

A Bird for Richmond Park

By Nigel Jackman Richmond Park Bird Recording Group

Inspired by a campaign last year to elect a 'national bird' for Britain, the Richmond Park Bird Recording Group have followed suit and a bird for Richmond Park has been chosen.

The UK poll, launched by The Urban Birder ornithologist David Lindo, offered a shortlist of ten birds. More than 200,000 people voted with the robin winning, followed by the blackbird and the barn owl. Other contenders included the blue tit, mute swan, kingfisher, red kite and wren, and all these eight birds can be seen in Richmond Park.

Encouraged by the interest sparked by the national campaign, the Bird Recording Group decided to choose its own avian representative for Richmond Park. The criteria were that the chosen bird should:

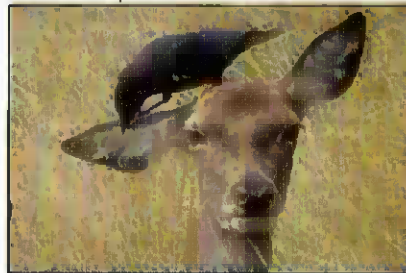
- be an all-year resident
- be recognisable to all – not just enthusiasts
- truly represent the character of the Park
- not be selected just to represent a particular preservation cause

The resulting deliberations produced a shortlist of the following four candidates:

Green Woodpecker – commonly seen and heard, brightly coloured with subtle distinction between the plumage of the male (next column), female and juvenile (facing page). Symbolic of the park through its association with acid grassland and oak trees.



Jackdaw – numerous, seen everywhere, including around people; has a gregarious, 'cheeky chappie' personality and an easily recognised call. Frequently feeds on grassland and is often seen with (and on) the deer of the park.



Little Owl – well represented in the park, albeit a less common and more secretive bird. Unusually amongst owls it is diurnal, so it can be seen during the day. An owl for the park with its rich woodland and grassland habitat. A 'cuddly' choice.



Kestrel – small numbers in the Park but more populous than other raptors. Seen frequently, whether hunting or at rest, with subtle distinction between male and female plumage. Its soft and friendly face disguises the nature of this bird as a silent assassin.



The Richmond Park Bird Recording Group together with regular attendees of the Friday Bird Group **overwhelmingly voted for the Green Woodpecker.**

Endorsements received included:

"I think the green woodpecker wins because it combines a need for mature trees with tree holes for nesting with a requirement for anti-hilly, invertebrate-rich open grassland. So the acid grassland and ancient trees both fit into the picture. Also very likely for a visitor to see and hear anywhere in the park."

"My vote would go for Green Woodpecker – such a charismatic species both visually attractive and a wonderful yaffle call."

"I'd vote for the green woodpecker. I think people walking in the Park see it a lot as it flies up from the ground. It bridges the trees and the grassland."

The Friends marketing team is currently looking at ways to adopt the Green Woodpecker as a wildlife emblem for the Park.



Juvenile woodpecker above, female below and male previous page



Green Woodpeckers

- The largest of the UK's three woodpeckers
- Population of approx. 52,000 in the UK.
- Estimated more than 100 breeding territories in Richmond Park – the largest local population in London.
- Nests in holes in mature trees, especially oak, ash and birch
- 4 to 6 eggs laid March to mid-June
- Young hatch after about 19 days, fly after about another 21 days and become independent a further 3 to 7 weeks later