

Spring 2016



Too close to the deer

The Visitor Centre

The Royal Forty

Ponds and streams

Starlings and hedgehogs in crisis

In memory of John Peake and Raymond Garrett

We are very sorry to report the deaths of two of the Friends' great stalwarts who have contributed much to both the Friends' work and to the Park.

John Peake had been a Friends' Trustee for over two years with responsibility for the Visitor Centre and, together with colleagues Mary Davies and Liz Hunt, had grown the popularity of the Centre to record visitor numbers and sales achieved last year (see page 8). He made a big contribution to the Friends and the Park and was very likeable, patient and friendly.

Raymond Garrett is familiar to many as the man who organised a group of people to monitor the numbers and species of butterflies in the Park. He led regular courses, walks and talks about butterflies and was an enthusiastic member of the Park's wildlife and conservations groups. Ray was also one of the few who had been a volunteer at the Visitor Centre since it opened in 2007.

Ray and John will be sadly and greatly missed by many Friends' volunteers and members.

Newsletter people

Production and Layout: Vivienne Press
Editors: Christine Ecob, Alison Glasier,
Vivienne Press
Proof Reader: Sally Wood
Advisors: Richard Gray and Ron Crompton

Cover photos by Andrew Wilson whose books *Wild in the City*, *Wild about the Thames* and *Wild about Sheen and Mortlake* contain some pictures of Richmond Park. For all his books see: www.unity-publishing.co.uk

Volunteers needed

Volunteer Co-ordinator We have 200 volunteers in several groups, including staffing the Visitor Centre. Each group is managed by a team leader who also recruits new members and we have a volunteer database managed by another volunteer. The volunteer co-ordinator role is a 'light touch' co-ordination, dealing with matters that run across the groups such as publicising our volunteering, leading the team organising our low-key annual volunteers' event and liaising with The Royal Parks. The job is likely to be half a day a week at most and two FRP Trustees are available to advise and help.

Design We're looking for a volunteer with graphic design experience to design and produce our posters, leaflets, flyers and occasional presentation material for our fairs, conservation projects, public information etc. (but not including our monthly Friends' email bulletins). The work is occasional and not complex, but projects can vary greatly so flexible skills are appreciated.

If you are interested in either of these roles please email ron.crompton@frp.org.uk

Too close for comfort



The Royal Parks had a publicity campaign last autumn to dissuade people from crowding round stags fighting and mating during the rut, because of the

stress caused to the deer and disruption of their normal behaviour.

In Bushy Park over the summer people were often feeding and stroking the fallow deer, and even holding children on their backs. You could then see those same deer invading family picnics, wanting more food, and people grabbing their children and running away in panic.

These incidents raise questions about what should be our relationship to wild (or actually semi-wild) animals. Can we use them for our entertainment or should we leave them alone and be content to see them only at a distance or through a wildlife documentary?

As more of us live in cities, fewer of us have contact with wildlife other than urbanised foxes and birds. We've closed down animal circuses and zoos have fewer large animals because of stricter animal welfare regulations. We travel more and further but human destruction of wildlife habitats and the declining numbers of many species means there are far fewer wild animals to be seen anywhere in the world.

Wildlife documentaries are a wonderful way for us to appreciate wildlife but because we see David Attenborough getting close to animals, we want to have the same experience – without

the physical and intellectual effort of his patient waiting and even more patient understanding of the animals.

All this means that we flock to places like Richmond Park where with minimal effort we can see, touch, feed and take selfies with 'wild' animals. We're not concerned that this might stress the animals; our and our children's entertainment is more important.

Occasionally, the animals hit back – as red deer do when they trample dogs or corner humans against a tree (both have happened in Richmond and Bushy in the last couple of years). Deer like those in Bushy that aggressively invade picnics will probably have to be killed because of the risk they pose to people.

Why can't we accept that we can't all see wild animals 'up close and personal' as David Attenborough does? And that using them for our entertainment degrades both them and us – and indeed destroys the wildness for which we come to see them?

Instead we might just learn to keep our distance and see their intimate habits in documentaries. I know badgers and barn owls and stag beetles exist in Richmond Park. I've occasionally seen them in my 35 years living here, but I'm content just to know that they are there. Isn't that sufficient?

Ron Crompton
143 Palewell Park
London SW14 8JJ
020 8876 1123
chairman@frp.org.uk

Interview with Adam Curtis, Assistant Park Manager

By Paul Critcher

Assistant Park Manager Adam Curtis and his family are among the lucky few allowed to live in the Park. “The lifestyle when you live on site is fantastic, but the flip side is you're always on call. On balance it's great, particularly for the family. My boys are growing up in the Park and my wife loves it.”

Adam has a background in countryside management and is responsible for the landscape, ecology and conservation in the Park. His responsibilities also include public access, paths and bridges.

He has many favourite spots in the Park. “Getting up before dawn and going out for long runs and seeing the light change and the sunrise and the mist coming off the lakes, and feeling the temperature difference when you run out of the fog into the heat is unbelievable. You really do feel that you're experiencing the seasons.”

“I love it when you see unusual wildlife in the Park. I'm a licensed bat worker, and there's a stronghold of brown long-eared bats in Sidmouth Woods where we've been doing a lot of conservation work. In summer hobbies feed over the lakes, and I've spotted a buzzard.”

Since the Park was enclosed there have always been deer – they are one of the Park's highlights. “Currently, we are running a breeding population of 630 deer and it's evident that this is the right number because the health and condition of the deer is fantastic and the Park is not overgrazed. If the

population was allowed to increase, vegetation would be damaged and eventually the deer would suffer from malnutrition. Historically, deer numbers would have been controlled by predators such as bears and wolves. In an enclosed park such as Richmond we have to manage them by culls to keep the population healthy.”

A major issue facing the Park is its ever-increasing popularity: in the past ten years visitor numbers rose from 2.2 to 5.5 million. Adam contrasts this with the total of 4 million visitors a year to all of Natural England's 163 nature reserves. “Tensions arise with greater visitor numbers and a minority of users who are inconsiderate to others – it's not cycling or motorists, it's just people. There's no magic wand.”

Another challenge for the Park's management has been the substantial reduction in funding, as Adam explains: “When I started here ten years ago we were 95% government funded; it's now 35%. We've managed to bring in income to match the reduction in budget by running events and activities on a commercial basis – for example, filming rights.

The biggest filming project was Sherlock Holmes' *Game of Shadows*, a big Hollywood blockbuster filmed in the middle of the Park. It didn't affect the Park at all and brought in great revenue.”

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Beverley Brook work completed

The work on two sections of the Beverley Brook restoration was completed during last autumn creating a more natural stream and new wildlife habitats. In February, the Friends' conservation volunteers then planted a range of native species of trees and plants, largely those that exist in the Park currently or are known to have done so from historic surveys, including Pendulous Sedge, Lesser Water Parsnip, Yellow Flag Iris, Amphibious Bistort, Purple Loosestrife and Creeping Jenny (such wonderful names!). However, it will be 2-3 years before it looks fully green again. The works included:



◆ narrowing the channel to create diversity of flow (above);



◆ woody material fixed to the bed and new gravel banks (to the left of the timber) to help flow diversity and provide habitat for fish to spawn and shelter (previous column);



◆ shallower banks which create a new habitat and enable growth of marginal plant species;



◆ the fencing and river gates that prevent deer and dogs getting into the area, allowing vegetation to establish itself and stabilise the banks.

A new backwater also provides sanctuary for fish during high water flow; this increases the flood storage capacity of the Park. We are grateful to Toby Hull of the SE Rivers Trust who led this work so well.

Pen Ponds, fish and the Royal Forty

By Nigel Jackman

The Pen Ponds

Running west to east along a shallow valley in the heart of Richmond Park, the Upper and Lower Pen Ponds are a stirring sight at all times of the year and in any weather. Surprisingly, they are not natural features: the upper pond originated in the early 17th century as a trench which was dug to drain a boggy area, and this was then widened and deepened when gravel was extracted for local building. The lower pond also began as a gravel pit.

The ponds now take in water from streams flowing from the higher ground around them, with an overflow exiting from Lower Pen Pond in the direction of Beverley Brook.

The ponds are divided by a causeway. The Upper Pen Pond measures sixteen acres and the Lower Pen Pond measures six acres. Both ponds are quite shallow (nowhere deeper than six feet) as is apparent when red deer are seen wading or swimming in them.



*Mirror Carp courtesy of Jim Boswell
www.fish-uk.com*

The fish of Pen Ponds

The ponds contain carp (Mirror, Common and Crucian), pike, bream, tench, roach, rudd and eels. For more about these and other fish see www.fish-uk.com/fish_species.htm

Overall, the fish stocks seem to be sustainable and healthy. However, there are probably no more than fifteen large carp in each of the ponds, mainly a mixture of Mirror and Common, whereas in the past, the ponds were used to rear carp for food. There have been no efforts to supplement the carp stocks since it was last done twenty years ago by the Environment Agency.

Angling at Pen Ponds

Being shallow, clear and weedy, the ponds provide good sport although most visitors will see little more than a splash and ripple, a brief sight of a tail or fin, a bird with a fish in its bill or a catch on the end of an angler's line.

However, anglers describe Pen Ponds as a difficult location due to frequent disturbance by people, dogs and deer. Upper Pen Pond is the more difficult lake for fishing but can be more rewarding as the fish here are larger. However, Lower Pen Pond does hold carp to the mid-30s weight in pounds.

The Royal Forty: a revered carp dies



Louis Archer with the Royal Forty in 2010

Of all the fish in Pen Ponds none was more revered by anglers than the Royal Forty, a magnificent Mirror Carp so named because of her home in the Royal Park and her weight. Most serious anglers targeted the Royal Forty which at top weight was around 45lbs, but had weighed in at 48lbs. She was described as one of the most sought-after carp in the land and was fished every year after coming to attention in the early 1990s. However, after living for more than forty years, age eventually took its toll on the Royal Forty; sadly she died in July 2015.

The fish held iconic status and Ritchie McDonald, a legend amongst carp anglers, regarded netting her as his finest hour. He was reputedly in Richmond Park for the official good-bye and to lay a cross in remembrance!

Looking optimistically to the future, a couple of the carp at Pen Ponds may have the pedigree to become great fish too.

Fishing permits for Pen Ponds

Carp angling and general coarse fishing in Pen Ponds is available, by permit only, from 16 June to 14 March. Permits are issued by the Park Authority from Holly Lodge at £30 per rod, and at the last count there were 69 current permit holders (149 rods). An Environment Agency National Rod License is also required. All catches must be returned to the water uninjured and without undue delay. Night fishing is not permitted.

Shire horses



Operation Centaur, the organisation that provides the Royal Parks' Shires, is again offering **carriage rides** in 2016. For dates please see www.operationcentaur.com These carriage rides are the main fundraising activity for our therapy and conservation projects.

From Easter, we will also be offering livery services in the Old Police Stables at Holly Lodge, and we invite expressions of interest for sharers for our therapy horses.

How to answer 42,500 questions... and keep smiling!



Some of the friendly volunteers who open the Visitor Centre 364 days of the year

Must be patient, helpful, diplomatic, able to work flexible hours, numerate and happy to muck in, know Richmond Park intimately and like people (even difficult ones): oh...and there's no pay!

This could be a job description for volunteers working in the Visitor (or Information) Centre by Pembroke Lodge, providing help and information and selling a range of books, maps and gifts. They now number over 70, each working on average two shifts a month. Around a dozen have worked at the Visitor Centre since it first opened in 2007, so obviously it's rewarding work.

The Visitor Centre was originally planned by Friends' trustees (now

vice presidents) Sheila Hamilton and Brian Baker in autumn 2006 and later another Friends' trustee, Rachel Hirschler, joined this management team. An agreement was made between The Royal Parks, Hearsam Trust Foundation and the Friends. Initially, the Royal Parks Foundation provided a grant for fittings and the Hearsam Trust also gave support until the Centre became self-funding.

In the early days, opening hours were weekends and Bank Holidays only. Now, subject to sufficient volunteers, the Centre is open every day, except Christmas Day.

Much of the free help and information supplied, as well as many of the items sold, deliver strong messages

on protection and conservation in the Park – including the thousands of copies bought of the Friends' Guide to Richmond Park and Family Trails books. Other items for sale include Park maps, the Friends Calendar, honey, mugs, greetings cards, post-cards, pens, bookmarks, and children's toys.



Mary Davies in the Visitor Centre

Visitor numbers to the Centre have grown from 20,000 in the early years to 32,600 in 2014 and, last year, a 30% rise to nearly 42,500. The Centre's visitors' book is testament to the popularity of the Park and has been signed by citizens from 57 countries from Albania to Vietnam, many saying how much they cherish the Park and appreciate help from the Centre's volunteers. Not only are the volunteers dealing with thousands more enquiries but now they sell dozens of different items which, in 2014, achieved £28,000 in sales, but last year this rose a staggering 36% to £38,000.

Selling was not initially a priority but all profits go back into conservation and wildlife projects in the Park and the recent works on Beverley Brook

(see page 5) designed to bring back fish and other wildlife, had significant funding from these sales. Other projects that have benefitted include Pen Ponds' tern rafts and works on Ham Pond.

To enhance the range and deliver a stronger message about the Friends and Park conservation, several new items will be available by Easter that feature the Friends' logos and name (see leaflet with this newsletter).

Today, the Visitor Centre is run by Mary Davies, who manages stocks of free and sale items, and Liz Hunt who handles housekeeping and volunteer admin. They and other volunteers demonstrate the full range of required skills answering questions as diverse as the perennial "Where are the deer" to "Where's King Henry's Mound...I urgently need to get there as I'm meeting my girlfriend to get there as I'm meeting my girlfriend to propose to her"!



Eye-catching double-sided shopping bag, one of the new Friends' items for sale in the Visitor Centre; see leaflet enclosed.

We are very sad to report the deaths last January of John Peake and Raymond Garrett. John was the Friends' trustee with responsibility for the Visitor Centre and its rotas and accounts, and Ray had been a volunteer since the Visitor Centre opened. We will miss them greatly and pay tribute on page 2.

Hedgehogs

By Ron Crompton

A report last year on Britain's hedgehog population estimated that since 2000 they have declined by at least half in rural areas and a third in urban areas.



Photo from www.hedgehogstreet.org

Regent's Park is the only one of London's Royal Parks known to have a breeding population. Research conducted there last year found a small population of 30-40 hedgehogs, including young hoglets (yes, that's what they're called!). The researchers used thermal imaging cameras, radio tagging and GPS tracking to record their movements and behaviour.

Not surprisingly, the hedgehogs were found to prefer foraging in shrubberies and hedges and avoided the very short open grassland in public areas and sports pitches. They also travelled up to a mile a night to forage. They were found nesting in dense scrub and used up to four different day nests during the week-long survey. The study was featured on BBC *Springwatch* last year.

So why are there no hedgehogs in Richmond Park?

There are occasional sightings; last year a hedgehog was found having fallen through a cattle grid and some were seen in the garden of one of the gate lodges on the edge of the Park. These few may either be coming through the gates from the surrounding area or have been released into the Park.

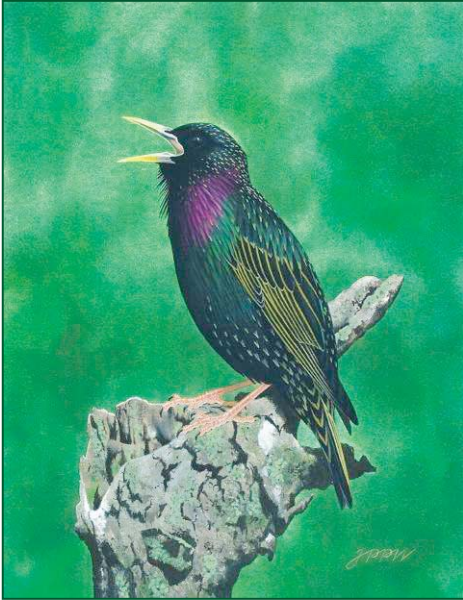
No one knows quite why there are so few here but it is likely that the walls are a big obstacle to hedgehogs getting into the Park and badgers and foxes may prey on any that do make it through. No past records exist, other than vague anecdotal evidence. Hedgehogs do live in Bushy Park where they were re-introduced, or the existing population boosted, in recent years.

Based on the research findings, The Royal Parks are making changes to habitat management in Regent's Park and trialing the use of nest boxes. Further monitoring is planned for 2016. Maybe as a result of the current interest we will welcome hedgehogs back to Richmond Park one day.

You can find out more about the hedgehog research at http://www.supporttheroyalparks.org/vi_sit_the_parks/the_regents_park/hedge_hogs

For simple things that you can do to help your local hedgehogs see www.hedgehogstreet.org

Where have all the starlings gone? by Hugh Bradshaw



Starling: painting by Jan Wilczur

Although it was once common to find starlings nesting in the Park's ancient trees, they have now all but disappeared as a breeding bird. This decline mirrors the national decline in starling numbers.

However, as starlings still nest in the houses of Richmond and Barnes, are other factors contributing to their decline in the Park? Could grey squirrels be preying on the starlings' eggs or are the increasing numbers of parakeets out-competing them for nest sites?

The Richmond Park Bird Recording Group would like your help in finding out why tree-nesting starlings are in such crisis in the Park. When walking in the Park this spring, ***please look out for tree-nesting starlings and send any records to hughtjbradshaw@gmail.com*** noting the location in the Park and, if possible, the species of tree. Breeding starlings are particularly easy to locate in early spring when the males sit next to their nest holes, delivering their cheery songs and flapping their wings in a bravura attempt to attract passing females.

With your help we can try and reverse the decline in this popular bird.

New Chelsea Stadium

The view from King Henry's Mound (KHM) to St Paul's Cathedral about 10 miles away is one of London's ten protected views. The protection prevents tall building developments that obscure the view between KHM and the cathedral or behind it. Chelsea's Stamford Bridge stadium is roughly half way along the view and is just visible from the Mound.

The Club has applied for planning permission to construct a new 60,000-seater stadium. The planning documents show that the protected view has done its job and substantially limited what Chelsea can do. Although the stadium will be visible from the Mound, the building will sit well below the cathedral and should not detract from this treasured view.

Pond Works

Bishop's Pond is located next to the Tamsin Trail near Bishop's Lodge and Richmond Gate and is well known for its grey heron. It virtually dried up in late summer for no obvious reason. However, it now seems likely that during work to reduce leaks in the mains water pipes supplying buildings in the Park, The Royal Parks inadvertently plugged a hole from which water had been leaking into the pond! Mains water is not a desirable supply for a natural pond so TRP are now aiming to install a drain to take run-off from the road and horse ride near Richmond Gate across to the pond.



Bishop's Pond

Gallows Pond near Kingston Gate was heavily colonised by the invasive non-native New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*); a similar colonisation occurred in Ham Ponds. The pond also tends to dry up in summer. Rather than clear out the existing pond, with the risk that traces of the weed would remain, last autumn Royal Parks contractors filled in the old weed-contaminated pond and dug a new pond slightly further up the hill from the old one. They have also demolished the culvert, which took away water from the pond and under the road, and replaced it with an open ditch so that the water flows more freely down to the Park wall. Gallows Pond is temporarily fenced off to allow marginal plants to establish themselves without deer and dog interference.

Dann's Pond is in the south of the Park, across the road from Ladderstile Gate and is a habitat for the rare Great Crested Newt (see the article in our autumn newsletter). Phased restoration started in 2010 when one third of the pond was cleared of overhanging trees and de-silted, improving the habitat for the newts. A further third was de-silted and vegetation cleared over the last year. Once that has settled down, the final third will be done in a few years' time. The work involves clearing vegetation and raking the ground during the summer whilst the newts are in the water, then the pond can be desilted in autumn when the newts have emerged and are hibernating.

Pembroke Lodge car park

During the winter, The Royal Parks did extensive work to upgrade Pembroke Lodge car park. The southern end was re-surfaced (eliminating the long-established potholes!) and an interceptor tank installed to prevent pollutants that are washed off the car park from entering into the park ditches and ponds. The northern end will be re-surfaced when funding is available. The pedestrian walkway through the disabled parking area in the centre of the car park has been extended to the road, giving a clear path for pedestrians from Pembroke Lodge to the parkland.

In addition, the Tamsin Trail north of the Visitor Centre, which was badly eroded, has been given a harder surface.

Trees and bushes have been planted within the car park and two enclosures created on the opposite side of the road. These are all designed to screen the road and car park visually from the interior of the park, to encourage pedestrians to cross at the raised crossing points and to demarcate the area as a pedestrian zone thereby helping to slow traffic.

The Royal Parks have commissioned W.S. Atkins, the engineering consultants, to look at ways of improving the inadequate pedestrian crossings at Pembroke Lodge and at other places in the Park, something that the Friends have been lobbying about for a few years now.

What's in a name?

Spanker's Hill, Bone Copse, Thompson's Teeth, Bishop's Pond – the Park is full of enigmatic names and others that appear obvious but are not what they seem. Now you can find out where they come from thanks to Max Lankester who has written '*What's in a Name*' – this is an illustrated booklet that is available, **free to download** on our website: www.frp.org.uk/news/1355-whats-in-a-name or via the Hearsam Collection's website: www.hearsumcollection.org.uk

Max is a Hearsam Collection Trustee and an expert on the history of Richmond Park.

To test your knowledge:

Who was the Bishop after whom the pond was named? Well, several areas are named after Kings, Queens and Lords, but our bishop was no high man of the cloth – Bishop's Pond is named after humble William Bishop and his son Charles who were assistant keepers between 1790 and 1830.

And why are Pen Ponds so named? There are now many swans, so maybe they are named after the female swan? But no – the name comes from deer pens of which there were many in the Park.

Membership and Subscriptions

If you want to receive the monthly Friends' bulletin by email, and are not already doing so, then please email bulletins@frp.org.uk with the subject 'Add to bulletin' – you can easily stop it at any time.

As you are all aware memberships have changed: individual membership is now £10 and household membership is £15. If you have not already updated your standing order, then can I ask that you do so now. This will ensure that you continue to receive the newsletter and bulletin, but more importantly you continue to support the Friends of Richmond Park and all its projects. Thank you.

Chris Mason (membership)

Enquiries

Friends: see www.frp.org.uk. If your query is not answered here, please email secretary@frp.org.uk

Park management: contact Park Manager Simon Richards, 0300 061 2200 or email Richmond@royalparksgsl.gov.uk

Police non-emergency telephone number: 101

This newsletter is printed on paper which is 50% recycled and 50% from certified sustainable forests.

Isabella and Pembroke Lodge win awards

Every year, the Richmond Society gives awards for developments in the local area. In 2015 one of the three highest 'brass plaque' awards was given to the new disabled visitor reception and improved access paths at Isabella Plantation. The award said that "*The new green oak clad centre with sustainable soak away and the improvements to paths throughout the plantation were of the highest grade.*" The reception building has some very good interpretation boards and the best loos in the Park!



The new terracing and planting in the rear garden at Pembroke Lodge also won a Certificate of Commendation.



Our congratulations to Park management and the designers and contractors.

Friends' Walks

All welcome. Friends' Walks are free, last about two hours and start from a car park. All except Bird Walks are on Saturdays starting at 10am unless otherwise stated. If you need special support or help with the walk, please phone Ian McKenzie on 020 8943 0632 in advance, or 07824 784335 only on the walk day itself. Please keep dogs under control. See also www.frp.org.uk

Date	Starting at 10am from
2 April	Roehampton Gate car park + Walk the Wall option
16 Apr	Dawn Chorus walk (Sheen Gate 5am)
2 May	Spring Bird Count (Details to follow)
7 May	Broomfield Hill car park
4 Jun	Pen Ponds car park
2 Jul	Sheen Gate car park

Plus Informal Bird Walks every Friday at 9.30am from Pen Ponds coffee kiosk.

Friends' AGM

The 55th AGM will be held on Saturday 16 April at the normal venue, King's House School. The agenda and papers are sent with this newsletter.



This year we have six activities planned, beginning with an owl pellet dissection workshop with Susanna Ramsey and the Nature Collection, and finishing with a 'Moon Watch' led by an experienced astronomer. Birds, poos and prints, bats and fungi are themes of events in the months in between.

In March, Discoverers volunteers and Janet Bostok will, for the first time, be hosting a group of young people from Surrey Docks Young Farmers' Project, learning about environmental issues at first hand in Richmond Park.

For more information see www.discoverers.frp.org.uk

Friends' Courses

Courses begin at 10am and are typically a 30-minute talk at Pembroke Lodge followed by a two-hour walk. Courses are for members of the Friends only and do not need to be booked – just turn up. There is no charge and coffee and tea are provided. See also www.frp.org.uk

- 21 May** **The Ecology of Richmond Park**, led by Bill Elms
18 June **Beverley Brook project site visit**, led by Julia Balfour – meet at Roehampton Gate car park

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www.frp.org.uk



Pen Ponds by Andrew Wilson

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