

*From our Chairman***We are not alone**

I recently took over as Chairman of the Friends' Forum, which comprises the Chairs of the various Royal Parks Friends groups. So I am now officially the Chair of Chairs! Together the various Friends have 7,000 members (with Greenwich and ourselves the largest), so we have some influence over the large and small issues affecting the Parks.

I am often asked what is happening in the other Royal Parks and whether they have the same problems as Richmond Park. There are eight in London – Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, St James's Park, Green Park, and Regent's Park – and three in the suburbs – Greenwich, Bushy Park and Richmond Parks. Richmond is the largest, twice as large as Bushy and 25 times as large as St James's. However, while the Parks are very different, they have many of the same problems.

The first common problem is the increasing numbers of visitors. This summer represented the highest visitor numbers ever for all the Royal Parks, particularly for those in central London. This affects grassland, facilities, wildlife, clearing up (especially litter), and park maintenance budgets. Add the recent dry weather and all the parks are looking tired; winter will be a welcome relief.

The second common problem is the conflict between amenity (or human use) and conservation. Historically, the parks have survived because they were royal and not used by the general public. But the Parks, especially in central London, now

represent much of the remaining open land in their areas and are under enormous pressure to be used for all sorts of human activity, and more intense activity – a quiet walk or lying in the sun is no longer sufficient.



Large chunks of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens are used for concerts and events, and much of Hyde Park and Greenwich Park will be used for the Olympics (the triathlon and equestrian events respectively). Smaller chunks of Hyde Park are being used for monuments (for example, to the 7/7 bombings though they happened a long way from the Park), and of Regent's, Hyde and St James's Parks for the Mayor's new cycle rental scheme.

The Royal Parks agency's marketing of the parks for entertainment, sports and active leisure (for example, the new central Royal Parks half-marathon) exacerbates the problem. The Parks are experiencing both increased use and increased intensity of use – a "double whammy".

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