

The magazine of the Friends of Richmond Park

Spring/Summer 2023

# Park Life

In Richmond's National Nature Reserve



**Sir David Attenborough opens new woodland**  
**Three 100 year anniversaries**  
**Park Police and Rangers**  
**New paths — a step too far**

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### Park Life continues to evolve

As announced in our January bulletin, Park Life has now become bigger — 24 pages rather than 16, and twice a year (May and November) rather than three times a year. This gives the same amount to read over a year with substantially less printing and postage costs. We hope you enjoy this longer format — please send any comments to [editor@frp.org.uk](mailto:editor@frp.org.uk)

### Vivienne Press says goodbye and welcomes Joanna Mills

After eight years as Editor and Producer of the Newsletter and now Park Life, I am handing over this role into the expert hands of Joanna Mills.

Since moving to Richmond 20 years ago, the Park has become essential for my well-being. As I have limited mobility and can't walk far or cycle, I love seeing the views as I drive. Sadly, the recent road closures have taken away my favourite drive down Broomfield Hill and removed my ability to access the north and eastern sides of the Park at the weekends. Improving access to green spaces for the 18% of the adult population with limited mobility is an important and evolving issue across the UK.

Through Park Life, I have learnt a huge amount about the Park and enjoyed working with our expert team — many many thanks to you all. And special thanks to those who have been part of this team throughout the whole eight years: advisor Ron Crompton, wildlife specialist Nigel Jackman, sub-editors Christine Ecob and Alison Glasier (who is also one of our reporters), proof-reader Sally Wood and printers Tim Tyler and Jon Bull at Selsey Press. It's also been a pleasure to work with the many amazing photographers whose wonderful photos really make all our publications. And the highlight for me was a hand-written letter of appreciation from Sir David Attenborough!



Joanna has been a Friend of Richmond Park for a couple of years but has lived in the area (East Sheen) for much longer. She's spent most of her career in journalism, mainly with the BBC, and has also worked for an environmental campaigning organisation and most recently for an MP.

Joanna says: "Richmond Park was a lifeline during Covid when I was working from home and getting real cabin-fever. Walking in the Park early every morning, whatever the weather, set me up for the day – I then didn't mind spending the next few hours logged on to my computer. There's so much of it to love, but especially witnessing the seasons change throughout the year."

Front cover photo: Sir David Attenborough and new friend © The Royal Parks, Chris O'Donovan

## New Paths — a step too far by Roger Hillyer

January to March this year saw extensive work on paths in Richmond Park, causing one of the biggest changes in the Park's physical environment in the past 25 years. While The Royal Parks carried out some works last year, we were surprised by the speed and extent of these latest works.

The long-term increase in visitor numbers and high footfall has had a big impact on the landscape, and climate change is bringing periods of heavy rain and periods of drought. This damages paths and, in some areas, they have become wider and wider as walkers spread out. Path works can keep people to a narrower area and so help habitats recover.

However, Richmond Park is special because of its essential character. As the Management Plan under which it is run says, it is a place "whose character is semi-natural, managed, arranged and, to some degree, designed — albeit with a strong response to and expression of nature."

We understand the need for some works as The Royal Parks wrestles with the two challenges of visitor numbers and climate change. The initial works last year and indeed some of this year's works seem to be a reasonable response.

But the extent of this year's works, for example in creating new man-made paths where previously there was only a natural path, have moved the balance away from Richmond Park as a semi-natural space towards a more urbanised park.

Photo: new path from Oak Lodge to Pen Ponds causeway © Nick Coleman



New paths and upgraded bridle ways will change visitor behaviour: some may lead visitors to areas that were previously quiet; cyclists may be unclear on the path's status and go where they are not allowed. All this needs time to be understood. And in terms of practicality, it will also take time to appreciate the maintenance and repair implications and any issues when rainfall causes erosion and puddles.

The shock of the colour of a new path may blend in over time, but it's time for a pause, a time to take stock. We might find it difficult to articulate what we mean by the essential character of Richmond Park, but we know when we're losing it.



## Early morning magic in Richmond Park by Steve Read

A walk in the Park is always rewarding and especially so with the allure of the pre-dawn light and the added appeal of having the Park almost to yourself. However, in the spring and summer, this means a very early clamber out of bed!

One of the first things you'll notice is the absence of parakeet chatter. Thankfully, these birds are not early risers and combined with little or no aircraft noise, you can take in the full sound palette of the Park's residents. The night shift of tawny owls can still be heard calling, alongside the dawn chorus stalwarts of robin and blackbird as they start the day shift. As the spring rolls on and the light levels rise, the richness and complexity of this early morning chorus rises too. Year-round residents like song thrush, mistle thrush and treecreeper are joined by summer migrants including blackcap, garden warbler and common whitethroat. If lucky, you might hear a cuckoo calling.



It never fails to amaze me how the red deer temperament changes as soon as the first calves are born in May. The hinds become incredibly protective and anxiously watch human visitors and their dogs, surrounding or following you until you move away from where they may have secreted their calves. The golden rule is to keep at least 50 yards away.

Photo above: Stag at Dawn © Mads Bjerke [www.madsbjerke.com](http://www.madsbjerke.com)

Remember that the Park's vehicle gates are closed until 7am in summer, but the pedestrian gates are open 24 hours a day, except during deer culls.

As soon as the calves have become acquainted with their legs, they are led out into the Park, quickly dispersing into the newly-emerging bracken croziers. As these bracken fronds begin to unfurl, they provide the fallow deer, who give birth a few weeks later, the perfect environment to hide their newborn fawns. In the quiet of a still early morning, you can sometimes hear the plaintive bleat of mothers and offspring seeking out each other.

Standing amongst the mighty oaks, take a moment to look up into the canopy, where no sooner have the fresh leaves begun to unfurl than they are eaten by a myriad of invertebrates, like the green oak tortrix larvae (*Tortrix viridana*). Fortunately, oaks are resilient and can re-flush an entire canopy of leaves. It's in this canopy you might see large numbers of small birds, mainly tit species who time the hatching of their eggs to coincide with this superabundance of readily available food.



Away from the trees, on the acid grassland dotted with anthills, I keep an eye out for any signs of a late migrant wheatear flitting around or a resident green woodpecker thrusting its powerful beak into an anthill. Standing alongside Pen Ponds with the glorious sight of the sun rising behind the Ballet School, I'll pause to see and listen to the water birds. Sometimes I'll watch newly hatched bundles of downy feathered ducklings bimbly across the water surface in pursuit of their parents, or hear the now sizeable grey heron chicks croak and squabble over food offerings.

Lawn field, between the Ballet School and Pen Ponds, is one of the best places in spring and summer to hear the beautiful, lilting song of the skylark. Catch it early enough, without the planes and general hubbub, and let the song wash over you. See if you can spot the songster high up as the sky lightens, pouring out the sweetest of songs.

This is some of what awaits the early visitor. And as you leave the sanctity of the Park to join the hustle and bustle, you will be ready to start your day... give it a try.

Photo above: tree creeper with breakfast! ©David Mathews

# 100 years of bird recording

## by Nigel Jackman, Chair of the Richmond Park Bird Group

**Richmond Park is a very special place for birds and 100 years of bird recording has significantly contributed to this.**



216 bird species have been recorded since 1921 and 172 of them in the last decade. We are all familiar with the ubiquitous parakeets, crows, jackdaws, tits etc. But occasionally surprising rarities have been seen, such as the Montagu's harrier (spotted in 2011), bittern (2004), black-throated diver (1965) and curlew sandpiper (1938).

We know all this because there are records going back more than a century, compiled by volunteer observers (including notably Cyril Collonette in the 1930s) who reported their findings to the Committee on Bird Sanctuaries in the Royal Parks. One of its roles was to ensure there was suitable vegetation and shelter in the Park.

The Committee was disbanded in 1977 and its work was taken on by official Bird Recorders, elected and supported by members of what is now the Richmond Park Bird Group (RPBG). These were Barry Marsh, who was the Recorder for nearly 40 years, Tim Howard, Jan Wilczur (who in 2012 wrote 'A Review of the Birds of Richmond Park') and now Phill Pentek.

*Painting above: Skylark and her eggs © JanWilczur. Photo right: little egret ©Nigel Jackman.*

Phill visits the Park several times a week, recording all his sightings and collating this with the records of numerous other birders. The RPBG organise a 'standard walk' monthly count, a twice-yearly whole Park count and surveys of populations of special interest. From all this data, Phill produces quarterly reports and an annual breeding report for the RPBG, the Park's Wildlife Group and Park management.

The comprehensiveness and continuity of information is unusual and invaluable. It helps provide a holistic view of the bird life and allows the RPBG to monitor and interpret, over the decades, resident, migrant and vagrant bird populations and changes in breeding patterns, and contributes to regional and national data.

In the case of Pen Ponds, it encouraged us to seek improvements to the island, which was slowly eroding. Common terns started breeding for the first time ever in the Park a few years ago until they were ousted by the more aggressive black-headed gulls. Within a few months of the island being upgraded, the common terns were breeding again.

Skylark numbers have fluctuated, but have thankfully stabilised since protection measures were put in place a decade or so ago. The challenge now is to hold on to or build our local breeding population against a worrying background of numbers plummeting nationally where the species is in critical decline.

In 2013, knowing that sand martins would never breed because of a lack of nesting sites, the RPBG persuaded the Royal Parks to install an artificial nest bank, funded by the Friends, at Upper Pen Pond. Within just a few years, sand martins began using the nest bank in good numbers, sometimes raising two broods. A real success story.

The records confirm the disappearance of several of the Park's species including marsh tit, hawfinch, tree sparrow, common partridge and red-backed shrike, and the decline in others such as starling, spotted flycatcher, garden warbler, skylark and swallow.

On the positive side, some species once absent are becoming more commonplace. These include little egret, Egyptian goose, buzzard, red kite, raven, Cetti's warbler and a bird that divides opinions, the ring-necked parakeet.

Bird recording, by encouraging the maintenance and improvement of habitats and the protection particularly of breeding birds, has helped the Park to continue to be a sanctuary for birds and a place for visitors to enjoy both rare and common species.





## Members' Memories — The first Bewick swan

by Barry Marsh, Richmond Park Bird Recorder 1949-1989

In the autumn and winter of 1948 I had to cycle daily through Richmond Park to attend college near Kew Gardens. Passing Pen Ponds twice a day gave me the chance to note anything of interest birdwise – by the end of that year, the Upper pond was nearly full after post-war restorations. At this time, it had a resident flock of between 40 and 50 mute swans.



One day in December, when I reached the causeway, a small group of swans of mixed ages drifted towards me. One was noticeably smaller than the mute swans and had a totally different colouring, with an even, greyish plumage and a pinkish-coloured bill.

As I looked at this bird an unfamiliar bird call came from further out on the pond. A quick scan with my binoculars soon discovered the culprits, three adult swans with bright yellow beaks. I had discovered my first Park rarities, but were they Bewicks or whoopers?

I phoned Bob Hayman, the only competent birder I knew at the time, who worked at the Natural History Museum. By lunchtime, their presence was confirmed and by evening it was decided they were Bewick's swans – the first time they'd been seen in the Park and only the eleventh occurrence in the London area. Many birders came to see the swans which could be viewed at relatively close range.

I borrowed a camera to photograph them. The young bird was clearly unafraid of me unlike the adults who were far more timid (*photo above* ©Barry Marsh).

They stayed three weeks before moving on to a pond near East Grinstead in Surrey when Pen Ponds froze over. Since 1948 there have been at least four more occurrences, all at or over Pen Ponds, with Mike Lewis recording a group of twenty on October 27th 1991.

## Guild Award for Barry Marsh



The Royal Parks Guild awards a trophy annually to an individual who has made a significant contribution to wildlife conservation. In 2022, the recipient was Barry Marsh.

Barry has moved to Devon so joined the ceremony last November online. But the Park's last manager, Simon Richards, has also retired to Devon, and so was nearby to hand Barry the trophy and certificate in person, and to thank him for his huge contribution to Richmond Park over more than 70 years.

*Photo of Barry with his wife Gillian and daughters Nicola and Debra, and the award.*

## The Rangers of Richmond Park building on success



In spring 2019, following a proposal from the Friends, The Royal Parks (TRP) began a trial of volunteer rangers in Richmond (and Bushy) Park. Their role is to provide visitors with information and advice so that they 'Tread Lightly' and 'Help Nature Thrive' in the Park. They find that most people change their behaviour once they understand the effect it may be having on the wildlife. However, Rangers will phone the police if they spot an issue that needs them – such as a dog chasing deer.

TRP's Volunteer Officer for Richmond and Bushy Parks, Jo Meays, kindly gave an interview to the Friends. Jo organises the Rangers' initial training and the 'volunteer package' that includes excellent monthly emails, monthly socials in a local pub, and on-going training with walks and talks about the Park.

There are now 79 active Rangers in Richmond Park, reaching around 20,000 visitors a year. Once a Ranger, people rarely drop out – only four in the last year! Jo sends a reminder to those who haven't booked a session for three months, and most then start booking again.

They work in pairs, walking around the Park in 2-hour sessions from 10.30am to 4pm in winter, and longer in the summer months. There is one pair at a time in the Park during the week and two pairs at weekends. This means that the current numbers just about cover a week, if they do on average one session each – however, many do more.

Rangers book their own sessions on a shared spreadsheet. The starting place in the Park varies, depending on particular needs, such as skylark nesting, the rangers' own preference and advice from the Police. Jo is in close contact with the Police, especially as they share the same building in Holly Lodge.

Rangers are great at giving feedback to Jo with concerns about the Park and ideas for the future. One idea is to add stationary rangers – at car parks and at Pen Ponds – with a table with information about the Park.

The Rangers have been so successful that TRP are about to extend the programme to Regent's Park.

If you would like to become a Richmond Park Ranger, Jo will be advertising soon on Park notice boards and on TRP's volunteering webpage for new Rangers to increase their numbers in the Park.

*Photo: Jane & Michael with new recruit, the Tangerine Team! © Michael Parker*

**Reported by Vivienne Press**



# The Parks' Police — Sergeant Pete Sturgess educating, informing and enforcing

Sergeant Pete Sturgess had been in the police for 19 years when he decided to apply for a rather different post within the Metropolitan Police Force. With two children, he had long been a fan of Richmond and Bushy Parks and when the chance came to be the sergeant in charge of operations in both the Parks, he jumped at it, beating off the competition and securing the job in November 2019.

Little did he know what lay around the corner – within three months of taking the job on, he and the Parks were plunged into the challenges of the Covid pandemic. With sudden rule changes about access for people, cars, bikes and dogs, size of groups and if you could sit down, people

were confused and sometimes angry but, in general, he found that most people were happy to comply. It all depends on how you approach them, he says.

And this is how Pete and his team approach all their work; they are here to help and co-operate with the Park visitors, seeking to educate and inform visitors before, if necessary, moving to enforcement.

Pete heads a team of officers, working in pairs seven days a week from 7am to 10pm, and two special constables who work a minimum of two eight-hour shifts per month.

Pete and his team liaise with and are supported by the volunteer Rangers and



Pete and his team rely on the public to report anything suspicious or concerning, so please do contact them on their direct line 07920 586546 or email [richmondpark@met.police.uk](mailto:richmondpark@met.police.uk)

The Royal Park's wildlife officers who help keep them informed and updated. However, as there are only two police officers covering both Richmond and Bushy Parks at any one time, for much of the time there are no police in Richmond Park.

There is plenty to occupy Pete and his team who get around the Parks either in the police buggy (a bit like a golf cart), in a police car or on their bikes. They are responsible for enforcing the Park Regulations as well as UK Law and road regulations.



Unauthorised commercial vehicles, illegal parking, off-road cycling and car speeding are areas of focus.

Speeding is a tricky issue where bikes are concerned – while some cyclists argue that speed limits do not apply to them as bikes are not 'vehicles', Pete and his team do have other powers including enforcing the offence of using a cycle in a manner that endangers or is likely to endanger another person.

A key part of the role is ensuring the protection of wildlife. Pete is passionate about the wildlife and emphasises that we are in their home. Throughout the year, much police time is taken up with visitors harassing the deer and occasionally with dogs, when they chase, and even kill, deer. Owners generally say that they didn't think their dog would do this. Pete advises: *"It's not like a normal council Park – if you can't recall your dogs, consider whether the Park is the place to let them off-lead."*

Enforcing the barbecue ban is also important. Unfortunately, some people don't realise that a stray spark could start a huge blaze and others place their BBQs in the hollows of ancient oaks, destroying them.

Weather has forced the closure of the Park when storm conditions have made it too dangerous for the public but Pete says, *"Still some people risk life and limb by climbing over the fence and then claiming that they didn't see the notice."*

It's clear, talking to Pete, that he loves his job. One proud moment was when Sir David Attenborough was filming in Richmond Park and needed a lift. Pete was able to transport him in the police buggy, managing to take a selfie en-route!

## Reported by Alison Glasier

*Photo left: Sgt Pete Sturgess with the electric bike donated by the Friends of Richmond Park, with Friends' Chairman Roger Hillyer (left) and Trustee Nick Coleman (right).*

*Above: Sir David Attenborough and Sgt Sturgess*



# Platinum Jubilee Woodland – opened by Friends' Patrons Sir David Attenborough and Clare Balding

A year after our late Queen planted a tree at Windsor to launch the Queen's Green Canopy, Sir David Attenborough with help from Discoverers' children and Clare Balding, on 20 March planted the final two of 70 trees in a new woodland in Richmond Park. What began as a celebration of the Jubilee has become a living legacy and the Park's first new woodland since 1993.



*Discoverers children running to greet Sir David Attenborough ©The Royal Parks, Chris O'Donovan*

Earlier, at a reception in Pembroke Lodge attended by 130 guests and FRP volunteers, Clare Balding spoke of her love of Richmond Park. There were also presentations from Dan Rex, Chief Executive of the Queen's Green Canopy, Richmond Park Manager Paul Richards and Friends' Chair Roger Hillyer.

Guests and volunteers then walked down the Tamsin Trail led by Friends' vice-president Richard Gray who had conceived the event, to watch the final trees being planted. *"It is a great thing and a privilege to plant a tree,"* Sir David told them – and no-one disagreed with that.

The 70 new trees (one for each year of the late Queen's reign) include oak, small-leaved lime, sweet chestnut and elms resistant to Dutch elm disease. They join a number of mature trees on the site, surrounded by a new native hedge.



*Sir David Attenborough and Clare Balding.  
©The Royal Parks, Chris O'Donovan*



*Friends' volunteer Valerie Reading-Kitchen planting in memory of her late husband, Stewart © Roger Hillyer*

Many of the new trees and hedges were planted on The Royal Parks Community Planting Day on 13 February. Around 350 people took part including over 100 children who, led by Monique Sarkany of the Friends Discoverers programme, had fun making their very own little trees out of clay. Tremendously creative, they were delighted to take their designs home to cherish and remember this special day.

The following week, Friends' Conservation volunteers continued planting hedges and a scrub shelterbelt of native species around the woodland. This is a mix of nectar and berry-bearing trees and shrubs to provide shelter and a food source for small mammals, birds and invertebrates.

The Queen sadly did not live to see the creation of this new woodland but when she was updated on the progress of the nationwide Queen's Green Canopy shortly before her death, she replied simply *"Keep planting"*.

***Reported by Joanna Mills***

*Monique Sarkany and Discoverers making trees  
© The Royal Parks, Chris O'Donovan*



*Left to right: Richard Gray, Sarah Olney MP, Gareth Roberts, Tom Jarvis, Andrew Scattergood © Amanda Boardman*



# 100 years of the Isabella Plantation's national azalea collection

by Jo Scrivener — Assistant Park Manager, Richmond Park

The Isabella Plantation has over 80 varieties of evergreen azaleas that form a stunning display every spring. Among these is Plant Heritage's National Collection of Wilson 50 Kurume azaleas. The famous plant hunter Ernest Wilson originally collected these from the Japanese Island of Kyushu and sent two sets of the 50 plants to England in the early 1920s.

There is no better place for these than the wonderful 40-acre woodland garden of the Isabella Plantation. Here, the acid soil and enclosed woodland setting provide the perfect growing conditions for a wide variety of woodland and ericaceous plants including azaleas and rhododendrons.

Gardeners in the Isabella Plantation started to collect Wilson 50 Kurume azaleas during the 1980s, and this work continues today. The collection was registered with Plant Heritage as a National Collection in 1991. At this time, five varieties were already well established within the garden, 19 were bought as young plants and 26 were supplied as cuttings. To achieve this collection, The Royal Parks has collaborated, gifted and also exchanged plants with a wide range of prestigious gardens and worked closely with the Royal Horticultural Society's Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group.

At its peak, the Isabella Plantation collection claimed to have 49 of the 50 Wilson Kurume azaleas. However, it has become clear that some were supplied mis-labelled while others are so similar in flower that it is questionable whether they ever constituted distinct varieties.

Difficulties with identification have been compounded because Wilson's original



descriptions were limited to just a few words describing form and colour. Recent research has also highlighted discrepancies between records by Wilson and those of various gardens. Evaluation of the Isabella Plantation collection over recent years has concluded that it currently holds 38 of the 50 Wilson azaleas.

Although many of the Wilson 50 Kurume azaleas grow out in the garden amongst other evergreen azaleas, the main collection remains housed within the Isabella Plantation nursery. This is to avoid the risk of disease and to maintain correct labelling and identification.

The Collection is sustained annually by stock-checking plants and by re-identification during the flowering season in April and May. This guides propagation by

semi-ripe cutting from mid-July into August. Some of these azaleas are difficult to propagate and struggle to establish, often becoming diseased and so require annual propagation.

The Royal Parks plan to continue collaborating with other UK Gardens to find the missing Wilsons and hopes to follow in the footsteps of Wilson and visit Japan to secure a new collection of Wilson 50. In doing so, the Isabella Plantation would continue its important role in conserving and sustaining interest in cultivated plants that are now no longer widely available in the nursery trade.



*Editor's note: We do not have any individual photos of the Wilson 50, but the Still Pond planting includes two Wilson's azuma kagami and hinodegiri azaleas. There are photos of all the Wilson 50 at [visit.caerhays.co.uk/wilsons-50](http://visit.caerhays.co.uk/wilsons-50).*

*Photos: top, Still Pond ©Louise Oliver; bottom, Isabella azaleas ©Vivienne Press*



## Hives of industry in Richmond Park

by Alison Glasier

Amongst all the other tempting merchandise at the Visitor Centre, you can treat yourself to honey, made by the bees and flowers of Richmond Park.



The honey-making bee hives are looked after by Fiona Dickson who has been keeping bees since the early 1990s when she lived in Barnes. Inspired by a bee-keeping neighbour, she decided to learn how to do it properly and enrolled in evening classes to qualify as a fully-fledged beekeeper. Initially she kept her hives at the Royal Ballet School but has since moved them elsewhere in the Park. Even though she now lives in Norfolk she still commutes to Richmond twice a week in summer to tend to her hives.

Although technically bees don't hibernate, you are unlikely to see them during the winter when they will need less attention from the beekeeper. Bees are warm-blooded creatures and will cluster around the queen in a tight ball during cold weather, changing position so that they all keep warm. They only leave the cluster when the weather gets a bit warmer and they pop out for a poo!

One of the key activities of beekeeping is to prevent the bees from swarming, which is particularly likely in May and June. The queen bee lays up to 2,000 eggs a day and a good hive can support 60,000 bees.

When the hive gets too crowded, the bees would normally swarm and the beekeeper needs to adopt swarm control techniques. These include 'thwarting', which involves rubbing out the special cells that house the new queen bee before hatching, and 'taking advantage', which can involve splitting the hive into two or more units. Fiona often doubles the colonies during the productive season then unites them back to their individual units choosing the younger queen to lay.

Because of the diverse range of pollen in the Park, the honey varies in taste and colour throughout the season. It tends to be lighter in spring and the colour can range to almost black if the bees are feeding on honeydew or hawthorn.



Fiona also makes pollen-enriched honey by adding small quantities of pollen as it is believed that hay fever may be alleviated by eating local honey, the theory being similar to homeopathy.

**So next time you're in the Visitor Centre (by Pembroke Lodge Car Park) why not try a jar of Fiona's honey?**

*Photo right: queen bee (blue mark made by bee-keeper) surrounded by worker bees © Gill Silvester*

## Fallow deer — elegant, graceful and fun!

by Ron Crompton

**Pity the poor fallow deer, so often outshone by their cousins, the larger, more spectacularly antlered and more photographed red deer.**

But it's not always been so. Probably introduced to this country by the Normans specifically for hunting, fallow deer were the mainstay of the Richmond Park herd for as long as it was a royal hunting park. Records show that in 1656 there were 1,500 fallow and only 200 red in the Park herd (compared to 300 of each today).

Fallow deer are a social animal and you can see large groups of them – often mixed bucks, does and fawns (male, female and young). They flick their long tails continuously, looking around nervously for danger and displaying the distinctive black inverted horseshoe shape on their rumps. They are such elegant and graceful creatures.

The groups usually contain all four main types of coat – the common (tan with white spots in summer but fading to grey in winter), the paler menil (which keeps its spots in winter), and the black and the white (both relatively rare with only a handful of each in the Park's herd). The white is not an albino, as commonly thought but a distinct type.

Like the red stags, the fallow bucks re-grow their beautiful palmate antlers each year. The dominant males set up territories (called 'stands') often in the same areas every year, and attract females by their pungent smell and their strength. They don't aggressively round up females as the stags do.



Fallow deer are accomplished scroungers and you'll often find a small group of young bucks around the front of Pembroke Lodge nosing up to visitors for food.

The more visitors feed them, the more aggressive they become and they're known to invade picnics, sending screaming children running in all directions.

In contrast, their most delightful behaviour is the games that the fawns play, often galloping around in circles or figures of eight, leaping and twisting in the air. Older deer can be seen 'pronking', a straight-leg walk with all four legs striking the ground at once, body erect, tail high, like a show horse, before they too gallop away and leap in the air.

Fallow deer are certainly more fun than red!

*Photo: Fallow deer ©Bartek Olszewski*



## Skylark protection

We're lucky to have skylarks breeding in Richmond Park – but they are few in number and we are in danger of losing them if we don't protect them.

Because they nest on the ground, they are very vulnerable to disturbance by people and dogs so it's vital that their nesting areas are protected for the four months of the nesting season.

There are now three protected areas: Lawn Field between Pen Ponds and White Lodge, Crown Field up the hill from the rugby pitches and The Bog between Holly Lodge and Sheen and Bog Gates.

These areas are not completely closed off but Sussex-style fencing has been installed alongside the footpaths leading onto them.



These are intended to remind and inform, with signs asking people to keep to the path and keep dogs on short leads. However, the signs are not as clear as other new signage in the Park (and see article on signage design in the Summer 2020 Newsletter).

Hopefully, by leaving the nests undisturbed, the skylarks will thrive and Richmond Park will remain a haven for this iconic bird.

**Reported by Joanna Mills**

*Photo: new fencing with sign ©Roger Hillyer*

## Summer limb drop



Summer Limb Drop or Summer Branch Drop is a rare and little understood phenomenon that affects apparently healthy branches on mature trees. There is no obvious cause and it happens suddenly and without warning.

It tends to occur during warm weather, day or night, and might explain why you

have come across branches on the ground that seem to have been torn off a tree on a windless day.

There are several theories about the cause based on the effect of warm weather: issues with transpiration from the leaves, tissue shrinkage in the tree limb, gas release inside the tree tissue or deterioration of cell walls.

**Reported by Monique Sarkany**

## New wooden road barriers



The installation of wooden gates at the end of March at several locations in the Park gave a sense of permanence to the biggest changes to traffic movement in the Park for 20 years.

It was back in 2020 during the pandemic that The Royal Parks (TRP) consulted on a trial of traffic restrictions in Richmond Park. These were the closure to vehicles of the road between Sheen Gate and Sheen Cross, the road between Robin Hood Car Park and Broomfield Hill Car Park and, at weekends and public holidays, the road between Richmond Gate and Roehampton Gate.

A public consultation, with detailed analysis by TRP, endorsed the trial by a large majority. Last October TRP announced the decision to make the closures permanent. During the two years of the trial, the restrictions were put in place by some rather unsightly plastic

cones and the new wooden gates have replaced these.

The closures have reduced access especially at weekends to visitors who are less mobile and who wish to enjoy all the Park. We note TRP is extending its free summer minibus service with wheelchair access, which will now do 4 circuits every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 5th April until 29th November 2023. [www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/richmond-park/visitor-information](http://www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/richmond-park/visitor-information)

The Friends' charitable objects include "...to conserve and protect the peace and natural beauty of the Park..." which is a National Nature Reserve and to "...limit the adverse effects of activities that damage its attributes..." So we have always been in favour of reducing through-traffic.

**Photo and report by Roger Hillyer**

## New raised pedestrian crossings

As part of our response to The Royal Parks Movement Strategy consultation, the Friends emphasised the importance of pedestrians and pedestrian priority in Richmond Park. We therefore pressed The Royal Parks for improvements to the existing 'raised-table' crossings and the introduction of additional crossings.

Visitors to the Park will have seen extensive work to increase the number of raised crossings and some modifications to the designs of the crossings.

Designing changes to the crossings has been a challenge for The Royal Parks – how can the crossings be made more effective but without aspects like Belisha beacons which would not be appropriate in the Park?

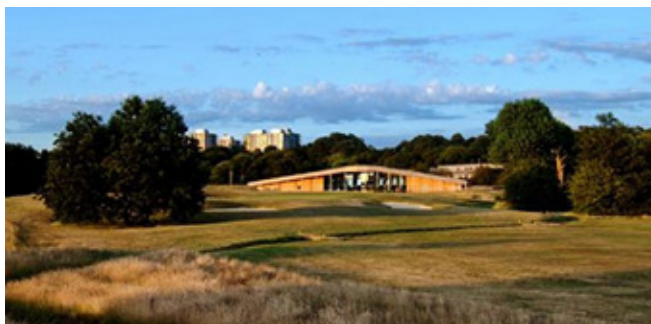
We welcome work intended to make the Park safer and more accessible for pedestrians. We plan to monitor whether these crossings make it safer and easier to cross the road.

**Reported by Roger Hillyer**



## 100 years of the Richmond Park Golf Course by Ron Crompton

Most visitors to Richmond Park are unaware of its golf course, hidden on the other side of Beverley Brook, with no access from the Park itself. Yet this is part of Richmond Park, enclosed by the same walls, part of the National Nature Reserve and managed as the wider parkland, for example in the type of native trees and shrubs planted.



For much of its history, this area was known as the Great Paddock, mostly farmed, and a place where deer were fed to be fattened for hunting. In WW1, it was the site of a large, tented military camp, where regiments assembled before being moved to France.

Then in the early 1920s the government agreed to the site being used for a new public golf course for the 'artisan class'. Similar 'artisan' golf courses had been created around the country since the late nineteenth century to give working men the opportunity to play affordable golf on good courses in exchange for helping to maintain them.

The Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) officially opened the 'Prince's course' on 9 June 1923. The Prince was a keen golfer and strong supporter of the 'artisan' golf movement. He was also born at White Lodge. Two years later, a second course, 'the Duke's course', was opened by the

Prince's younger brother the Duke of York (later George VI).

There are still two 18-hole public courses, now open to anyone on a pay-as-you-play basis, without a membership fee. A fire destroyed the old clubhouse, located near Roehampton Gate, and in 2014, a new clubhouse was built next to the A3. This is constructed in wood and half-hidden in the landscape to reduce its impact on the Park. Glendale Golf manages the golfing as a concession, while The Royal Parks manages the surrounding land.

Without deer and dogs, and away from the fairways, the golf course is excellent for wildlife.

Veteran oaks and hawthorns are scattered around the area and the ponds and ditches that cross the course are important corridors and habitats, enhanced by recent work, such as cleaning the water which runs off from the A3 to Beverley Brook and creating new reed beds. It is one of the two sites in the Park for the protected great-crested newt.



*The remains of sellions, the medieval field system, wonderfully preserved on the undisturbed land of the golf course. ©Phill Cutts.*

## A Learned Resident at Sheen Lodge by Monique Sarkany

Some ugly cement rendering, alcoves in the wall and the ruins of a red tiled floor are all that is left of Sheen Lodge, around 150 metres to your left as you enter the Park through Sheen Gate.

From 1852 until his death 40 years later, this was the home of Professor (later Sir) Richard Owen, as Queen Victoria had granted him residence on a grace and favour basis.



Richard Owen was a world expert in comparative anatomy and eminent in the relatively new field of paleontology. It was he who first coined the name 'Dinosaur' (meaning terrible lizard) and who was the driving force behind the establishment in 1881 of the Natural History Museum in South Kensington.

Owen entertained many famous people at Sheen Lodge. They included Charles Dickens and his family, William Gladstone, the painter Sir John Millais, the explorer David Livingstone (who gave the Professor an elephant's tusk shaped like a corkscrew) and the social reformer Sir Edwin Chadwick. The mathematician and 'father of the computer' Charles Babbage also visited. Charles Hallé (of the Hallé Orchestra) played the piano there and the household

were entertained by the world famous Swedish soprano Jenny Lind ('the Swedish Nightingale').

He got on well with Charles Darwin until the publication of the Theory of Evolution in 1859, which he strongly criticised. He was allegedly a ruthless character who strived to damage the reputation of competing scientists. A notorious example was his refusal to credit Gideon Mantell for his discovery of the famous Iguanodon found in Tilgate Forest in Sussex.

Owen was a keen gardener and in summer, he would rise before dawn to go for a walk in the Park, and then tend to his garden before breakfast. The Lodge's garden was described in 1893 as '*... one of the simplest but most unpretending but withal one of the most charming...flower gardens close to London.*'

He also loved birdwatching in his garden and found that his list would have been incomplete if it wasn't for John Gould (a famous British ornithologist) who often came by and sat with him on summer afternoons, imitating bird sounds, which drew out more elusive visitors.

It is said that Richard Owen grew ever fonder of Sheen Lodge in his declining years, enjoying daily walks and a rest on an extraordinary garden seat made out of a whale vertebra.

This extremely eminent but controversial scientist was buried within a short distance of the Park at St Andrew's Church, Ham.

*Drawing of Sheen Lodge (name changed to Sheen Cottage in 1921) from Wikimedia Commons*





Discoverers is the Friends' activities programme for families with school-age children. Events take place twice a month throughout the year and during school holidays. All Discoverers events are free. For information, please see [www.frp.org.uk/discoverers/](http://www.frp.org.uk/discoverers/)  [thefriendsofrichmondpark](https://www.facebook.com/thefriendsofrichmondpark)

### Richmond Park Flora Group

We monitor, survey, identify, record and offer guided walks.

For information on activities and how to join us, please email  
Gwen Hewitt  
[gwen@the2hewitts.plus.com](mailto:gwen@the2hewitts.plus.com)



### Friends' Walks

**All are welcome to come on these free guided walks.  
Each walk lasts about two hours and starts from one of the car parks at 10am on the first Saturday of each month.**

If you need more information or special support or help with the walk, please phone Ian McKenzie on 020 8943 0632 or email him at [walks@frp.org.uk](mailto:walks@frp.org.uk) in advance, or phone 07340 766573 only on the day of the walk.

**Dogs must be kept on leads during all walks.**

**Due to road closures in the Park, we show the gates that those arriving by motor vehicle will need to come through to reach each car park.**

3rd June	Pen Ponds Car Park, via Roehampton Gate
1st July	Robin Hood Gate Car Park, via Roehampton Gate
5th August	Kingston Gate Car Park, via Kingston, Ham or Richmond Gates
2nd September	Roehampton Gate Car Park, via Roehampton Gate
7th October	Sheen Gate Car Park (Deer + Walk-the-Wall) via Sheen Gate
4th November	Pembroke Lodge Car Park (Fungi) via Kingston, Ham or Richmond Gates

### Magazine people

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**Park management:**  
[Richmond@royalparks.org.uk](mailto:Richmond@royalparks.org.uk).

**Police non-emergency:** phone 101

### The Friends – who we are and what we do

The Friends of Richmond Park is a charity founded in 1961 and dedicated to the conservation and protection of Richmond Park, its peace and natural beauty for the benefit of the public and future generations.

The Friends fund conservation and interpretation projects, organise the Discoverers programme for families, monitor events in the Park, and offer guided walks, talks and webinars. Our more than 300 volunteers staff the Visitor Centre, carry out conservation work, monitor sporting events in the Park and pick litter as part of our Adopt-an- Area scheme.

We lobby and campaign on issues such as the ecology and wildlife of the Park, policing, car access to the Park, cycling, flight paths and local planning issues. We also publish books, leaflets, the Richmond Park calendar, Park Life magazine for members and provide a monthly email bulletin.

You can find out more about the work of the Friends on our website ([frp.org.uk](http://frp.org.uk)), Facebook, Instagram and on Twitter.

New members are always welcome so please join us. You can do so via our website or pick up a form from our Visitor Centre, or email [membership@frp.org.uk](mailto:membership@frp.org.uk)

### Membership — Joining and Renewals

Please note that membership renewals for those paying by cash or cheque only is 1 January. Individual membership is £10 and household membership is £15. Please send payment to Chris Mason – details below.

It's easy to become a member: you can sign up online at [www.frp.org.uk/membership/](http://www.frp.org.uk/membership/) using your credit card. Alternatively you can obtain a form from the website, from the Visitor Centre at Pembroke Lodge or by emailing me at: [membership@frp.org.uk](mailto:membership@frp.org.uk).

If you are a member and don't receive the monthly Friends' bulletin by email and wish to do so, please email [bulletins@frp.org.uk](mailto:bulletins@frp.org.uk) with the subject

'Add to bulletin'. Please also include the first line of your address and post code. You can easily stop this at any time using the unsubscribe button.

If you change your email or home address then please let me know by emailing [membership@frp.org.uk](mailto:membership@frp.org.uk) and including your previous address.

If you wish to receive Park Life as a pdf instead of as a printed booklet, then email [membership@frp.org.uk](mailto:membership@frp.org.uk) with the subject as 'Park Life as pdf' using the email address registered with us.

**Chris Mason, Membership Secretary**  
(Postal applications to: 38 Chesham Rd, Kingston, Surrey KT1 3AQ)



**The Friends of Richmond Park work to protect the Park's peace  
and natural beauty for future generations.**



*Young fallow deer © Bartek Olszewski*

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