



FRIENDS OF WANSTEAD PARKLANDS *newsletter*



TRAPPED A heron on the Ornamental Water, its beak clamped shut by a plastic six-pack ring.
Credit: Tushar Bala

A picture that shames us all

Have we failed in the battle against litter? **John Sharpe** reports



CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? A 1980s Tango tin found during the February's pick

Many of us were deeply shocked by this photo of a Wanstead Park heron, its beak muzzled by plastic.

The picture was posted on the Friends of Wanstead Parklands [Facebook page](#) in February by Tushar Bala, who informed Epping Forest of his dreadful discovery. We also made enquiries that prompted an investigation involving, among many others, Epping's swan rescue team.

The emergency was escalated to the head of conservation at the City of London Corporation, and we are happy to report that the heron has since escaped its confines and is said to be thriving.

However, the episode has thrown a spotlight on the impact of Wanstead Park's ongoing litter problem, and given new impetus to the Friends' monthly litter picks.

Since last June, the Friends' volunteer army has turned out in their dozens on the first Sunday of the month, collecting more than 20 bags of rubbish during a 90-minute session - making an outstanding contribution to the health of the Park.

During the November litter pick, in addition to the usual cans and bottles, volunteers found Nordic walking spikes, a frying pan, a football jacket, mittens, plus the remains of fireworks from Bonfire Night, plus half-used boxes of giant matches.

The January pick was blighted by boggy conditions, but in February, despite freezing temperatures, 28 litter pickers turned out, finding two car number plates, a large can of motor oil, a leopardprint picnic rug, and a Tango can that had



JUST BRING YOURSELVES Dozens of volunteers attend our monthly litter pick... no experience - or equipment - necessary!

been buried in the thicket since it was discarded in the 1980s.

The sheer number of dog poo bags found discarded in Chalet Wood was, in the words of one volunteer, "remarkable".

Another volunteer, on his third bag of rubbish of the morning, found a discarded mini trampoline. "It did not leave me jumping for joy," he said.

The March pick attracted 30 volunteers, with a haul that included several dog balls, a child's car seat, a traffic cone, half a tent, and a butane gas cylinder.

Please do join us on the next litter pick, on **Easter Sunday (April 4)**.

We will meet at 11am, our usual spot, to the left-hand side of the Temple.

You can't miss us, in our hi-viz jackets, but for the exact location, click here: w3w.co/cabin.sushi.tall.

For a £5 deposit, we provide litter-grabbing 'pickers', and all the black plastic bags that you and your family can fill in 90 minutes.

No experience necessary! Click here to read more about the [March 2021 litter pick](#).

We hope to see you there!

Letter from the chairman

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2021 edition of the Friends Newsletter...

First, thank you to all members who have renewed their membership. We hope it's a vote of confidence in how we run our charity, and in the quality of the newsletter. Any comments you have in this respect are valued, so do email me at wansteadpark.org.uk@gmail.com.

2021 has already brought excellent funding news. In February, we received confirmation from the Central Grants Programme of the Corporation of London that we had been successful in the award of £4,100 to support our Park Signage project. Thanks go in particular to Peter

Brimson for his contribution. See his report on page 5. It will now enable us to consider a further project of similar value this year.

We have also been informed that the Heritage of London Trust (HoLT) has been awarded an additional £14,000 from the City Bridge Trust to carry out phase 2 work on the Grotto landing stage. This is proving an excellent collaboration between the Friends, the HoLT and the City of London.

In this issue, we are delighted to have an interview with Epping Forest Verderer Nicholas Munday (page 7). Nicholas is a member of the Epping Forest Commons and Consultative Committees, and has recently taken on board the chairmanship of the Wanstead Park Liaison Committee.

The latter is a mix of CofL management, Redbridge councillors and representatives from the Friends and WRENS, the Wanstead Park and Flats

Conservation group. Historically, it has dealt with operational issues, going forward, it will include more strategic matters (see the City Limits' column on page 10).

During this latest lockdown, it has been heart-warming to see so many new people discovering the joys of a walk in the Park, but also alarming to observe the consequential damage to the paths. Two-metre wide walkways have become five metres, the need for social distance not helping.

Wet weather has turned some paths into swathes of mud. The CofL have reported similar issues throughout Epping Forest caused by both walkers and cyclists, with the situation providing ongoing path maintenance headaches to the operational team. At a time when the City Open Spaces department reports budget cuts and manpower shortages, this is unwelcome news.

I'm delighted to welcome two new members to the Friends



committee, Adrian Russell and Ali Bajwa. Both have survived their first committee meeting, and both will, I'm sure, provide energy and thought to proceedings in the future.

An ironic benefit to committee meetings has been the use of Zoom. An emergency facility we were forced to adopt because of Covid, it has enabled us to arrange speedy ad hoc subgroup meetings, and enabled us to be much more productive. And it's free!

We hope you enjoy reading through our latest News.

John Sharpe Chairman



DUCK AND COVERED The ancient bluebell wood attracts thousands every year. Credit: Mike Edwards

Almost bluebells

As Chalet Wood prepares to burst into flower, *Gill James* has everything visitors need to know about the annual display

Chalet Wood changes with the seasons – but it’s in spring that it really comes into its own. Before then, in February, the delicate foliage of the bluebell starts to poke through the leaf mould, while the wood is full of light and birdsong.

Then in April, as the leaf canopy thickens, comes the spectacle: a haze of blue, stretching uninterrupted under the beeches, attracting visitors in their thousands.

The Wren conservation group spends much of the winter months thinning dead wood and tidying prickly brambles when the bluebells are dormant. This work leads to this wooded stretch of Wanstead Park being a glorious site for bluebells in April.

This year, as with last, there will be a one-way system in place around the Chalet Wood bluebells to ensure social distancing. Logs have been used to edge the paths through the wood, thus creating natural barriers to stop folk trampling the bluebells.

To get you in the mood for the display, here are nine facts you never

knew about Wanstead Park’s bluebells. *With thanks to woodlandtrust.org.uk*

1. Chalet Wood in Wanstead Park gets its name from the elaborate refreshment building that was situated to the west of the garden of the Temple. It burned down, we believe, on 23 November 1948. Most people now think of it as the Bluebell Wood.

2. Our native bluebell has fragrant, nodding, violet-blue (rarely white or pink flowers) with white anthers, which are clustered on one side of the stalk. Their presence is a sign of ancient woodland. The leaves are narrow and dark green and don't like being trodden on. The bluebell woods of Britain and Ireland are considered to be some of the most spectacular floral displays in Europe, accounting for about a fifth of its world



ROUTE AND BRANCH Edging the path with logs. Credit: Rita Kenny

population, and we have one of the best on our doorstep!

3. The native bluebell differs from the Spanish bluebell, introduced in the 1680s, which is a more robust and upright plant with thicker leaves and no perfume which often escapes from gardens. There are several growing on the edges of Wanstead Flats. They readily cross breed with the more delicate native bluebell and the resultant hybrids spread quickly, out-competing our native bluebells and diluting their gene pool.

4. Chalet Wood comprises mainly beech trees. You may also spot silver birch, hairy birch, grey poplar, and at the edge of the track through the wood leading to the Keepers Lodges is an impressive mature sweet chestnut. By the south edge of the main track, there are patches of wood anemones.

5. Many insects reap the benefits of bluebells which flower earlier than many other plants. Woodland butterflies, bees and hoverflies all feed on their nectar. Bees can ‘steal’ the nectar from bluebells by biting a hole in the bottom of the flower, reaching the nectar without the need to pollinate the flower.

6. The bluebell has many traditional names such as crake feet, crow bells, fairy flower, harebell, wood bells, and wild hyacinth in Scotland.

7. Bluebells have been used for a variety of different things throughout history. Their sticky sap was once used to bind the pages of books and glue the feathers onto arrows, and during the Elizabethan period, their bulbs were crushed to make starch for the ruffs of collars and sleeves.

8. Due to their toxicity, there has been little use for bluebells in modern medicine.

However, their bulbs have diuretic (increases urination) and styptic (helps to stop bleeding) properties, and research on how these flowers could potentially help fight cancer is ongoing.

9. Bluebell woods are believed to be intricately woven with fairy enchantments, used by these mischievous beings to trap humans. It is also said that if you hear a bluebell ring, you will be visited by a bad fairy, and will die not long after. If you are to pick a bluebell, many believe you will be led astray by fairies, wandering lost for ever more...

To find Chalet Wood, go to w3w.co/prom.cycle.mirror

Time for a party ...three centuries in the making

The unveiling of Wanstead House in 1722 is a landmark worth marking – but how?

Paul Clements reports

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Next year will be doubly poignant in the history of Wanstead Park – for 2022 marks the tercentenary (300th anniversary) of the completion of Wanstead House, the first and finest Palladian mansion to be built in Britain.

By a terrible twist of fate, it will also be the bicentenary (200th anniversary) of its demolition: on June 10 1822 began a month-long auction of the house's contents, before the building itself was torn down.

The City of London Corporation which manages Wanstead Park in its present state will doubtless have plans to mark these unmissable occasions. But here at the Friends of Wanstead Parklands, we wanted to offer our own suggestions. Below are the fruits of our brainstorming.

We also want your suggestions, which we can then put to the Corporation for consideration.

We would also like to start a group to help pull together a suitably extravagant event in to mark the twin anniversaries. So please step forward!



LET US EAT CAKE! We need spectacular ideas for a 300th anniversary event for Wanstead House
 Picture taken from the Sofia Copolla film, *Marie Antoinette*

Wanstead House digital resurrection

An online exhibition of photographs of the park today... but which, at the swipe of the mouse, reveal how the House would look within that landscape, were it still standing. For an idea of how it might look, click here for this [Daily Mail article about 'rebuilding' Corfe Castle](#) (tinyurl.com/digicorfe)

Wanstead House 3D

Commission a light artist who, using holographic projectors, 'rebuilds' Wanstead House after dark on the spot where it stood for a century.

A 1722-themed Grand Fete

Umbrella event that could include:

A Georgian ball

Dust off your powdered wigs for an evening's masquerade

A "Regency drag" fashion show

A catwalk, models in period dress - time to get your chemise gown and tight breeches out of storage... – with eminent local photographer David Bailey and other notables choosing a 'winner'.

A right royal Indian knees-up

To celebrate the Anglo-Indian Georgian era – and in honour of the thriving local Indian community today.

BBC Proms goes outside

The 1710 and 1720s were a high point of Baroque music, with two of the most famous works written just six years apart, both celebrating bodies of water: Handel's *Water Music* (1717) and Telemann's *Water Music* (1723). Invite the BBC to have one of its orchestras perform next to (or on a barge on...?) one of Wanstead Park's lakes, as part of an outdoor Proms. They've performed twice in a [municipal car park in Peckham](#), so why not a more salubrious, east London setting?

A Journal of a Plague Year... live

Published in 1722, the year Wanstead House was completed, [Daniel Defoe's celebrated novel](#) – about a fictional narrator tracing the devastating progress of the plague through London – has been dramatised before.



BAROQUE OF AGES Handel's *Water Music* and Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Wanstead House even gets a mention in it... A semi-staged reading in the grounds by renowned actors would be even more poignant post-Covid.

Wanstead walks and talks

A weekend of events and tours around the park by historians, archaeologists and naturalists, about the family that built (and ultimately destroyed) Wanstead House - and the wildlife that thrives in the Park today.

Wanstead House, the documentary

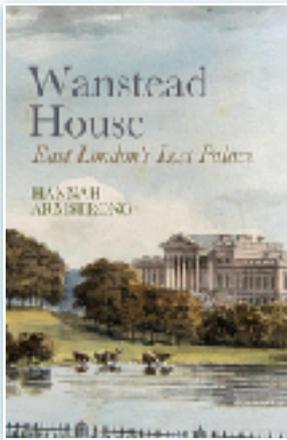
Documentary-makers at BBC Two and Channel 5 *love* stories about the rise and fall of English houses - and this one takes almost a full century, and there's an anniversary to peg it on. Plus the Geffrye Museum in Dalston (all about the history of the home) is about to reopen, so there may be appetite among TV commissioners.

Coming to a TV service near you ...

In a similar vein, how about a Bridgerton-style TV mini-series based on Geraldine Roberts's novel, *The Angel and the Cad*, about the rise and fall of Wanstead House?

A permanent tea pavilion

After 300 years, isn't it time that Wanstead Park had a more permanent cafe? As well as serving tea, it could have a gallery space, a roof garden with views over the park - just like Inn The Park in St James's Park. No



New book about the House's rise and fall ...and for a 'knockdown' price, too

For the best part of four years, Dr Hannah Armstrong has been writing what will surely be the definitive book on Wanstead House.

Scheduled to be published by Liverpool University Press, on behalf of Historic England, in March 2022, *Wanstead House: East London's Lost Palace* will cover the history of the park, the house and its owners in unprecedented detail.

The study, by Dr Armstrong – whose essay on the Palladian mansion appeared in a [recent newsletter](#) – will be issued by Liverpool University Press on behalf of Historic England, and financed solely from pre-orders.

The hardback's recommended retail price will be £45. However, pre-orders placed now via the publisher's website will come at the **greatly reduced price of £27** (plus £4.50 P&P).

Wanstead House: East London's Lost Palace will fascinate anyone who enjoys visiting Wanstead Park, or who has an



FULL HOUSE Josef Frans Nollekens, Lord Tylney, with family and friends at Wanstead House in 1740. Credit: courtesy of Fairfax House, York

interest in the history of the magnificent Palladian mansion that stood at its heart, or who simply wants to learn more about the lives of the people who lived there.

Whatever your connection to Wanstead Park, you will surely want to take advantage of this wonderful offer and, in so doing, help to contribute to the book's success.

To take advantage of the early-bird discount, go to tinyurl.com/wansteadhousebook and place your order using our promotional code

WANSTEAD40

Note: to avoid complications when booking, ignore the website's autofill option.

Nigel Franceschi

offence to the stalwarts running the Tea Hut, but isn't the 300th anniversary a good moment for an upgrade?

Sculpture park

Pop a fountain jet in one of the lakes, create a topiary cow (in honour of our recent guests...) and a spare Barbara Hepworth on the water's edge, and... done.

Royal visit

Ask a member of the Royal Family to unveil a commemorative plaque. After all, they were frequent visitors to the House in its heyday...

Now it's your turn. Got an idea for how Wanstead Park's 300th anniversary should be marked?

Please email us as wansteadpark.org.uk@gmail.com, or join the conversation on the Friends of Wanstead Parkland Facebook page, at tinyurl.com/fwpfacebook

To bring a 'Wanstead Park 300th' event to life, we need your help. Please join the Friends of Wanstead Parklands' anniversary committee. Register your interest by email at wansteadpark.org.uk@gmail.com

All ideas and offers of help welcome!

Sign here... please!

Wayfinders really are on their way, says **Peter Brimson**

The Friends of Wanstead Park have been granted £4,100 to provide wayfinding signage in Wanstead Park. The grant is from the Central Grants Programme of the Corporation of London.

So if you ever felt lost in the Park, or unable to find a way out, fear no longer.

The Friends have long campaigned for improvements to the Park and have fundraised for some small but useful initiatives, such as new benches and seating at the Tea Hut.

We were also aware that many local residents did not know of the park's existence of the Park and so we collaborated with Redbridge Council to provide directional signage around the borough.

However, that initiative left another problem – that of visitors finding their way around the Park once they have arrived. Members of Friends of Wanstead Parklands report frequently redirecting visitors who

look lost, asking questions such as “Where is the way out to Aldersbrook?”, “Where is the Temple?”, or “Which way to the Bluebell Wood?”

The Friends' committee therefore decided that wayfinding was needed. We set about planning this through a series of walks in the Park seeking to identify where signposts should be placed and which features and facilities should be indicated.

Over a period of months in 2019/20 various iterations of signs were proposed, modified and sometimes discarded e.g. we started with eight signs and finished up with 10.

There was also discussion on how to use the main posts to indicate 2,3 or 4 destinations with attached finger posts. For example, the post at the Warren Road car park entrance will have finger posts indicating the Heronry Lake and the Ornamental Waters.

The CoL contributed to and agreed the final list. They also provided design and costing (via tendering) of the scheme. They will install the signposts later this spring.

The Friends and the Corporation of London have co-operated on this project and both of us hope that the signs will improve the visitor experience and lead to an increase in people enjoying this historic Park.

Virtual AGM to be held in June

In normal circumstances, and in keeping with the Friends of Wanstead Parklands constitution, our AGM would have been held in February.

However, give the extraordinary current climate, the committee has decided to

hold a virtual AGM instead, on **June 10 2021.**

It will deal with essential business only – for example, election of committee members, determination of subscription rates for the forthcoming year (2022), and receipt and approval of financial statements for the previous year.

We will be in touch with members with further details, including how to log in to the meeting. John Sharpe

NEW MEMBERS

To new members who have joined us in 2021, we hope you enjoy this newsletter and subsequent editions.

We have recently sent out a final reminder to members who have yet to renew their membership. We hope you will rejoin and continue to support FWP activities.

NEW-LOOK WEBSITE

Apologies to any members who have had difficulties

logging in to the recently updated Friends of Wanstead Parklands website (wansteadpark.org.uk).

Our recent change of website platform has caused a couple of gremlins, and we are indebted to committee member Greg Harper for his efforts to fix them.

We now endeavour to update the website every Friday, so please **check back regularly** for the latest news about Wanstead Park. *John Sharpe*

Nature spotting: kingfishers

In her latest dispatch about the creatures that make Wanstead Park their home, **Tricia Moxey** discovers a rarity – but blink and you’ll miss it...

The unmistakable flash of a kingfisher’s bright turquoise

plumage is a wonderful sight, and an indication that bodies of water are sufficiently clean to support a range of fish. How fortunate, then, one was [spotted in Wanstead Park in January](#), by Deepak Dembla.

The European kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* is a highly territorial bird, each one controlling at least a 1km stretch of river. The brilliant blue of its feathers is the result of light striking specially modified layers of feather cells.

At 17cm long, around 40g in weight and with a top flight speed of 20mph, kingfishers eat 60 per cent of their body weight a day; the equivalent of 15 minnows. These are speared by the beak, knocked unconscious on a branch, and then swallowed head-first. Indigestible fish bones are regurgitated as pellets.

The adults pair in the autumn, retaining separate territories until the spring. The males engage in an aerial courtship display while emitting a shrill whistling song. Selecting a suitable vertical riverbank, they excavate a 45-90 cm tunnel ending in a larger nest chamber. Ritual feeding of the female takes place before mating, and she then lays between 6-10 almost spherical, glossy white eggs.

Both sexes take turns to incubate during the day, with the female sitting through the night shift. Incubation lasts for 20 days.

The young call for food with a churring noise and are fed on fish for 25 days, each one swallowing at least 334 g of fish during this time. The nest quickly becomes very contaminated with droppings, pellets and fish bones.

When fledged, mortality is high as these young kingfishers can become waterlogged and drown or starve. The parents may have two or three broods a year to ensure that some young survive to breed.

There may be as many as 6,400 breeding pairs in the UK, but with fewer than 20 recorded breeding pairs in the Greater London area, largely due to lack of suitable nesting sites, kingfishers have been given an ‘amber’ status.

Some years ago, a pair attempted to nest in the façade of the Grotto, but the nest hole was stopped up with a drinks can. Artificial nest sites in suitable locations away from potential human interference have



ON THE WING A Eurasian kingfisher, spotted by the Perch Pond in January. Credit: Deepak Dembla

been used successfully by breeding pairs. Installing such a site could be an exciting potential project within the local area.



Parkland people

NICHOLAS MUNDAY

In the first of a series of interviews with those charged with looking after Wanstead Park, we profile the 61-year-old solicitor who, in his spare time, is a Verderer for the southern part of Epping Forest

First things first, can we have a short summary of your background and career?

I grew up in Chingford and went to Forest School in Snaresbrook. Our first family house was right on the edge of Epping Forest, near Pole Hill in Chingford. When Nicola and I married, we bought a house in Halstead Road, Wanstead.

Today, I am a lawyer, working as a solicitor handling international disputes. I have my own small practice, but for most of my career was a partner in Clifford Chance LLP, a large law firm. I've been a Verderer since 2019.

How did you get where you are today, one of the people in charge of Wanstead Park?

I know Wanstead Park very well. I visited very often as a youngster, walked there with my children, and my father-in-law lived for many years on Warren Road, backing on to

the park. As a family, we have an interest in historic architecture, and I relish the opportunity to help bring to life the heritage and natural aspects of the park.

What exactly is a Verderer? How do you describe what it is you do?

The name comes from the Norman French word "vert", meaning green. A Verderer is a "green space manager".

I first became aware of the role when I was a Commoner of Epping Forest; people with half an acre are eligible to be a Commoner. I lived at Hurst House on Woodford Green and that house has a large garden. This gave me an insight into the management structure for the Forest.

When asked about the role, I usually explain that, since Norman times in the 11th and 12th centuries, Verderers across the country have managed forest land on behalf of the Crown that owned the land.

A forest exists as a harmonious blend of nature and human intervention. If left alone, a forest would become dense and the lack of light through the canopy would prevent new growth.

After the Epping Forest 1878 Act, the role of Verderer was changed to strike the balance between public access and use of the Forest with the need to conserve it as a natural green space.

My role has three aspects: to work with the Corporation of London, the owners and conservators of Epping Forest; to engage with all people and stakeholders connected with the forest; and to provide oversight and assistance to the team actually maintaining the forest under the leadership of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

How does Wanstead Park take up your time? What are the most pressing issues in your in-tray this moment?

I spend a fair amount of time on Wanstead matters. I am looking at ways to bring the Grotto back to life. I am also looking at ways to improve the vistas and layout of the park.

I keep an eye on the progress with signage, paths and play areas, which are all progressing well under the guidance of the Epping Forest officer/Keeper team.

A lot of work is being done by the Superintendent and his team of the water issues concerning the lakes and the Roding. Much more is being done than is often seen.

What's the most remarkable thing you've ever seen in the Park - animal, vegetable or, well, something else?

I am fascinated by the wonderful and large ant hills at the top of the Glade. When I first heard that the grass-cutting process involved carefully avoiding ant hills, I made a special trip to see what all the fuss is about.

I was amazed and now tell everyone about how ants form part of the biodiversity of the park and act as a food source for so many birds.

Complete the following: "In my opinion, the biggest problem facing Wanstead Park today is..."

...Establishing a sustainable method for managing water flow through the lake system.

We all know water is difficult to contain. The Wanstead lake system, during its early life, always had problems and it was constantly being changed. We have no historic stable base position to return to. The railway line from Leytonstone to Snaresbrook cut off the rain water source to the lakes from Leyton Flats. The building of the houses in Wanstead further cut off rain water flows into the lakes.

There is just not enough source water to fill the lakes all year, so at times we have high water or no water. We need a plan, and that is the biggest problem as we cannot really have a viable plan without a water source.

We have some water pumping opportunities, but it is a complex subject and a very expensive one indeed.

If you could wave a magic wand and make one thing happen to benefit the park and its users, what would that be - more cycle paths, a permanent cafe, a ban on dogs...?

I envision a park that interprets the historic layout for the 21st century. I would like a series of welcoming areas that encourage families to perambulate and explore.

I would have the Grotto as a destination, with a café area, a play area and good quality picnic space.

I would also like the park to be a role model of good nature conservation alongside enjoyable public use, and see cattle grazing as part of this. Definitely needs a magic wand!

What are your hopes for Wanstead Park over the next five years?

I would like Wanstead Park to be recognised as one of London's great parks, with a unique link to a fascinating historical context.

I hope to play my part in helping Wanstead to continue to be a destination of choice for families.

Clearing the grotto from the Grotto

Report by *Gill James*

All that remains of Wanstead Park's once-glorious Grotto is the view. But what a view!

Perched on the edge of the Ornamental Water, when it was built in the 1760s, it contained an entertainment salon with a boathouse below. It was the only part of Wanstead House that survived the wrecking of the estate, but was burned out during maintenance work in 1884. What stands today are sections of exterior brickwork.

Fortunately, the Corporation of London is working to maintain the Grotto's appearance - and now the Heritage of London Trust has agreed a grant to restore its landing stage.

However, dreams of setting off from the Grotto in an elegant barge to enjoy a lover's tryst on the lake are some years off - not least because, despite a temporary boost to water levels from this winter's floods, you'd get stuck in the mud and the weeds, and be chased off by nesting swans.

Low water levels have encouraged the growth of plants in the lake bed, which have long obscured the view of the front of this lovely building. One of these is purple loosestrife, a pretty waterside wildflower which produces a gorgeous purple haze when it flowers in summer. However, it is very invasive and it is gradually colonising the lake bed and contributing to silt build-up.



TIDY Volunteers clear weeds and branches from the lake bed. Credit: Gill James

Taller and even more damaging are the young willow saplings, which can grow into full-sized trees. Last summer, there were up to 40 willow saplings, some of which are already four or five metres tall, obscuring the view and beginning to threaten the integrity of the Grotto remains.

So, on a frosty January morning, volunteers from the Wren wildlife and conservation group donned their winter boots, waded into the icy lake in front of the Grotto and cut down the saplings with hand loppers. The City of London tree team provided welcome support by bringing along a chipping machine, which turned tree trunks into mulch in no time.

At least we can all enjoy the view again, even if we can't drift down lake to the Grotto for tea and entertainment on a summer's day.

One day soon, perhaps...

In other news

MOO ARRIVAL



Quinine, one of the three longhorns that grazed Wanstead Park last summer, gave birth in February. Her calf has been named Catherine, after Catherine Tylney-Long, who inherited Wanstead House in 1805, aged 16.

A PAT ON THE BACK

Karen Humpage's glorious illustration of the 'Wanstead three' - Nuru, Nina and Quinine - has raised £140 for the Friends of Wanstead Parklands. The 13x10in print, which graced the cover of the

last newsletter, is still available to buy online at tinyurl.com/wansteadcows, with £5 from each sale going to the Friends.

As a token of our appreciation, Karen has been given honorary life membership of the Friends of Wanstead Parklands. "The most I've ever won is £10 on the lottery... so thank you very much!" she said.

To see more of her work, go to karenhumpage.co.uk.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEWS

John Rogers, film-maker and author of *The Other London*, alights on Wanstead Park in the latest episode of his [Great London History Walks series](#) (54 mins).

To watch his tour of "one of the most storied locations in London" - which includes impressive aerial footage of the Park, taken by a drone - go to youtube.com/watch?v=ANSy1J3wB-Y

STEP BACK IN TIME

A new self-guided local walk around Wanstead Park is available now to download.

Option 9 on walkspast.com is a two- to three-hour circular route from Manor Park station to the Alexandra Lake, taking in the history of the Aldersbrook area.

It's the latest in a series of walks around the Lower Forest (Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park and the neighbouring parts of Epping Forest) by Aldersbrook residents Paul Hayes and Russell Kenny.

Each of the nine walks are thoughtfully put-together, providing key historical references and guiding pictures.

Walks can be followed on your mobile or by printing PDFs containing route maps.

Listen as you stroll at walkspast.com/p/walk-9-aldersbrook-and-aldersbrook.html

SCARR IN OUR MIDSTS

Folk singer Emma Scarr's latest album features Wanstead Flats on its cover. The track "Sirens In July" recalls the devastating fires that destroyed acres of its drought-hit grassland in 2020. Stream and download at emmascarr.bandcamp.com



OUR MAN IN THE CHURCH

Revd Canon Martyn Hawkes, of St Gabriel's on Aldersbrook Road E11, has been appointed interim Priest-in-Charge of the Parish of Wanstead. We wish him all the best and look forward to working with him.



FREEZE FRAMED Skylarks in the winter snow on Wanstead Flats (below). Credit: Mary Holden

Have you heard the skylarks sing?

Fencing on Wanstead Flats will give nesting birds a chance to thrive, says **Gill James**

Many of you will be aware of the skylarks on Wanstead Flats, and will have heard them singing as they soar into the sky lifting everyone's spirits with them.

Skylarks are famous for their song flights, which are delivered by the males from early spring and all through the nesting season. They can hover for more than 10 minutes at a time, all the while delivering a beautiful song that has inspired poets and composers for centuries.

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from Heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.



Higher still and higher

From the earth thou springest

Like a cloud of fire;

The blue deep thou wingest,

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

from 'To a Skylark', by Percy Bysshe Shelley

It can be hard to work out where the song is coming from because the singer is so far off the ground - often at 300 feet or higher.

Wanstead Flats has the only breeding skylark population in inner London. Unfortunately, they have been unable to breed successfully for several years due to unintentional disturbance from humans and dogs. Other factors may be predation by crows, foxes and rats.

Skylarks nest on the ground in the areas of long grass. They (and the less conspicuous Meadow Pipits) are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during the nesting season, which runs from early March to the end of August.

Disturbance can cause birds to abandon their nests and any young birds may flee, get lost and end up starving to death. We are in danger of losing the last few of this critically endangered species. They have already disappeared from Leyton Flats.

For this reason fencing has been installed around the main nesting site to try and protect any that remain and hopefully allow them to breed. While the fencing is newly in place, members of the Wren Group will be around as much as possible to answer any questions the public may have.

Anyone for a pint?

Our focus on pubs around the Parklands. This issue: **The North Star, Leytonstone E11**

Originally established when two Browning Road cottages were knocked together, the North Star is first mentioned as a beer house in the 1858 rate-book. It was rebuilt and refaced sometime at the turn of the 20th century, when it acquired a hipped slated roof with decorative clay ridge tiles.

The front façade was embellished with Italianate architraves and pediments. Since that reconstruction, the building has been largely unaltered externally.

The North Star obtained a beer and wine licence in 1939 and a full licence in 1959 and has remained continuously open under its original name.

The interior of the pub consists of a single large space around a horseshoe bar. The walls are covered with rail memorabilia. The North Star is a free house, with regularly changing beers in both traditional and modern styles. It was named the local CAMRA branch's pub of the year 2019, and normally has six real ales on tap.

For visitors to the Bush Wood area of Wanstead Flats, the North Star offers the nearest place of refreshment - and a toilet! It is a friendly "locals' pub", which is deservedly popular. Outside, there is a fair-sized beer garden, as well as picnic tables out front.

In normal times, there are regular live music and comedy nights and a quiz. Food is available some days.

Richard Arnopp is a member of the Campaign for Real Ale



The North Star is at 24 Browning Road, Leytonstone E11 3AR, 020 8989 5777, thenorthstarpub.co.uk



TIGHTEN UP The City of London has announced a double-digit budget reduction for Epping Forest

City Limits

This issue, **John Sharpe** discovers what deep budget cuts mean for Wanstead Park

So the indulgence that was Sir Simon Rattle's proposed £288 million auditorium at the Barbican is toast. More money for City of London's open spaces such as Wanstead Park, then?

Here's the reality. The City of London Corporation has announced a double-digit budget reduction for Epping Forest to see them through 2021. It's a tough one to take for the hard-pressed local management, particularly when forest and park maintenance demands soar with a 300 per cent increase in footfall.

Look out for new parking tariffs as the drive to increase income becomes the name of the City game.

So what does that mean for Wanstead Park?

We already knew that major works to restore the health of the Lakes had been reduced to statutory work on the dams to alleviate flood risk; that this would negate the immediate possibility of applying for Heritage of London Trust funding, and leave question marks about the future.

As a committee, the Friends of Wanstead Parklands have the choice of jumping up and down and making lots of noise about the City's failure to come up with the goods – or we work with them as best we can, to positively influence future investment.

A quick read of the Epping Forest Business Plan 2020-2023 (cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Green-Spaces/epping-forest-management-plan.pdf) goes some way to demonstrating the City's commitment to the Park.

In addition, in February, we had the attention of management during open and honest dialogues. There is recognition by the City that the state of the lakes is the single most important feature for park users, and several ongoing projects reflect this:

- the statutory dam work, scheduled to commence in "early 2021".
- the Thames 21 Partnership, aimed at addressing the issues of water retention and habitat availability within the Park lakes through the creation of areas of wetland and reedbed habitat.
- the Spa-Flow consultancy report, which is identifying how additional catchment water can be harvested from areas such as the golf course, to feed the Heronry Pond and Ornamental Water.
- The potential restoration of the River Roding pumping station, an investment aligned to the 2022 Abstraction licence application.

So there are signs that the City has upped its game on planned work, and we thank them for their collaboration with the Heritage of London Trust in raising money for phase 2 work on the Grotto landing stage.

But what of project delivery? Allowances have to be made for Covid. Additional work along with manpower shortages have left the operational team struggling to cover all angles. But the delayed projects are accumulating.

Directional signage in the Park, the replacement of entrance noticeboards and the introduction of commemoration benches are all funded, but have stalled.

We will look for progress on these and the water management initiatives in 2021, and will judge performance on this basis.

'There are signs the City has upped its game on planned work'

The recent hot topic of discussion between Epping Forest and the Friends of Wanstead Parklands has concerned fund-raising. Historically, the Friends has used its fundraised cash for small projects. Consideration is now being given to raising money for higher-value projects.

Verderer Nicholas Munday (interviewed in this newsletter) has generously stepped forward to facilitate its feasibility, and to date has brokered meetings between the Friends and the City, and agreed to take on a revised role as Chairman of the Wanstead Park Liaison Group.

His vision is to move this partnership of Friends, City management, Redbridge councillors and WRENs, the Wanstead Park and Flats Conservation group, to a more strategic level of decision-making; and use his own fundraising expertise to lead and evaluate potential opportunities.

As a Committee, we look forward to working with Nicholas and thank him for his heartfelt interest in Wanstead Park. Within the blueprint presented to the Friends, there is a level of creative thinking that is attractive. More on this in our next edition.

Future capital projects funded by the City, however, is another matter. Right now, there are rigid criteria governing awards, and a battle to get through a myriad of committees in order to be heard. This City committee structure is being reviewed following yet another costly consultancy.

Let's hope it is actioned swiftly.

Now go online...

Check out [our new-look website](http://our-new-look-website), where you can download [previous editions of the newsletter](http://previous-editions-of-the-newsletter): wansteadpark.org.uk

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