



FRIENDS *of*
RICHMOND PARK

*Protecting Richmond Park's peace and
natural beauty for future generations*

AUTUMN 2013



Richmond Park calendar girl
Nigel Reeve, Park Ecologist
Summer birds and butterflies
Species loss – Skylarks next?

Welcome

I've been editing this newsletter for about five years now, and am beginning to run out of steam (and occasionally hours at the right time of year), so would love to start handing over to one or two people with editorial and layout skills. You would not be on your own: the design template has been created; there is advice and help from the small editorial team that meets between newsletters; we have an expert proof-reader in Sally Wood; and lovely photographs and interesting articles keep coming in, so we are never short of material – quite the opposite usually!

Apologies to everyone who sent me items that I couldn't squeeze into this issue, and to those that I had to edit ruthlessly. What remains still offers a fascinating insight into the Park at this time of year.
Marilyn Mason, editor@frp.org.uk

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Please pass it on to a friend or recycle it when you have finished with it.

HURRY, HURRY, HURRY!

Our fabulous 2014 calendar is now on sale at the Visitor Centre, on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, 10.00am–3.00pm, and on Mondays to Thursdays, 11.00am–2.00pm (depending on volunteer availability), and also at Park Management offices at Holly Lodge (Monday–Friday, 9.00am–4.00pm). At £5.99 (cash only), the calendar makes a perfect Christmas gift – but it sold out last year so buy yours soon!

Our thanks go to the many photographers who so generously donated their photos.

We will also be selling a brand new range of Christmas cards at only £3 for a pack of five, or 80p each. All profits will go to support conservation projects in Richmond Park.



Linda Lennon, Chief Executive of The Royal Parks, with calendar.

PLEASE LET US HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS!

We now have email addresses for more than 65% of our members, who receive a monthly email containing: the latest news of the Park and the Friends; the Park Diary and Isabella Diary written by The Park Management; the Friends and Isabella Walks programme; notice of events in the Park or publications about the Park. Try it for a while and see what you think – you can always unsubscribe!

Please email Chris Mason at membership@frp.org.uk with your name, postcode and email address.

Please note that we never give details of our members, including email addresses, to anyone else.

Cover photos: Two seasonal photos by Danielle Connor – see page 9 for another, and page 12 for more about Danielle.

The front cover is also the cover photo for the Friends' 2014 calendar – see below.

Species loss

Over the summer I was in Norfolk, visiting a stately home, and by chance saw a hare dashing across its grounds. It was a wonderful sight that has stayed with me.

We no longer have hares in Richmond Park – the last one was seen in 1972. They live entirely above ground and were driven away by increasing dog numbers. We have also lost hedgehogs and water shrews.

According to the Park's Bird Recording Group, whose records go back to 1921, in the last 50 years we have lost breeding pairs of Pheasant, Grey Partridge, Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Redstart, House and Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer.

These lost species of mammals and birds are the obvious ones. Many others that we do not see or where our records are not so good – beetles, butterflies, insects, wildflowers – have undoubtedly also been lost.

We have also gained species. But the new bird species are mostly "urban" birds – the Mandarin Duck, Red-crested Pochard, Egyptian Goose, Collared Dove, Ring-necked Parakeet – that you can find in any local park.

So it is troubling to read of the recent decline in Skylark numbers (see the report on page 9). One of the main reasons seems to be people with dogs ignoring the signs (*photo on the right by Jan Wilczur*). The disappearance or decline of species can be caused by a range of factors, from climate change to farming

practices to human (and dog) disturbance. But we humans are ultimately responsible for the vast majority of it.

Does this matter? Yes it does. The world we know is shaped and sustained by a vast range of species that interact with each other and the earth, in ways that we often don't understand.

How will the world adjust to the large and rapid loss of species now occurring? We just don't know, but we should care deeply. Biodiversity is essential for our future. The loss of a species diminishes us. It reveals our arrogance as the dominant species. We lose the unique contribution of that species to the world and our lives. In the case of the Skylark we will lose its wonderful song high above the Park's grasslands – Vaughan Williams' "Lark Ascending" and Shelley's "blithe spirit". I don't want in future to have to go to Norfolk to hear it.

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Policing

The Safer Parks Panel, on which the Friends are represented, meets quarterly to review policing and set special tasks for the next quarter. For the last quarter (June to August), crime continued to be low. There were 27 incidents of cannabis and one of heroin possession (these tend to be higher in the summer); four thefts from cars, six of bicycles and one of lead from a roof at Richmond Gate; four summons/charges and 31 written warnings to cyclists for speeding; 23 fines for off-track cycling; and 150 fines to motorists for speeding, illegal parking, using a mobile phone and no MOT/insurance. The police also secured two convictions for speeding cyclists and one for a dog chasing deer, with fines of £150 plus costs. Seasonal tasks were protection of calving deer and ground-nesting birds from dogs and people, and anti-social cycling. For the autumn quarter they have moved on to protection of "autumn fruits" including fungi, chestnuts, and acorns.

Autumn deer

With autumn came advice from Park Management to steer clear of rutting stags, which can be aggressive, and to leave chestnuts and beech mast on the ground for the deer. November also brings the deer cull, and every year the cull provokes some opposition. The reasons for it, and the humane nature of the cull, were explained in our autumn 2010 newsletter, and can also be found on the Friends' website.



Photo by Danielle Connor

Congratulations, Richmond Park!

This summer the Park was awarded a Green Flag for the sixth year running, given in recognition of achieving the national standard for parks and open spaces in England and Wales.

Congratulations, too, to the Isabella Plantation, which celebrated the 60th anniversary of its founding in August.

Bracken control

Park Management increased its bracken control work over the summer. Some areas were rolled by the shire horses, hired in from Hampton Court and a magnificent sight, while other areas were sprayed with herbicide, which is slowly absorbed into the plants' underground rhizomes as they store sugars to overwinter. The only visible signs at the time of spraying are slightly paler tips, but by autumn these disappear as the bracken gradually turns yellow and then brown as the leaves dry out. Next spring fewer young shoots will emerge, and a reduction of 80-90% is expected.

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

The Royal Parks thanks the dedicated and stalwart band of 40 OPM volunteers who worked alongside staff during the summer months to search for the nests of this invasive pest. This season was particularly challenging for the surveyors, many of whom have been carrying out this difficult task for several years and have built up a wealth of invaluable experience.

The task, which involves searching every oak tree in an allocated area for caterpillar nests, requires patience, perseverance, thoroughness, physical stamina, and a willingness to contribute several hours a week to the job during June and July. The long cold winter and late spring delayed development of the caterpillars, which pushed back the surveying season and required double-checking of many areas, much of this in the very hot July weather. Park Manager Simon Richards said "the

dedication of the volunteers and their determination to finish the job was impressive and they again played a crucial role in our ongoing management of this challenging pest".

This year The Royal Parks used a combined management approach of carefully targeted pesticide spraying in the early part of the season, followed by surveying and manual nest removal. Analysis of the season will include a review of the spraying programme, any part the weather may have played in population levels this year, and the formulation of the strategy for next year.

Royal Parks Board

The Royal Parks Board met in Richmond Park in June, their first meeting outside central London since the new Board was created 18 months ago. As well as touring the Park they discussed the tree diseases now affecting it and possible future action (tackling OPM now costs TRP £250,000 a year). The Board comprises top management of TRP and non-executive directors, including four local council leaders, a representative of the Royal Household, and members with commercial and management experience. Ron Crompton, our Chairman, and Liz Coyle, Chair of the Friends of Greenwich Park, gave a presentation on the work of the seven Royal Parks' Friends bodies.

Antiques Roadshow

On what turned out to be the very last of the blazing hot days of summer, a long line of visitors queued at the gates of White Lodge, then snaked slowly across the lawns in front of the house, clutching parcels in a variety of shapes and wrappings. Parking was available only in the Sheen and Roehampton car parks, from where there was a shuttle bus, but many people walked in with their precious objects – for this was the day the BBC's Antiques Roadshow came to Richmond Park.

Hundreds (*pictured above right*) waited in the hot sun for up to two hours to



present family heirlooms for valuation at the hands of the experts assembled in the Ballet School garden. Some visitors received welcome surprises; others at least learnt more about the treasures they had dug out of their attics. Though only a few were chosen for filming, nobody went home without an expert appraisal. The two programmes resulting from the roadshow are due to be broadcast early in the New Year.

Although this event at the Royal Ballet School was very well organised and minimally disruptive, the Friends continue to have concerns about social events at the school, particularly at night, when they can cause excessive traffic, and noise and light pollution.

Acute Oak Decline

The Royal Parks, together with other organisations, are carrying out research into a relatively new disease, Acute Oak Decline (AOD). There are now a number of oaks in the Park showing symptoms: bleeding lesions on trunks, and dieback and thinning of crowns. Work by Forest Research indicates that the causal organism is bacterial, and is also looking at the role a native Agrilus beetle may play in the disease.

Ponds

Work on the two ponds near Ham Gate should have begun by the time you read this. They were heavily silted up

and suffering from non-native aquatic plants in their shallows, so they are being drained and cleared of invasive plants, and will only be refilled once all traces of them have gone. Once the work is complete, the ponds will be much more attractive to wildlife. We hope to report in full on the various pond projects in our next issue.

Cattle grazing trial

An assessment of the cattle grazing area by the Richmond Park flora group volunteers shows that it has a shorter sward and a lot more broad-leaved flowering plants than the control area next to it, as was anticipated when the trial began four years ago. Cattle grazing is likely to continue in the same location, with the fences repaired.



Changes at Holly Lodge Centre
Holly Lodge Centre has a new Manager, Anna King (pictured left). The Centre, an independent charity, provides hands-on experience of the Park for children from both special needs and mainstream schools. Anna's role will include managing 80 volunteers and school visits. Pat Ealey, who set up and ran the Centre for 20 years, will become a part-time Community Engagement Manager. If you would like to help in the Centre's valuable work, please contact Anna at aking@thehollylodgecentre.org.uk.

New signs for cyclists

Regular users of the Park may have seen the new, bold signs shown on the left – designed to target and alert offending off-track cyclists – popping up in a few sensitive areas. Assistant Park Manager Adam Curtis explained that following the introduction of Fixed



Penalty Notices (FPNs), police have been using these temporary signs to educate and inform cyclists so that they are in no doubt that off-track cycling in the Park is indeed an offence. The signs are used tactically and moved around high offending areas. Between June and August, the police issued 23 FPNs for off-track cycling offences.

Many cyclists, few spectators



August's Prudential RideLondon-Surrey 100 brought thousands of cyclists to the Park on their way from central London to Box Hill. The early morning race was of 20,000 amateur cyclists, many riding for charity and not all as fast or fit as the Olympic cyclists last year, as the photo above, taken by member Alan Vincent on Sawyer's Hill, shows. For two hours wave after wave of riders passed, and for over half an hour at around 9.30 it was impossible to cross the road. The second race was of 150 of the world's top cyclists, accompanied by the familiar motorcade. Spectators were sparse, as the photo shows, and there were no major problems.

However, Friends' monitors reported stewards inadequately briefed about the Park, litter from gel food packs (dangerous for the deer), cyclists urinating against trees and incidences of stressed deer, some of which, before the race, leapt over the barriers keeping them from the cyclists. Next year's event is already scheduled for Sunday 10 August; the 25,000 places will be allocated by ballot.

London Duathlon

In September the Park hosted the London Duathlon, with 3,000 participants. The Friends had met Limelight, the new organisers of the event in July, and agreed measures to mitigate potential impacts on the Park, including reducing noise from announcements and music, and disqualification of participants who litter the Park with gel food packs. They also had on the race website a "Message from the Friends" asking participants not to litter, cycle off-track and so on. On the day, the event was uneventful and the Friends' monitors had little to report.

Open Park

It was another first for the Friends this year when we were invited to participate in September's London Open House weekend by offering three Richmond Park walks. Ian McKenzie co-ordinated the operation, and, together with Max Lankester, Janet Bostock and Michael Davison, welcomed all-comers at the Pembroke Lodge meeting point.

Attendance was not large – perhaps it takes a while for new events to establish themselves in the Open House schedule. However, all four volunteer leaders welcomed the chance to explain the richness of the Park's history and ecology to newcomers from farther afield than our Saturday morning regulars, and the walkers for whom the Park was a new experience were very appreciative. Many thanks to all the volunteers who gave up their time to share their vast knowledge!

Tribute from the USA

Left in the Visitor Centre in September by a gentleman from Texas: "Favourite park – worldwide; helpful volunteers in the Visitor Centre". Although many visitors express admiration for the Park, we think his comment (well deserved, of course) was exceptional.

Aircraft noise – the Friends respond

The Friends submitted a one-page paper to the Airports (Davies) Commission,

looking at options for London's airports. Their consultation paper on Aircraft Noise discusses the value people attach to quiet areas such as parks and how aircraft noise might affect that. It affects the Park in two ways: low level noise on the north side from aircraft landing; and substantial noise over the quiet centre of the Park (the quietest area in London with ambient noise levels of only 25 decibels) from aircraft taking off.

The third runway proposed a couple of years ago would have quadrupled the number of take-offs over the Park. One of the three new options put forward by Heathrow would have an approach path over 50% of the Park, although take-off noise would be reduced. This has been done deliberately to minimise the impact of noise on residential areas and thus reduce opposition.

Research widely reported last month found that the risks of stroke, heart and circulatory disease are higher in areas with a lot of aircraft noise. Aircraft noise can harm wildlife too, according to a 2009 scientific review (see BBC news at <http://tinyurl.com/yf794fl>), which reported that noise pollution was becoming a major threat to the welfare of wildlife.

If you suffer from aircraft noise, or are concerned about its impact on the Park or the potential local impact of Heathrow expansion, you might like to support HACAN ClearSkies (www.hacan.org.uk), the organisation that campaigns against aircraft noise.

Latest news: Friends' Patron Baroness Susan Kramer is now Minister of State for Transport.

Volunteering with the Friends

Volunteering has been an important feature of Friends' membership for many years, but this has increased significantly in recent years with calls to help with the Queen's Jubilee visit, the Olympic road races, conservation work, detecting the Oak Processionary Moth, the History project and much more.

We have around 230 volunteers working on projects run by the Friends or helping with projects run by others, for example, the wildlife recording groups or Park Management. It was hard to fit all the volunteers into the rooms allocated for our morning at Pembroke Lodge last winter, so this January we will meet in the larger Belvedere Suite.

We are not entirely sure of the total number of volunteers, so we have put in place a Volunteer Coordinator, Jane Townsend, who has been compiling a database of those we do know about. We will shortly be asking all those who have teams of volunteers working with them to check names and update the list where appropriate. We observe strict confidentiality with members' details, retaining only essential contact information and allowing access only to Trustees or Associates. As well as keeping records, Jane will help to identify volunteers for new roles as they arise. Trustees and Associates looking for volunteers will be able to ask her to suggest names from the database. New members will be invited to contact her if they are keen to volunteer, and their details and interests will be recorded and passed to the Trustee or Associate who looks after the area that sparks their interest.

If you'd like to volunteer, you can email Jane at volunteering@frp.org.uk, indicating the area(s) that interest you. Current options, in addition to those mentioned above, are: Visitor Centre, walks/talks, Discoverers, newsletter editing or mailing, gardening in the Isabella Plantation, special events/fairs/monitoring, and helping with activities such as fund-raising or writing a paper on a special project. Please contact Peter Burrows-Smith (peterburrows-smith1@virginmedia.com or 020 8392 9888), or Sheila Hamilton, (sheilahamilton23@googlemail.com or 020 8876 2623) with any questions.

DISCOVERERS

For families exploring Richmond Park



One Saturday in late September, 12 families met at Sheen Gate at sunset to observe bats hunting for insects around Adam's Pond (*photo above by Brian McDonald*). The children ranged in age from 4 to 11, and proved knowledgeable and very enthusiastic. They certainly impressed our expert, Philip Briggs, who works with the Bat Conservation Trust and as Projects Manager of the National Bat Monitoring Programme. Like last year, the event was over-subscribed and we had a waiting list – it is a shame to have to turn anyone away so next year we might try running two Bat Walks.

Please go to the Friends' website and Discoverers' web pages for details of our programme for the remainder of the year. The team needs volunteers to help run our events and make it possible to expand what we do. If you have a skill, interest or enthusiasm that you think would appeal to our ever-growing list of Discoverers' families, do please tell us about it!

Email: discoverers@frp.org.uk
Website: www.discoverers.frp.org.uk

With thanks to Ron Crompton, Michael Davison, Teresa Grafton, Richard Gray, Sheila Hamilton, Gillian Jonassus (Park Arboriculturist), Pat and Mark Lunt, Mary Pollard, Alan Vincent and Park Management for news items and photos.

Summer birds

The discovery of a family of three fledged young Hobbies (*my painting of a Hobby is on the right*) in early September marked the end of a long hot summer which has, it is hoped, helped the Park's birds to recover from last year's disastrous breeding season. They put on breathtaking displays of aerial agility, hawking dragonflies by Pen Ponds.

Another family party that appeared at the Ponds was of Kingfishers, including three juveniles. Like the family of Grey Wagtails that also appeared, they had probably been hatched in a nest beside Beverly Brook. A second pair of Common Terns took advantage of the new tern raft, with both pairs successfully raising two young each. Grey Heron hung on as a breeding species for the Park by nesting on Upper Pen Pond Island and fledging one young. The Great Crested Grebes, despite a late start, did well to fledge three young. A pair of Egyptian Geese, unusually, managed to raise almost a full brood of seven goslings. The Upper Pond Mute Swans managed to raise three young from the six that hatched.

Water Rails in the reed bed increased to three territories, and the sighting of a fully grown juvenile was proof of successful breeding. This bird was seen running along the base of the Sand Martin bank which has so far failed to attract any potential tenants.

The commoner species of water bird on the Pen Ponds, however, had far poorer breeding success. Only one Mallard duckling fledged and no other broods were seen. A brood of five Tufted Ducklings first appeared on the small Leg of Mutton Pond, surprisingly, given its popularity with dogs. Their mother soon moved them to Lower Pen Pond, which was otherwise almost devoid of young water birds. Of the Moorhens, Coots and Mute Swans breeding there,

Jan Wilczur



only the former managed to produce one surviving young.

The cheerful song of a male Whitethroat greeted visitors at the Pen Ponds car park for the first time ever. He used the mature scrub at one end to establish a territory, attract a mate and successfully produce a brood of three young.

With the departure of Tim Howard, the Park's long-standing bird recorder and assiduous recorder of breeding birds, the number of reports of breeding woodland birds decreased considerably. Of the few that were made, perhaps the most surprising was that of a pair of nesting Willow Warblers.

Skylark survey

A survey of breeding Skylarks in Richmond Park this spring revealed only eight singing males, a decline from 23 in 2009. As the only Park bird species to nest on the ground, they are particularly vulnerable to disturbance by people and dogs. Once distributed widely in the Park, Skylarks declined to



Lawn Field, showing dogs running free; photo by Jan Wilczur

such a degree that in 2002 signs were erected around Lawn Field, the grassland beside the main track from Pen Ponds car park to the Ponds, at that time their main breeding area in the Park. Visitors were asked to keep to the paths, not to fly kites and to keep dogs on leads while walking through the nesting area. Co-operation from visitors resulted in Skylarks increasing in numbers and spreading to other areas: the Park's three Skylark territories in 2001 rose to a peak of 23 by 2009, so becoming one of the most important breeding areas for Skylarks in Greater London and Surrey.

But this year only a single pair was left in Lawn Field, avoiding the grassland itself and choosing, unusually, to nest amongst the bracken. Counts were made of dogs using Lawn Field this spring. Only 20% of dog-walkers complied with the signs by keeping their dogs on leads, and half of the dogs off the lead entered the grassland. So disturbance from dogs is probably a significant factor in the decline of Skylarks in the Park.

In the UK the Skylark has suffered a dramatic decline, a trend mirrored in the London area. Those in the Park offer visitors a unique opportunity to experience the song of this charismatic species, but unless further protection measures are implemented it is probable that Skylarks will be restricted to just a few pairs or become extinct altogether as a Park breeding species.

Butterflies in the Park *Ray Garrett, Transect Walker*

Was 2013 a good year for butterflies, as some national media had suggested? The long cold spring followed by the heat-wave in July delayed the first appearance of Speckled Wood and Small Heath butterflies in the Park by about two weeks, but summer arrived just in time to energise our most prolific grassland species, the Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, which came out in large numbers. Reports from our 22 butterfly surveyors are mixed.

Ross Compton says of his area in and around Isabella Plantation, and Queen's Ride for Purple Hairstreaks: "With the exception of Meadow Browns, which I found in greater numbers than recent years, 2013 has been very disappointing, in particular for Purple Hairstreaks, which peaked at less than one tenth that of recent years."

Simon Silvester, for the north-east corner of the Park, agreed that few butterflies were to be seen anywhere until July, when there was an explosion in numbers: "On one occasion in mid-July I saw over 400 butterflies, the most I have ever recorded. The majority were Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, and also many Small and Essex Skippers, if somewhat fewer Large Skippers than previously. The highlight was to see 10

Small Tortoiseshells on one day, having seen only occasional single specimens since I was a child. The number of Common Blues in August was an improvement on my 'none' of last year whilst Small Coppers seemed to be struggling. There were many Whites, but whether they were Green Veined or Small Whites is often unrecorded as they are so difficult to identify unless at rest. Small Heaths and Ringlets were significantly fewer than I recall last year."

John Lock, reports on the north-east of the Park: "This year seemed better than last for the nettle-dependent species, not only Small Tortoiseshells but also Red Admirals, Peacocks and Commas."

Gay Carr, also surveying in the north-east, adds: "I would say that it was a good year for Speckled Woods in my area."

Pam Kent, surveying in Pembroke Lodge Gardens, says: "This is my third year, having learned that the best places to look are the shrubby wooded and long grass areas rather than, as originally expected, the herbaceous borders. My high hopes for large numbers were dashed after favoured habitats were cut back in midsummer. In the end, I saw a total of 160 butterflies, compared to 137 last year,

on six outings between May and the end of August, mainly Whites, Speckled Woods and Meadow Browns."

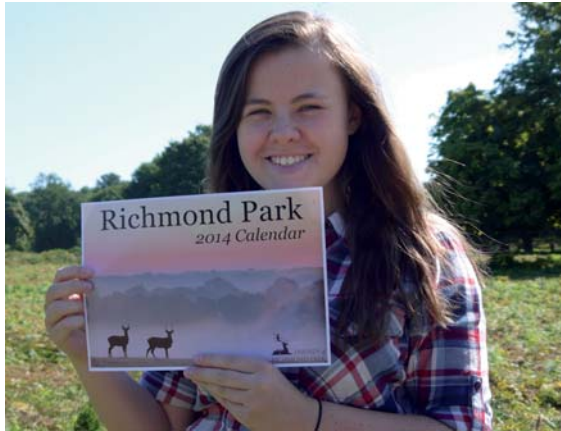
Ken Cheesman, surveying the south-western edge of the Park and Ham Bottom: "I don't think it has been a particularly good year for any species, indeed possibly slightly lower numbers in general than recently. However, Ringlets are probably now present in much larger numbers than we had thought, masked this year by the fact that there was no break in the hot weather for catching when they and the Meadow Browns were not so active, so they were difficult to tell apart."

Most of us would agree with that and now, although the figures have not yet been collated, our general feelings are that overall numbers and timings will not look much different from the most recent (four) years, indeed not quite as good as 2012 for some species – though we are pleased that Small Heath and Small Copper numbers have held up. How our results look in the wider context will have to wait until Butterfly Conservation produces its countrywide report in the new year.

Photos below of Small Copper (left) and Small Tortoiseshell (right) by Simon Silvester.



Calendar Girl *Mary Pollard*



This autumn 17-year-old Danielle Connor becomes the Calendar Girl for the Friends of Richmond Park: her stunning sunrise photograph has been selected as the cover for the new Richmond Park calendar, now on sale at the Park Visitor Centre.

Danielle is a self-taught photographer from Wimbledon, whose amazing photographs we discovered through our Facebook page. Her family, she explains, are not naturalists, or particularly interested in photography, and it was only at the age of 14 when she began walking her dog to Wimbledon Common and photographing him that she started to capture her lovely images of the natural world. She soon discovered the wonders of Richmond Park, and her early trips provided an opportunity to engage with nature and explore further, extending the range of her photography. Danielle feels Richmond Park to be enormously accessible and describes it as “a place of firsts”, with something new to see in every season, in different light throughout the day.

Soon every birthday and Christmas present brought an upgrade to her cameras; hours were spent babysitting and cat-sitting to earn money for equipment, and her work has really

benefited. Her favourite activity is arriving at the Park by sunrise during the rutting season, which she sometimes does five or six times in a month, to photograph the deer and their unusual behaviour at this time of year. She is very sensitive to the needs of wildlife, and finds that an enormous lens is definitely the way to avoid intrusion when approaching them!

Danielle’s talent is being recognised with awards such as Marwell Photographer of the Year and being short-listed for Wildlife Photographer of the Year, and she is keen to find sponsorship to help her develop her work. The Friends are honoured and grateful that she has generously donated four of her beautiful photos to the 2014 Calendar – do look out for them!

To see more of Danielle’s photographs please visit www.danielleconnor.net

Nigel Reeve interviewed by Michael Davison

Ten years ago the job titles didn’t exist. Yet in his decade as Community Ecologist, and then as Head of Ecology, for The Royal Parks, Nigel Reeve has made his role indispensable in managing London’s eight Royal Parks in a way that enables them to function as habitats for a diversity of wildlife as well as places of public recreation. Nigel’s early retirement at the age of 58 leaves Richmond Park with a large gap to fill. Park staff and volunteer wildlife groups have looked to Nigel for help and advice on safeguarding the Park’s priceless natural assets, from tallest oaks to tiniest insects, from giant stags to the grasslands they graze.

Nigel was interested in the natural world from a early age; he studied zoology at Royal Holloway College, following his BSc with a PhD in mammal ecology, with the hedgehog as his

special subject. After 20+ years as a lecturer and researcher at Roehampton University he recalls, “I felt the need to move from the academic world to a role where I could make a more practical contribution to wildlife conservation”. Already involved with the Richmond Park Wildlife Group, “when the new post of Community Ecologist was advertised I leapt at the chance and was lucky enough to get the job”.

The role of Head of Ecology “is a bit like being a consultant on the care of wildlife in the Parks”, Nigel explains, “ready with a wide range of ecological advice, services and information. As well as park management, there are contractors, statutory agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and others to negotiate with.” Asked what among his achievements for The Royal Parks has given him most satisfaction, Nigel answers, with typical generosity: “Working with colleagues and volunteers to benefit the wildlife of our Parks: nothing I have achieved has been done without the help of others”.

One of the associations he values most highly is with the Friends of Richmond Park, and especially the volunteers who work with the various wildlife groups. He praises their work as “a huge benefit to the management of the Park – obtaining, organising, digitising and analysing species records and other ecological information is a big task. I ask the Friends, don’t waver in your support, and keep on volunteering as surveyors and recorders”.

Nigel also commends the Friends’ “Tread Lightly” campaign, as pointing the way to minimising the impact of millions of visitors on the Park. “I do not think we should limit visitor numbers, but the challenge is to change the behaviour of people who unknowingly

or uncaringly disturb wildlife and damage habitats. We need to stop weighing people’s interests against wildlife conservation – we should be on the same side”.

The Friends are much in debt to Nigel for his immense contribution to our *Guide to Richmond Park*: he wrote a magnificent scene-setting opening chapter on the natural wonders of the Park, and some 30 of his own photographs illustrate the rich variety of its wildlife.

Happily, Nigel’s advice will not be entirely lost to the Park. After a year off, he plans to take on occasional ecological work and to continue with the statistical analysis of bird surveys. Meanwhile he is pleased that his successor will be joining “a small but robust Ecology unit that is now established and valued within The Royal Parks”.

Does Nigel have a favourite spot in Richmond Park? “To sit among the veteran trees in High Wood, away from the roads and car parks, is a delight,” he replies. “And the view from Ham Cross Wood over Pond Slade with a herd of deer in sight rivals the African savannah for scenic beauty.”



Nigel was given an award by the Royal Parks Guild for his Outstanding Contribution to Wildlife Conservation in the Royal Parks, particularly for his work on the conservation of acid grassland and hedgehogs (still found in Regent’s Park). He is seen here receiving the award from Linda Lennon, Chief Executive of The Royal Parks.

Membership and Subscriptions

Chris Mason has taken over from Sheila Hamilton as Membership Secretary. He has been dealing with new memberships throughout the summer, but by the time you read this, he will be dealing with all aspects of the role and will be sending out renewal notices in January. Please note that to reduce postage costs, renewal notices will be sent by email wherever we have an email address for you. The notice will be sent out early in January, so do remember to check your spam box occasionally then in case that is where communications from us end up! We will not be sending a printed New Year bulletin to everyone, again on cost grounds, and because the majority of you do now receive the monthly email Bulletin. Chris can be contacted on membership@frp.org.uk or on 0777 136 7030.

Subscription rates are £6 for an individual, £10 for a household.

Chris Mason & Sheila Hamilton

Friends on Facebook

The Park at dawn, a grumpy owl, an angry deer, the old bandstand in the Park... See pictures and stories of all of these and more at www.facebook.com/thefriendsofrichmondpark.

Volunteering

See the news item on pages 8–9 if you'd like to volunteer with the Friends.

Police non-emergency telephone number: 101

Queries about Park management?

If you have any observations or concerns about the way the Park is being managed please contact Park Manager Simon Richards at The Royal Parks, Holly Lodge, Richmond Park, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 5HS. Tel: 0300 061 2200
Email: richmond@royalparks.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.royalparks.gov.uk

Queries about Friends?

See www.frp.org.uk, or contact secretary@frp.org.uk.

Trustees

Chairman: Ron Crompton

Vice-Chairmen: Peter Burrows-Smith (Conservation & Ecology; Walks), Sheila Hamilton (Membership & Visitor Centre)

Other Trustees: Nick Coleman (Website; Events), Teresa Grafton (Education), Richard Gray (Marketing), P J Greeves (Events), Rachel Hirschler (History Project), Richard Polson (Hon. Secretary), David McLaughlin (Hon. Treasurer), Mary Pollard (Publicity; Social Media)

Vice-Presidents: Brian Baker, Richard Carter, John Collier, David McDowall, John Repsch, Douglas Reynolds, John Waller

President: Lord Rix, CBE

Patrons: Sir David Attenborough, Dame Jacqueline Wilson, Baroness Kramer of Richmond Park

Friends' walks and courses**WALKS**

All welcome. Most, though not all, walks are on Saturdays and start at 10.00am from a car park.

Please phone Peter Burrows-Smith on 020 8392 9888 in advance if you need special support or help with the walk, and please keep dogs under control.

* **COURSES** are typically a 30-minute talk at Pembroke Lodge followed by a two-hour walk. Courses are for members of the Friends only and places must be booked – please contact Sue on 020 8549 8975 or sue.gibbons@npl.co.uk. Coffee/tea provided. There will be no charge.

See also www.frp.org.uk.

There are also free guided walks in Isabella Plantation led by Park staff throughout the year. These walks last about one and a half hours and are publicised on Park notice boards.

Date	Time	What and where
16 Nov	10.00am	COURSE: Fungi (Janet Bostock & Elizabeth Cheesman)
7 Dec	10.00am	WALK: meet at Kingston Gate car park
26 Dec	10.00am	WALK: meet at Roehampton Gate car park
4 Jan	10.00am	WALK: meet at Sheen Gate car park
18 Jan	10.00am	COURSE: Introduction to Bird-watching (Peter Burrows-Smith)
1 Feb	10.00am	WALK: meet at Pembroke Lodge car park
15 Feb	10.00am	COURSE: Birds of Richmond Park (Peter Burrows-Smith)
1 Mar	10.00am	WALK: meet at Robin Hood Gate car park
15 Mar	10.00am	COURSE: Spring Birds and Bird Song (Peter Burrows-Smith)
5 Apr	10.00am	WALK: meet at Roehampton Gate car park

Other events

14 Nov 7.00–11.00pm “**Glad Rags and Glitter**” at The Belvedere, Pembroke Lodge, £60

3 Dec 7.00pm **Christmas Concert** at St Mary Magdalene Church, Richmond, £20

Both above events are in aid of Holly Lodge Centre; for details please contact the charity on 020 8940 8730 or email hlicevents@thehollylodgecentre.org.uk.

11 Jan **Friends' volunteer event** at Pembroke Lodge

12 Apr **2014 Friends' AGM**, details in spring newsletter



Registered charity No. 1133201
www.frp.org.uk

*Richmond Park is a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest
and a Special Area of Conservation*