

The magazine of the Friends of Richmond Park

Autumn/winter 2025

Park Life

In Richmond's National Nature Reserve

**A wander through the woods of
Richmond Park**

Looking for the riverfly

Art in the Park



FRIENDS *of*
RICHMOND PARK

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Isabella azaleas ©Eric Baldauf; Olly ©Ken Edwards

Richmond Park Christmas Tree card ©Diana Loch

From the Chairman

Welcome to this edition of Park Life. This summer was one of the hottest on record, and Richmond Park has certainly felt the effects. Many of our trees have been showing signs of heat stress, with remedial tree work by The Royal Parks clearly visible from Sheen Wood to Spankers Hill Wood.

It is a reminder of the challenges climate change brings to the Park’s landscapes and biodiversity, something we have highlighted in recent issues.

In September, our Art Talk and Art Walk focused on trees, offering new ways of looking at them and deepening our appreciation of their beauty and fragility. It was inspiring to see so many people engaging with the Park’s trees in a fresh light. There’s a full article on this in the magazine.

Sadly, we must also mark the end of the dedicated Parks Police unit. This is a significant loss, following 150 years of service, and we will greatly miss their expertise and commitment to Richmond Park.

Meanwhile, the Friends continue to be engaged in Heathrow’s Airspace Modernisation proposals. As members will recall, we have been working on this issue for several years. Now a new threat has emerged with the revival of plans for a third runway. This would inevitably increase the number of flights, heightening the risk of routes over Richmond Park and intensifying our campaign to protect its tranquillity.

Thank you for your continued support of the Friends.

Roger Hillyer

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Cover photo of sunrise over Adam’s Pond by Amanda Boardman @mandsby

The growing wildfire risk facing the Park

It may well be raining by the time you read this, but 2025 has been an exceptionally dry year in Britain. The first half of the year was the driest since 1976 and five areas of England were in official drought.

London was not one of them but the lack of rain, not just this year but also in 2018 and 2022, is giving Paul Richards, the Park Manager, real cause for concern, not least because of the risk of a major wildfire breaking out in the Park.

Most of us associate fire risk with summertime but in Richmond Park, the risk develops much earlier. Warmer, wetter winters mean more vegetation growth. As soon as the winter rain stops, the bracken dries up and is ready to catch fire until it is supplanted by new growth. During spring, grassy areas grow but soon dry up in hotter, drier summers, leaving more “fuel” at risk of

catching fire. The fire risk season now extends from March to September.

As with all dangers, prevention is key.

Several measures have been taken in the Park: the hay was cut four weeks earlier this year, though the drought meant that only six bales were harvested, compared to 90 last year; wider paths in fields such as Spankers Hill and Lawn Field were mown to act as fire breaks; and amber warning signs around the Park alerted the public to the risk.

Being ready to respond to a fire is also vital. The Park’s maintenance team have three tanks of water (browsers) which are routinely used to water trees; they can be hooked to a tractor and taken to any site in the Park. They also have a ‘slurry vac’ – a tanker which can be used to pump water from the ponds or Beverley Brook. Twelve fire hydrants are located



Firefighters from LFB during a joint exercise in the Park in July

around the perimeter of the Park and available for use by the fire brigade.

But in response to the growing risk of a wildfire, in July Paul Richards initiated a joint exercise between his team and the London Fire Brigade (LFB). No actual fire was created for the training exercise, which simulated a wildfire spreading towards a skylark nesting area – a priority for protection. An area was designated as the fire's starting point and cordoned off.

The exercise involved six fire engines, more than 50 firefighters and a command unit, as well as officers from the Metropolitan Police. A Mobile Command Centre was established at Roehampton Gate, with monitoring screens displaying live video from an LFB drone. An LFB engine pumped water from Beverley Brook which was then fed to another fire engine with many fire hoses.

Since the beginning of the year, the fire brigade has been called out four times to a fire in the Park

Wind is a major factor in the spread of wildfires and this was modelled during the exercise, with the simulated fire changing direction to accelerate uphill towards the Royal Ballet School, forcing the incident commanders to adapt their tactics and reprioritise resources. It brought home to Royal Parks staff how quickly a fire can take hold and change.

Paul Richards said one of the key lessons from the exercise was the importance of rapid and efficient communication between Park staff and the Fire Brigade: as a result, in the event of a fire, a firefighter would immediately join the Park's team so they could share their precise knowledge of the Park and the lines of communication would be clear.

Since the beginning of the year, the fire brigade has been called out four times to extinguish a fire in the Park. One of those call-outs was only six weeks after the training exercise.



Firefighters damp down the remains of a wildfire in dead wood on Sawyer's Hill in August

Almost all UK wildfires are caused by human actions, rather than lightning strikes – the main threats come from barbecues, campfires, cigarettes which are not extinguished properly and pieces of glass which can act as a magnifying glass, concentrating sunrays to one spot until it is so hot it catches fire. All preventable.

Paul Richards says the public's vigilance is vital in spotting and reporting fires, helping to keep the Park and its wildlife safe.

So if you discover a fire, don't hesitate: call 999 and ask for the fire brigade. And be ready to give an accurate location with the What3Words App which is used by all the emergency services.

By Monique Sarkany. Monique is a trustee of FRP

Main photo courtesy of London Fire Brigade

Bringing in the new boys



Keeping Richmond Park's deer healthy isn't only about making sure they have enough to eat. It also involves bringing in new deer every few years so the herd doesn't become too inbred. Three new red deer stags and three fallow bucks were introduced to the Park earlier this year in a programme called the bloodlines project. The Park's senior wildlife officer Tony Hatton told Park Life how it's done.

PL: How often are new deer introduced?

TH: About every 15-20 years. It's something deer parks have been doing since the 1600s, bringing in new bloodlines from other estates to keep the herd healthy, otherwise you end up with too much inbreeding. If we did it more often than that, we would lose our own Richmond Park bloodline.

Where did you go to find the deer?

Our vets identify estates which have deer with the genetics and the "look" that we want – which is something like what you'd see on a whisky bottle! But it's getting

harder and harder to find a more natural-looking stag. Lots of estates are breeding stags which have 30-40 points on their antlers. We want a natural look of 12-14 points with a nice even-looking head.

We went to an estate near Inverness in Scotland for the red deer and the Powderham estate in Devon for the fallow deer. They have to be tested for TB so we can only go to estates which have a handling system and a TB testing regime in place. The deer also need to be able to cope with a busy environment like Richmond Park. If they are too wild, they will run all day long or attack a car because they're not used to them. So out of 200 deer parks or estates in the country, there are probably only 3 or 4 which are suitable.

How do you choose each one?

I'm looking for longevity. If you buy a big old stag, it might look grand but it will most likely pick a fight with the biggest stag in the Park and I'd lose him quite quickly. So the oldest animal

I selected is 5 years old, the others are 3-year-olds. For the fallow deer, I was selecting for Bushy and Greenwich parks as well and we wanted a certain colour, the tan with the white spots.

Why only stags and bucks?

Stags will cover several females. If you go for hinds or does, they will only have one baby so the process takes longer. Stags and bucks are also easier to choose.

When did they arrive?

I selected them in the summer last year. The stags then stayed in Scotland through the winter because we needed to wait until the spring to transport them, before they started growing their new antlers, to reduce the risk of injury.

We introduced them into the Park after dark so it was quiet and they wouldn't be unnerved by lots of people or dogs. We found a group of deer, parked the van, opened the gate and just let them go.

How did the existing stags respond?

At this time of year (the summer), there's no hostility. Once the testosterone starts building and females are around, it can get a bit rowdy. But actual fighting between



One of the newcomers takes in his new home

stags is the last option. When the rut is finished, the boys will all get together and spend the winter trying to put weight on, before they cast their antlers, grow new ones and the whole process starts again.

Will the newcomers breed this year?

At least one of them – yes. The 5-year-old is quite capable of covering the females.

How have they settled in?

The reds have mixed in with the existing stags already. The fallow bucks were very low key and went off on their own. But once the does come into season, they will be sniffing around them.

We brought them from places where they are used to people and they've been handled lots of times. They are sensible enough to follow each other around because there's safety in numbers.

Can we spot the newcomers?

You might be able to see the red or yellow ear tags. But we try to do this process discreetly, so the animals have at least a first season of covering females and getting used to their new surroundings.



Fallow bucks ready for the journey to London

Main photo by Tammy Marlar (tammymarlar.com)

Other photos by Tony Hatton

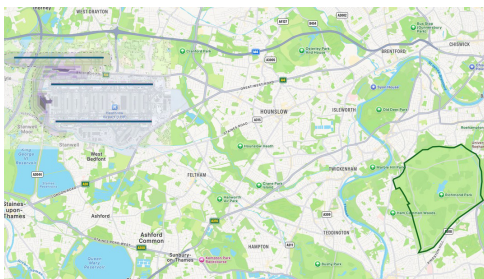
Heathrow's third runway is bad news for the Park

Heathrow's plans for a third runway, published in August, increase the threat to Richmond Park, and its tranquillity and biodiversity. They are similar to Heathrow's previous plans developed in 2018-20 but then abandoned when Covid struck.

The plans comprise:

- A third runway and sixth terminal located north of the current two runways, costing £49 billion; at its western end the third runway would be over the M25
- A 60% increase from the current limit of 480,000 to 756,000 take-off and landings a year

It's expected that Heathrow will submit a planning application in 2028, with the runway opening sometime after 2035.



The plans say nothing about proposed new flight paths. But both the previous third runway plans and the current Airspace Modernisation plans include flight path options over Richmond Park, so it's safe to assume that the full third runway plans, when they appear, will also propose flight paths over the Park.

The Government has already expressed support for a third runway and is expected to water down the regulations on the

environmental impact of such massive projects in a raft of revisions this autumn.

Heathrow faces problems with its plan, notably how it will be financed (airlines are fiercely against increasing passenger charges, which are already among the highest in the world); how the M25 will be kept open while the new runway is being built; and competition from other airports (Gatwick, City, Luton) that also have expansion plans.

In addition, it's reported that there are six other competing proposals, notably one from the property group Arora based on a shorter runway not over the M25, which costs less at £25 billion.

We have major concerns about the third runway plans.

- The proposed increase in aircraft movements will mean greater pressure for new flight paths to give respite from noise, with the easy answer being to fly over previously largely untouched open spaces such as Richmond Park.
- The move to water down regulations governing projects, and the Government's drive to speed up delivery of 'critical' infrastructure projects, will mean only a cursory environmental assessment of the impact of new flight paths on Richmond Park, despite its regional and national importance.
- Our proposed plans for minimal change to flight paths will probably be shelved despite their widespread support among MPs, the London Assembly and other community groups.

Wildlife survey – what we’ve learned so far

The Richmond Park Wildlife Survey has now completed Phase 2, which was to classify the 600,000 images collected by all the cameras set out in the Park by Friends’ volunteers in the spring last year.

The Zoological Survey of London (ZSL) set up an online project to allow volunteers to review all the images and identify the species and their numbers.

Nearly 1,500 volunteers, some from the Friends and the rest from ZSL’s database, classified 168,487 images which contained wildlife – so the majority showed only vegetation. Each image had to be classified by five different people to ensure consistency, requiring an enormous effort, for which the survey team are extremely grateful.

As anyone who trawled through the images will know, jackdaws appeared more often than any other creature, followed by red and fallow deer. There were plenty of sightings of foxes, grey squirrels, rabbits, crows and pigeons. All of this is as expected but the real interest

will be to track their behaviour across the Park and through time and to cross-correlate species’ movements.

The next phase will analyse the results to investigate all the species found and to track their behaviour, which will take some time. The UK Health Security Agency conducted a simultaneous survey of tick prevalence and the findings from that will be incorporated into the Friends’ survey analysis.

The ultimate aim of the project is to provide the first comprehensive scientific survey of the wildlife that lives and visits the Park, how it uses the Park and interacts with humans, and what can or needs to be done to ensure that the wildlife continues to thrive there.

A further aim is to provide an understanding of the Park’s place in the overall ecology of London, as part of a wider ecology project which ZSL are conducting across the whole of London’s green spaces.

By Hugh Deighton, who is leading the Friends’ work on the survey



If we build it, will they come?

In recent years, a number of measures have been put in place to encourage particular birds to nest in the Park, especially those whose numbers are in steep decline. Nigel Jackman investigates the impact of these measures.

Richmond Park is an exciting place for birds, both residents and visitors, but birds are under threat and a little help from all of us can make a difference.

Day to day management of the Park and enhancement of particular habitats can help individual species or wildlife more generally. Protecting gorse, hawthorn, scrub and reed beds are good examples.



The artificial sand bank for sand martins

In collaboration with the Royal Parks, the Friends and the Richmond Park Bird Group have gone further by creating artificial nesting places for birds. In 2011, we built an artificial sand bank (a hole-filled concrete construction at the top of Upper Pen Pond) for sand martins. It took a while, but in 2017 the sand martins began to arrive and by 2019 multiple pairs nested. There is now a sizeable breeding population in the Park. A great success story.

The reed bed at Upper Pen Pond has recently been improved and enlarged which should benefit reed warblers and water rail breeding there.



Volunteers from the Friends constructing a kingfisher bank

Two years ago, Friends' conservation volunteers built an artificial kingfisher bank in the vicinity of Upper Pen Pond and improved the habitat in which it stands. We're still waiting for a pair of kingfishers to breed there, but these banks are often successful elsewhere. So fingers crossed.

Artificial tern rafts at Upper Pen Pond allowed common terns to breed in small numbers for the first time from 2010 and then every year.



The common tern



Warning signs near skylark nesting grounds

Sadly the rafts were removed in 2023. But the terns were already under siege from rival black-headed gulls. Improvements to the island instead were intended to allow both species to breed together, but this year a pair of herring gulls, yet another new breeder, terrorised the other two species and both failed to breed. We must now wait to see what happens next year and hope the herring gulls don't return.

Skylark protection has been a priority for several decades. Once an extremely

common sight, skylarks are now a red-listed species because of the dramatic decline in numbers. The birds nest on the ground from February to September so are very vulnerable to increasing visitor numbers.

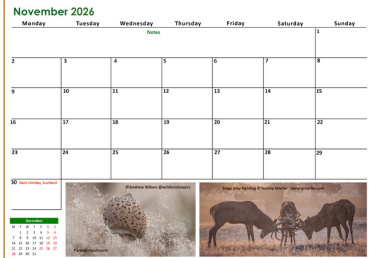
Breeding territories (the area where a pair of skylarks have their nest) have varied from 10 to 20 in the last decade, with 15 this year.

The Royal Parks have deployed notices and fencing to try to educate visitors and deter people and dogs from disturbing the nesting grounds.

All of these measures help our birds. This year six swift boxes were installed at Holly Lodge after the breeding season. We wish the initiative every success in giving swifts a home in years to come.

Words and photos by Nigel Jackman, chair of the Richmond Park Wildlife Group

43 photos in the Richmond Park Calendar!



Many of you told us how you miss the calendar page photos of previous calendars - so they are back!

Vivienne Press, who has run the 'Call for photos' and designed and produced the calendar for 10 years, has redesigned the calendar pages to allow the maximum space for writing, while including the photos. There are also small monthly calendars for the following month and a year planner on the final page.

With its 43 beautiful images, including 12 full-page, this is more than just a calendar — it's a wonderful memento of the wildlife, scenery and peace of Richmond Park throughout the year. A thoughtful gift to yourself and for your friends!

Same price as last year - £10.00 at the Visitor Centre and frp.org.uk/shop

November photos: Beverley Brook ©Amanda Boardman; Parasol mushroom ©Andrew Wilson; Stags play-fighting ©Tammy Marlar

trees lost in the storms of 1987 and 1990).

But more are named after royalty and politicians and events associated with them – such as Sidmouth, Teck (the Duchess of Teck, the ‘People’s Princess’ who lived in White Lodge), and Queen Elizabeth Wood (Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother). Spankers Hill Wood seems to have been named after a prize horse of Sir Robert Walpole, the first British Prime Minister, who had a lodge at Pen Ponds.

Confusingly, there are two Coronation Plantations (for Edward VII in 1902 and Elizabeth II in 1953) which are close to each other and three Jubilees (for Victoria’s golden in 1887, George V’s silver in 1935 and Elizabeth’s platinum in 2022).

***“The trees encountered on a country stroll
Reveal a lot about a country’s soul ...
A culture is no better than its woods”***

At one time all the woods were closed to the public and deer, but in 1903 Edward VII, keen to develop Richmond and other parks as public amenities, ordered them to be opened. Exceptions were made for Sidmouth, Pond and Teck Plantations which were kept as wildlife sanctuaries.

Today, the enclosed woods provide a canopy of tall oaks and beeches, below which is a shrub/scrub layer often of high value to wildlife. Sidmouth Wood, for example, is an optimum habitat for roosting bats and nesting birds.

All the woods and their trees are suffering from disease, climate change



(heat and drought in summer, torrential rain in winter) and increased visitor numbers. Sheen Wood has lost many trees to Acute Oak Decline, heat stress and waterlogging, and visitors eroding the understorey and compacting tree roots.

The Royal Parks recognise the problems and have restored Sheen Wood, with new planting, fencing and the creation of defined paths for visitors. They have also restored Prince Charles Spinney, with the help of Friends’ conservation volunteers, and plan on restoring part of Spankers Hill Wood.

My favourite? Undoubtedly High Wood. It’s the best preserved of the pre-enclosure woods and its veterans and dense undergrowth create an air of mystery, despite the growing network of beaten paths criss-crossing it.

By Ron Crompton, a Vice-President of FRP. This is the third of his series of features on Richmond Park

Photo of the beech wood in autumn by Nigel Attenborough

The quote is by W H Auden from his poem Bucolics

An oak tree transformed

Some years ago, an oak tree stood proudly near Sheen Gate. Sadly, the oak was dying, became dangerous and had to be felled leaving just a tall monolith. The Royal Parks leave these monoliths in their natural state to provide habitats for the myriad creatures that inhabit the parks.

But this tree had another destiny. It remained a wildlife habitat, but in a very different form – thanks to Dan Cordell, an artist and sculptor based in Devon who has a lifelong affinity with the natural world and natural materials, particularly wood.

In the spring, he started to transform the felled oak into an intricate sculpture representing the creatures which live in dead and decaying wood. Stag beetles crown the sculpture, ants, beetles and slow worms crawl up the sides, a bat alights and rests. It took Dan about five days to complete. Amazingly, the main tool he used was a chainsaw.

The wood is unfinished to retain the natural qualities that will then attract exactly the creatures represented. The sculpture will mellow and slowly decay but oak is naturally fairly rot-resistant so it will probably last for 20 years or more.

That's not all.

Wander down to the newly refurbished Petersham playground, and you will see further examples of Dan's work.

The brief from TRP was to represent different habitats – grassland, deadwood, pond and woodland – and he has achieved this with two beautiful standing sculptures and two benches where children can

play and identify woodpeckers and squirrels, frogs and rabbits, leaves and flowers. These sculptures were made in Dan's workshop and then transported to their playground home.



Dan's hope is that his sculptures are not only aesthetically pleasing but that they also gently educate visitors in the importance of preserving habitats to encourage our wildlife to thrive. And the dead oak at Sheen Gate lives on through the work of a unique and talented artist.

By Alison Glasier, a member of FRP

Photo of the sculpture at Sheen Gate car park by Roger Hillyer

An unwelcome return to Attenborough Pond

The highly invasive New Zealand pigmyweed has returned in force to Attenborough Pond. Also known as swamp stonecrop (*crassula helmsii*), it had established itself in the pond a couple of years ago and Park staff had gone to huge lengths to get rid of it – draining the pond and scraping out the base to remove every last bit.

It's very difficult to control as it's a succulent which can rapidly grow from a tiny segment, smothering native species, and forming a dense mat on the water. It thrives in both muddy conditions and in open water. The wet winter last year, followed by an early, very dry spring, seems to have created perfect growing conditions and there's now more of it in the pond than before.

There are pockets of NZ pigmyweed in Pen Ponds but there it is kept under control by other well-established vegetation. It may have been spread to Attenborough Pond by waterfowl or dogs.



If it's not eliminated, it is likely to spread from there to other ponds in the Park.

Assistant Park manager Pete Lawrence and his team are looking at options to get rid of it again. The most radical would be to scrape out the pond again to get rid of the bulk, then follow this up with regular volunteer checks, picking out any regrowth recorded. In the meantime, he's asking people to keep their dogs out of the ponds and avoid wading in the shallows as this could inadvertently spread the plant.

Help needed

The Friends are seeking members who are willing to help our Team Leaders coordinate activities in two areas:

Events

There are a number of these including local fairs, events with our sponsors, sports and charity events to help raise our profile, educate the general public about the Park and show-case our activities to conserve and protect it, as well as to attract new members.

Monitoring

Numerous activities take place in the Park organised by The Royal Parks. We occasionally monitor activities to establish a record of what occurred and propose improvements.

If you would be interested in assisting with either of the above please email Peter Allnutt (volunteers@frp.org.uk) who will arrange an exploratory discussion.

Looking for the riverfly



It's a cool morning in mid August with a breeze rippling the surface of Beverley Brook. A small group has gathered close to the river, near the Roehampton Gate café. One person, clad in waders, is in the water while another calls out 30 second timings from the riverbank.

This is the Friends' Riverfly team carrying out their monthly check on Beverley Brook's riverfly population.

In the river, the team leader Brian McDonald kicks up the bed of the river in several places for a total of three minutes among different habitats – hence the timings called out from the riverbank. The mud, stones and creatures stirred up by the process are captured in an ultra-fine white net.

After a few catches, the contents of the net are transferred into a large white sample tray and the real work begins.

The team members use measuring spoons to scoop out the water and sift through the mud for the tiny invertebrates. They're actually looking for several species: gammarus or freshwater shrimp, cased caddis, caseless caddis and a group known collectively as olives.

If you're thinking a shrimp isn't hard to spot, think again. These insects are tiny, often only visible in the muddy water in the sample tray when they move. A cased caddis looks like a thin black stick, barely 3-4mm long. Nor are they the only creatures in the river. So it's not only a question of finding and identifying the riverflies, but also of "discounting" the others.

Why look for them? Because riverflies are vital indicators of river health and water quality, particularly sensitive to pollution and other environmental changes.



The sample tray

They are also an important food source for fish, dragonflies and birds. The South East Rivers Trust on behalf of the Environment Agency records riverfly populations along several stretches of Beverley Brook, not only in Richmond Park, but also from the Wandle and Hogsmill rivers. Citizen science groups like the Friends' riverfly team gather the data.

There's a points system based on their abundance, measuring how many riverfly are detected and which kind. Species like stoneflies are grouped with other flies but, if identified, score an extra point. Each survey group has an overall target for a particular stretch of the river, allowing the South East Rivers Trust to measure progress over time.

Riverflies are vital indicators of river health and water quality, particularly sensitive to pollution

Heads bent over their river samples, the team swap thoughts about what they've found.

"Think this might be a cased caddis?"
"No, it's too small". "It's moving – look."
"Hurray! – it is a cased caddis, that's one point". "What about this wormy-type thing?" "No, we're not counting it".

The team's target score is four. That's not four riverflies – it's a scale measurement. After about an hour of sifting, the target is met with a sum total of 42 olives, 32 gammarus, 3 caseless caddis, a cased caddis and a few other river creatures which aren't part of the survey. That gives an overall score of six – comfortably above the pollution trigger level score of four.

Then it's a matter of packing up, rinsing out the trays and returning the riverfly to the river until next month's survey.



Volunteers Angela and Laura examine the findings

This work has been going since 2019 allowing the Trust and the Environment Agency to build up a vital picture about the overall health of Beverley Brook.

For most visitors to the Park, it's a place to enjoy nature, walk the dog or look for the deer. Few of them are aware of all the scientific work that goes on, measuring the Park's biodiversity and the health of its soil, flora and water courses. The Friends' Riverfly team are part of this effort.

If you'd like to join the Riverfly team, no specialist knowledge is required – the current team include a primary school teacher, a retired banker and a former army officer. Full training is given. Contact Brian McDonald via volunteers@frp.org.uk for more information.

Words and photos by Joanna Mills

Art in the Park

Sir David Attenborough, Friends' Patron, has said: "It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living."

As members of the Friends, we all love Richmond Park. As well as 130,000 trees, rare grasslands, streams and ponds, wildlife and open views, it is also the quietest place in London. Within the Park's 2,500 acres, there are many miles of paths and trails where we can easily leave the crowds and be surrounded by the beauty and peace of nature.

But when visiting the Park, how much do we really see? We are so used to rushing we even rush in art galleries – the average time people look at a painting is eight seconds! The antidote is 'slow looking'



Pastoral woodland near High Wood by Vivienne Press

Slowing down gives us the chance to see more, but in the ground-breaking series "Ways of Seeing" John Berger pointed out: "The way we see things is affected by what we know or believe."

To help enrich our experiences on future visits to the Park, the Friends held a free public talk about how British artists have seen and painted trees and woodlands. Around 200 people attended, in person and online.

Friends' Chair, Roger Hillyer, introduced our speaker, Tim Craven, an accomplished painter whose work explores the relationship between painting and photography. He has a long-standing fascination with trees, drawn to their vertical forms, their play of light and shadow, and their abstract patterns. In 2013, Tim founded The Arborealists, a group of European artists who make trees their central theme.

Tim explained the importance of 'pastoral woodland', which we see in Richmond Park, in paintings by Constable and Turner. He explored



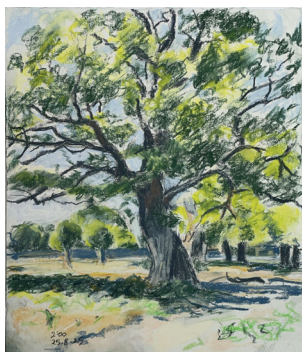
Tim Craven with one of his own tree paintings

and a great way of doing this is through sketching. This makes us look slowly and deeply, and become immersed in the peace and natural beauty that surrounds us.

how and why the tree has been a major subject for British artists, including as a motif in abstract art, and the tree's current role for painters as a symbol of our fragile natural environment.

After the talk, there was a further opportunity to see the art display and meet the artists, to visit our mobile Visitor Centre and to chat over a drink.

The event was conceived and organised by Vivienne Press. Roger Hillyer acted as event manager ably helped by seven more Friends volunteers. Thank you to all!

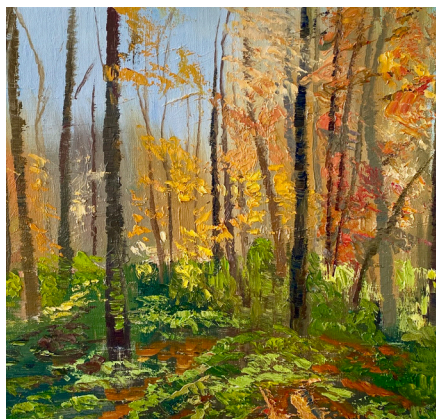


Oak pastel by John Blandy

A few days later, we held our first Art Walk, vividly described by one of the participants, Rosie Leydon:

“This was a magical combination of an art and sketching session and a guided tree walk. We began in Sidmouth Wood, in dappled September sunlight, sketching/painting materials in hand, and foldable seats at the ready.

“Lynda Minter, a professional artist, encouraged us first to feel tree bark and leaves, and to observe carefully, before starting to sketch, stopping at interesting trees for 5, 10 or 20 minutes, offering us hints and advice. As we walked and sketched, Christopher Hedley explained fascinating tree facts while Eric took photos while sketching along with us.



Autumn Woodland by Lynda Minter

“At the end we laid out everyone's best pieces – sketches, watercolours, and pen and ink drawings – and also, it must be said, a very wide variety of artistic abilities! A very enjoyable morning, with a very supportive group of participants.”



We hope that, through art, we can encourage visitors to experience the joy of connecting deeply with the peace and natural beauty of Richmond Park and so help foster appreciation and care for the Park's wildlife and ecology.

Tim's talk is now available to view on the Friends' YouTube channel.

By Vivienne Press, a trustee of FRP, who organised the Art in the Park event

Photos of Tim Craven and of the Art Walk group by Eric Baldauf

Friends of Richmond Park Discoverers

Over the spring and summer, families have turned up to our events, some returning and some for the first time, eager to learn about the park and its fauna and flora. There is always something to make and take home as a souvenir of a great day out.



Some of our events have limited spaces because of the nature of the outing: Little Owl walks are a good example. It's better to run several small groups rather than one large noisy and visible group: we are mindful of the wildlife we love and seek to see in the Park.

We feel strongly that if we learn about the Park, we learn to love it and we will take care of it. Again and again, everyone is struck by its beauty and rich wildlife

and we learn what a fragile environment it is and what we can all do to protect it.

Many of our events are open to all: we let the local schools know and they kindly place our flyers in their weekly newsletters; we also advertise at the Visitor Centre and on social media platforms and we update our website regularly.

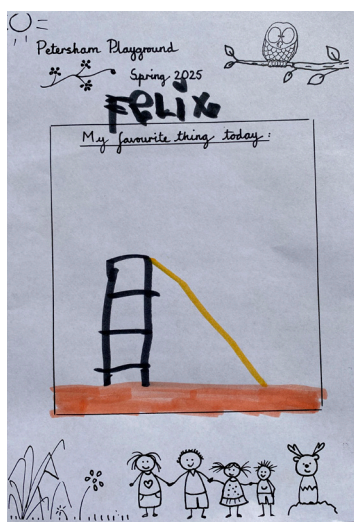
In the spring, we invited all families to come and join us on a Skylarks Walk. Our information panel on skylarks was studied closely and there were many discussions with our volunteers, some of whom are excellent birdwatchers.

The children were well rewarded. "We saw seven!" one of them exclaimed. Seeing skylarks is important: Richmond Park is one of the very few places where they still breed in London, nesting on the ground where they are vulnerable



to disturbance from walkers and dogs. On that occasion, the children proudly made a bird out of clay to take home.

We held two events for all at the new Petersham Playground. The improvements to the playground were long overdue and The Royal Parks have certainly delivered. The new playground is more naturalistic with wooden logs children can go through, wooden huts to play in, and climbing, jumping, and balancing apparatus which not only fit in with the surroundings but are also great fun.



Our tree trail near the playground was informative but the weather was not with us on that occasion so, by the end, we all huddled under the gazebo to make our bird plumage-coloured friendship bracelets. This activity was brought to us by one of our dads: Discoverers has built up genuine connections and it is becoming a little community of its own.

During the summer holidays, we held our popular Story Time and book-related activities at the Belvedere in Pembroke Lodge. We also teamed up with Help Nature Thrive who invited us to join their



public engagement events in Richmond Park. The first of three such events also celebrated the opening of the Petersham Playground with some hedge planting.

On the first Sunday of every month, we go on a Nature Walk. We never know what we will see but we know it will be special: two stags rolling playfully in a mud patch at the top of Upper Pen Pond was fabulous for us to see in August.

It is always a pleasure to meet up with our Discoverers' families and we are looking forward to more exploring and caring for the Park together. The Discoverers volunteers make a wonderful team, each bringing their knowledge, enthusiasm and giving their time: they are a constant reminder of what can be achieved in our community with kindness and goodwill.

Discoverers' families can subscribe to our mailing list so they can sign up for smaller group events. It's free to join. You can sign up via the Friends' website, frp.org.uk/discoverers-mailing-list

Words and photos of Discoverers' activities by Monique Sarkany, who leads the Friends' Discoverers programme

Photo of wallowing deer by Paula Redmond

Friends' Information

Friends' Guided 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 10 am on the first Saturday of each month.

Dogs must be kept on leads during all walks.

We list the gates that those arriving by motor vehicle will need to come through.

If you need more information or special support or help with the walk, please phone Ian McKenzie on 020 8943 0632 or you can email him at walks@frp.org.uk in advance. Or phone 07340 766573 on the day.

Dec 6th	Pen Ponds car park (vehicle access via Roehampton Gate)
Dec 26th	Pembroke Lodge car park (vehicle access via Kingston, Ham or Richmond Gate)
Jan 3rd	Robin Hood Gate car park (vehicle access via Roehampton Gate)
Feb 7th	Roehampton Gate car park (vehicle access via Roehampton Gate)
Mar 7th	Kingston Gate car park (vehicle access via Kingston, Ham or Richmond Gates)
Apr 4th	Sheen Gate car park + Walk-the-Wall (vehicle access via Sheen Gate car park)
May 2nd	Broomfield Hill car park + Isabella plantation (vehicle access via Kingston, Ham or Richmond Gates)

** The Walk-the-Wall option is a 7.5 mile (12 km) walk that takes three to three and a half hours. It covers a circular route along the wall/fences enclosing the public access areas of Richmond Park, excluding the golf courses. There is one steep hill with the remaining route on the flat or gentle slopes.*

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

Park Management

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Police non-emergency: Phone 101

Friends Information

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.

Our more than 300 volunteers staff the Visitor Centre, carry out conservation work 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), Facebook, Instagram, X and Threads.

Membership – Joining and Renewals

Joining

If you are reading this and not a member, then do join us to make sure you receive future editions of Park Life and our monthly electronic bulletin.

Membership is £10 a year for an individual and £15 a year for a household.

Join online at: frp.org.uk/membership-join

Renewals

We have implemented a new system for holding membership records to replace the Excel based system we used for many years. The new system has modernised the way members join the Friends, how we manage memberships and has automated the renewal and payment process for our membership fees. For the first time we are now able to accept direct debits.

Members for whom we have email addresses (nearly all members) have been invited to create a member account to manage their membership. We have invited and encouraged members to set up a direct debit to pay membership fees as this reduces the time our volunteers spend administering our memberships.

Members can, if they wish, continue to pay using their current method – Standing Order, Credit Card or direct payment. If you are a member and we don't have your email address (and so you don't receive our monthly electronic bulletin), then please send an email with your name and address to membership@frp.org.uk.



Photo of autumn colour by Thomson's Pond by Vivienne Press



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

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

www.frp.org.uk



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