



LONDON
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NEWSLETTER

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Cover: German Hairy Snail (*Pseudotrachia rubiginosa*) found in a new site in the River Lea catchment (Cody Dock) (Gino Brignoli)

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

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

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

Early Notice - Society AGM - Thursday 10th December

The LNHS Annual General Meeting will take place at 6:30pm on Thursday 10th December 2026. The meeting will be held online using Zoom. The AGM will be followed by a talk about Bees from Tony Madgwick, our President.

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

National Plant Monitoring Scheme

I'm getting in touch to invite your LNHS members to take part in the National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS) – a nationwide citizen science project that's helping us understand how the abundance and diversity of wild plants and the health of different habitats, and ecosystems across the UK are changing.

Plants are the foundation of our habitats, but until recently we've lacked a consistent way to measure how they're faring. The NPMS is filling that gap – and your group can be part of it.

How it works:

You adopt a 1 km square in your local area and surveys the plants on plots within it, following guidance we'll provide. There are different participation levels, so everyone – from enthusiastic beginners to experienced botanists – can get involved.

You will visit your square twice a year (once in late spring or early summer, and once in late summer) to record the plants you find. You will receive a wildflower identification guide and booklets with detailed survey guidance to help you get started, and you can also draw on support from the NPMS team (support@npms.org.uk) if you'd like advice or support. There's also a useful video on how to get started on the NPMS YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL8_ksbubMM).

Why it's such a good idea:

- A great reason to get outside and explore together – many groups treat their surveys as enjoyable field days.
- Multiple members can share a square
- A social, skill-sharing activity that encourages learning and collaboration.
- You will receive newsletters and feedback reports showing how your data contributes to a national picture of plant distribution and ecosystem change.

There are still NPMS squares available across most of the UK – including near you. You can explore the map and find an available square here: npms.org.uk/square-near-me-public.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss how you could get involved, please don't hesitate to get in touch at support@npms.org.uk

James Harding-Morris (BSBI)

On behalf of the National Plant Monitoring Scheme

Meet the author: Amanda Tuke

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne interviews Amanda Tuke, author of *Wild Pavements – Exploring Britain's Cities with an Urban Naturalist* published by Flint Books.

Amanda Tuke is a London-based urban naturalist and nature writer. She works as a consultant botanist, leads urban plant and bird walks and teaches botany. Amanda writes a monthly column for 'Bird Watching Magazine' which often features urban birds and her feature writing can be seen on her blog The Urban Naturalist. You can also find her on Instagram at @suburbanwilduk and on Bluesky at @amandatuke.bsky.social. Wild Pavements: Exploring Britain's Cities with an Urban Naturalist is her first book.

How did this book come about?

I have been an active member of the LNHS for several years now and I often write about urban bird-watching for my column in *Bird Watching Magazine*. Then around four years ago I hatched the idea of writing a book about the joy of being an urban naturalist and exploring London and other cities in the UK with that perspective. The plan was to share the delights of urban nature rambling with a wide audience, seek out people who care for nature in our cities and then, as I'm an ecologist by background, explore current ideas in ecology and conservation with particular relevance for the urban species which live alongside us.



Amanda Tuke (c) Louise Rose Photography

How many years was this book in the making?

I developed the proposal for *Wild Pavements* in late 2022 and started the research in 2023. I began by rambling from the City of London in the direction of the eight points of the compass, with a loose ultimate destination in mind in each case but not a fixed itinerary. En route I looked out for interesting pavement plants, street trees, fungi, insects and birds and so on. Between London walks I was also exploring other cities in the UK for features for my magazine column.

What do you want to achieve with this book?

There is already a legion of inspirational urban nature custodians across Britain and beyond. From them I heard repeatedly that the most effective way we can care is by paying attention to nature and learning more about it whether we're naturalists, photographers, foragers, or just love spending time in the open air. I believe we really do need even more urban naturalists of all ages and backgrounds who recognise plants, fungi, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals and understand what these different groups need to thrive. And we need city-based naturalists, who are skilled at sharing their knowledge and passion with others,

and can persuade more people to take positive action for the benefit of urban nature.

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

I'm regularly amazed by how the species I've found have had to adapt to cope with us, their often-challenging neighbours. Despite the noise pollution we create and inexplicably tolerate, some songbirds have found ways of keeping their communication channels open. Pavement plants survive where they aren't repeatedly sprayed with herbicide, or in some cases, like the Rue-leaved Saxifrage, are showing signs of herbicide resistance. Urban Peregrines make use of artificial light for nocturnal hunting, and Flounder fry find sanctuary in the rubbish we dump in rivers. But there are many more species for which cities remain hostile, hazard-filled places. Toads struggle to negotiate busy roads, and migrating birds strike glass-sided office blocks. Urban Dippers breed less successfully because of water pollution, and air and light pollution reduce the diversity of insects, fungi and plants.

There are things we can all do to support urban biodiversity. We can consider the advice of wildlife gardeners and make thoughtful changes in our own gardens, accept some plants growing on pavement edges, demand wildlife-friendly street trees, champion a mosaic approach to managing our parks and cemeteries and insist that green roofs be the norm rather than the exception. A greater quantity and diversity of wild plants could mean more fungal diversity, more diversity of invertebrates and small mammals, and potentially more birds and larger mammals.

But there are also some things we might need to stop doing for the benefit of urban wildlife. Will 2026 be the year when the weight of evidence against generalised bird feeding finally stacks up? Or when we stop believing that keeping honeybees is good for biodiversity, particularly given the evidence that urban beekeeping is correlated with a fall in wild bee diversity? Or we challenge the idea that sowing 'wildflower seed' is the answer to increasing plant diversity? Or when we stop tolerating the levels of air, light and noise pollution our cities currently generate?

Not everyone is enthusiastic about sharing our built-up world with wild plants and animals, which was a key motivation for writing this book. The diverse human populations which make city living so gloriously



rich inevitably mean diverse attitudes to the natural world. So what are the most persuasive arguments for nurturing urban nature? For starters, some of the changes which would benefit nature would be great for us too. I'm guessing that only a minority of city-dwellers would object to less dumped rubbish and dog mess, more thoughtful building projects, more street trees, or aspirations to reduce noise, water, air, and light pollution. Persuading residents to tolerate more plants on pavements, wilder-looking verges, estate lawns, parks and cemeteries, and more wooded parks might be a harder sell, but progress is being made in some areas, and learning can be shared. Managers of our city grasslands are discovering that understanding different perspectives, effective communication and directly involving residents are essential to bringing communities on board. Using 'cues to care', is another approach. For example, imagine in an urban park an area of grassland is deliberately allowed to run wild each year to encourage wild flowers and invertebrates. A thin border can be mown around it to show that the mowing approach is considered, rather than lazy. This can help change perspectives and educate people that an urban park is being managed to foster biodiversity.

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

There are really too many delightful moments and amazing people to mention, but the real standouts for me were the male Black Redstart I found just off Oxford Street, the Common Toads I helped on their perilous journey to a pond in a London park, the partnership protecting nesting Kittiwakes on the Tyne Bridge in Newcastle, and meeting the inspirational street tree activists in Sheffield. I also remember with gratitude the generous help of people around London, of the LNHS teams, GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London), yourself and the publisher's layout designer. It was wonderful to meet dedicated local naturalists and conservation volunteers at local sites scattered through the communities around London.

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

The Natural History Museum has set up a free-to-join Urban Nature Network and has produced a couple of excellent beginner-friendly guides to urban plants which you can download for free. <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/take-part/identify-nature/pavement-plants-id-guide.html> walkers will be familiar with using the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme site.

7th October 2025

Regent's Park, NW1

Bob Saxton

This was a tree walk focusing exclusively on one genus, *Alnus*, in the manner of Bettina Metcalfe's Regent's Park *Fraxinus* workshop back in September. There were 17 participants.

Bob Saxton had devised a route that maximised the number of *Alnus* species and cultivars to be seen, starting at York Bridge, going clockwise around the SE extension of the Boating Lake, up into the Inner Circle, along Chester Road and turning off the Broad Walk to end up by the NE canal-like extension to the Boating Lake.

Before we looked at individual trees the main characteristics of *Alnus*, or alder, were highlighted: male catkins and female 'cones' (remaining through the winter); and buds on short stalks. Bob expressed his view that the term 'cones' is justifiable as common usage, even though

the scientifically correct term is *strobili* (only conifers have true cones). He also talked about the root nodules, which improve the fertility of poor soils.

We began by looking at *Alnus glutinosa*, the most common species, and were able to compare both cone size and leaf shape with *A. cordata*, or Italian alder (larger cones, heart-shaped leaf, compared with *glutinosa*'s ovate leaf with flattened apex). *A. glutinosa* is abundant by the waterside and, although many individuals are hard to access, we managed close-up inspections.

We compared two *A. glutinosa* cultivars that are quite similar: 'Imperialis', with its feathery leaves, and deeply lobed 'Laciniata'.

Later in the walk we appreciated several example of *A. incana*, or grey alder, with its grey bark and

pointed deep-toothed leaves. Side by side with the species we saw its cultivar, 'Aurea', with yellow foliage.

Within the Inner Circle we studied a splendid hybrid, *A. x spaethii*, whose boat-shaped leaves have distant teeth. Bob had brought along a single leaf of one of its parents, *A. japonica* (sourced from another park), for comparison.

The walk concluded with two specimens of *A. rubra*, or red alder, notable for the recurved edges to its leaves: the minutely rolled leaf margin has the effect of giving a dark green rim to the underside.

Somewhere in the Park there may be an example of the most obvious missing species, *A. viridis*, or green alder, but finding this would be a challenge, as not all likely locations are accessible.

28th February 2026

West Norwood Cemetery

Will Roomes and Matthew Edwards

West Norwood Cemetery was founded by its own act of Parliament in 1836 and consecrated for its first burials in 1837. It is approximately 40 acres in size, and contains around 42,000+ graves. Known as one of the 'Magnificent Seven' cemeteries it is a site of important historical, ecological and architectural interest. We met at the entrance to the cemetery. It was a bracing but bright day. There were about 20 people in attendance. The talk was led by Bettina.

Although we encountered and identified many types of plants, the theme of Bettina's walk was identifying coniferous trees, and we will start by sharing some things we learned about these trees.

The cemetery was amply planted with conifers, especially plants in the Cupressaceae family. Bettina explained there were three to five key identification features for conifers. Those I recall include: smell of the leaves when crushed; whether the leaf sprays are flat or more rounded; the shape of the cones; whether the leaves are compressed and scale like, or flare upwards in awl-like points. I will note here some of the key identification features of a few of the conifers we saw.

One of the first conifers we investigated was a *Thuja plicata*. Bettina used a Socratic method of questioning throughout, encouraging us to use sight, smell, vision and touch as well as our descriptive abilities to really think about the key identification



Thuja plicata cones and leaves (Images Will Roomes and Matthew Edwards)



Platycladus orientalis cones and leaves

features of this and all plants. She steered us away from making analogies to other plants and encouraged us to describe as best we could the features of the plants in their own right. Some of the key identification features of *Thuja plicata* included: a wine gum smell to the foliage when crushed; scale-like leaves arranged in flattened sprays like a skirt, with a green underside; and the distinctive wine-shaped cones. We then saw a x *Hesperotropis leylandii* - an intergeneric hybrid of *Hesperocyparis macrocarpa* and *Callitropsis nootkatensis*. The key identifying features were: football-shaped cones and the lemony scent to its leaves (from its parent *Hesperocyparis macrocarpa*). We were again encouraged to identify the plant by asking: are the sprays of leaves 2D or 3D? Bettina mentioned that if we're not sure what the tree is based on the list of identifying features, it could be a hybrid.

As we progressed through the cemetery, past the catacombs and some interesting pines, cedars and *Araucaria*, we chatted cordially among ourselves. I loved meeting like-minded plant enthusiasts and sharing thoughts on plants and life and, because of our setting, discussions about death. There was also some small debate as to whether we lose our intuitive connection to plants when genera are split with genetics. For example, *Hesperocyparis macrocarpa* has 19 synonyms on Plants of the World Online.

We saw a *Platycladus orientalis*. The etymological derivations of the naming help with identification - *platys* being Greek for 'broad, flat or level' and *klados* meaning 'branch or shoot of tree'. The cones are in the shape of a cross, with 4 sections hooked at the end and 2 other internal scales with



Prunus cerasifera



Chamaecyparis lawsoniana leaves with terminal red flowers

hooks. The tree was quite mature, and had a drooping/ billowing shape, different from the upright

sprays of its younger form. Finally, we encountered some *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* species

and cultivars. *C. lawsoniana* is native to southwestern Oregon and northwestern California where it can reach... In the UK, these are popular ornamental trees in cemeteries, and as such, we came across quite a few of them. Bettina drew our attention to the main identifying features of *C. lawsoniana*, which include: football-shaped cones with pointed scales; flat leaf sprays, terminating at this time of year in red male cones; a parsley-like smell to the crushed leaves; a droopy leader to the tree. Another tree we looked at during the walk was the Myrobalan or Cherry Plum. *Prunus cerasifera* is one of the first trees to blossom in the U.K, and is often seen in hedgerows or as a street tree. It has white flowers which can be confused with *P. spinosa* (Blackthorn), but differ in having reflex sepals and slightly larger flowers. The common cultivars 'Pissardii' and 'Nigra' were both present, with subtle differences such as the deeper purple foliage, and darker pink flowers, on 'Nigra', and the pale pink flowers fading to white on 'Pissardii'. Another plant spotted during the day was *Anemone blanda*, sometimes known as the Greek or Balkan windflower. This tuberous perennial herb, a neophyte in the U.K having been introduced into cultivation in 1868, provided a nice link with the history of the cemetery. In 1842 an area was acquired by London's Greek community, which over time has been filled with many fine monuments and mausoleums. This part of the cemetery is now known as the



Anemone blanda

Greek Necropolis, and has the highest concentration of listed funerary monuments anywhere in Britain.

It was a fascinating walk. Many thanks to the LNHS and Bettina for an enjoyable day.

11th April, 2026

Hackney Downs Park

Andrew Marks

Before we looked at any trees, Nic Young shared his thoughts on *how* to look. We were a baker's dozen at Nic's local Hackney Downs Park. His approach to tree identification, which he does not see as an exercise in learning taxonomic botany, is about observing, increasingly closely, without jumping to conclusions. This attitude is, he told us, rooted in philosophy, particularly that of Goethe, who urged people to resist preconceptions and immerse themselves in observation.

This spoke directly to your reporter's predilection for lurching prematurely to conclusions, and a little research into Goethe brought up his famous statement that "It is a misfortune to pass at once from observation to conclusion", and "The close and thoughtful observer more and more learns to recognize his limitations." Nic's reassuring take on this was that we shouldn't get hung up if we don't know the name of a plant, and that when we know a little, we can sit in ambiguity, between knowing and not knowing.

Inspired, we began to closely observe trees, and were soon in discussion around a *Juglans* species which had been planted from a seed collected in 2008 in Kashmir, by Eugene Clerkin, a founder member of Tree Musketeers which is a voluntary organisation that protects, preserves and cares for trees in Hackney. Eugene said it was *Juglans regia*, Common Walnut, and that was thrown open to discussion: some thought that *J. regia* would have fewer leaflets and a bigger terminal leaflet than our tree had; and that it would have glabrous petioles, unlike the mildly hairy ones we were observing.



Acer monspessulanum (images Andrew Marks)



Prunus cerasifera with *Taphrina pruni*

However, we also bore in mind that there can be great variety within a species, so we continued investigating. The leaflets, when crushed, had a resinous smell with notes of citrus, strong enough to be obvious to even the olfactorily-challenged amongst us. That suggested Black Walnut, *J. nigra*, whose leaves contain various volatile compounds which contribute to its pungency, and while all *Juglans* species contain these compounds, *J. nigra*'s produce the most aromatic

smell. On the other hand, *J. regia*'s essential oils produce the most citrusy scent ... hmm...

We were unable to reach a consensus as to the identity of Eugene's tree; it was likely to be Common Walnut, with the reserved possibility of Black Walnut; but rather than being discouraged we rested tranquilly in our not-knowing. And Nic was positively delighted by the combination of close observation and discussion,



Koelreuteria paniculata

together with our inability to make a firm identification: “Embrace the ambiguity!”

We unambiguously identified a *Koelreuteria paniculata*; and while the Golden Rain Tree is not a particularly notable species to meet in a London park, this one really caught the eye with its young, tender, pinnately compound leaves sprouting directly from the trunk in an optimistic spurt of epicormic growth; their delicate purple, tinged with spring green, was tastefully

displayed against a background of yolky-yellow *Xanthoria parietina* lichen.

A *Prunus cerasifera* was strikingly infected with *Taphrina pruni*, a fungal plant pathogen that chemically induces the fruit of various *Prunus* species to deform into a flattened and elongated tongue-like shape, swollen on one side. The so-called Pocket Gall also prevents development of a stone, and the seedless fruit never ripens, instead eventually shrivelling and falling. This Plum Cherry was so thoroughly colonised by the invader that almost every fruit was distorted, a depressing situation for the tree, and one doomed to continue year after year.

We were lucky to see a young *Liriodendron tulipifera* ‘Integrifolium’; this is a rarely-seen wild mutation of *L. tulipifera*, the Tulip Tree, and is now designated as a cultivar because it has been selected and propagated by nurseries. It differs from its parent in that its leaves have two lobes instead of the usual four. In fact, the leaves of juvenile *L. tulipifera* have rounded, almost oblong leaves, with no side lobes; and the ‘Integrifolium’ cultivar keeps leaves in this form throughout its life, and throughout the tree.

We discussed how to name trees, with some insisting that binomial nomenclature were the only acceptable terms, while others had a fondness for common names. There are of course compelling reasons to stick with binomials, which are the only way to be sure of avoiding ambiguity and confusion. But Nic made the thoughtful point that one uses botanical taxonomy to consider the relationship between plants, whereas common names are about the observer’s relationship with the plants. The consensus: binomials are best, but common names have their

uses.

Amongst an interesting avenue of oaks was *Quercus agrifolia*, or Californian Live Oak. (“Live” oaks were so-named in North America because their foliage remains green throughout the winter, as opposed to their deciduous relatives which have a brown, “deader” look once their leaves have fallen). Its leaves were mostly sage-green, but some were coloured with the wine-lover in mind, being decidedly burgundy or claret. This tree can be mistaken for *Q. Ilex*, of which there were a number handily nearby, so we were able to note that its bark was even darker than the dark grey of *Q. agrifolia*, and was cracked into squares rather than fissured. And the leaves of the latter are persistently spiny, where *Q. ilex*’s are spiny on sprouts and saplings only.

Another rather rare tree was *Acer monspessulanum*, Montpellier Maple. It’s said to be sometimes mistaken for *Acer campestre*, the Field Maple, but there are clear differences; one being that the crimson wings of the samaras of the former were at a noticeably narrow angle to each other of around 45 degrees; this readily distinguishes it from *A. campestre*, whose samara wings are in a strikingly straight line, at close to 180 degrees. Also, the Montpellier’s leaves were entire, where those of *A. campestre* have distinctly rounded teeth.

Our encounters with these trees, and the ensuing discussions, had been both informative and a great pleasure, which was pretty well what Goethe had in mind when he urged us to “With lively vision contemplate in joy”. Close observation of, and engagement with, the natural world, together with an alert mind and the all-important element of joyfulness ... just what the philosopher ordered!

18th April, 2026

Coppetts Wood and St Pancras and Islington Cemetery

Brittany Pugh (edited by Mark Spencer)

A group of 18 people joined Mark Spencer at the edge of Coppetts Wood in North London with the aim of surveying Coppetts Wood, followed by St Pancras and Islington Cemetery, and to learn about plant identification more broadly. We were interested in re-finding a number of species at Coppetts Wood, particularly Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) or Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), sadly we found neither.

The first part of our survey took us along a narrow footpath leading into a wooded area bordered by dense vegetation including Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), White Deadnettle (*Lamium album*), and Common Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). On the left of the path was a species of apple tree, leading us to learn about the widespread over recording of the only native species of UK apple *Malus sylvestris*, also known as Crab Apple. In the past many apple individuals with small fruits were recorded as *Malus sylvestris*, however, using genetic and morphometric information, field observations have indicated that true Crab Apple are usually restricted to very old hedgerows and forest stands. Many 'Crab Apple' trees across the UK, including the individuals we saw at the edge of Coppetts Wood are actually Domesticated Apple (*Malus domestica*) which is a complex hybrid largely derived from the wild species *Malus sieversii*, which originates from



Hyacinthoides x massartiana (Images Britt Pugh)

Central Asia as well as a 'dash' of *M. sylvestris*.

Moving further into the wood we spotted some invasive Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) in an open area, opposite a denser stand of trees with some very pretty mixed population

of Bluebells growing in the understory. We learned that the majority of 'Spanish' Bluebells in the UK are hybrids (*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*) and that the true Spanish Bluebell (*H. hispanica*) is a rare plant here. Recent studies have concluded that the native Bluebell (*H. non-scripta*) does



Primula veris field

not appear to be at significant risk despite widespread concerns about the impact of non-native Bluebells.

On another open area near to the path was a small individual of Common Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), which steered us into a discussion about the fact that Common Hogweed and Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) can hybridise. However, observations of these hybrids are rare, and it is not yet known whether hybrids may confer problematic genes from Giant Hogweed, who's sap is famously known to cause photosensitivity and can lead to severe burns and blistering. As we departed Coppetts Wood, we past a beautiful planting of Cowslip (*Primula veris*), these may be the non-native subspecies *P. veris* subsp. *macrocalyx* from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (further investigations required!). This and several other survivors of past plantings were observed in the wood, of note were Meadow



Malus domestica

Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*), subsp. *balearicum*).

a UK native but not native to this part of London, and Fodder Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba*

Moving across the dual carriageway from Coppetts Wood,

we spotted an abundant strip of Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*). The widespread use of grit salt on roads across the UK and Europe has led to the spread of salt-tolerant Danish Scurvygrass from its native coastal habitat inland along many road verges. Nearby in a hedge was a large patch of, originally planted, but now rampant, Persian Ivy (*Hedera colchica*) which elicited a discussion about when to record apparent garden escapes.

Within St Pancras and Islington Cemetery, we spotted many species on the grass verges and between gravestones, despite the clear signs of regular mowing. These included Common Dog-violet (*Viola vivianiana*) as well as some probable *V. bavarica*, it's hybrid with Early Dog-violet (*V. reichenbachiana*), Common Field-speedwell (*Veronica persica*), Greater Stitchwort (*Rabelera holostea*) and Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*). A big thank you to Mark Spencer for leading the walk and to all of the lovely participants for such a fun day of surveying and learning about plant species!



Cardamine pratensis



Rabelera holostea



Veronica persica

25th April, 2026

Battersea Park

Ellen McGrath

A total of 18 of us met on a gloriously sunny Spring morning, to study trees in Battersea Park. It has over 8,200 trees including some from the initial landscaping in the 1850s, predominately *Aesculus*, *Fraxinus* and *Ulmus*, 50 trees on the Tree Register, include six English and 20 London champions; a designation based on tallest or widest. Our focus was either uncommon species or those of most interest in April.

Starting from the Chelsea Gate entrance, we studied a *Juglans regia*, with a short, thick trunk and compound pinnate leaves. A monoecious species that produces far more male flowers than females, we observed it had many catkins 8-10 cm long, already blacken and shedding pollen, throughout the canopy but very few, and only on sunniest side of the tree, inconspicuous female flowers in termination buds.

We viewed three species of *Aesculus*, all in bloom, the most numerous were *A. hippocastanum*, white flowers with a reddish spot at the base of the petal, but we also located the cultivar 'Baumannii' with yellow and white flowers and several *A. x carnea* which typically has red flowers, although we noted that two of the *carnea* also had some branches with white flowers.

The majority of the *Fraxinus* are *excelsior* including a *F. excelsior* 'Pendula' with black buds, but we also viewed a *F. latifolia*, reddish brown buds, just coming into flower. There were also some narrow leaved *Fraxinus*; including the *F. angustifolia*, with brown



Crataegus monogyna (all images Jamie)

buds, an *angustifolia* variant 'lentiscifolia'. We observed several *Ulmus* species including *U. 'Clusius'*, *U. glabra* 'Pendula' and *U. pumila*.

There was many *Crataegus*, all in flower. In addition to the two UK natives, *C. monogyna* and *C. laevigata* we noted *C. submollis* and *C. coccinea*. Both *C. submollis* and *C. coccinea* have 10 flowered stamens and serrated leaf margins, the *C. submollis* has long thorns and the *C. coccinea* flower has pink stamens.

Near to the *C. coccinea*, at the corner of the path opposite the tennis courts, there is a *Styphnolobium japonicum* 'Pendula', long branches sweeping to the ground hidden by a dense

canopy of compound oval leaflets.

One of the oldest, and rarest tree is the *Unedo arbutus x andrachnoides*, an evergreen with deep red bark, sadly damaged during a storm, however a replacement has been planted. Another recent planting is a *Toona sinensis* 'Flamingo' with deep pink leaves and twigs, leaves will become green later.

We also noted several variegated cultivars; an *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum' yellowish foliage, turning a dark green, with mostly dark green leaves at the base. A *Castanea sativa* 'Albomarginata', leaves mostly green but with creamy on the edges. An *Ilex aquifolium* 'Ferox Argentea', this has very spiky leaf tips.

Ending the walk by returning to Chelsea Gate, we noticed a large hedge with oval, glossy leaves, *Ligustrum lucidum*, this is a London Girth Champion, and is adjacent to an *Ilex*, with twisting leaves and a sharp tip which curled downwards, this is an *I. aquifolium* 'Crispa'.

With thanks to Clive Freedman for a very informative and enjoyable walk. This report includes only a small subset of the 103 species we viewed; the Friends of Battersea Park website has an excellent interactive tree [map](#) for those wishing to explore further.



Ilex aquifolium



Toona sinensis

Around Borough Station

Bob Boas (morning) Bob Saxton (afternoon)

Ten of us met Bettina outside Borough Tube next to the church of St George the Martyr on a hot cloudless day under the shade of several *Magnolia kobus* trees. Next to them stood a *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Nana' and a youngish *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*.

We moved to the churchyard, now a charming garden, dominated by a huge *Platanus x hispanica*. There were lovely views of the Shard and of the church tower from under a large *Styphnolobium japonicum*, or Pagoda tree, whose green twigs (even over 4 or 5 years of growth) provided a reliable ID point. Near the entrance was *Cestrum parqui* – a Chilean shrub from the Solanaceae family, covered in small yellow 5-petalled flowers. Another rarity was a chest-high yew-like *Cephalotaxus harringtonia* 'Fastigiata', whose new growth appeared like miniature green fountains. A myrtle, *Myrtus communis* 'Variegata' which had lost much of its variegation, sported little black fruits. We also looked at a large *Prunus avium*, or wild cherry, noting the characteristically rounded teeth on its leaves.

From there we walked to a local housing estate, observing *Toona sinensis* 'Flamingo', *Musa basjoo* (banana) and a large *Tilia platyphyllos*, one of our two native limes, notable for the soft hairiness of its leaves. The well-planted gardens of the estate offered a few surprises: a gigantic *Prunus avium* and several whitebeams, including *Sorbus x thuringiaca* as well as *Sorbus intermedia*, the Swedish whitebeam. We also enjoyed *Acer*

buengerianum, a maple with a distinctive three-pointed leaf. Still within the estate we found two rarities: *Decaisnea fargesii*, or blue sausage shrub, from China; and *Persea americana* – the avocado tree, no doubt grown from a resident's discarded seed.

Another highlight of the morning was a study session on the fascinating inflorescence of *Acer pseudoplatanus*, or sycamore, with male flowers at the top of each raceme, and hermaphrodite flowers (containing non-functional stamens) below.

After lunch we glanced briefly on the boundary of Tabard Gardens at a fashionable *Lagerstroemia indica*, or crape myrtle, before studying *Platanus orientalis* in more depth, noting the differences with *Platanus x hispanica* (London plane) – that is, more deeply divided leaves and up to 5 or 6 bobble-like fruits rather than 2-3.

Walking deeper into the Gardens, next stop was a rarity: a 'graft-chimaera', +*Laburnocytisus adami*, created by nurserymen as a 'fusion' of *Laburnum anagyroides* and *Chamaecytisus purpureus*. The difference between an intergeneric hybrid and a graft-chimaera was expertly explained – the latter offers a clever way to combine, for example, two different flower colours on one tree.

Next stop was a difficult oak with sweet chestnut-like leaves, rather more than tentatively identified as *Quercus castaneifolia*, after easily eliminating *Q. acutissima* and *Q. velutina* as candidates –

although similar *Q. libani* remains a possibility.

Graham then showed us a real architectural curiosity of the area: a run of iron 'stretcher railings' erected after the Second World War using metal four-handled stretchers originally made for casualties of the Blitz.

Further trees included *Morus alba*, the white mulberry, notable for its smooth shiny leaves and straight upright trunk (both very different from *M. nigra*, the black mulberry, which is more common).

A handsome *Juglans regia* (English walnut) came next, its pinnate leaves showing the characteristically enlarged terminal leaflet; followed by *Fraxinus ornus*, the flowering ash, distinguishable after flowering by its broad leaflets and darkish grey bud.

Working the streets again, we enjoyed the features of *Gleditsia triacanthos*, with its double pinnate (rather than just pinnate) leaves at the ends of its branches; *Robinia pseudoacacia*, with its slight dimple at the end of each oval leaf; and *Robinia x slavini* 'Hillieri', a hybrid which differs in having pointed oval leaves and pink flowers.

On Decima Street we found towering *Ailanthus altissima*, or Tree of Heaven, and then two hawthorns: *Crataegus* 'Paul's Scarlet' and *Crataegus persimilis*, the latter always distinguishable from *C. crus-galli* by its shorter thorns.



Cephalotaxus harringtonia 'Fastigiata' (image by Bob Saxton)



Quercus castaneifolia (image by Bettina Metcalfe)

Further highlights in the Bermondsey Street area included a quince (*Cydonia oblonga*), *Acer negundo* showing characteristic green young twigs, a wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*) with marked shoulders on its leaves and an elegant lime, *Tilia tomentosa*

'Petiolaris'. What an amazing collection of natural urban wonders!

9th June, 2026

Regent's Park *Tilia* Workshop

Andrew Marks

There are relatively few species of the *Tilia* genus, and only six or seven of them are commonly found in UK streets and parks; nevertheless, many find even this small number are often not easy to distinguish with certainty. In the hope of addressing this deplorable state of affairs, eight of us gathered for Bettina Metcalfe's workshop, under grey clouds and cold rain; a beguiling early summer's day.

Before learning how to tell one Lime from another, we discussed some of their common characteristics. They have palmately-lobed cotyledons, which are succeeded by cordate leaves that are, to varying degrees, asymmetric at the base. The flower buds are shiny ovoids, often optimistically chubby; and the inflorescences are highly scented, attractive to both pollinators and humans.

The peduncles of the inflorescences are fused to lanceolate bracts, whose pale greenish-yellow colour contrasts with the darker leaves, helping to spot a *Tilia* from afar. There was a waggish suggestion that their evolutionary purpose is to aid human identification, although there are those who stubbornly insist that the bract is for seed dispersal by the wind, pointing to its winglike form.

Both the common and binomial names were accurately descriptive; *Tilia cordata* had the most heart-shaped leaves of all the species we looked at; and these Small-leaved Limes also had the most consistently small leaves. They had slightly irregular serrations, were dark green above and blue-



Tilia mongolica leaves (images Andrew Marks)



Tilia x euchlora leaves

green below, with reddish-brown tufts of hair under the main vein-joints, and tips which were often curved.

The most obvious identifier was that the flowers – in a range of 6-13 per inflorescence – were held above the bracts and leaves, unlike any of the other *Tilia* species we looked at, where they hung below; with the exception of *Tilia mongolica*, which is closely related to *T. cordata*.

Bettina shared her conviction that the more we engage with an object, the more readily we can identify it. She encouraged us to build a picture in our minds and memories of each tree, including all the variations within a species; if we then compared our internal picture to what we were observing, it would hugely improve accurate identification. We were buoyed by these thoughts, and the gloomy conditions were inspired too, as a sunny blue sky appeared,

randomly dabbed with gentle explosions of snowy cumulus.

Another *T. cordata* presented itself, with the tacit intention of underlining that point about genetic variations within a species. This tree had lovely, tiny leaves uniformly throughout, where the leaves on the previous specimen had been bigger, and variable in size. Where the inflorescences on the first tree were fused about one-third the way along the bracts, here they were halfway along. Finally, the second tree's branches were far more down swept than the first.

The leaves on the next species were quite shiny, and their serrations had fine, pale yellow tips. Those two features suggested Crimean Lime, which was confirmed by the tangled mass of branches, variously described as swooping down, or drooping; the effect of the swoop-droop was a thick skirt of foliage around the tree, descending to the ground and modestly obscuring the tree's limbs. The binomial, *Tilia x euchlora*, derives from the Greek "euchlorus", meaning bright green, possibly referring to the vibrant yellow-green shoots.

The third tree had bigger leaves than *T. x euchlora*, and much bigger than *T. cordata*. They were the most oblique at the base of any species we looked at, and were dark grey-green on the underside, without orange hairs. The serrations were coarse and forward-pointing, with big yellow-tipped teeth. This was the American Lime, *Tilia americana*. Its bracts were longer than the previous two species, as were the flower buds, and the number of flowers at up to 12 per bract was the greatest we saw...as someone remarked, semi-cordially, everything American is bigger...

Next up was a tree with more

rounded leaves, some with small tips and some with none. Their most noticeable feature, which readily identifies this species, was the compact felt of thin, white-silver hairs on the underside of the leaves. It was *Tilia tomentosa*; the specific epithet is Latin and means "covered in dense matted hairs." Tomentosa in turn derives from "tomentum", meaning woollen stuffing for cushions; and it's not a stretch to imagine that the leaves' hairs, if we could only develop an efficient harvesting method, could be used for that purpose.

The common name is Silver Lime, and again both it and the binomial accurately reflect the tree's characteristics. It is unarguably tomentose, the bracts and twigs also being hairy. As for "silver", it is an appropriate, if slightly poetic descriptor, for the bright shimmering look produced when the leaves are fluttering in the wind, and showing their undersides against their much darker upper surface.

We now observed *Tilia platyphyllos* or Broad-leaved Lime. The leaves felt downy and tactile to the hand, the soft, furry hairs giving a soothing feel when gently stroked. The hairs were not confined to the leaves, the petioles and even the twigs being hairy too. There was a slight curvature to the leaves, with the sides drooping; their underside was described as "corrugated" and "puckered-up". Finally, we noted five regularly-spaced and prominent ribs on the fruit buds.

Tilia x europaea was next in view, the hybrid of *T. cordata* and *T. platyphyllos*. This widely-planted street tree is easy to spot by the often-prolific sprouting from the base and trunk.

Finally, in the new Queen Elizabeth Gardens, we looked at



Tilia americana, leaf, bract and flowers

a tree whose leaves had distinct shoulders and large, crude teeth. This was either *Tilia mongolica* or the hybrid *T. mongolica x cordata*.

Packed with *Tilia* information, we felt a new confidence that any Lime that might cross our paths, challenging us to identify it, may well find that all us were up to the test.

Interesting invertebrates of Cody Dock

Gino Brignoli

Cody Dock, a community-led regeneration site on the River Lea, continues to reveal itself as an unexpected hotspot for biodiversity, with approximately 700 invertebrate species recorded to date. In addition to on-site habitat creation, management and monitoring, the charity acts as a wildlife custodian across around 4 km² of east London.

Located in the borough of Newham, the site is of particular entomological interest due to the close juxtaposition of a variety of habitat types within a relatively small area. Some of these may be considered relict, such as a reedbed (*Phragmites australis*) that has persisted with only light management, echoing the former extent of the West Ham Abbey Marshes before the channelisation of the River Lea. Alongside this sits what was, until recently, an extensive post-industrial brownfield corridor, a legacy of coal gas production, shipbuilding, and chemical manufacturing. Today, only a patchwork of these important invertebrate habitats remains, as large areas have been lost to development.

Nearby green spaces, including Memorial Park and the more recent Lea River Park, are managed for both people and wildlife, helping to maintain connectivity through native tree planting, hedgerows, and wildflowers across the surrounding industrial landscape. The river itself adds a further layer of ecological complexity: with a tidal range of up to five metres, and water conditions that shift between fresh and brackish depending on the direction of flow. This dynamism within



A good-sized population of *Formica cunicularia* are found in the area (all images Gino Brignoli)



A queen of the nationally rare Brown-banded Carder Bee (*Bombus humilis*) often found foraging on flowers across the site

the constrained channel creates niches that a variety of plants and invertebrates can exploit.

Through *ad hoc* recording, structured ecological surveys, visits from LNHS recorders and national recording schemes,

and aquatic sampling, a series of notable discoveries has highlighted the ecological richness of this site.

One of the most striking findings emerged during aquatic sampling: the first UK record of the invasive freshwater leech *Barbronia weberi*, a species native to Southeast Asia. This discovery, now published in *The London Naturalist* (No. 104, 2025), represents a significant addition to the British fauna. The species is thought to have been introduced via the aquatic plant trade, an increasingly recognised pathway for the inadvertent transport of invertebrates. Its ecological impact remains uncertain, though there is potential for interactions with native freshwater fauna.

Equally notable was the discovery of Arcangeli's Pill Woodlouse (*Armadillidium arcangelii*). Native to the Mediterranean, this species has historically been confined in Britain to glasshouses and garden centres, where it has likely become established through the horticultural trade. Its occurrence outdoors over a couple of years at Cody Dock is among the first such records in Britain and most likely indicates an emerging capacity for establishment in the wider environment.

Another Mediterranean species, the earwig *Forficula* (*Guanchia*) *pubescens*, was also recorded. As far as we're aware this species has not previously been documented in Britain, and its detection may represent a recent introduction. As a largely nocturnal and inconspicuous insect, it is possible that its distribution has been under-recorded, and further targeted survey work may clarify its status.

Not all notable species at Cody Dock are non-native. The Brown-



A tiny ground beetle (*Syntomus foveatus*) first discovered at our site by our youngest recorder (a 4 year-old) during a City Nature Challenge bioblitz



Arcangeli's Pill Millipede (*Armadillidium arcangelii*) is a Mediterranean species usually found in garden centres in the UK, but an outdoor breeding population has been found at Cody Dock

banded Carder Bee (*Bombus humilis*), a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, has been recorded foraging on site. This historically declining and now scarce bumblebee favours flower-rich grasslands and open mosaic habitats, such as those found on brownfield land. Its presence suggests that habitat creation and management at Cody Dock is

supporting species of conservation concern and highlights the importance of maintaining a diverse supply of floral resources throughout the season.

Community volunteers ran a light trap once a month over the last couple of years, significantly contributing to the 135 Lepidoptera recorded on site. A

small carabid beetle *Amblystomis niger* turned up as bycatch in one of the traps and was a first record for London. Purple Hairstreak (*Neozephyrus quercus*) was also recorded for the first time in 2025, associated with mature oak (*Quercus* sp.), a handful of which nestle along the site boundary.

The site has also provided a stage for more subtle but equally compelling observations. The Eyed Longhorn Beetle (*Oberea oculata*), a striking willow-associated species, has been recorded along the dock margins. This critically endangered beetle, previously thought to be restricted to a small population in the Cambridgeshire fens, is a Section 41 Priority Species. Its presence reflects the availability of suitable willow habitat, particularly established stands that can support larval development.

Man-made habitats abound for the enterprising invertebrate. Aggregations of Bristly Millipedes (*Polyxenus lagurus*) have been found inhabiting lighting bollards along the river footpath. They emerge from behind the lighting modules and rest atop the metal bollards. These tiny (2–3 mm), largely nocturnal animals are typically found beneath bark or within crevices, and are easily overlooked despite being widespread in England.

Neglect and disregard are also excellent for invertebrate life to thrive. Rotting timbers lining the river walls provide habitat for Wharf Borer Beetles (*Nacerdes melanura*). Although the adults resemble soldier beetles and may be seen visiting flowers, their larvae develop in damp, decaying timber colonised by fungi.

The Phoenix Fly (*Dorycera*



Monthly aquatic invertebrate sampling sessions from the River Lea and the Dock often yielded excellent finds such as this Lesser Water Boatman (*Sigara* sp.)



Rose Stem Girdler (*Agrilus cuprescens*) often found along the river footpath and were added to the UK list in 2010

graminum), one of Britain's largest picture-winged flies, has also been recorded. This Near Threatened, Section 41 Priority Species is associated with brownfield habitats and grasslands supporting large umbellifers, though aspects of its life history, particularly larval ecology, remain poorly understood.

Fifteen species of ladybird have been recorded across the site, including the diminutive Dot Ladybird (*Stethorus pusillus*) and Forestier's Ladybird (*Rhyzobius forestieri*), a species thought to have originated in Australasia.

Among the molluscs, the German Hairy Snail (*Pseudotrachia rubiginosa*) has been found along the nearby Channelsea River. Native to Britain, it is one of the country's most threatened snails, historically associated with river systems such as the Thames and Medway, where it may have persisted since the last glaciation, and this colony are likely to have been here as long.

Taken together, these findings point to the dual role of Cody Dock and its surroundings as both a refuge for native biodiversity and a point of entry for non-native species. Its position along a tidal river, combined with ongoing habitat creation, restoration and community engagement, has produced a dynamic and evolving landscape. As such, the site offers not only opportunities for discovery but also a valuable lens for observing changing patterns in species distribution in an urban context.

Gino Brignoli was formerly the Biodiversity Officer at Cody Dock (January 2022 to March 2026). He is now employed as Collections Officer (Biological



Spotted Marsh Ladybird (*Coccidula scutellata*) is one of 15 species of ladybird found in the area



Swept from grasses during a regular volunteer session, the Phoenix Fly (*Dorycera graminum*) is a UK BAP species

Data) at the Glasgow Museums Biological Records Centre.



The first known record of the earwig *Forficula* (*Guanchia*) *pubescens* on the UK mainland



The only known breeding population outside of the Cambridgeshire fens of the Eyed Longhorn Beetle (*Oberea oculata*) has been found at Cody Dock



The miniscule Bristly Millipede (*Polyxenus lagurus*) found living inside the lighting bollards along the Lea river path



Toadflax Brocade (*Calophasia lunula*) found attracted to a light trap during our monthly Moth Club sessions

4th July, 2026

Ruislip Woods

Neil Anderson

The forecast showed a warm, sunny day, so it was somewhat frustrating that some early sunshine had disappeared under cloudy skies by the time of the start of the meeting and so it stayed for about 90 minutes.

Though feeling warm, there wasn't a lot of flying insect activity in the overcast conditions. We did see a Willow Emerald Damselfly by our meeting point and the group of six headed to the southern end of the Lido.

The previous Saturday on Dick's LBC walk I'd spotted several Red-veined Darters and the site's first Lesser Emperor from this spot, but no Odonata were flying.

House Martins and a few Swifts were feeding overhead and we walked down to the extensive stands of Purple Loosestrife which were in full flower. Quite a few Honey Bees and the odd bumblebee were nectaring and we saw our first butterfly – a Small White on the flowers. Soon after, a Peacock flew past us.

Given the paucity of insects, we looked at some of the flora. Also here was Gypsywort, so called because the dye extracted from the plant was apparently used by Romany people to darken their skin. We also found the aromatic leaves of Water Mint and some Creeping Yellowcress.

As we walked past the Water's Edge pub, we looked at a clump of Black Horehound. We watched several Common Carder Bees visiting the flowers as well as a single White-tailed Bumblebee, a couple of *Spaerophoria* sp. females and a Marmalade Fly (both species of hoverfly).



Green Hairstreak (images Neil Anderson)



Small Copper on buttercup

Along the western edge of the Lido we looked at Dittander in flower, which used to be used as a flavouring before the introduction of Horse Radish, some *Rosa rugosa*, which presumably arrived via a bird dropping (Greenfinches are partial to the hips) and some Lesser Swinecress. A couple of Yellow-bellied Sliders were basking on a decrepit raft

From one of the fishing platforms, we were serenaded by the lovely song of a Garden Warbler as well as the more commonly heard songs of Blackcap and Chiffchaff. We also found a young froglet which we managed to avoid treading on.

On the edge of the platform, one of the group spotted a dark beetle. It wasn't one that I recognised. Nobody else knew what it was, but with a couple of tech-savvy members and the use of apps we concluded it was *Galeruca tanacetii*. Back home, doing a little more research, it was the correct ID and one of its main food plants, Yarrow was growing very close by.

We looked at a couple of common spiders- an immature *Araneus diadematus* and, in its funnel web, *Agalena labrynthica*.

Fortunately, as we were approaching a more open area the sun began to emerge and generate more warmth. Almost immediately the butterflies started to fly. Most numerous was the Gatekeeper, all of which were looking fresh. We also saw smaller numbers of Meadow Brown and Ringlet. Both Small and Green-veined White were seen on the bramble flowers and then a Comma appeared.

The real highlight though was a White Admiral that also sipped from the flowers and posed for photos.

In the grass the other side of the path several skippers danced. Most



Malachite beetle

appeared to be Small, but we did see a couple of Essex Skippers with the inky black undersides to the antennae tips. A small number of Common Blue Damselflies were hunting amongst the grasses, and we also observed a couple of Black-tailed Skimmers and a male Emperor.

A Cinnabar moth landed on a nettle by Haste Hill, giving some good views.

Walking through to Poor's Field we saw other species of hoverfly including the bumblebee mimic *Eristalis intricaria*, *Volucella inanis*, *V. pellucens* and *Eristalis pertinax*.

We looked at some of the plants growing in the acid grassland of Poor's Field with Ling in bud, Dwarf Gorse not as well developed and in flower, Tormentil, Heath Bedstraw and Heath Speedwell.

In addition to some of the butterflies seen earlier we saw a few Marbled Whites, Peacocks, Red Admirals and a single Small Copper. Around the small oaks we saw quite a few Purple



Pied Wagtail

Hairstreaks, and we watched a couple walking around the twigs, looking for suitable places to lay eggs.

While we were examining the behaviour of one of these butterflies, I spotted a male Muntjac which most of the group saw.

On our return Francis found a second White Admiral. We also admired a male Banded Demoiselle sitting on a bracken frond and a bit later a female Beautiful Demoiselle flew past us.

Mario was trying to find Lousewort

for us, which he'd previously seen on an LNHS botany trip here a couple of years ago, but sadly we didn't find it.

Having had four hours or so exploring we were keen to catch the bus which had just pulled up. Some interesting sightings in good company.



Great Crested Grebe



Buzzard

January, 2025

St John's Garden, Farringdon, EC1

Susanna Thornton

St John's Garden is a tiny woodland park behind Farringdon station, at the edge of the Square Mile. In medieval times, the site was part of the Clerkenwell priory of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, or St John's Hospitallers, and was probably a kitchen garden. It became a burial ground, then a Victorian park. Today it is a green half-acre hemmed in by tall buildings, with the trains, underground and the Elizabeth line only metres away. The park has several mature Plane trees and a lower canopy of Cherry, Whitebeam and Birch, two dense old yew trees, a large Portuguese Laurel, and a large sycamore shading the top park gate.

During a recent birding visit, on a cold quiet day just after New Year, I saw a Magpie fly with a stick to an old nest in one of the cherry trees where it tried to weave the stick in, a female Blackbird foraging amongst dead leaves near the fence, and then – suddenly and excitingly – two Robins fighting, chasing each other like fighter pilots, and clashing with a kerfuffle of brown wings.

The Friends of St John's Garden have been monitoring bird life on this patch for several years. The Friends is a community organisation made up of local residents and workers. In 2023, we requested an eBird 'hotspot' at the park, allowing us to record bird life there more systematically. Initially the hotspot was used just by us locals, submitting complete checklists roughly every week, but now other birders whom we've never actually met are also recording regular complete lists



Magpies have raised young successfully in the park (Hilary Barton)



Robin on the old drinking fountain in St John's Garden (Hilary Barton)

and incidental sightings, helping create a picture of bird life in this inner London location.

On almost every visit, we see Robins, Magpies and Blackbirds, as I did the other day, as well as Blue Tits, Great Tits, Carrion Crow,

Woodpigeons and Parakeets. Feral pigeons were very numerous and almost a nuisance, but have declined in number in the park over the past year, possibly because there seem to be fewer people feeding them. Intermittently we also get Goldfinches, Wrens and



Robins have nested on a balcony overlooking the park (Susanna Thornton)

Dunnocks. In the last year or so, Pied Wagtails have cropped up in the vicinity of the park, usually seeking dropped crumbs on the pavements, and remarkably fearless. We have had glimpses of a Woodcock and a Coal Tit, as well as a gorgeous lemony Grey Wagtail that one day appeared by the new wildlife pond, and just before Christmas a fantastic Great Spotted Woodpecker in the sycamore tree, given away by its “kik kik” call. There have also been sightings of a Kestrel, as well as Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull overhead.

Black Redstarts are the rarest bird to have been seen around St John’s Garden. Central London is famously an extremely important location for this species, where the bombed-out buildings left behind after the Blitz replicated the bare stony cliffs of their natural habitat. We see Black Redstarts using rooftop aerials as singing posts at the north end of Britton Street at the junction with Clerkenwell Road, and perching on the roofs of buildings on office blocks along

Turnmill Street, as well as on the balconies of flats along Benjamin Street immediately south of the park. June and July 2024 was a particularly good period, with frequent sightings every day – and almost no work getting done by me! dashing to the window every time I heard their distinctive silvery call. We are plotting each Black Redstart sighting on eBird in its exact specific location, hoping to identify where there might perhaps be a nesting pair.

We have seen five species successfully raise young in and around the park: Robin, Great Tit, Blackbird, Magpie and Wren. Blue Tits used one nest box in the park in 2024, and in 2025 they used the box on the tree at the Goldsmiths’ Centre cafe opposite. Both years, Blue Tit adults were seen carrying food to nestlings, very busily zooming across the park and across the road to the cafe, but for some reason we never saw any fledglings. In 2024 a Wren was observed carrying nesting material into a secluded nest box in the bottom corner

of the park, but did not attract a mate. In 2025, however, a Wren pair successfully raised a large and noisy brood, observed in the thick ivy on an old brick wall near the park bench seating area. Blackbirds bred successfully in both 2024 and 2025, and we saw the fledglings learning to fly, crashing into the first-floor windows of Kurt Geiger head office. Crows nested high up in the tree canopy in 2024 and 2025, but it is too high up for us to see nestlings and we don’t know if they bred successfully. We have seen Magpie nest-building activity each year – including the very early season stick-carrying I just saw – and last year saw Magpie adults feeding noisy, very demanding young, although none of the nests half-built by Magpies in the park seem to have actually been finished or used.

The full bird list for St John’s Garden since 2023 is now 21 species.

The Friends of St John’s Garden help care for the park alongside the team at Islington council and other bodies. We use the birding data, and other observations e.g., of pollinators, to help inform planting decisions and other interventions to improve the biodiversity value of the park.

Being such a small space, it is easy to survey the whole of St John’s Garden within half an hour. It is of course an unlikely place to see anything rare and ‘exciting’ – apart from of course the Black Redstarts! But it is enjoyable – and indeed exciting – to observe the birds which use this tiny space as each year goes round, and it is a moving thing to observe the struggle of wild birds to survive and thrive, right in the heart of the city.

25th April, 2026

Russia Dock Woodland and Stave Hill

John Cadera

Before Meeting at Onega Gate, we did a walkabout of Russia Dock woodland to see what may be around.

At least 6 male Blackcap were singing as far up as Downtown Pond. We also heard a male Greenfinch, all too briefly and we could not locate it again with the group.

A total of 11 people joined us for the morning walk, including a child in a pram – our youngest birder so far! While chilly at the start the morning soon warmed up. We had great views of Wren, Robin, Chiffchaff and an obliging male Blackcap. We also heard Goldcrest in the big conifer but apart from a hint of movement the singing male remained mostly hidden.

As we walked along the side of the green, 6 Herring Gull went over, the temperature had also warmed up considerably since we started out bringing out a few Speckled Wood and Small White.

Downtown Pond was a bit on the quiet side, even the Moorhen mostly kept to the edges of the reeds. Thanks to someone's keen eyes we manage to find a pair of Blackcap and most people got to see the female with her rusty brown cap. Quiet and secretive, female Blackcap are a bit of a prize when you consider how few are seen even when you are surrounded by males singing.

I was asked an interesting question about bird names: why are species mostly named after the



Mallard (all images Isabelle Kiff)

male? It is probably because males are often noisier, many species have more showy plumage with somewhat obvious field markings. Otherwise, you could end up with field guides full of species called brown or mostly brown.

At Globe Pond we found Mallard, Moorhen, House Sparrow and the resident pair of Canada Goose awaiting the 3rd batch of young to hatch since their arrival four years ago. One of the few places in Rotherhithe where you can still find four species of pigeon; Woodpigeon are easy, although Feral Pigeon kept away until we started moving off! A Collared Dove called but also stayed out of sight. This species has become scarce with only a couple of pairs in the area. A single Stock Dove arrived but stayed mostly hidden, completing the set. We also found a Small White and a Holly Blue near the pond. We encountered more Blackcap and another pair of Long-tailed Tit.



Blue Tit

It was also at Globe Pond that we finally met members of the Surrey Bird Club, who were checking the area for future visits. While we chatted with them, a Goldfinch went over. It was also time to call it a day, we had seen 25 species, which is about right for this time of the year. While the London Bird Club lot dispersed for our homes the Surrey Birders headed for the Surrey Docks Farm and a well-earned Cake O'clock.

9th May, 2026

Cheshunt

Andrew Peel

A total of 18 people met up on a warm spring day, for this annual LBC/RSPB walk, a third of them youngsters, which was pleasing. We heard and saw Goldcrest, Song Thrush, and Chaffinch *en route* to the Holyfield 'nightingale loop'. Also, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, and Cetti's warblers, with good views of two song flying Sedge Warblers. Garden warblers were everywhere, outnumbering Blackcaps 2:1. On the lakes there

were handsome Great Crested Grebes, male Pochards, Tufted Ducks, and Gadwall. Nearing the hide, a singing male Reed Bunting; on and around the rafts, numbers of noisy Black-headed gulls, and two Common Terns.

At the loop we had to shelve our plans for a circular walk due to the expansion works on the electricity plant. Two warblers noisily chased a Cuckoo into view, then we saw

and heard a pair of Ravens, one of them diving dramatically in display. We finally heard 3-4 Nightingales singing or calling, the best one from the other side of the Lea. We also saw Buzzard, Kestrel, and a Red Kite; and Peacock, Painted Lady, Holly Blue, Orange Tip and Small Heath butterflies, Banded Demoiselles, and other damselfly and dragonfly species. The group saw a total of 46 bird species.

30th May, 2026

Amwell Nature Reserve

Francis O' Sullivan

Two members met me at St Margarets station for the walk to the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's reserve at Amwell having changed trains at Broxbourne as there were no direct trains that weekend. Fortuitously as we saw our only Collared Dove while travelling on our connecting service.

At Amwell station before setting off we watched a group of Jackdaws bringing sticks to the chimneys of some Victorian cottages, much to the annoyance of householders they drop the sticks into the chimneys to create a base for their nests. When we reached the river, we scanned the flat grassy area which is part of a marina to look at the geese. We had already seen Canada and Greylag and a hybrid Granada on the river. They were joined by wagtails a pair of Grey Wagtail and a single Pied or possibly a White Wagtail as its back was grey not black.

As we progressed along the towpath a distant Cuckoo could be heard and our first raptor of the day a Buzzard soared overhead. Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs sang in the bankside vegetation and what I thought might

have been a Garden Warbler if only very briefly.

When we reached the reserve proper a Garden Warbler was singing but hiding nearby and a local birder told us yes, they were Garden Warblers, there were up to six on site this year. From the viewpoint we saw a Little Ringed Plover in flight and Lapwing. The ducks as well as the usual Mallard, Tufted and Gadwall included a pair of Shoveler which have usually moved further north to breed by this time of year.

From the Gladwin hide we could make out Cormorants and Grey Herons on the island and eventually a few Little Egrets which all breed locally. Good views were had of a male Reed Bunting singing and Reed Warblers moving energetically in the reeds. However, there was only a brief view of a Sedge Warbler. Great crested grebes were nesting but there was no sign of Little grebes and a Cuckoo flew past in front of the hide.

Several Greenfinch sang as we made our way back to the viewpoint-they seem to have recovered somewhat

from their decline. To avoid the heat and sun we went through the woodland and were rewarded with a close up of a singing Garden Warbler in full voice. On the bramble we saw a Small Tortoiseshell butterfly only the second one I have seen this year. 2026 will be remembered not only for Garden Warblers but Painted Ladies they seem to be everywhere.

Another raptor appeared which on reflection we decided was a Kestrel and not a Sparrowhawk. We made our way to the dragonfly boardwalk and added Pheasant and a singing Whitethroat. Red Kites flew overhead. Another birder told us he had just seen mating Norfolk Hawkers. On the stream Banded Demoiselles were added to the Beautiful Demoiselles we had seen on the river. In the orchid enclosure a pair of what I think were Southern Marsh Orchids stood out in the surrounding greenery.

In all 58 species were seen. My personal highlights were the close up of the singing Garden Warbler and Reed Buntings.

27th June, 2026

Ruislip Lido and Woods

Dick Middleton

Unlike the same field meeting in 2025 we started in bright sunshine and with a clear blue sky. Another difference was the temperature, while last year it was 26°C when we finished, this year it was the starting temperature and it was to get up to about 31°C by the end – were we mad?

We were to look for birds, dragonflies and butterflies. While assembling at the Lido entrance a couple of Willow Emerald damselflies were spotted on the dead hedge beside us by Neil. As he is the LNHS Odonata Recorder this was very helpful and his expertise would prove useful later. He also saw Small Red-eyed damselfly and, en route to the dam, pointed out Common Blue damselfly.

From our vantage point on the dam in front of the Boathouse we were able to look down on the wildfowl present. There were upwards of fifty Canada Geese, a usual sight at this time of the year, good numbers of Coot but not many Mallard. Pied Wagtail had already been noted but it good to see a family party of Grey Wagtails. Swift, House Martin and a lone Swallow dipped down over the water as did a single Common Tern.

Dragonflies were also below us and Neil was soon adding Emperor, Lesser Emperor and Red-veined Darter to the days tally. The sky was not neglected and, by the time we moved on, four Common Buzzard and three Red Kite had been observed and a high flying Cormorant was seen. Butterflies along the grass bank of the dam included Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Green-veined White and Painted Lady and a Purple Hairstreak appeared on the nearby conifer – this species seems to have been forced down from the treetops by the hot conditions.

The next port of call was the fishing platforms area where it was interesting to encounter the same trio of warblers as had been recorded during the May meeting, namely, Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Cetti's Warbler. While the first two certainly breed here the presence of the latter for such an unusually prolonged period suggests that, it too, has possibly bred in area. A flash of yellow in the brambles, when it settled, proved to be a Yellow Shell moth. Ringlet and Comma butterflies were noted and Neil was able to add Black-tailed Skimmer and Red-eyed Damselfly to the list of Odonata.

Leaving the Lido we entered Poor's Field where there was little to detain us. Neil pointed out the Petty Whin, Dwarf Gorse and Gorse and a Small Heath butterfly quickly crossed our path. Respite from the sun was sought by taking an early entry into Copse Wood. Here the usual targets of White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies were met but given little attention as an attack by biting insects led to a hasty retreat. On the way out of the wood a wrong choice of path meant running the gauntlet of stinging nettles.

A quick look at the pond at the far end of Poor's Field added a Broad-bodied Chaser to the dragonfly list. We then headed for the exit noting another White Admiral; Neil pointed out a Roesel's Bush-Cricket; an unexpected Common Spotted Orchid was seen by the track, this being some distance from the known area where it occurs and the finale was the sighting of a Marbled White butterfly.

My thanks to all who endured the heat to support this field meeting but especially to Neil for his input and extensive knowledge.

1st August, 2026

Footscray Meadows

George Kalli

Six people joined me on a hot, sunny day with a slight breeze. The walk to the meadows had calling Collared Dove, Carrion Crow, the ever-present Ring-necked Parakeet and Goldfinch. The first section of woodland had a few Wood Pigeon and House Sparrow. Emerging onto the scorched brown grass of the meadows there were quite a few butterflies mainly Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown. A Jersey Tiger moth sped past. Quite a while was spent looking at the butterflies nectaring on the remaining flowers. We had nine butterfly species today. Here we had Small White, a couple of Painted Lady, Small Heath and Holly Blue.

A calling Great Spotted Woodpecker showed us its undulating flight movement across the meadows. The yaffle call of a Green Woodpecker was also heard today. Moving towards the small woodland area a wren was in

song and a Blackbirds alarm call was heard as it flew besides us. A group of three dainty Long Tailed Tit, probably juvenile posed on a branch and then flew off. The pink pink call of a Chaffinch was heard and good views of a perched stock dove were had. A goldcrest was heard and a jay was seen perched.

We started our walk along the clear flowing water of the River Cray. Here were both male and female Banded Demoiselle, blue and green respectively flying daintily over the water with their colours being reflected by the sunlight. Five Odonata species were seen today including Brown Hawker, Emperor Dragonfly, Blue-tailed Damsel, Black-tailed Skimmer and Banded Demoiselle. A Comma and Red Admiral were added.

Reaching the iron bridge a brief glimpse of a Grey Wagtail flying up from the water was seen.

Better views were had on our return walk on the other bank of the river. On our return brief views of a Kingfisher in flight was gained. Again later on better flight views of the Kingfisher was seen. A Chiffchaff was heard doing its contact call.

On reaching the Five Arches Bridge birds added included Coot, Moorhen, Mute Swan and a couple of Egyptian Goose. Further up the path a Cetti's Warbler called and a few Mallard and four Gadwall swam past. Lastly a calling male Kestrel flew overhead. A Speckled Wood was seen in the last part of the woodland.

A total of 31 bird species were identified today alongside nine butterfly species and five odonata species. The Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail and the calling Kestrel were the highlights backed up by decent totals of butterflies and odonata.

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.