

FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK

January 2019 - WINTER NEWSLETTER
No.87



EVENTS Programme for 2019

February 14th – Thursday Winter Stroll

11am from the Mansion steps
Beryl will lead us around areas of the Park – there will be changes to see.

March 26th – Tuesday - Downham Woodland Walk

Meet at the bus stop outside the lodge gates nearest to Beckenham Hill Station, on Beckenham Hill Road at 10.30am. Beryl will lead us to this woodland where we will be guided around by Janet from Friends of Downham Woodland Walk.

April 7th – Sunday - Spring Bird and Heron Watch

11.00am to 4pm at Kelsey Park lake. Organised by Friends of Kelsey Park and Bromley RSPB.

April 28th – Sunday - Bluebell Walk

Meet at the Mansion steps at 2pm
Nick Bertrand will lead this popular walk on behalf of the Friends of Beckenham Place Park and Creekside Education Trust

October 26th – Saturday - Autumn Bird Migration

Meet at the mansion steps 8.30am for a quiet scan of the skies and/or 9.30am for those who prefer to just do the walk
Led by bird expert, David de Silva

Contact details for members: Membership of the Friends is free for 2019,

Email: bpp.friends@hotmail.co.uk

Website: www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk

From the Chair

Welcome to the winter edition of the Newsletter. As you can see, we have put together a busy programme of walks, starting with a winter stroll on the 14th February and not forgetting our popular Bluebell walk on the 28th April. The Friends are dedicated to protecting the wildlife of the park. This is why we are supporting our member Juliet Chalk with her project to open up the ancient pond, known as Stumps Hill pond. The pond is badly silted up and needs some of the trees to be cut back to allow the sunlight through.

Quotes have been obtained from specialist contractors but as you can imagine the works will be expensive. We are applying for a grant from the Pocket Parks Plus initiative, which if granted, together with match funding from Lewisham Council, will enable us to proceed. The ultimate aim is to build a walkway for pond dipping, as well as protecting this ancient asset, which used to teem with wildlife.

Another project currently being undertaken by the Friends is to install a series of bat boxes and, if funds permit, some bird nesting boxes. Once appropriate sites have been identified, we will be approaching the Council for permission and assistance in positioning the boxes.

Work continues to restore the Homestead buildings, the restored lake and also on creating the new car park. The official opening of the completed park is due to take place in July this year.

Finally, as you know the Friends run the Visitor Centre every Sunday from 12 until 3.30pm and other days when events are taking place in the Mansion. We have been asked to open the VC during the half term period to complement the range of planned activities. This will stretch the resources of the current band of volunteers, so we need some help.

If you could spare just a few hours a month that would be appreciated. No need to be a park expert, just somebody who enjoys meeting new people. Why not call in one Sunday and learn more from one of the volunteers.

From the Secretary

It is now generally well known that the plans by Environment Agency for a Flood Alleviation Scheme in the east of the park have been cancelled. We are advised by Lewisham Council that this is because of escalating costs of the

project. The wider consequence is that further funding will have to be sourced to bring any upgrades or improvements to that side of the park. Our understanding is that Environment Agency was originally to have funded upgrades to the skate park and young children's play area, as well as a new adventure area for older children and much needed toilets. On the plus side a major upheaval to the landscape will not take place, with all that implies, and there is no need to demolish the Cherry Blossom kindergarten building. However, the east of the park remains the poor relation. This is not the only major element of the regeneration programme that has not turned out as planned. Wide Horizons, an outdoor adventure learning organisation, were quoted in the application forms to Heritage Lottery Fund as a major partner for the regeneration of the park. Wide Horizons were supposed to have been facilitating kayaking on the lake i.e. providing both the kayaks and sessions for schools etc. At the time that the second round application form went in to Heritage Lottery Fund it was pointed out to them that Wide Horizons were not financially stable. These concerns were ignored. Subsequently, both Lewisham and Greenwich Councils made a loan of £700K each to Wide Horizons to keep it afloat, but ultimately the organisation ceased trading on 31st July 2018. Cllr Chris Barnham recently wrote to me on 8th January 2019:-

“It's fair to say that Council officers were aware of the challenges Wide Horizons faced transitioning from a position where they enjoyed considerable local authority support to a position with significantly reduced support. However, at the time their skills and connections to local schools still made them a desirable partner for this particular project. We were disappointed that we could not bring the partnership to fruition.”

In my opinion, this sums up the entire park project: wishful thinking of what Lewisham desires set against what is reasonable and credible. For example, it is not deemed necessary to have lifeguards for the lake, despite the fact that it is being marketed for wild swimming. We shall see how that one plays out. In the meantime, the size of the lake has been reduced because of the discovery of Asbestos Contaminated Material. The consultant employed to advise offered three alternatives 1) Abandon the lake. 2) Reduce in size to avoid excavation of crocidolite fibres. 3) Continue as planned, which would make

the works notifiable to the appropriate authorities, including having to prove medical surveillance of workers. Option two was chosen and the consultant recommended that after removing the Asbestos Contaminated Material, it needed to be hand screened and chemically capped if kept in the park. It has been moved to the border of the park with the railway line adjacent to the gate lodge. All this can be found on Lewisham Council planning portal on their website, the reference for the suite of documents is DC/18/107764.

One of our committee, Nick Goy, has been in extensive correspondence with Lewisham Council, Trees for Cities and Dr Mark Spencer, FLS, a Forensic Botanist about the recent new scheme of whip planting. Dr Spencer is Hon. Curator (Plants) Linnean Society of London, Scientific Associate Natural History Museum, London, London Natural History Society, Vascular Plant Recorder, Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. In Autumn last year he informed the Beckenham Place Park Project team that their tree felling and new planting policies ignored and systematically undervalued the extant biodiversity of the park. He asked whether a full Phase 2 Habitat Survey was to be carried out for the plantation style planting of new woodland in the park, which he considered increased the vulnerability of existing habitat. His concerns were ignored and this echoes Lewisham's successful application in September 2016 to its own planning department to waive the usual requirement of an Environmental Impact Assessment. The planning reference for this is DC/16/098117.

VISITOR CENTRE NEWS

Visitor Centre Open Sundays 12-3.30

The Visitor Centre has been kept going in Margaret's absence by Beryl and several volunteers – principally by Nick, Tamsin and Elaine. Thanks to all of you.

RJK (leaseholders) have scaled back their operation in the Mansion. They have appointed a new 'manager' (Helen) so that Tim (of RJK) can prepare their submission to Lewisham re. the new lease. The council have told Tim that the car park to the front of the Mansion is to be re-landscaped into a 'drive' between 18th March and 12th April so access may be through the basement for part of the time. The council may also be removing the terrace bar.

Visitor numbers are still high and donations to the Friends continue each week (thanks partly to Beryl's lavender sales).

EVENT REPORTS

Fungus Foray 14 October 2018

Rain in many varied densities did not prevent the enthusiasm of our leader, Dr Mark Spencer, and therefore us participants as well, from enjoying this interesting walk.

Before setting off, Mark gave us some fungus information on the steps of the mansion. On his way into the park he had found some earthstar fungi. These are regionally and nationally rare and he has been finding them in several locations during his park visits over ten years. He is now dismayed that at least two of these locations have been severely damaged and potentially destroyed by the felling of coniferous trees by Lewisham Council. These fungi are fascinating and he asked the younger members of the group to tap them, whereupon they puffed out a black smoke of spores – to the delight of children and adults! He had also found another fungus which produces a black substance which can be used as ink. He warned us of the many poisonous fungi and that one way of identifying them is by their smell. We learnt about gills, mycelium, etc.

The weather had not been suitable for fungi but nevertheless we came upon quite a few. An edible Hen of the Woods at the base of an ancient tree could have been living there for 100 years, some pretty amber fungi named *hygrophoropsis aurantiaca* growing where a large conifer had been. We learnt that some fungi kill their host, some just like to 'nibble' their host and some prefer dead wood. Several fungi in the same and adjacent trees will use their mycelia to fight and kill each other for dominance and they can also communicate from tree to tree.

There is so much we don't know!

Many of Lewisham's plans for the woodland are showing 'Man acting as God' by the destruction of older trees and also dense planting of saplings into grassland areas, which are themselves a well-balanced habitat. Poor ecological structure will follow which is hostile to many established trees,

plants and invertebrates. The woodland, established for thousands of years, has been a settled environment with everything co-existing as it is meant to. We all managed nearly two hours in the rain before going off home with rather numbed thoughts of what is happening to our lovely park. The study of fungi is an extremely exacting and interesting subject so I hope nothing is amiss with this report. Thank you Dr Mark Spencer!



Bird Walk 10th November 2018

A beautiful sunshine morning with glowing autumn colours and a blue sky. Sixteen of us gathered together with our leader, Dave de Silva. He has been visiting the park for about twenty five years but now lives some distance away – some shocks were thus in store for him due to park renovations!



Dave explained how the park is a prominent high green island amongst suburbia for migrants passing overhead from east to west. We tuned our ears to the various identifying bird songs around us and our eyes to the identifying styles of flight over our heads. We spent times standing quietly in a still group which gave us the opportunity to 'get our eye in' to the movements above in the branches. We spent nearly three hours walking around this lovely space and we all had personal triumphs such as the first time spotting a nuthatch and seeing an egret by the river. Parakeets were noisily in abundance in various spots and it was amazing to be told that the first escaped wild ones went back into Victorian times!

We spotted 32 species all together – it was a thoroughly enjoyable morning and many hearty thanks go to Dave from us all.

Information about the species spotted is also held in the Visitor Centre: Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Common Gull, Dunnock, Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Herring Gull, Jay, Little Egret, Magpie, Nuthatch, Ring-necked Parakeet, Song Thrush, Woodpigeon, Blackbird, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Cormorant, Feral Pigeon, Goldfinch, Great Tit, Grey wagtail, Jackdaw, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Long-tailed tit, Moorhen, Pied Wagtail (*yarrellii*), Robin, Starling, Wren.

Bird Count with Bromley RSPB 19th January 2019

Very many thanks go to Liz Anderson and David Hampson of Bromley RSPB for conducting about 60 of us on this informative walk. Luckily the weather was much better than predicted, albeit cold with a sharp wind. We spotted 26 species. A heron flew overhead by the river Ravensbourne being harried by a noisy mob of crows and we were fortunate to see up to 15 migrant Redwings on our way back up to the mansion. There is a Bird Count Folder in the Visitor Centre which lists birds observed in the Park. Here is tally for this walk:

Stock Dove, Mistle Thrush, Crow, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Jackdaw, Starling, Dunnock, Blackbird, Robin, Song Thrush, Ring-necked Parakeet, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Common Buzzard, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker,

Grey Heron, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Wren, Magpie, Jay, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Redwing.

Sensory Garden and workdays

The garden is still open while other garden landscaping work goes on. The Friends' volunteers are working on the second Saturday each month ie next workdays February 9th and March 9th (10am to noon) meet in the garden. We just did a workday in January and almost finished the winter clean up. The relatively mild weather is making some plants come back to life and bulbs are showing through. The seed heads left for birds are mostly finished so some dead heading took place. There's always something that gets left 'for next time' and new volunteers always welcome. In summer we expect to resume two Saturdays a month but people are not expected to attend every workday, just as and when it suits. contact bpp.friends@hotmail.co.uk

Websites of Interest

Lewisham Local History Society www.lewishamhistory.org.uk

Bromley Local History www.bblhs.org.uk

Ravensbourne Valley Preservation Society www.rvpsbromley.org

We recommend for reading the history of the park on the Friends website

There is also a lot going on at the mansion these days, please google Beckenham Place Park.

29th June cat festival, 30th June Flower Show and Dog Show, 20th July Launch Day, check on Lewisham's website.

Summer Events are also being planned by Friends of Beckenham Place Park, look out for additions on the website.