Kabir Kaul is a young conservationist and wildlife writer, passionate about biodiversity in London, and he loves to encourage people to make their doorstep more wildlife-friendly. In May, Kabir set up a WhatsApp group called Northwest London Birders, which currently has nearly fifty members. It is for birders and wildlife enthusiasts of all levels, living in or interested in the wildlife of the London Boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. The group helps to connect like-minded people in the region, and share sightings of birds and other wildlife. If you are interested in joining the group,

- Email Kabir Kaul to sign up to the Northwest London Birders WhatsApp group
- Click here to check out Kabir's 'Kaul of the Wild' blog

Birding in Ruislip Woods



My local patch is Ruislip Woods, a sprawling semi-ancient woodland in the London Borough of Hillingdon. At its centre lies a sizable lake, Ruislip Lido, which can be an outstanding site for migratory wildfowl in winter. It is the largest continuous woodland in the whole of London, and is designated as a National Nature Reserve and a Site of Specific Scientific Interest. The Woods are two-minute drive away from my home in Eastcote, and boasts a variety of habitats. It consists of four woods: Park Wood, Copse Wood, Mad Bess Wood (named after a fierce landowner), and Bayhurst Wood Country Park, separated from the main reserve by Breakspear Road. I have yet to visit most of the woodland habitat, and I hope to do so in the near future.

Ruislip Lido is a large lake with one of the capital’s only beaches, so it can become very busy at times! The Lido started life as a reservoir, supplying drinking water to Paddington over one hundred years ago. In winter, this lake is home to hundreds of Arctic wildfowl, including Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon and the very occasional Goldeneye. Besides the ducks, when the water

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levels are low or the lake is frozen, waders such as Snipe can be seen. At the north of the Lido lies a very small marsh, which provides a habitat for the odd Water Rail, and Marsh Tit and Lesser Redpoll can be heard in the trees nearby. Beside Copse Wood lies a large pasture and scrubland, known as Poor's Field, which is home to breeding Whitethroat and Garden Warbler, and is a former breeding site for Red-backed Shrike. The Woods have breeding Sparrowhawk, and are alive with the song of Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, among other warblers in summer. Mad Bess and Bayhurst Woods are less accessible than the rest of the site, with circular paths running around the edges of the woods: nevertheless, they are superb for butterflies, including the Purple Emperor, and a variety of mammals.



There have been some fantastic species that have turned up at the Lido and Woods in the last two decades, including Arctic Tern, Woodcock, Jack Snipe, and Hawfinch (during a nationwide influx), though only very recently have I discovered how impressive the site is for birds. The pandemic has helped me to value and appreciate my patch more: before the lockdown, my most memorable sighting was a Dunlin, but in the last few months this has changed dramatically, especially from visiting Poor's Field, where I have seen Spotted Flycatcher, Redstart, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll, and at the Lido, a Little Ringed Plover! The site is watched by only a handful of birders, but thanks to their immense knowledge, I have learned so much more about the Woods and its wildlife.

Ruislip Woods is a magical place, a mosaic of habitats filled with biodiversity. I hope to get to learn about and explore more of my patch in the future, and enjoy what I have on my doorstep; something that can definitely improve our wellbeing during these uncertain times.

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