

# LONG LANE PASTURE NEWSLETTER

## No. 42 Spring/Summer 2019

Welcome again; and what a busy time it's been on the Pasture since the last edition; and despite some cold weather, the flowers and tree blossoms just kept coming in orderly fashion as the weeks progressed, making for a beautiful spring. The fruit trees are laden with swelling fruit; due to no severe frosts at the wrong time, and mostly dry weather, enabling pollinating insects, especially the bees, to get on with their vital job with diligence and unhindered by rain.



The weather in May was certainly better than the dull wet days we've had so far in June, but the water in our ponds was getting low, so for the tadpoles it was a blessing. However for the butterflies it has put matters on hold. What promised to be a good year with early sightings of brimstone, orange tips and green-veined whites, has petered out when those rainy days arrived.



Dragonfly sightings have also been down since those warm sunny days in May, where damselflies and broad-bodied chasers were seen criss-crossing the ponds, mating and laying eggs. I'm sure better weather will arrive later this summer, so with fingers crossed, let's look back on the year so far.

### Pond Day

We kicked off our annual events with Pond Dipping Day in April. A lovely sunny Saturday brought many families to the Pasture, & the ponds did not disappoint! Water snails, various insect & caddisfly larvae, tadpoles, and the best of all, a large broad-bodied chaser nymph were netted from the ponds and displayed in trays of water for eager young eyes to study closely and compare to the illustrations in the charts and books on hand.

No newts or frogs were caught, but common newts were seen, along with pond skaters, water boatmen and

leeches! Everything noted & photographed was carefully returned to the ponds at the end of the session, and left in peace to continue their fascinating aquatic existences.

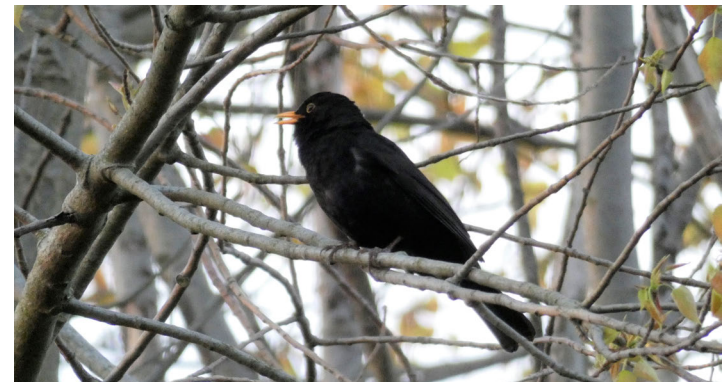


### Dawn Chorus at Long Lane Pasture

The alarm sounded at 4am. Early yes, but the birds were already singing, so I got dressed and made my way to Long Lane Pasture. Stepping outside it was dark, chilly and overcast; but there was lighter sky visible on the north-eastern horizon. Arriving at the Pasture the exuberant singing of blackbirds and wrens was unmistakable; & encouragingly the clouds were drifting away.

A group of bleary-eyed people slowly gathered in the gloom under the gazebo before setting off to walk along the paths to see what we could identify. My mobile phone said it was 6° Celsius, but in the 8 knot northerly wind it would feel more like 2°; and it sure did!

The tuneful renditions of individual wrens and robins coming from different areas of the Pasture indicated a healthy number of these species, and mixed in were the signature songs of chaffinch, blackcap and what was probably a great tit; as they have a range of different mournful calls. Then two moorhens squawked in alarm



before scuttling noisily over the pond. Flying overhead in the clearing sky were seen the silhouettes of carrion crow, seagulls, pigeons, magpie & starling. Suddenly a startled fox was spotted darting across the Pasture; and before it disappeared into undergrowth, turned its head and let out a few barks, annoyed at being disturbed.

Standing still as it grew lighter, there was birdsong in all directions coming from the trees and hedges. Nothing out of the ordinary, and sadly no song thrush was heard as in previous years, and no whitethroat discernible either; but the rasping cackle of a jay was unmistakable. The cold was beginning to deaden my fingers and ears, and yes, I should've worn gloves and a woolly hat; but no matter, the sun was about to break the horizon...

The few clouds remaining were brightening up, from shades of yellow to orange to red, until a bead of bright light appeared above the horizon through the distant trees; daylight had begun! The symphony of birdsong



soon subsided, with only the wrens and blackbirds still sporadically calling, again dominating the soundscape. The chilled group of visitors said their goodbyes & went their separate ways, as I stayed behind and totted up the morning's number of species noted.

Above me a solitary woodpigeon flew steadily overhead, then something caught my eye... Slowly spiralling down was a feather! It landed about 4 metres away and felt warm to the touch as I picked it up! I guess this must happen often but I felt lucky to have seen it actually fall from the bird.



On the way to the gate I heard a blue tit chattering, saw a dunnock fly low across the brambles; then high in the willow, a long-tailed tit was heard & then seen flying to the next tree. Oddly alone, as they're usually in groups.

Back home, hot chocolate seemed acceptable at 6:15am as a medicinal remedy and felt good as I clasped my frozen fingers around the mug. Previous dawn chorus mornings at the Pasture had seen flights of Canada geese, mallard, jackdaws and even a cormorant pass overhead. It was later reported as one of the coldest days in May for 5 years; so hopefully it was just the cold weather that saw a smaller number of species recorded. Still, it was an enjoyable event; please join us next year!

It's mid June now and most of the butterflies and birds we regularly see on the Pasture have appeared on cue with 12 species of butterfly noted so far. The six main grassland species we see each year are due any day and hopefully if the weather warms up, will all be on the wing by the time this Newsletter is published. The moorhens have already hatched their second brood, and the 9 baby mallard ducks seen one morning apparently

tried to make their way to Pentlands! Neighbours found some in their back gardens & others on the allotments! Some were brought back to the Pasture by well-meaning people, while others were taken to Pentlands. We now



know the parents came from the lake at Pentlands as we have seen them fly there & disappear behind the houses in Squires Lane. Next year we will try and round up the ducklings and move them en masse if the mother duck chooses the Pasture again to build her nest.

### D-Day

At the beginning of June, there were reports of up to two dozen DC-3/C-47 types in the UK, heading for Duxford in Cambridgeshire, preparing for the D-Day 75<sup>th</sup> commemorations. On the Saturday after lunch, the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight's Dakota flew over Finchley on its way to the RAF Museum Hendon, where it could be seen and heard performing several low passes. It was painted with the black and white stripes used during the D-Day campaign, applied to all allied



aircraft to make them easily identifiable. This photo was taken as it departed and slowly flew over the Pasture toward east London. We are all grateful for the sacrifices earlier generations unselfishly made in WWII to ensure our freedom.

We hope you will enjoy the East Finchley Festival on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> where we will have a stall; & sign up to our friends list to receive future Newsletters by email. And have you thought about volunteering? Saturdays 10-12.

*That's all for now, enjoy the summer; cheers! Donald*

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