asia Minor 1700	grey	5-9 broad leaflets , short petiolules, terminal leaflet obovate	fragrant panicles, hermaphrodite and staminate flowers, insect or wind-pollinated	fluffy upright creamy-white clusters of flowers , smooth bark
<i>pennsylvanica</i>	Red/Green Ash	East N America 1783	brown	7-9 leaflets shoots often velvety , petiolule downy, pubescent along veins	panicle dioecious samara purple tint	pyramidal tree yellow in autumn stem round, even at nodes
<i>velutina</i>	Arizona Ash	SW USA Arizona, New Mexico 1891	dark brown	3-7 leaflets grey-green, short-stalked, bluntly toothed, densely hairy beneath	panicle dioecious	small tree pubescent twigs ridged bark

A total of 10 people met at the Ready Money Drinking Fountain in early September on a beautiful summer's day to explore the different Ash species growing in Regent's Park. We walked a large semi-circle, starting along the edge of the zoo comparing *F. americana* with *F. excelsior*, we noted *F. ornus* growing in the hedges and some very tall older *F. angustifolia*. We then ventured into the wild areas in the north west of the Park finding *F. excelsior* 'Diversifolia' and *F. pennsylvanica*. Passing between the boating lake and the back of the London Business School we studied *F. latifolia*, the Girth & Height County Champion of Greater London according to The Tree Register, finally ending up in the Inner Circle to admire the rare *Fraxinus velutina* by the Café.

Fraxinus is a genus in the Oleaceae. Other genera in that family include *Forsythia*, *Jasminum*, *Ligustrum*, *Olea*, *Osmanthus*,

Phillyrea and *Syringa*.

The genus *Fraxinus* has 58 accepted species and is widespread in America, Europe and Asia. All seven species we looked at are medium to tall trees usually with a strong leader and a light crown. They have opposite to subopposite imparipinnate compound leaves. The buds are brown, black or grey. The terminal velvety bud is mitre-shaped. The twigs are flattened between the opposite buds. The trees can be monoecious, dioecious or can have hermaphrodite flowers. Our native ash exhibits 'sex liability' a term describing a tree that can change sex. *F. excelsior* can produce only male flowers one year but might produce only female flowers the next year, or it can have a mix of both. The flowers of *Fraxinus* typically appear before the leaves and are arranged in panicles or racemes. Ash trees grow to about 250 years of age.

Our three European species are severely affected by ash dieback. Studies have shown though that *F. pennsylvanica* is also susceptible to the disease. The other American species seem less susceptible. The fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* that causes ash dieback, is not currently known to be present in North America. However, American ash species are devastated by the Emerald Ash borer (*Agilus planipennis*) which in turn has not reached Great Britain yet, but is cause for great concern.

To distinguish the various species in Regent's Park, the above chart can be helpful. The most useful characters for each species are shown in bold.

Regent's Park has a particularly rich variety of interesting trees and further workshops will be held in the coming year.



Fraxinus americana (images: Bettina Metcalfe)



Fraxinus angustifolia



Fraxinus excelsior leaf



Fraxinus latifolia



Fraxinus ornus



Fraxinus pennsylvanica



Fraxinus velutina

20th September, 2025

Recording plant galls at Lesnes Abbey Woods

Joss Carr



Two galls on Turkey Oak *Quercus cerris*: bulge-like deformations on the leaf caused by the mite *Aceria cerrea* (left) and hardened woody galls on catkins caused by the sexual generation of the wasp *Andricus grossulariae* (right). (Images: Joss Carr).

This meeting was a collaboration between LNHS and the Biological Recording Company led by LNHS Plant Gall recorder Tommy Root.

Lesnes Abbey Woods is one of London's special green spaces. Situated in the southeast of the city, in the borough of Bexley, the site makes up a whopping 88 hectares of ancient woodland, park, heathland and grassland. Two of these habitats, ancient woodland and heathland, are very

scarce in Greater London. Lesnes Abbey Woods therefore supports some quite uncommon species of plants, fungi and insects. On a mild September day group met LNHS Plant Gall Recorder Tommy Root to explore the site and record the plant galls present.

Plant galls are abnormal growths of plant tissue caused by the invasion of another organism, a wasp, a fly, a mite, a fungus or a bacterium, for example, within the plant tissue. Galls typically form on

leaves, stems, roots, or flowers and come in an astonishing variety of shapes, sizes and colours. The structure itself forms due to the plant's response to irritation or chemical signals from the invading organism. Galls provide food and shelter for the invading organism inside and, while they may look unusual, are generally not harmful to the overall health of the plant.

One of the best places to look for galls is on oak trees, around 50 different gall-causing species are



Looking for galls on Turkey Oak *Quercus cerris*



Left: The bright green and sticky gall of the asexual generation of the wasp *Andricus grossulariae*, on English Oak *Quercus robur*.

Right: The artichoke-like gall of the midge *Taxomyia taxi*, on Yew *Taxus baccata*.



Left: Leaf pustule galls caused by the mite *Vasates quadripedes*, on Silver Maple *Acer saccharinum*.

Right: Gall of *Dryocosmus kuriphilus* on Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*.

known on oaks in the UK. It is convenient, therefore, that Lesnes Abbey Woods is home to rather a lot of oaks. Our enthusiastic group of 17 started the day at a particular impressive Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*) near the Lesnes Abbey lodge. Under the experienced guidance of Tommy Root we identified several galls on this one tree, including, for example, the galls of *Aceria cerrea* and *Andricus grossulariae*.

We next made our way about 20 metres north to an English Oak (*Quercus robur*) and found another few species. On the tree itself we found the bright green and sticky galls of the agamic (asexual) generation of *Andricus grossulariae* growing on acorn cups. This is the same species responsible for the rounded, nut-like galls on the neighbouring Turkey Oak. We also found a single example of the Ram's Horn Gall caused by the wasp *Andricus*

aries. The floor beneath this oak was littered with thousands of fallen woody Knopper Galls (*Andricus quercuscalicis*).

We continued to mill around the parkland area in the morning, checking all of the ornamental trees closely. Additional exciting gall finds included the artichoke-like galls of the midge *Taxomyia taxi* on Yew (*Taxus baccata*), pouch-like swellings caused by the midge *Dasineura urticae* on



Oyster Gall and *Neuroterus anthracinus* on underside of Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* leaf

Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), and galling caused by the mite *Acalitus brevitarsus* on the leaves of Italian Alder (*Alnus cordata*). Though not typically considered galls, several powdery mildews, a group of fungi which form white dusting on plants during autumn, were also spotted, including the uncommonly recorded *Golovinomyces bolayi* on Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola*.

After a productive lunch when we spent time identifying some collected specimens, we were keen for a change of habitat so moved onto the northern margin of the woodland. A particularly good Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) tree here yielded an additional four galls for the list, all found on the leaf undersides and caused by small wasps in the family Cynipidae: *Neuroterus anthracinus*, *Neuroterus numismalis*, *Neuroterus quercusbaccarum* and *Cynips*

disticha. The former even had the wasp itself sitting on its gall! We also found that leaves of the shrubby elms along the woodland margin were covered with small pustule galls caused by the mite *Aceria campestricola*.

We rounded off the day by splitting up into groups. Some continued along the woodland margin and some ventured into the woodland itself a little way. Additions to the site list from the woodland margin group included the fungus *Taphrina populina*, which forms galls on the leaves of Black Poplar and its hybrids (*Populus* sect. *Aigeiros*), the wasp *Ophelimus maskelli*, which forms leaf pustule galls on *Eucalyptus* trees, and the mite *Vasates quadripedes*, which forms leaf pustules on Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*). The woodland interior group recorded the midge *Hartigiola annulipes*, which forms 'lighthouse galls'

on Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and the non-native wasp *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*, which forms galls on Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and is a recent arrival in the UK (circa 2015). Seeing *D. kuriphilus* was particularly fitting as Lesnes Abbey Woods was one of the first UK sites at which the species was found!

All in all, the day was a resounding success with the group generating an impressive 187 records including 122 records of 44 gall-causing species. Those 44 gall-causing species included 15 mites, three fungi, 14 wasps, four true bugs and eight midges. A big thanks to all who attended and we hope you enjoyed hunting for this obscure but fascinating group of organisms with us. Extra special thanks go to Tommy Root for leading the group.

1st November, 2025

Stephens House and Gardens

Andrew Marks

These landscaped gardens, improbably hidden away off a Finchley side street, had been given for “the use and enjoyment of the people” by one ‘Inky’ Stephens, who must have been a generous and thoughtful chap. The people in our case were a group of 27, led and educated by the erudite Bettina.

We first encountered an *Acer opalus*, the ground around it strewn with its autumn leaves, glowing in shades of fiery orange, crimson and marigold. Their petioles were long, some up to 15cm, and their palmate lobes were gently rounded and shallow; some of them had a few small, irregular teeth while others were as toothless as fresh babies. Otherwise known as Italian Maple, this is one of lesser-known *Acer* species in the UK.

Our attention was then drawn to a small tree which looked like *Taxus baccata*, but, as one of our party opined, with botanical precision, “it’s not quite right”. It sported the familiar red arils and pectinate leaves, but on a closer look the leaves were shorter and wider than those of the Common Yew. This was *T. baccata* ‘Adpressa’, a rare cultivar which is a female clone.

We were fortunate to see the very rare *Prunopitus andina*, which on a cursory glance again had similarities with *Taxus baccata*, but with some marked differences; the bark was less coloured, and the leaves were held in whorls instead of pectinate combs. Also, the fruit of this Chilean Plum Yew is dark blue-purple rather than red; and it’s said to be not only edible, but downright delicious,



Acer opalus, autumn leaves (images: Andrew Marks)

especially when made into jam.

We viewed an unfamiliar species of *Fraxinus*: the leaves were pinnately compound, with long thin points and there was a hairy white halo around them when held against the light. The leaflets were amazingly soft to the touch, so pleasingly tactile that it was hard to stop stroking them. This was the well-named Velvet Ash or *Fraxinus velutina*; the specific epithet means “velvety”, referring to the fine, soft hairs on the underside of the leaves which

gave that beguilingly gentle feel.

Next up was another tree with pinnately-compound leaves, its leaflets finely serrated. It was not *Fraxinus*, despite its leaves being distinctly *Fraxinus*-like. Perhaps *Juglans*? No, its buds were too long, and the wrong colour. The pendent seeds, and the leaves, suggested *Pterocarya fraxinifolia*, but that has naked brown buds, and these were enclosed; and its leaflets overlap the rachis, and on our tree they did not. This was the extremely rare *Pterocarya*

rhoifolia, the Japanese Wingnut.

Two trees which are by no means rare are *Prunus serrula* and *P. mackii*, but they are worth a mention for a striking difference between them. They both wore shining bark, beautifully satiny to the touch; in both cases the smooth areas were interspersed with lenticels, and in *P. serrula*, with rough dull bands. The main contrast was the luscious deep purple-red of the former, the Tibetan Cherry, and the orange shades of its Manchurian cousin, with notes of marmalade and copper.

We saw a *Celtis occidentalis*, or Common Hackberry; the outstanding feature of the tree, was its bark, which was ridged and very hard; so extremely hard in fact that it felt almost inorganic. Its leaves were asymmetrical, and had simple pointed serrations, except at the oblique base where they were not toothed. At the other end were pointed tips.

Next was *Ostrya carpinifolia*, the Hop Hornbeam, which had the long, double-serrated, parallel-veined leaves of the true Hornbeam, *Carpinus betulus*: hence the specific epithet. But it differed in that its bark was not smooth, having rectangular plates, and also no buttresses. Another difference is that Hornbeam fruit has exposed seeds, where *O. carpinifolia* has papery packets, with a single seed enclosed in each.

We met a *Davidia involucrata*, with its pleasingly rounded crown. This monotypic plant had heart-shaped leaves which hung



Bark of *Prunus mackii* (left) and *Prunus serrula* (right)

down at right angles, and had teeth ending in fine transparent tips. At this time of year its large white bracts were long gone, so the names of Handkerchief, Dove or Ghost Tree did not resonate as they would in late spring.

Some (I) find it challenging to consistently distinguish between the *Tilia* species by their leaves, so the sight of *Tilia mongolica* was welcome, its coarsely-serrated leaves with their irregular spikes and two distinct shoulders inviting a confident identification. But while the leaves don't look like those of other Limes, they do bear a passing resemblance to the leaves of vines, and of Ivy, and of some *Acer* species. Our Mongolian Lime had small, round, shiny, pinky-red buds, typical of *Tilia* sp.

A final handsome tree was *Quercus frainetto*, the Hungarian Oak, which is not hard to find in parks, but this specimen was notable for its impressive size. The big leaves, their autumn colours like those of russet apples, were 14-25 centimetres long, and divided into deep, parallel V-shaped lobes (i.e. they were not indented at 90 degrees). The lobes had rounded side-lobes, and were smaller at the apex of the leaf; and there were auricles at the base of some leaves.

Thoroughly full of tree knowledge and joy, we emerged back into the quotidian world of the North London burbs, and gave thanks, in no particular order, to Inky and Bettina.

22nd November, 2025

Crossness

George Kalli

There were six Attendees with leader. The walk from the station to the Norman Road field gave us some noisy calling Ring-necked Parakeet, a few 'ticking' Robin, calling and seen Goldfinch, Dunnock and calling Jackdaw.

A calling Pied Wagtail flew overhead and a perched Buzzard took flight over the field; a Grey Heron also flew over and a couple of calling Long-tailed Tit were also present.

A small flock of Canada Goose were grazing near the viewing screen to the Great Breech Pool but only Coot and Moorhen were added here. A Meadow Pipit called as it flew over us.

Moving towards the protected area the 'pink pink' call of a Chaffinch was heard and then it was seen flying away.

The explosive call of a Cetti's Warbler was heard from the reeds and a small group of Mallard flew over as did a couple of mute swan.

Making our way towards the newly brightly painted viewing screens on the seawall it was good to see the wide expanse of mud still present. The tide was only slowly coming in and the first feeding Avocet was seen. There were a total group of at least 19

Avocet together seen today.

Good numbers of Shoveler were feeding together with quite a few Teal as well as Redshank, both feeding and calling, plus 2-3 Curlew, who were probing for food in the mud.

One of two Little Egret were on the mud and also in flight and small numbers of Shelduck were also feeding here.

Cormorant were perched on the wooden stakes scattered around with their outstretched wings hung out to dry.

A small number of Black-tailed Godwit were probing the mud with their long straight bills; their calls could also be heard.

A single Great Black-backed Gull was on the water.

Moving towards the Thames Water outflow a big row of different waders were feeding along the edge of the incoming tide. These included up to 200 Dunlin, a few Lapwing, Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit. Amongst the rocks at least four Snipe were seen both feeding and resting.

The Dunlin were also spectacular as they took flight all together as the tide rose. Their amazing flight

displays were observed and it is fascinating they do not collide with each other while in flight.

At the outflow there were big numbers of Black-headed Gull on the water and among them were a couple of Wigeon and Gadwall.

A calling Grey Wagtail flew overhead and there were more Cormorant here drying their wings.

A white chested ruff was hiding among a small group of roosting Redshank. However, it did start to move around for everyone to get good views.

As the rain started we made our way back to the hide for lunch with no further birds added on our return walk was back across Norman Road field to the station.

A total of 44 species were identified today which included eight wader species.

The waders were the highlights of the day especially the Avocet, Ruff, Curlew and Snipe – all seen well. The Dunlin flock in flight was especially pleasing to see and action packed.

A good spread of duck species at close range was also well received.

29th November, 2025

Ruislip Lido and Woods

Dick Middleton

The weather report the day before was less than promising so, while it was not as bad as expected, I did wonder whether anyone would attend this field meeting. It was with some relief when six other intrepid souls joined me near the Lido bus stop.

As usual at this venue we started on the dam in front of the Boathouse where we could view the water below. The immediate impression was that the wildfowl numbers were quite low. However, Pochard Mallard; Tufted Duck and Coot were noted and a reasonably obliging Little Grebe constantly dived close to the dam.

Moving on along the dam a Great Tit, which was to be the only sighting of the day, was spotted on the feeders in the back garden below us. At the next stop a Pied Wagtail dodged among the four species of gull present on the beach. The majority were Black-headed Gulls and amongst them

there was one with a blue plastic ring. When the ring number was read it became apparent that this was a bird that I had recorded before and that it had been ringed in Poland. Time was spent looking at the plumage of the Common Gulls noting the winter head pattern, the leg colour and that the grey of the wings is subtly darker than that of the Black-headed Gulls. Two of the three Lesser Black-backed Gulls present had very dark backs (presumably the *intermedius* subspecies) and the potential for confusion with the Great Black-backed Gull was discussed. Fortunately these were adults who displayed their obvious yellow legs. Herring Gull completed the set with a range of ages from first winter to full adult plumage.

Carrying on along the tree lined footpath the birds were more noticeable by their absence. So, it was with some relief that a very obliging Little Egret was found

perched reasonably close to the path. While admiring it the first Blue tit of the day passed through.

Leaving the Lido we went out onto Poor's Field which also appeared to be a bird-free zone. However, at this point the heavens opened and, by mutual agreement, we headed for the exit. Fortunately, just before we reached it, the rain stopped. Two or three Redwing were spotted at the top of the trees and the pause to look at them led to a Nuthatch being seen. There followed various directions being given as to where it was but eventually everyone managed to see it. While this was going on a very flighty flock of Redpoll touched down briefly in the treetops. A little later they flew back over us and it was estimated the flock contained about sixty birds. This was the grand finale.

My thanks to all for their support.

6th December, 2025

River Lee Country Park

Francis O'Sullivan

A total of six members set off from Cheshunt station but we were then joined by Harry who somehow managed to find us at Bowyer Water while we were looking at a male Goldeneye. However he had missed the six Siskin we had found high up in the canopy just before. At least we thought they must be Siskin but try as we might we could not get a definite id on them. Elaine had seen streaking on their underside and they were very quiet while feeding in the birch tree which might point towards Siskin rather than Redpoll. We then saw many Common, Blue and Long-tailed Tit and an exceptional number of Goldcrest often having several in view at the same time. Harry thought they must be migrants rather than locally bred birds. Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Chiffchaff, our only warbler of the day, were heard if not always seen.

At the wader scrape viewpoint we found a Grey Heron, a male Pheasant and a flyover Little Egret. Harry also got us onto a Red Kite. On the water Pochard, Mallard, Tufted Duck and Shoveler were picked out. Crossing the canal Mute Swan, Coot and Moorhen were added to our list. Along the Relief Channel two introduced species one a mammal and one a bird were the main points of interest. The mammal was a female or juvenile Muntjac which got hemmed in by the fencing and so had to retrace its steps the way it had come, the bird was a Black Swan.

At the Information Point staff said the Bittern had been seen that morning and a very active Sparrowhawk but neither showed for us while we had our sandwiches. We did see Great Crested Grebe, Black-headed, Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls but no Common Gull. We pushed on for the weir and the Grebe Hide at Holyfield lake where a pair of Great Crested Grebe began their mating ritual if only briefly. Across the river the normally shallow body of water was dry and the abode of 70 odd Canada Geese and on the river a few Gadwall were feeding. Harry picked out a raptor far away over the farmland which he thought was a Peregrine.

As we turned for home we did see a definite Peregrine on an electricity pylon. Ravens have nested on these pylons and I had heard one before we set out in the morning. Another harsh call was heard in the trees by the river. At first we thought it might be a Green Woodpecker but when two thrushes flew out of the tree Harry realised it was a pair of Fieldfare. Ahead of us on the track a fox raced away with something in its mouth. When we reached the spot it had been first seen all that was left of its supper was a few feathers which we were unable to identify.

We crossed over the canal to the area of tall vegetation. Despite the minimal drizzle the sun began to shine and a complete rainbow developed in front of us. Then a charm of 25 or so Goldfinch

appeared from nowhere feeding on the seed heads a few feet away. A moment to savour and remember.

Another Muntjac was seen, this time a male with its pair of sharp horns. At Hooks Marsh a Water Rail squealed in the reed bed and we ran to catch up with Sue and the others who were looking at something in the channel in the reeds thinking it might be the rail but it turned out to be a Dabchick, even so a new species for the day for most of us.

A passing family showed us a picture of a Sparrowhawk which they said they had seen only feet away in a tree. "Is it still there?" I asked. There was no problem identifying the Song Thrush singing in the small copse by the humpback bridge but try as we might we could not see it. Redwings were darting in and out of the trees and we did finally find one which gave us a good view. A Chiffchaff worked its energetic way through the bare branches of a small tree and we finally saw one after having heard so many but not seeing any. The final bird of interest was a Common Buzzard Harry put us onto which also came close chased by a Crow. A total of 60 species were either seen or heard and considering the weather forecast had made some of us come out in full wet gear it was an amazing day with minimal rain and multiple rainbows.

14th December, 2025

The London Wetland Centre, WWT Barnes, Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

“Goldeneye!” came the shout and everyone turned their attention to a very handsome male Goldeneye dressed in black and white attired for a formal evening out. Goldeneye are rare at the London Wetland Centre (LWC) in Barnes and in the last 15 years of my visits this was the first male Goldeneye at the centre for me. However, in the recent past I remember a female did spending several weeks of the winter in the Wildside area. We had picked up the male Goldeneye at the Dulverton Hide, the first hide when you head along the ‘South Route’ from the visitor centre. It swam away from us towards the Observatory Hide, a three storey glass fronted hide which is one of the most impressive bird watching hides in the world. It also doubles as a venue for corporate events. “How do you know it is a male” asked one of the beginner bird watchers in the group. I explained the female has a brown head and is not crisply dressed in black and white as the male. I pulled out my copy of the compact and slim *Birdwatchers Pocket Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Peter Hayman published by Mitchell Beazeley to show the illustrations of the male and female. With around 3,000 illustrations of 430 European species, this is surely one of the most useful and standard setting bird guides that have ever been produced. I always take it on organised bird walks in the UK so that I can show things to beginners. In addition to it being small and lightweight, the book has the advantage of now being available very cheaply on the online, second-hand book market.



Male Goldeneye (images: Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)

We had got off to a good start, on one of the 35-40 bird watching walks organised by the London Bird Club, this one in December being the last for the calendar year. Leading it was Harry Halstead who had been talent spotted as potential walks leader when he had joined other LBC walks. The wonderful thing about the events organised by the London Natural History Society (LNHS) is that people with varying levels of knowledge from beginner to advanced join them and it is as much about the social interaction with other like-minded people as much as getting one’s nature fix and seeing wildlife. The London Wetland Centre which is entirely

man-made, opening at the end of the 1990s, is intensively managed for wildlife. This together with the visitor facilities which includes a well-run café with proper meals and hot drinks and the ease of public transports makes it one of the best urban nature reserves in the world. Because of this, the London Bird Club run four bird walks a year to this site, one for each season. This winter walk had got off to a good start and at the next hide, the Dulverton Hide, things got better.

Each winter, a few Bittern arrive from the continent, probably from the Netherlands. Britain enjoys a maritime climate and



Great Cormorant

is more hospitable in the winter than continental Europe where water bodies may freeze. Usually, views of Bitterns are frustratingly short and obscured by the reeds in the reedbeds which they take up residence in. On this occasion there was a Bittern out in open view. George Kalli, who also leads walks for the London Bird Club got the bird into view through his telescope for the 13 people who had joined the walk to enjoy wonderful views. Good things never last and several minutes later it flew to change position.

It had only moved a few tens of meters, but now the reed beds swallowed it. But there were other birds to enjoy. The sky glinted black and white in what seemed like a cluster of tinsel which had been jettisoned into the sky. It was a flock of Northern Lapwings. A few centuries ago large flocks would have darkened the sky but with the impact of agriculture they are no longer plentiful anywhere. The LWC is the nearest to central London where a small flock may still be seen. RSPB Rainham Marshes is the best site within 20

miles of Saint Pauls Cathedral, the recording radius of the LNHS.

A hundred plus gulls were on the water or perched on the small spits of land which intersected the water. The largest were the Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. We were blessed with sunny skies and it was easy to make out the pink legs of the former and yellow legs of the latter. As the names suggests, the Black-backed Gulls could also be identified with their black wings and backs. As for the juveniles, that is another matter. They are not easy to tell apart without examining the pattern of the tertial feathers on their wings. A Common Gull or two was also present together with the commoner Black-headed Gull all of which had now changed to winter wear, with barely a trace of last summer's dark chocolate hood. A Great Cormorant swam past the hide, looking uneasy. A Grey Heron was entirely unruffled by the excited chatter in the hide.

We stopped by the area with the bird feeders which is always a good place to pick up on passerine birds like Blue and Great Tit, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Wren and Robin. As a bonus we also enjoyed a Great Spotted Woodpecker that was visiting. There was no sign of a Sparrowhawk that sometimes lurks around to pounce on the unwary.

We moved onto the Peacock Hide, a large three storey construction with grand views across the grazing marsh. Out on a large grassy embankment was a flock of Wigeon. These are colourful ducks, the male especially being a fashionista with a golden crown and pink on the belly. Unusually for ducks, their feeding behaviour is more like cattle as they graze on grass as their principal source of sustenance. Other feeding



Wigeon grazing

modes are available such as diving a method used by the Tufted Duck and Pochard which were also present. Dabbling or filtering is another method used by a number of species including the well-known Mallard, and Gadwall whose numbers swell in the winter. The filtering is taken to a higher level by the Shoveler, who are the equivalents of Flamingos in the duck world. Their bills have become specialised with fine lamellae in the beak. The physical principal of having a built-in filter is also used by flamingos as well as baleen whales. The latter gulp water and filter it out using their baleen plates like a tea strainer.

Lunch was taken back in the Observatory Hide. Most of the group had brought their own lunch, but being less organised I had bought a bacon roll and a flat white from the café. The hide is heated in winter and has large comfy sofas on which we reclined. From the upper floor we watched waterfowl milling about in the water whilst on the edges the Phragmites reeds swayed in a gentle wind. Oh my goodness, bird watching cannot get any more luxurious. Harry decided it was time to head back out into the 8 degrees Celsius outside and visit a few more hides in search of more birds. I would have been happy to

lounged around for longer in the heated hide and sip my coffee even more slowly. But the awkward part of being on the committee is that one has to keep up with the group and make a show of making an effort. Sigh. So off we went to the hides at Wildside for even more closer views of gulls and ducks. We spent some time watching Herring Gulls in various stages of maturity plunge-dipping to catch prey. But we could not quite make out what they were catching. Harry informed that we as a group has seen 50 species of birds. This was in a span of four hours. Who would think London is so good for wildlife?

4th January, 2026

East India Dock Basin and Bow Ecology Park

George Kalli

Clear blue skies, sunshine and cold conditions greeted eight attendees, including the leader, at the DLR station at East India Dock.

For the early arrivals a Peregrine showed well as it strongly flew overhead towards the Thames.

An explosive calling Wren showed itself as it perched and sang on an iron fence post and nearby in some bushes a chiffchaff did its 'huet call'.

Walking towards the Thames we came across the Greenwich meridian line on the pavement separating east from west.

An Egyptian Goose flew in off the Thames. Looking across the Thames to the O2 dome we were looking straight into the sun.

Despite, this on the exposed stretch of mud below the Dome both Canada and Greylag Goose were seen.

All five gull species were seen being Great Black-backed, Herring, Lesser Black-backed, Common and a Black-headed Gull in flight.

A few Carrion Crow called overhead and continuing the

walk along the Thames path a few Cormorant were flying overhead.

Small birds calling and moving through the trees included Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tit.

A couple of Robins were seen and their ticking and normal calls were also heard and a couple of Chaffinch and Woodpigeon were also seen.

There was a Cormorant perched on the small pier next to the entrance to the East India Dock Basin.

Amongst the trees here an alarm call of a Blackbird was heard. Then at least two Blackbirds flew out of the trees.

On the Basin which was frozen in parts, we could see quite a few gulls perched, these included large numbers of Black-headed with a couple Common and Herring Gull.

There were a couple of Moorhen and good numbers of Teal and Mallard.

A few house sparrows were heard and Blue Tit were around some feeders.

Near the Thames we had good views of a couple of Song Thrush perched and in flight.

A Coot was also on the Thames.

Leaving the basin we had a look at the River Lee as we made our way towards the Bow Ecology Park.

The birds added included at least four Grey Heron, both male and female Shelduck, which were swimming in the river, and two distance Mute Swan.

Along the edge of the mud a Common Sandpiper was busily dashing and feeding on insects.

A couple of Redshank were seen in flight and also perched on wooden structures alongside the River Lee.

Other small birds seen included more Long-tailed Tit and some calling Goldfinch.

In the calm cold and bright conditions 33 birds were identified with the highlights being the Peregrine, the busily feeding Common Sandpiper, the Redshank, Shelduck, Teal and two Song Thrush.

11th January, 2026

Staines Moor

Andrew Peel



The River Colne runs through Staines Moor (image: Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne)

A total of 20 people met up on a cold day. To manage expectations the group were briefed initially that owls were unlikely this time (it's a quiet year for Short-eared Owl, and the resident Barn Owl had died). The rough grassland site is home to the oldest anthills in the U.K, some 22 years old, and many molehills.

Walking along the river we saw

numbers of Stonechats, and a Chiffchaff. There were groups of Dabchicks and Moorhens on the river, Grey and Pied wagtails, and a Little Egret. Red kites appeared at intervals, Magpie were omnipresent, a mobile Starling flock, and Crows. A Green woodpecker flew along, and there were brief glimpses of seeping Meadow Pipits.

After a brief break (where one person spotted a flying Kingfisher), we crossed over the river for our return journey. Brief drizzle and wind, a Linnet, and a pipit which flew off from the waterside was a probable Water by call. We flushed two Roe Deer, heard Redwing, and glimpsed Dunnock and Wren. Goldfinches, Woodpigeons and two Mistle Thrushes flew over as we finished.

Reflections

Nirma de Silva Wijeyeratne

from an island in the lake

you rise all at once

to form aerial patterns

black dots on a grey cloth that floats

you wheel in unison

become an ellipse

form a circle an inverted S

morphing into shapes in two-toned images

that alter every second

connected yet unconnected

before you come back to land

in a mass of whirring wings

a marsh harrier drifts away unsuccessful

a year later a large house by the lake

your island empty

your reflections no more

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