

Future Generations



One day last August I took my grand-daughters, aged 7 and 4, to explore the Park. They live in Peckham, close to a local park, but it's nothing like

Richmond Park and, without a car (like many young London families), they don't get to the country much.

We walked around King Charles Spinney (following one of the routes in *Family Trails*) and then Petersham slopes, investigating everything along the way: the tree stumps on which birds and squirrels hold nuts while they peck or rip them open, the lattice bark of the sweet chestnut trees, the three ages of silver birches, the enormous rabbit warren near Petersham playground, the male deer, red and fallow, with burgeoning antlers, a group of hinds happily munching on a tree, maintaining the browse line.

They were fascinated and excited by it all. They couldn't believe that deer grow their antlers anew every year or that stag beetles live in deadwood for five years before emerging for just a few days. They searched around the tree stumps for bits of acorns and nuts and looked down the rabbit holes. I recalled David Attenborough's comment to President Obama that he's never met a child that is not fascinated by the natural world – just turning over a stone and finding a slug underneath is exciting!

But there was more: my grand-daughters seemed at home in the Park, accepting it as a world in which things have a purpose and are interconnected – that an ecosystem is at work and that disturbing any part of it has consequences. They accepted that trees grow chestnuts which are food for the deer and by taking them (or the blackberries growing nearby) you are making the winter that bit harder for the deer. And that the deadwood on Petersham slopes provides homes for beetles and by building dens you are killing those beetles. They understood that nature should be left alone and not disrupted by our thoughtless actions.

It was an uplifting experience for me. They are part of the future generations for whom the Friends conserve and protect the Park. We conserve it as something radically different from their local park – as a wondrous survival, a natural ecosystem so close to the centre of the city where Londoners can experience and understand nature, how it works and how they should treat it. My grand-daughters' excitement and fascination shows we are on the right track and makes all the effort worthwhile.

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