



**FRIENDS OF
LONG LANE PASTURE**



NEWSLETTER

No 32. Late Spring 2016

What a mild winter it has been; with some daffodils and snowdrops flowering surprisingly early in January; like these photographed on the 10th, and morning frosts were slight and infrequent.



However, at the back end of April, we've had hard frosts & even several brief snow showers, hence the snow-capped lettering!

Of course, we've endured rain over the winter months, and lots of it; but thankfully not the disruptive amounts that fell over some northern counties and in Scotland, yet enough to keep the Pasture waterlogged since last November; and the sogginess continues in many areas, so be careful and please wear sensible footwear.



As written about before, the Pasture slopes towards the northeast, and excess rain water used to collect along butterfly border against a boundary wall. How we are presently dealing with this is explained later.

But first, an inspirational note from the Chair of Long Lane Pasture Trust:

First the good news: I'm delighted to tell you that the Panton Trust has given us a further £2,000 to help us in our work. This is not the first time the Trust has supported us in this way, so we must be getting something right.

The not-so-good news is that the Pasture has had an awful winter with rain; and had we not already taken steps to overcome this, it would have been much worse. The Panton Trust's generosity will help us to implement a more permanent solution to the flooding.

Thirdly, the weather has delayed much of the routine winter work, which means we could do with some practical help. If you have a couple of hours to spare on Saturday mornings please do come and join us. Wear old clothes and boots or wellingtons – we can supply any tools you may need.

The Pasture is now open from 10 am. Entrance just off Long Lane opposite the Finchley Fire Station and before the road goes under the NCR. It is signposted.

Dennis Pepper

Pasture Weather



During Tuesday afternoon, November 17, 2015, strong winds from named storm Barney

tore some felt roof tiles from the Pasture gazebo; and downed trees across the UK.

The following weekend a patch repair with roofing felt was speedily fixed by our busy volunteer Oliver to maintain the gazebo's water tightness. He's added suitable guttering since, and we are grateful for his good work.

The Pasture enjoyed one significant fall of snow two months later on Sunday morning January 17; and it looked beautiful, but the snow was mostly and sadly gone by noon.



I took advantage of this rare occasion to take many photographs as soon as it was light, as this might have been the only appreciable snow we got this year; and as it turned out it was, despite last week's flurries!

Fox tracks were everywhere, revealing where they go and where their current den is located. The main pond had frozen over and even the 'oily' pond took on a bizarre 'world map' appearance when viewed from the hill. I'm sure one or two snowy snaps will make it to next year's Pasture calendar.



The bird feeders were kept filled during the cold months, and we've been delighted to see greenfinches, house sparrows, tits and charms of goldfinch feeding; the latter enjoying the niger seeds.



All the usual resident birds were seen during the winter whatever the weather, with the addition of those two Scandinavian thrush visitors, redwings and fieldfares



With several shrubs flowering eerily early, like this wild plum blossom on December 30, we

didn't know how the spring was going to pan out; but the season seemed to settle down during February and the usual succession of flowering plants; snowdrops, crocus, narcissi and tulips behaved themselves and appeared in a season orderly fashion, despite the wide variance in temperatures from week to week.

With the Hawthorn about to flower, and the Oak and Ash vying for first place as to whether we get a soak or a splash; summer is fast and thankfully approaching.



Flood Management

Local anecdotal myth says that ever since the A406 North Circular Road was elevated above the Long Lane junction years ago, there have been occasional problems with drainage in the area during very wet weather.



The Pasture Trust plan on contacting the local water authority at some stage to see if we can get a definitive answer as to whether the

natural flow of ground water (that some say may be the source of, or a tributary to the local Strawberry Vale brook) has been disrupted by the foundations of the NCR bridge that's takes this major road over Long Lane.

Increasingly each year, there seemed to be more days when the lowest part of the Pasture became flooded, with water seeping into the gardens of the neighbouring properties.

It used to take several weeks for this standing water to naturally drain away and left the ground unworkable for many weeks after, and risked harming the plants and any burrowed invertebrates.

We of course are very fortunate to have a source of clean fresh water coming into the Pasture, and have utilised this to channel some of this into our main pond, but each year the volume of water to deal with seems to increase.

Action had to be taken. Late last summer, after a technical survey, an experimental sump or 'Well' was excavated through the sun-baked



hardened earth in the chosen area. During the wet winter it was enlarged and a lot easier to dig! A small pump with an automatic float switch was installed, and an inch bore hose attached.

With a suitable RCD protected power supply, this arrangement operated tirelessly and automatically over the winter months, draining away thousands of litres of rainwater into the surface water gullies outside the Pasture, adjacent to the NCR.

Rather amusingly, every time we thought the rainy season was over, and could remove the apparatus, another deluge fell! And as the ground was already saturated, the rainwater flowed effortlessly across the Pasture filling the sump, and the pumping equipment had to be set up again!

When time and our finances allowed, a more permanent arrangement was to be formally established, to continually protect the lower Pasture from future flooding. The welcome donation from the Panton Trust can now make this a reality; with possibly concealing the sump & pump in a child and wildlife-safe, picturesque wishing-well type structure. The planning and decisions now begin...

As the warmer weather increases, already sodden areas are beginning to dry out, and it shouldn't be too long until the Pasture's clay-rich soil once again becomes like solid iron and the problem of flooding fades. But the rains will come again, and we must be ready....

Butterflies & Friends

Already this spring orange tip, holly blue, and both small & large white butterflies have been seen flitting about; while comma, red admiral and peacock had already been sighted on the odd warm sunny day earlier this year.



In late April a large red damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) was seen flying and sunning itself near the small pond by Frank's Oak, next to the allotments.

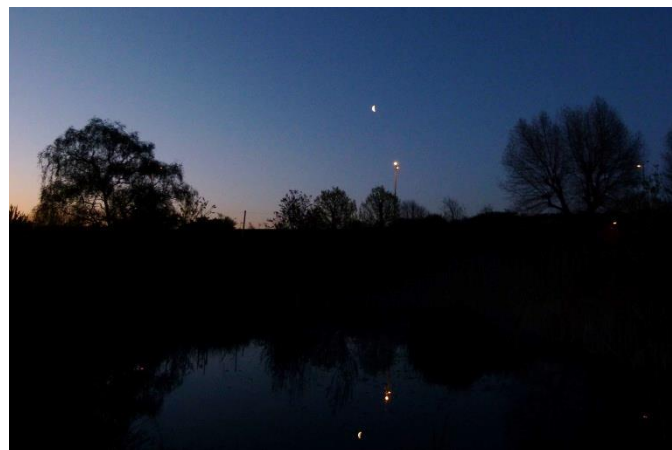
Pond Dipping Day was cold, overcast and wet. Caddis fly larvae, pond skimmers and a water boatman were seen along with tadpoles and a big newt sighted. An enthusiastic family from

Crouch End also discovered a leech! Any of the creatures photographed and studied were very carefully handled and returned to their pond. The honey bees are active as are several other species of bee, all busily collecting nectar and pollinating the flowers and early fruiting plum and damson trees.

STOP PRESS: Dawn Chorus Walk

I've just returned from the Pasture after the now annual May dawn chorus walk. My toes are still frozen after an interesting couple of hours listening to birdsong and recognising dark shapes as they darted into hedgerow.

Sunday morning started with the car covered in frost, under an astounding dark blue velvet cloudless sky, decoratively full of stars.



As cold as it was, it was windless so no chill factor to worry about, but the fleecy jacket and woolly hat was essential attire. I arrived at the Pasture just as the BBC World Service began the 4am GMT news. Thank goodness for BST!

In a lightening sky, the bright planet Saturn was already fading away as the dozen or more band of valiant locals set off from the frosted gazebo to hear the dawn chorus soundscape. We were led by bird enthusiast Derek Warren.

The waning moon was just past three quarters and shone radiantly to the south east, reflected in the pond. Wrens, robins, blackbird & dunnock were all heard, while pigeons, wood pigeons, carrion crows & unidentified seagulls flew purposefully overhead. A cormorant's unmistakable form was also recognised.

By the time we reached the bee circle the peacefulness of the morning was invaded by the sound of an electrical generator, powering temporarily lighting on the neighbouring Northern Line railway. Vital rail-replacement work on the southbound track continued throughout the night; with groups of orange clad workers occasionally passing silently by.

As the sky brightened, in the distance an ethereal haze began to lift from the large pond. A few members of the group ascended Octavia's hill to the south, while some of us paused to await the rising sun to peak above a small section of the reddening horizon we could see in the distance.

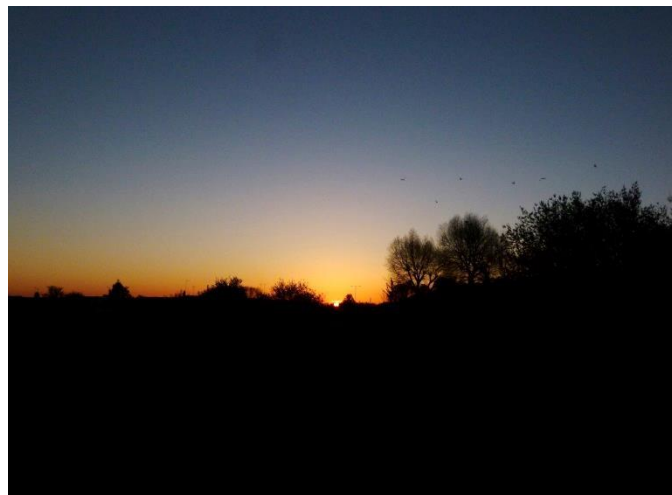
High in the sky, aircraft seen heading east to mainland Europe from north American cities, were already having their jet engine exhaust condensation trails (contrails) lit up orange from the below horizon sun. And it was then that I made an astonishing discovery...



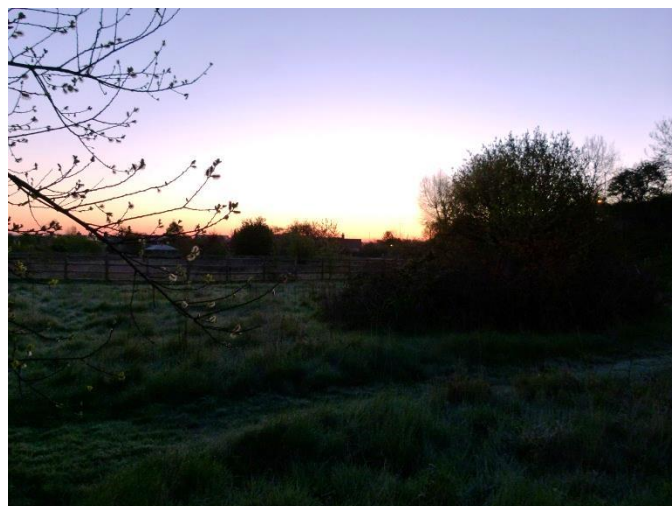
By using the FlightRadar24 application on my smartphone, it was possible to identify a very distant golden lit contrail seen low on the horizon as a Dutch registered Boeing 737 from Amsterdam to Ibiza (at 34,000 feet altitude) that was passing over Belgium, 25 miles west of Antwerp! A distance from Long Lane Pasture of 191 miles, according to Google maps!

I just searched on-line about this, and in ideal conditions, an aircraft at 35,000 feet would be possible to see at 229 miles away! So my observation was within these parameters.

As more pairs of wood pigeons passed overhead, the orange limb of the rising sun suddenly appeared!



It bathed the frosted pasture in a spectacular amber glow and the birdsong surrounding us seemed to intensify. The welcoming warming light glistened through the iced-fringed foliage; it was a breathtaking moment...



As the intrepid crowd made their way back to the gazebo, for hot coffee and biscuits, more morning mist rose from the main pond and drifted across the Pasture in all directions.





It was now light enough to tell the difference between male and female blackbirds, and see the emerald shade of a calling greenfinch perched in a tree; and the beautiful multi-colouring of a singing goldfinch sitting on an aerial on a neighbouring house. Their near-constant chatter and call as they fly over in small groups make them easily identifiable.



The now resident moorhen also drew attention to itself, skulking in the mist, with an alarm call before it fluttered from sitting in the reeds to plopping rather ungainly onto the water!



The number of species was totted up and together we made it 15 identified. Not a great number, but nothing usual was missing; with dunnocks and robins seen the most; including this very young fledgling, casually sitting on a bench and taking a great interest in the group of early morning visitors.

And of course, the ever-present dear little wren; the most vocal of birds, with its fast high-pitched trilling amongst its very loud repertoire.



With recent sightings of kestrel, sparrowhawk, heron, Canada goose, jackdaw and mallard, we are confident the Pasture is a welcoming habitat for our avian visitors. And we hope for our human friends and visitors too!

That's all for this edition. If you have been, thanks for reading; bye! Donald

You can now monitor Pasture activity on Twitter.

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

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This Newsletter is issued by the Long Lane Pasture

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