

## Biodiversity and us

At the Friends AGM in late April, Nigel Reeve, The Royal Parks Ecologist, gave an excellent talk highlighting Richmond Park's rich biodiversity – see page 10 for some of his fascinating facts and figures. No wonder that the Park is a National Nature Reserve. Only Windsor Great Park rivals it in South East England.

But the Park's biodiversity has been eroded and is threatened with further erosion. The last water vole was seen in the Park in the 1930s, the last water shrew in 1966 and the last brown hare in 1972. The skylark faced the same fate until recently when a protection zone was set up.

The culprit for this loss of biodiversity is the species that is not mentioned in the list given by Nigel – man. Our dogs made it impossible for the brown hare, which lives on the open ground, to survive. We and our children move the deadwood and destroy the beetles' habitat, and by building dens from the wood, "we hoist the invertebrates into the air, to dry out and die", in Nigel's words. We break off fungi for fun or because we mistakenly think they are destroying the tree; we stamp on anthills and crush the nests and young ants which are growing up in the domes, warmed by the sun; we use veteran trees as waste bins.

Nigel's talk was both uplifting and depressing at the same time. We have a long way to go to educate ourselves and others about the large impact we have on the Park's wildlife, and how we can reduce that impact.



Also at the AGM, we agreed to move to charitable status for the Friends. Some members expressed concerns about replacing the present 1961 objectives, specifically those about minimising the impact of traffic, with the more general objectives now proposed; in the end 90% approved the new objectives. While I understand the objectors' concerns, I should make it clear that the new general objectives are intended to widen what the Friends can do (and strengthen our public interest commitment, which is important in seeking charitable status), and they do not prevent us pursuing any of the goals set out in 1961, if the membership so wishes. We are now preparing the application to the Charity Commissioners.

Finally, the AGM discussed the Friends' submission on the proposed changes to Park regulations, particularly parking charges, summarised on page 6. We think it is a fair reflection of the views on both sides of the argument and, most important, tackles the big problem of congestion in the car parks at peak periods while trying to minimise the impact on regular users and people living in surrounding streets. I hope you agree.

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*Looks interesting – but not good for wildlife*  
*Photo by Marilyn Mason*