

FRIENDS of LONG LANE PASTURE NEWSLETTER

No 27. Summer 2014

Welcome to the summer edition of our Newsletter. We enjoyed a classic spring this year, with blossom on the trees lasting longer than usual, and no late frost or nasty storm interrupting the imperceptibly warming weather as we gently slipped into summer.



March came in and out like a lamb, and locally lots of young birds were evident early, and I'm sure many parents are busy bringing up a second brood, like this young

Dunnock seen in late July. On the Pasture, the ground quickly recovered from the drenching it received during one of the wettest winters on record, and the bare-earth paths have mostly grassed over. We signed up more friends at our stall at the East Finchley Festival in June, where the weather was fabulous; but time marches on. The blackberries are already ripening and ready to pick; with the donations for the fruit an important income source for the Pasture's upkeep. So please come along and enjoy what the Pasture has to offer; like Butterfly Day, 2nd August.



But first, a message from our Chairman:

We are delighted to have received, for the third year running, a prestigious Green Flag Community Award, and the only one awarded in the Borough of Barnet this year. The



qualifying criteria include cleanliness, sustainability and community involvement. Of course you already know we are "Finchley's best kept secret" so please come and visit us

*again and encourage your friends and neighbours to get to know us. Currently the Pasture is open every day. If you have an urge to play a more active part, Saturday mornings (10.00 to 12.00) is when volunteers gather to keep the Pasture in good shape. **Dennis Pepper***

Pond Day

Our annual Pond Day was on Saturday, 19th April. This not only provides young visitors with a chance to pond dip, but we are able to monitor the health of our various ponds by looking at what is found. It's always a joy when frog spawn reappears in early spring, and by pond day the first tadpoles were already swimming free. These along with newts, various insect larvae, damselfly nymphs, water snails, pond skaters and

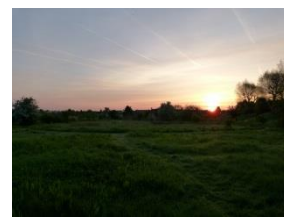


other minute creatures indicate the healthy nature of our ponds.

The main pond is managed each autumn with the removal of excess reed-mace. This large bulrush, if left unchecked would naturally propagate across the pond, changing the open aspect and preventing certain birds from landing on the water. This summer we have again seen several damselfly and dragonfly species mating and laying eggs, ensuring these spectacular insects a continuing presence at the Pasture.

Dawn Chorus

On Sunday 3rd May at 5am, people gathered by the main pond at the Pasture for a dawn chorus walk headed by local wildlife and bird enthusiast Derek Warren. The planet Venus was still visible in the brightening eastern sky as all 17 brave souls set out to walk around the Pasture in search of birdsong. And what a lot there was! Various species all chirruping away, which is why Derek was



needed to explain & filter out the individual sounds to identify what species was singing which song.

As we stood listening and looked back, an eerie mist was rising from the pond and shrouding the reed beds before slowly drifting away... This wasn't the only mesmeric sight; as we continued our trek we were treated to an increasingly colourful and spectacular sunrise, while all the time we were adding to the tally of birds identified.



The weather was dry and a bit chilly, with the grass covered in sparkly dew, so gloves and a hat were practical additions to a coat and sensible footwear. Some birds made their presence easily identifiable by either flying overhead, sitting brazenly on a branch, or happily pulling worms from the soil on the path we were on!

Just before 6am the bird calls were added to by the sounds of airliners transiting to Heathrow airport to start landing after the nightly curfew. From a photographer's point of



view it was a disappointing morning, as the light was poor and the birds fleeting. I was rewarded somewhat by seeing a Royal Brunei Airlines Boeing 787 pass over, just 10 weeks

old from its first flight, but a flight of swans would have been more welcome.

By the time we returned to the pond the sun was way above the horizon and more birds, mostly pigeons were flying overhead. The day proper had begun. We all agreed it had been an enlightening expedition and plan to do the same next year with greater publicity so more can enjoy the experience.



So, what was the final score? 22 species were seen or heard in the 90 minutes we were at the Pasture, and they were: *Blackcap, Blackbird, Blue tit, Crow, Cormorant, Dunnock, Feral pigeon, Great tit, Greenfinch, Jackdaw, Lesser black-backed gull, Long tailed tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Parakeet, Robin, Song thrush, Starling, White-throat, Wood pigeon and Wren.*

Other birds seen at or from LLP so far in 2014 are: *Black headed gull, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Common gull, Common tern, Fieldfare, Goldfinch, Green Woodpecker, House sparrow, Jay, Kite, Redwing and Swift.*

We are missing several species seen in previous years, like *Heron, Kestrel, Swallow and Sparrowhawk.* If you have seen any additional birds, please contact the Pasture to have them included in the list; thank you.

Pasture Flutterbies



So far this year has been both good and bad for butterflies seen on the Pasture. We were encouraged by early sightings of **small tortoiseshell, red admiral, comma, peacock** & even a **painted lady**; but still worried by so few sightings of **common blue & holly blue** butterflies. Even when **orange tip, speckled wood** and **brimstone** were seen this spring, numbers were down compared to years gone by.



But it is not all bad. During the first weeks of July the signature species of the Pasture, the grassland butterflies were everywhere. **Large skipper, small skipper** and **Essex skippers**



were soon followed by **meadow browns, ringlets** and hundreds of dainty **gatekeepers**; sometimes dozens on the same plant that would flutter about in all directions when approached. Of course, throughout the year, the omni-present **small white** and **large white**,



that seem to have no monthly variation, are reassuringly seen, though not I suspect to the pleasure of plot-holders in the neighbouring allotments!



On Saturday 2nd August we are having our Butterfly Day where we will count numbers as part of Butterfly Conservation's annual 'big butterfly count' a nationwide butterfly census. Please join us.

Featured Plant: Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*

This is a fascinating plant which we are doing our best to encourage on the Pasture. It is semi parasitic on grasses, gaining water and minerals from its host via the roots. Like any successful parasite, it does not kill its host-plant, but it does reduce its vigour. This means



that firstly a greater range of grasses are able to grow rather than the more competitive 'bullies' dominating; and secondly, other non-grass meadow plants can flourish. This should mean a far greater range of food plants for our larval Lepidoptera and for other insects. We have now had Yellow Rattle on the pasture for several years but it is by no means well established as yet - it's a 'work in progress'.



The flowers are pollinated by bumblebees, and when the large seeds are ripe & ready to disperse, they audibly rattle inside the seedpods - hence the name. This used to be and still can be taken as a sign that it's time for hay-making. The grass around the plant takes on a yellow hue indicating it's losing nutrients, and shows us where the rattle is growing.

The Pasture Bees

The Pasture honey bee enterprise is doing very well despite the loss of two colonies over the winter. Skilful stewardship from our beekeeper Harriet and fine weather has led to a restoration



of the colonies and the 'ladies' are in full production. This locally produced honey is highly prized; a limited amount will be for sale on the Long Lane Pasture stall at the East Finchley Winter Festival in early December.

New Equipment Arrives....

As reported in the spring edition, the Pasture Trust was awarded a grant from the People's Postcode Lottery Trust. We were able to purchase a new sit-on mower & a brush cutter, as well as safety equipment and gloves.



This has dramatically reduced the time needed to mow the extensive paths across the Pasture and we are better protected from injury.

If you are thinking of volunteering, come along on Saturday morning.

There are many different tasks to do throughout the seasons, plus you'll get fresh air and exercise!

Until next time, bye!

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