

# FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK

SPRING 2022 – NEWSLETTER    No. 94



## Events

Please see our website for forthcoming events.

### Dawn chorus

By the time this newsletter goes out we should have had the dawn chorus walk led by Liz Anderson on 1 May.

This event had to be booked via [beckenhamplacepark.com/events/Dawn-chorus-walk](https://beckenhamplacepark.com/events/Dawn-chorus-walk) as it's organised by Eventbrite with a maximum number of 25 people.

### Birds of Beckenham Place Park & Bird walk

For the last four years, a small group of us have been carrying out bird survey walks, approximately every 3 months. We walk the same route each time and note everything we identify by sight and some by sound. We like to think we record a snapshot sample of what is about and we are interested to see what effect the change from a quiet golf course to a new landscape with large lake is having on the bird populations.

We were worried the disruption from the landscaping and excavation works and increased footfall would have a negative impact on the bird populations. It is interesting to note we haven't found any significant decreases but several new species have been found.

With the construction of the lake, I think the biggest surprise was how quickly Little Grebes appeared and stayed. At the last count there were two pairs of these small diving birds. Listen out for their high pitched trill. We expected to find the usual wetland bird suspects - Coots, Moorhens, Canada Geese and Mallards but Egyptian Geese and Mandarin Ducks were a bonus. There have been brief sightings of visiting waders (Green and Common Sandpipers) and we hope Reed Warblers will appreciate the reed beds in the summer months filling the air with their chuntering calls.

Across the park Carrion Crows and Ring-necked Parakeets appear in largest numbers and the overall populations don't seem to have changed much. Both are very difficult to count during a walk as they can be quite mobile but what we can say is there are still lots of both species!

Some species numbers have dropped over time but this is probably from other unrelated factors. First Greenfinches and now Chaffinches have been badly hit by disease, populations of both have been crashing everywhere. Mistle Thrush numbers also appear lower but although our largest British thrush they can be surprisingly invisible at times so maybe we just missed seeing/hearing them. Going further back than 2018, when the major works started, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (the sparrow sized version of the commonly seen Great Spotted Woodpecker) has not been recorded since 2010, but I have heard one may have been seen in 2021. This bird has suffered great decline since 1980 and whether this is due to less insects for the young, habitat loss or a changing climate the jury is still out.

The familiar Ring-necked Parakeets have been around since the late 1990's and in about 2003 small flocks of another parakeet were found. These were Blue-crowned Parakeets, very similar to the Ring Necks but with a rich blue head, a distinctive white eye-ring and (fortunately!) a pleasanter call. Their numbers slowly went down and probably the last one was seen in June 2019 in Kelsey Park; the local population appears to have died out naturally.

Sightings of Birds of Prey have been increasing: Kestrels used to be the most reliable species to find, but now Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and even Red Kites can be seen locally. Hobby, a summer migrant falcon, has been seen hunting for insects in the skies above the park. On warm late summer evenings, you might have been lucky to see one hunting over the lake. Several species of Dragonflies and Damselflies have been recorded around the lake and we were again pleasantly surprised how soon so many species found the lake; Swifts have also been seen feeding low over the lake. The sighting of Hobbies was a wonderful find as they are usually not found so near to London but then Hobbies DO like Damselflies, Dragonflies and Swifts!

Along the River Ravensbourne Kingfishers can still be seen, but not as regularly as when they used to breed along that stretch. A Little Egret, once a rarity, was noted in 2004 and 2014 but one is now regularly seen at the Ravensbourne Station end where the river enters the park. Grey Wagtails can also be seen flying up and down the same section.

**I do worry what impact the proposed plans to open up the river paths will have on these three very shy species.**

In the Woodlands, Nuthatches, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Stock Doves and Jackdaw populations all appear stable. Treecreepers haven't been seen for years but they are secretive birds, the habitat is good for them and I would like to think there are some there.

On Friday 10<sup>th</sup> February Jo East and I led a bird walk for the Friends and were joined by a small group of very interested participants. It was a lovely sunny day and we took a leisurely stroll around the park. A flock of Redwings, winter thrush visitors from mainly Russia and Scandinavia, were some of the stars. They were feeding under trees, then flying back up into the ivy-covered trees, and back down again. On previous early morning visits, I have seen over 50 redwings feeding on the grass areas to either side of the main drive from the entrance lodge, along with good sized flocks of Starlings.

These are the birds we saw or heard during the morning walk.

Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue tit, Carrion Crow, Coot, Dunnock (Hedge sparrow), Egyptian Goose, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Great spotted woodpecker, Great Tit, Grey Heron, Herring Gull, House Sparrow, Jackdaw, Little Egret, Little Grebe (Dabchick), Long-tailed Tits, Magpie, Mallards, Moorhen, Nuthatch, Redwing, Ring-necked parakeet, Robin, Song Thrush, Starling, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Wren.

With thanks to Liz Anderson and Jo East.

A Friend (Tom) has contacted us to let us know on that on 8 March, he and a friend and saw a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers in Summerhouse Hill Wood.

### **Bluebell walk 24<sup>th</sup> April**

The Bluebell walk was to have been led by Nick Bertrand (who has managed the walk for us on many occasions) but unfortunately Nick damaged his knee just before Sunday. We cancelled the walk but on Sunday morning Nick contacted us to say that a colleague of his was willing to lead the walk. We rushed to send out an email to the Friends to advise that the walk was back on. In the event 12 or so people turned up and, after being guided to the woods, Mario (with the help of the group) led the assembly in search of the gorgeous bluebells. Vivienne informs us that Mario was very knowledgeable with a wonderful degree of eccentricity. Thanks to Mario and hoping Nick's knee is soon better. The Lewisham ground force, plus their band of volunteers, have constructed barriers across quite a few of the pathways which have been

trampled by the public. These are made of interlaced branches, holly, etc, look very in keeping and will give areas of the woodland and bluebells a chance to recover. There is also a long stretch of chestnut paling fencing to commence the plan of making a Drive by denying it to human footfall. This all looks very positive. There are also other areas where scrub has been cleared and a barrier erected to enable more light and the appropriate vegetation to regrow.

### **Bird ID Board**

We are now well under way with the information board, which will be situated near the lake. This should enable people to identify the water birds managing to live and breed alongside the human swimmers.

Although mainly financed by the Friends of Beckenham Place Park, it will be the same format as the Lewisham ones already scattered around the park.

Lewisham will be making a small contribution to the cost. Thanks to all those who have helped.

Thanks to Glenys for all her hard work on this project.

### **Pitch at the So Last Century Fair on Sunday 5 June**

We have kindly been given a free table at this Fair so please do come by and have a chat. As you are aware, our committee is presently extremely small, so any offers of help on the day or any advice as to what you might like to see on our stall will be very gratefully received. If you would like to join our committee please email us we do need more support.

### **Newsletter Articles**

If anyone has any interesting memories or stories about the park or the Mansion please get in touch. We would be pleased to hear from you and we would hope to include any articles and/or pictures in future newsletters.

### **Beckenham Gossip Column – Georgian Era**

The lives of the inhabitants of Beckenham Place are not widely or deeply known but various records give a bit of insight. Before John Cator acquired the property on which Beckenham Place was created in 1759 it was part of the Manor of Foxgrove which can be traced back several hundred years.

It was acquired by Sir John Olyffe who in 1612 left Foxgrove as part of his estates to his son in law Francis Leigh of the Addington Leigh family. Foxgrove descended to another Francis Leigh who died in 1711 leaving some debts and Foxgrove was sold to Lancelot Tolson of Bromley. A complex

web of untimely deaths without direct heirs and division of Foxgrove among more distant family gave John Cator the opportunity of buying parts of Foxgrove and along with some exchanges of property he acquired the site of the current mansion which was built between 1760 and 1762. Cator added to his estate with one purchase being the Beckenham Manor land in 1773 from Frederick St. John, Lord Bolingbroke known to his friends as Bully who had been married to the daughter of the Duke of Marlborough, Lady Diana Spencer. It was an unhappy marriage ending in divorce with Diana remarrying Topham Beauclerk who apparently was just as unsatisfactory a husband as Frederick had been.

Frederick didn't tell Cator that he had already leased Beckenham Manor to a Mrs Margaret Hare on a fundraising lease and rent back deal as Frederick needed money to pay for his debts and gambling. Cator had to engage in legal suits to acquire full ownership of the Beckenham property compensating Hare as Frederick St. John had managed to squirrel away the money via a complex financial machination.

This may have embittered Cator to some extent because we find some old press articles describing how he influenced church wardens to delay setting a poor rate which landowners paid as a tax on their property. The church wardens were prosecuted or sued by another local who implicated Cator and Cator's brother Joseph who lived at Clockhouse was subsequently sued for libelling the suitor in some letters.

One piece of evidence being that Joseph wrote letters anonymously on paper which was only supplied via a Bromley stationer to Joseph and the Bishop of Rochester whose palace was in Bromley. Witnesses swore that the handwriting was Joseph's.

John Cator was also sued by one of his tenants for preventing the tenant from accessing his rented property by changing the lock on the gate.

Jumping forward to 1818 and Beckenham Place and the rest of the Cator estate along with other local landed estates belonging to the Burrells were subject to the Corn Laws which kept the price of Wheat high by restricting foreign imports hence the price of bread was inflated. John Cator's nephew and heir, John Barwell Cator and other landowners such as George Eden and Andrew Coleville were depicted in some graffiti as hanging from a gibbet as they were benefitting from the Corn Laws.

This is described in a letter attributed to Emily Eden, daughter of Sir William Eden of Eden Park. Coleville is mentioned in her letter and he was married to one of Emily's sisters hence related to the Eden family. Both the Eden family and Coleville were leasing parts of the Burrell estates ie Eden Park and Langley Farm.

From Census records starting in 1840 we find that the local population included many farm labourers who were generally low paid and suffered long periods of unemployment so the effect of the Corn Laws can be compared to current increases in the cost of living.

With thanks to Mal

### **Park use in the past**

A friend(Joyce) has provided this snippet from the past:

"I lived in 2, the Homestead (from 1937 – 1947) which was the drive off for fairway number 9. During the war there was a Barrage Balloon post right there. My father was Head Greenkeeper, but on Sunday mornings it was his turn to help keep guard at the Barrage Balloon base."

### **Friends Expenditure**

The Friends have made a donation of £100 to The Fourth Reserve – this is a charity that is trying to purchase a strip of ancient woodland in Brockley

Gorne Wood in Lewisham SE London has been designated by Natural England as Ancient Woodland and it is the closest Ancient Woodland to the City of London.

Sadly in 20 years under the ownership of a property developer the site has fallen in to neglect.2022 will mark 100 years since this woodland at the end of Courtrai Road in Honor Oak Park, was declared a park for the communities of Deptford and Lewisham by the Metropolitan Mayor Charles Henry Dodd and Sir Philip Dawson, MP.

The creation of the The Dandy Fifth Park was a thank you to the Brockley 5th scout troop who had constantly patrolled the Brighton railway as part of the war effort. The first hut was built as part of the celebration, using money donated by the local community.

The hut itself was bombed in WW2, and has survived two fires in the years since. Each time the communities of Brockley and Honor Oak Park rallied round to help restore it.

As the park (now closed to the community) approaches it's centenary we are working to return the site back to community use and woodland management. Dandy Fifth Park has been identified as being one of 10 neglected green spaces in London that requires rescuing by CPRE London (Campaign to Protect Rural England).

In mediaeval times it was part of Brockley Green and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was the site firstly of the Croydon canal and later a railway line. They are trying to raise £100,000 (within 1 year) to purchase the woodland from the developer who owns the neglected site. Lewisham Council have agreed to assist them in their acquisition – but sadly not with money. All donations, however small, will help with this worthwhile project.

You can find more details on their website- <https://www.fourthreserve.org.uk/>



Map of proposed canal circa 1800 and picture of part of Gome wood.

## Sensory garden

The sensory garden gets high praise from visitors. Do look by if you are walking in the park.

With thanks to Mal and his band of hardworking volunteers.

## A few more definitions from the Uxbridge dictionary.

Abacus	swedish swear word
Bustard	very rude bus driver
Dandelion	camp big cat.
Doughnut	eccentric millionaire
Equip	on-line joke
Extempory	permanent
Fondue	affectionate sheep
Granary	old folks home
Hirsuite	ladies clothing
Intense	camping
Minimal	small shopping centre
Paradox	two doctors
Property	decent cuppa

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## Websites of Interest

### Friends of Beckenham Place Park

[www.beckenhamplacepark.org.uk](http://www.beckenhamplacepark.org.uk)

Lewisham Local History Society

[www.lewishamhistory.org.uk](http://www.lewishamhistory.org.uk)

Bromley Local History

[www.bblhs.org.uk](http://www.bblhs.org.uk)

Ravensbourne Valley Preservation Soc.

[www.rvpsbromley.org.uk](http://www.rvpsbromley.org.uk)

Deptford Creek

[www.creeksidecentre.org.uk](http://www.creeksidecentre.org.uk)

Kent Archeology

[www.kentarcheology.org.uk](http://www.kentarcheology.org.uk)

