

FRIENDS of LONG LANE PASTURE NEWSLETTER



No 35. Spring 2017

Hello, and welcome to another edition of the Newsletter. Since the last publication (a special edition produced for the Martin School Christmas Fair on December 4, 2016) we've all undeniably



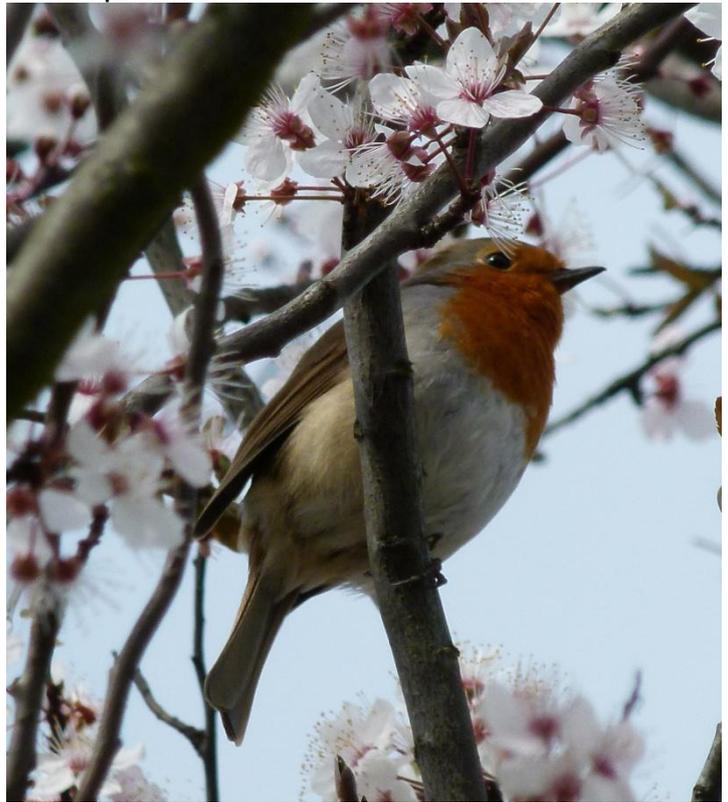
experienced a comparatively mild winter. I can only recall two mornings when some frost needed scraping from my windscreen. The main pond did freeze over for about a week in late January, and we were getting quite worried about the low level of all our ponds as the winter had been much drier than normal; but then February arrived...

It didn't take long with several bouts of heavy rain over the following weeks to saturate the Pasture, with our many ponds filled & ground very sodden underfoot. But we never experienced the deep flooding we battled with last winter, so for that we are very grateful.

Also, unlike last year's chaotic season, spring was in its proper place; with the snowdrops, crocuses,



daffodils and tree blossom appearing in an orderly and expected manner.



Along with the warmer weather there have been some sightings of butterflies, including several freshly emerged small tortoiseshells. Let's hope this will be a good year for plenty of these delightful insects.



With the welcomed assistance we received from volunteering groups last autumn, and the drier weather and with our regular help, we have the pasture in the best condition post-winter that we can remember. We managed to mow, rake and scrub clear a greater area than ever before, ready for this new season's growth.

Already we have mown the paths and because we were able to be open on most days during the

winter, we have welcomed increased numbers of visitors. Please come along and enjoy the wild beauty that is the Pasture.

Donald Lyven – Chair, LLP Trust

Thank You Waitrose

On Tuesday March 21, two members of the Pasture Committee arrived at the North Finchley Waitrose store and attended a coffee morning, to meet other charity organisations that benefited recently from the Community Matters scheme run by Waitrose.

The Long Lane Pasture Trust was one of the three chosen charities that competed for customer green disks during January and February.

Those attending introduced themselves and gave a brief talk about what their organisation did and how it benefits the community.

The Waitrose luxury chocolate biscuits went down very well with the tea and coffee, and a lively exchange of knowledge and contact details followed.



The Pasture Trust thanks Waitrose and its loyal customers who 'voted' for us, enabling a very useful cheque for £340 to be handed to the Trust which will go towards machinery maintenance, new tools and fence repairs.

All too soon it was time to say our goodbyes and descend the 30 odd steps from the upper floor of the supermarket, which has a rather lovely roof garden for staff to sit and relax in.

Birds Seen

We have been feeding the birds all winter as per usual and have seen many chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch, jay, dunnock, starling, robin, blue tit, coal tit and great tit all going to the feeding station. Long tailed tits, pigeon and woodpigeon also regularly feed here, and we've seen a pair of moorhens and three mallard on the main pond.



But of course, we are most blessed by a lively flock of London's iconic bird, the house sparrow!

The sparrows seen & heard on Long Lane Pasture nest in the roofs of the adjacent houses of Squires Lane, Long Lane and Rosemary Avenue. The traditional roofs of the 1930s semi-detached and even older terraced houses in Squires Lane, offer many useful nooks and crannies for the birds.



All these surrounding houses have gardens, and the neighbouring allotments also ensure a wide range of feeding opportunities; whether spring, summer, autumn or winter; as there is always something to eat with varied plants grown over such a large area.

Typical are the hawthorn trees bordering the Pasture that offer nutritious buds in May and the berries from September.

Through the winter there are the wizened but edible rose hips to chew on; but it is during the growing season when there are a plethora of aphids, grasshoppers, caterpillars and spiders to hunt and feed their young that the Pasture, the gardens and the allotments become so important in the lives of these sociable birds.



As you must be aware, there is a decline in the numbers of house sparrows seen in towns and cities across much of the UK. Well, as with any species, habitat is everything. Surrounding the Pasture the house sparrows have everything they have always required; nesting opportunities, a varied food source, and lots of cover to socialise in and enable them to travel safely, evading aerial predators. No one has told these birds they are on the decline.

Contrast this to a different district where many houses with newer roofs have been maintained with impenetrable plastic soffits; hedges & front gardens removed for parking, and a well kept 'neat and tidy' back garden - probably with plastic grass and decking - & you collectively have many elements of the house sparrows' habitat gone. Urban wildlife suffers from these changes.

Additionally, there are currently several areas in our borough where typical urban wildlife is being systematically eradicated. This is not being done on purpose, but is the consequential result of current planning and building practices; and sadly this is now occurring all over London.

The destructive trend to build out close to the boundary of a building site nowadays leaves little room for any adequate greenery around modern

buildings. As the photograph below illustrates, nature and cityscapes can thrive side-by-side, if there's enough 'green' area; *Exhibit A*: Heathrow's control tower built in 1955, still had these house sparrows living near when I took this photo in April 2009. The tower was demolished in 2013...



No provision is being made for swifts, hedgehogs or bats in new housing developments; and new gardens, if any, are minuscule. Any attempt to soften this harsh landscape usually consists of spiky non-native evergreen and low-maintenance plants growing through thin strips of bark-covered ground. We are witnessing a tragic and rapid transformation as urban habitats disappear.

The older areas of our borough, and places like Long Lane Pasture & allotments with their varied fruit trees & hedging, are becoming more vital for the survival of London's existing wildlife.

Lastly, a Red Kite was seen from the Pasture circling high over Finchley in early April. A bird whose endangered status was reversed by a dedicated reintroduction and protection scheme that has seen this species recover spectacularly; proving targeted help does work.



Frogs and Newts

These have been seen at the Pasture this spring. The frogs gathered in March and were noisily croaking and splashing about as they mated in the smaller ponds; while the Newts were seen coming



up for air in the main pond, and are often found under any suitable cover at any time of the year all over the Pasture. We imagine there are toads too, but one hasn't been seen for years; though they are encountered on the allotments next door so they are remaining very well hidden!



Our annual Pond Dipping Day was on Saturday April 15. The sun shone and families came to see tadpoles, newts, water snails, dragonfly nymphs, leeches and larvae that were discovered when keenly held nets were lowered expectedly into our various ponds by groups of inquisitive children. All creatures were safely returned to their homes!

Long Lane Pasture Honey

For many years there have been hives of honey bees kept at the Pasture. This has enabled Harriet, our beekeeper to produce a limited supply of excellent Long Lane Pasture honey.

This has been sold at local fairs and helped raise much needed funds over the years.

However, earlier this year, Harriet needed some major surgery and decided to relocate the bees to a fellow beekeeper out of the area, as she felt it unlikely she would regain sufficient fitness in the future for the amount of work required to look after them. Harriet is now well enough to be helping out again, as able, on the Pasture.



The Pasture Trust wish her a speedy recovery, and extend our gratitude for the great amount of work she has done as a volunteer, a Trustee and on our Committee over the years as vice-chair; & we are greatly relieved Harriet is back; and she only missed two meetings! But for the foreseeable future, Pasture honey production has ceased.

Stoic Dedication

Last September we had two new volunteers join us each week on Saturdays. No matter how cold, wet and foul the weather, or how mundane or intricate the task, Gwynnevere and Zoe arrived



eagerly each week and assisted us in a wide variety of activities as part of the volunteering element of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

The Long Lane Pasture Trust really appreciate the work they have put in over the seven months and hope they have enjoyed acquiring new skills and knowledge; and we wish them both success as they now concentrate on their exams. And we thank them also for the scrumptious pecan and chocolate chip cookies they baked and brought in on their final day. Delicious!

Barnet Civic Award

On the evening of Tuesday March 28, there was the annual Barnet Council Civic Awards ceremony held at Hendon Town Hall; where worthy citizens of the borough are presented with a certificate for outstanding selfless achievements that have benefitted the community in the London Borough of Barnet.

The Council Chamber was packed with winners and their partners, while the public gallery was filled with their nominators. A brief description was read out informing the gathering why each person was nominated; and enthusiastic applause accompanied every winner as they received their certificate from the Mayor.



Long Lane Pasture Trust member Wayne Armsby won his for the years of unstinting dedication to the Pasture since it was saved from rampant overdevelopment eighteen years ago. There then followed many years of bramble clearance, path laying and the removal of dumped rubbish. The Trust was set up, and once the Pasture was returned to a safe accessible state, Wayne has

opened and locked the gates, planted trees, mown the paths, cleared litter, given talks and guided tours, dug ponds, ditches, & encouraged a host of other people to volunteer on the Pasture with his keenness & passing on of his considerable expertise. **Below; snake's head fritillary.**



The Mayor of Barnet, Cllr David Longstaff spoke highly of the Pasture and urged others to visit, as he himself had done last September on the day GoodGym Barnet launched their activities in the borough, with their first run going to the Pasture! 47 other worthy winners received certificates that evening, and there followed a sumptuous buffet in the Committee Rooms where it was a pleasure talking to so many other interesting and well deserving people. Well done Wayne, and thank you.

Current Projects

We have just started monitoring what wildlife we may have roaming around at night on the Pasture by use of a trail camera. Last year a dead Muntjac deer was found in the allotments next door, and we know foxes cross the Pasture.



Hopefully we'll have some infrared photos for the next edition. Also we have a monitoring tube set up for nitrous oxide at the Pasture as London's air quality is much in the news nowadays; & reducing pollution levels is being looked at seriously by government. We should have the results in a month or so. ***Below; a bank vole seen in April.***



Dawn Chorus on the Pasture

The annual Dawn Chorus walk took place on the Pasture at the end of April. Anyone listening to the ambitious event on Radio4 on Sunday May 7, when radio stations across Europe linked up to an all-nighter from 00:30 to 07:00am to follow the chorus as the dawn raced across the continent, will have some idea of what our brave band of locals experienced on the pasture on the dull morning at 4:45am!

It was cloudy, but there were large gaps forming as the last bright stars rapidly faded from view. The thermometer indicated an air temperature of 7°C and it was mercifully dry, with not much dew on the grass either. I sensibly wore a woolly hat but wished I'd bought my gloves too....

The first birds I heard were the wrens trilling loudly from several directions across the Pasture; but let me now pass you over to our devoted member and amateur naturalist Linda Dolata who wrote the following about the morning:-

I suspect I am in the minority in thinking that 4:45am is the best time of the day, but even so we had an excellent turn out of people this morning (Sunday 30th April). In the past we have walked around in a group, but this time everyone seemed to find a favourite bench or

tree to wait quietly for the birds to do their thing, and for the sun to rise.

The blackbirds as ever were in full throated song, each declaring its territory as loudly and tunefully as you could wish for. A song thrush with its repetitive but so-pleasing melody carolled from the top of one of the poplars lining the North Circular Road, and as one might have guessed, even included facsimile police sirens in its repertoire - but somehow they sound much nicer when the thrush is the source of the sound.



The blackbird, thrush, robin, wren and blackcap all have wonderful songs, which everybody should do their best to hear at this time of the year... and all do still sing during the day; just not as concentrated into the few minutes of a dawn chorus, that the waking moments of the day bring as they collectively welcome the sunrise.



Close to where the song thrush perched on high, a pair of crows tend the nest that we watched them construct last year. Other recognisable arias came from a pair of competing blackcaps, then minute wrens who have such loud brave voices for such a tiny bird. Robins too added their melodic notes.

As the time passed, other less tuneful calls were included in the chorus - the carrion crows, and



*their cousins the **magpies** were in evidence, as was a single jay with its harsh call. A flight of seven mallards went over - no doubt a female being pursued by several potential suitors; then a pair of honking Canada geese. A good range of tits, blue tit, great tit, coal tit, were all both heard and seen. Then finally a single long-tailed tit was spotted. It is rare to see the beautiful little 'flying lollipop' on its own, but this one was so busy collecting insect larvae, that it obviously has nestlings to feed. We know that they have bred on the pasture in the past, as last year their tiny neat round nest was discovered, concealed in the brambles.*

The resident moorhen, was there too, whilst starlings, sparrows and pigeons haunted the bird-feeders; and overhead were seen an elegant seagull, wood pigeons, and doubtless other feathered vertebrates not listed.



We are very lucky in that we are next to both the railway line and allotments, which more than doubles the area for the birds to inhabit.

For anybody who has yet to visit the pasture, it is open every day at this time of the year - located on Long Lane, opposite Finchley Fire Station. If you want to know more, pop in on a Saturday morning... and look for our stall at the East Finchley Festival in June. - Linda

It really was a wonderful morning, especially when the sun rose and sent rays of orange light across the Pasture before disappearing into cloud!

In poor light, birds are often recognised by the way they fly; or by their known profile silhouetted against a lightening sky, in addition to their calls.

21 species of birds were positively identified.



Well, that's about it for this edition; I hope you enjoyed reading it and learnt something new, or at least found some items of interest.

We would like to thank our volunteers: Ollie, Alex, Nick, Phil, Marianna, Maureen, Linda, Harriet, Wayne and anyone else who has lent us a hand.

Finally, a big THANK YOU to Maureen, Ollie, Lucy & Simon O'Connor for the use of their photos.

Until next time; goodbye! Donald

You can now monitor Pasture activity on Twitter.

Please follow: [@LLPasture](https://twitter.com/LLPasture)

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