FRIENDS OF GREENWICH PARK

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2012 | Registered Charity No: 1029933 | Number 60

The Friends have had 20 busy years

April 2012 sees start of the 20th year of activity and influence for the Friends of Greenwich Park. Set up by a small group of concerned local people in 1992 when the Park was under threat of privatisation, membership had reached 500 by the first Annual General Meeting in June 1993, 1000 by July 1996 and nearly 2000 in 2012.

Over the past 20 years the Friends have helped achieve most of the recommendations in the important 1995 Royal Parks Review known locally as 'The Jenkins Report' including emphasising the historical and landscaping importance of the north-south Grand Axis with the associated restoration of the 17th century avenues, the partial closing of the Park to through traffic, setting up an east-west cycle route, opening up Queen Caroline's Bath and highlighting the site of the Roman temple, bringing The Orchard back under Park management and doing more for the Park's wildlife. They also fought - and won - a campaign to reverse the Jenkins Report recommendation that the Children's Boating Pool should be removed.

Good relations with Park management has been a strength right from the beginning as has cooperation with the National Maritime Museum and the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site set up in 1997, which essentially 'share' the Park. Particularly important in the run up to the Olympics with its attendant controversies has been the Friends role, working with the other local amenity groups, to ensure that the Park does not suffer any permanent damage from the equestrian events.

Now on to the next 20 years…

Olympics Update

As we are reminded daily by the media, the 2012 Olympic Games are now just a few months away. The Olympic Equestrian and Modern Pentathlon events will take place in the Park from 28 July to 12 August and the Paralympic events from 30 August to 4 September.

LOCOG's final planning application to Greenwich Council to hold the Games in the Park was approved by the Planning Board at the end of January. Most of our comments on the documentation were addressed satisfactorily before and during the board meeting. We welcomed a greater emphasis on The Royal Parks' involvement throughout the whole construction and reinstatement process and clear procedures for frequent site monitoring to ensure that ecological and other protection measures are fully implemented.

Events set up and Park access

Preparation for the events build began in earnest during March with the setting up of the operational compound on Circus Field. The Royal Parks' works to realign the Blackheath Gates were also given the go ahead, though the central section will not be completed until late autumn in order to accommodate LOCOG's construction needs. This month will see the start of preparations in the Park itself, with construction work for the arena and associated structures starting at the north end in front of the Queen's House. Construction vehicle movement from the Avenue to the arena - a much larger build than for the Test Event - will be fenced off from park users with marshals at either end for safety purposes.

During May members can expect see perimeter fencing going up in the Park to the east of the Avenue and Blackheath Avenue. We, and the other three local societies argued that the start of the month was unacceptably early for this. It should be left as late as practicable, particularly in areas where it will appear especially unsightly and obtrusive. LOCOG have said they will do what they can to accommodate our request, but we should not be too optimistic. The west side fencing will follow on in early June. Gaps and gates will be provided in the fences to allow access into and through most of the Park up to the 7 July shutdown for the public for four weeks. The Children's Playground and the southern part of the Flower Garden will remain open the whole time except on 30 July, the cross country day. LOCOG will begin to remove jumps and other event facilities immediately after this event.

We are pleased to learn that for the safety of crowd numbers outside and ease of movement within the venue, spectator capacity will be capped at 50,000 on cross country day, with just under half that number attending on the other event days. This is considerably less than the original 75,000 proposed, which we considered excessive.

The programme below shows the key works phases:

- April: Work starts on arena area in north of Park – Queens Field fenced off.
- May: Areas between arena and the Avenue closed; some other structures installed elsewhere. Installation of perimeter fencing begins on the east side of the Park. Path in the Park opposite the Sammy Ofer wing closed with alternative route signposted.

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Wildlife Open Day

Saturday 28 April 2012 11am-4pm

We are having the Open Day a little later this year, hoping that the weather will be good. Activities are based in and around the Wildlife Centre in various marquees, in the Flower Garden, just south of the lake.

We design the day to be of interest to all ages, though the puppet show, again provided by Kim McGee, will be aimed at the younger visitors. Her show, repeated regularly throughout the day, is wildlife based and changes from year to year.

In another marquee a team will be helping visitors plant their own vegetable or wildflower seeds in biodegradable pots which can be taken home and easily transferred to the garden or larger pots without needing to disturb the roots.

We will be showing visitors how to build nest boxes for solitary bees and other insects to protect them during the cold weather and again the nest can be taken home and put to work.

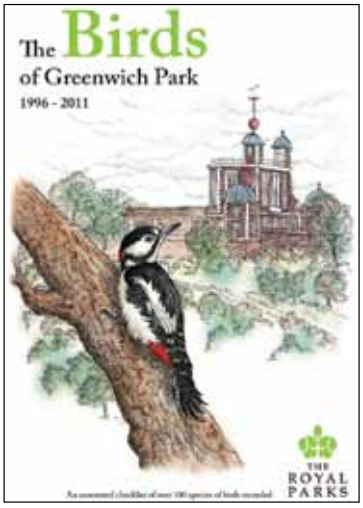
The Field Studies Council will be offering activities and information both about their history but also their new role working within The Royal Parks.

Volunteers will be providing guided tours of the Nature trail and ElaineWorrell's tadpoles usually put in an appearance (the frog spawn was early this year and the Open day is late-so they may have legs!).
All materials used are provided by the Friends and all activities are free of charge.

Please come, it will be fun!

The Birds of Greenwich Park 1996-2011

This new booklet is the culmination of hours of observing over many years by Patricia Brown, Joseph Beale and the Greenwich Park Bird Recording Group. It is not intended to help with bird identification, but is an annotated list of the 111 species seen or heard in the Park over the last 16 years.
The printing of the booklet was funded by the Friends and the booklet cover below was beautifully illustrated by Joseph Beale.
It is available, free of charge, from the Park Office, by the Blackheath Gate.



Outing to Elmley Marshes on 19 March

Having delayed the outing from early February, because the marshes were frozen, we enjoyed a glorious cloudless day. In the event, 12 Friends arrived at the RSPB car park at 11am and moved off to the first hide, some 1.5 miles down the path, making slow progress because of stopping to look at birds en route. We visited three of the hides, having lunch in the first and leaving at approx 4.30pm. Each hide gives viewing of a different selection of birds. The group was led by Harry Whitehead and assisted by Patricia Brown.

I list here the birds that were seen. Coots, kestrels, mute swan, avocets, curlew, oystercatchers, lapwings, red shanks, shelduck, tufted duck, great white egrets, turnstones, reed warbler, magpies, teal, sparrow, wigeon.

Wildlife: Advance Notice

The Wildlife Centre and Nature Trail will not be opening at the end of July and August because, although the southern part of the Flower Garden will only close for one day, the bulk of the Park will be closed and there will be no parking available either in the Park or near Circus Field.

We will resume offering activities with a Drop-In on Saturday 29 September. Sue Yates

Ship in a Bottle

Many members will have seen 'Nelson's Ship in a Bottle' artwork by Yinka Shonibare, until recently on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. With support from the Art Fund together with additional funds being raised through the National Maritime Museum's appeal for public donations, it is due to be moved this spring to a permanent new home outside the Museum's Sammy Ofer Wing, looking directly into the Park. It should prove an interesting addition to the Park's surroundings.

For further information about the ship and the appeal visit: www.artfund.org/ship

Education Opportunities in Greenwich Park

In the South of Greenwich Park, next to the Wilderness lies the Nature Trail. Hidden behind the Wildlife Centre, this small part of the Park provides a wealth of educational opportunities that can be extended across Greenwich Park.

The Wildlife Centre will provide the Field Studies Council (FSC) with a base from which to develop education services for schools and other groups. We look forward to working with the volunteers to develop a range of programmes to suit all ages and interests, including pond dipping, minibeast hunts, using the Deer Hide, and finding out more about plants and animals. For older groups the rest of the Park provides a broader range of subject opportunities including geography, science, leisure and tourism and art.

Toni Assirati, Head of Education and Community Engagement, The Royal Parks said: "London's Royal Parks offer unparalleled opportunities for city children to learn about the natural world. Following government spending cuts, the future of education programmes across The Royal Parks was uncertain. However, by working with the FSC, many thousands more school children will have the opportunity to learn, discover and be inspired in Bushy, Regent's and Greenwich Parks."

The FSC is an environmental education charity with 17 centres that extend throughout the UK. It is recognised as a national leader in developing outdoor education in both urban and rural areas. Alongside its work with schools, the FSC is committed to professional training and is one of the UK's foremost providers of taxonomic training. Families and individuals are also offered a range of courses that cover all aspects of the natural world.

We are keen to work with local schools and groups. If you are a parent, teacher or governor, or know someone involved in education or community engagement, do contact us with your ideas.
For more information:
www.field-studies-council.org/londoneast

Contact

- Email: enquiries.le@field-studies-council.org
- Tel: 020 3130 0469

Olympics Update continued

- June: Area to west of the Avenue near Circus Gate closed for installation of stabling. Further small sections alongside the Avenue and Blackheath Avenue closed for installation of other temporary structures. Extension of perimeter fencing continues. Path opposite the Queen's House closed.
- July: Park closed between 7 July and 4 August, but access to the Royal Observatory and Pavilion Tea House maintained until 23 July. Children's Playground and much of the Flower Garden open throughout except cross country day.
- August: Areas of the Park and pedestrian through routes gradually reopen. Some grass reinstatement work, mainly along the cross country route.
- September - November: Fencing and overlay removal continues. Areas in front of the Queens House and National Maritime Museum remain closed until all structures there have been removed by late November, when handed back to The Royal Parks for grass reinstatement work. For further details on the reinstatement work, visit: www.royalparks.org.uk/London2012_greenwichpark.cfm.

  Some timing may vary slightly.

More information about the decommissioning process following the games and grass reinstatement methods will given in the July Newsletter.

Communication

Despite the overall success of the Test Event, communication proved to be the Achilles Heel, whether that was telling people about the details of path closures or just getting the signage right. In response to our comments on this LOCOG have given assurances that clear plans will be posted on their dedicated boards in the Park in advance of each new phase of works or closures showing exactly where areas are open or closed and where alternative routes are available and so on so there is no scope for confusion. They have also promised to involve the local amenity groups in the detail of the park signage itself. Keep an eye on LOCOG's boards for the updated plans and maps.

Transport

For residents and park users, the Olympics were always bound to provide problems.

Transport looks to be the major one. We can all expect disruption and inconvenience over five or six weeks in July and August, but it is important that we know what the full transport plans are. Consideration of LOCOG's Transport Plan was deferred at the Planning Board meeting as it had not been finalised. Although this is not strictly within the Friends remit, we fully supported the comments from the other three societies about its inadequacies and lack of clarity.

The societies are pressing for more information on transport but, equally important, we want LOCOG to up its performance on communications. Early on they scored poorly. Latterly they have improved but it is critical that, from now on, they tell us clearly and promptly what is happening.

THE VIEW from the Park

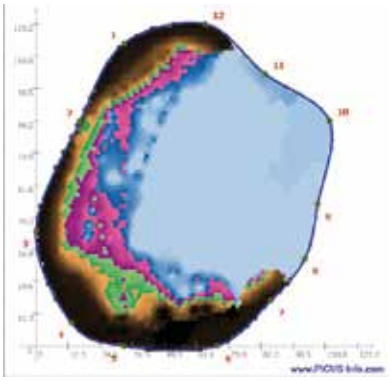
Graham Dear, park manager

As might have been predicted we had a fall of snow in February.

Lovely as it looks, snow falling on Cedars is not good news for the Cedars. Cedar wood is brittle. The weight of the snow sitting on the branches often results in splits and breaks. We always keep an eye on the trees for damage in the snow and sure enough, a large Deodar near Vanburgh Gate had three badly broken limbs which were not safe and had to be removed.

Regular visitors may have seen the mature beech tree which blew over at the top of One Tree Hill. The trunk was completely rotten inside providing perfect habitat for the larvae of the Greater Stag Beetle. The stump has been left to continue providing a home for Britain's largest beetle.

At the southern end of Rangers Field was another mature tree, a Turkey Oak, which was also badly infected with a fungal rot. Our Arboriculture Officer, Ian Rodgers, commissioned a 'picogram' of the tree trunk (like a CT scan) to



investigate the extent of the damage. You can see from the attached scan the extent of the rot *(light shade)* with only limited live structural tissue *(dark shade)* holding the tree up. The tree was in a prominent position close to a main footpath. It was not safe to retain it so unfortunately it had to be felled.

The programmed Blackheath Gate works began on 6 February. When the gates were originally built in 1855 they only served pedestrian, bicycles and horses. Now the gates serve as the main motor vehicle entrance to the Park. Unfortunately the gates just aren't big enough for emergency vehicles and the deliveries required for our day to day business.

With input from the Friends of Greenwich unit; Park, Blackheath Society, Greenwich Society, English Heritage and the Greenwich Council's Conservation Officer a fine design solution has been arrived at. It involves setting the gates back some 5 metres into the Park and making them slightly wider. This enables us to increase the width of the in and out road gates and creates more space for that crucial turn left out of the Park. An elegant curved railing will connect the new gates with the line of the existing railings.

The first phase of the gate works will be completed by 2 April. LOCOG will then install temporary central gates to facilitate their access requirements for the Olympic Equestrian Events. Phase 2 of the Blackheath Gate project will start in November 2012.

Building new gates is a major project which inevitably is causing some disruption. However, the new gates should serve the Park for another 150 years.

You may have noticed the Park being quite busy with contractors this winter. The improvements and extension of the playground, introducing more natural play elements, is complete and should prove extremely popular with younger visitors.

Also, the first phase of the Flower Garden lake works (funded by a Biffaward grant and the Friends), involving the installation of floating reed beds is complete. Submerged aquatic plants, added in April, should help to improve the lake environment for wildlife.

Thanks to The Royal Parks Foundation the Park will receive an elegant new drinking fountain, courtesy of Tiffany & Co. This will replace the redundant (and ugly) brick fountain on Bandstand Field.

Royal Parks Board appointed

We reported in the last Newsletter on a change in The Royal Parks governance arrangements with the establishment of a new Royal Parks Board, to be appointed by the Mayor of London, "to provide a voice for the Mayor and for London in how the parks are managed". Appointments have now been made for all 12 places on the new body.

In addition to the re-appointment of the former chair, Apurv Bagri, and the three other non-executive members of the former board, the three seats reserved for representatives of the London boroughs have been given to the council leaders of Westminster, Camden and Greenwich (Chris Roberts). The Royal Household representative on the Board is Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Ford, Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office. The two remaining non executive places have been filled, following a selection process, by Roger Bright, recently retired Chief Executive of the Crown Estate and Lord True, Leader of Richmond Council.

Just two Royal Parks executive members, the Chief Executive and the Director of Resources, make up the total.

The final list means that one third, rather than the expected one quarter, of the positions are held by Council leaders.

We will take a keen interest in how the new structure operates, and ensure that the views of the users of the Park continue to be heard.

New Chief Executive for The Royal Parks

We offer a warm welcome to Linda Lennon CBE who joined The Royal Parks as Chief Executive at the beginning of March. Linda was previously with the Parole Board, where she held the same position. Prior to this she was Area Director for the Civil and Family Courts in London and has 30 years of experience of working in the courts in London and the south east.

Friends AGM is on Wednesday 16 May 7.30 for 8pm

The AGM takes place on 16 May at 7.30 for 8pm in the Theatre, Blackheath High School, 27 Vanbrugh Park, SE3 7AG (Mycenae Road entrance). Copies of the Chairman's Report and the Financial Report are enclosed.

Officers and committee members proposed and seconded for the coming year are:

Chairman:

Liz Coyle, 3 Orchard Drive, SE3 0QP

Vice-Chairman:

Richard Jones, 65 Hervey Road, London, SE3 8BX

Committee Members:

Clare Marchant resigned during the year. Nominations have been received for Lesley Hodsdon (election), Clive Corlett (re-election). Tony Butler, Brendan Hicks, Ann Hutchinson, John Mitchell, Sue Yates continue to serve. The committee confirms the appointments of Christine Bevan as Secretary, Julie Punter as Treasurer and Fran Tyler as Membership Secretary.

Come and party in the Park: the Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band is back for our 20th Anniversary concert

The Friends' renowned Midsummer Jazz Concert is on Sunday 17 June, in the Observatory Garden, with the ever-popular Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band.

This is an event for the whole family. Tickets are only £5, with under-16s free. (Tickets on the gate, if available, will be £6)

The Garden will open at noon, and the band will play from 1pm to 3.30pm. There will be a bar and an ice cream stall.

This will be the last event in the Park, before it shuts down for the Olympics. So don't miss out.

Complete the booking form enclosed with this newsletter.

Duck Pond Visitors by Richard Lord

Recent visitors to the duck pond in March include a handsome pair of Egyptian Geese, see photo.

Originally from Africa, Egyptian Geese are now a UK breeding species and locally common in East Anglia.Highly territorial and noisy during the breeding season, it will be interesting to see if this pair hang around! Also spotted on the pond, a pair of tiny Teal. Usually present in winter on The Thames, one of their preferred breeding sites is "on the edges of lakes", so who knows, given the ongoing habitat improvement programme being carried out, we may soon have our very own breeding pair!

Friends of Greenwich Park

Chairman: Liz Coyle, 3 Orchard Drive, SE3 0QP Tel: 020 8852 8831
Wildlife Group: Sue Yates, 34 Hyde Vale, London SE10 8QH Tel: 020 8692 1760
Newsletter: Lesley Hodsdon lesleyhodsdon@gmail.com
Membership Secretary: Fran Tyler, 51 Lock Chase, London SE3 9HB Tel: 020 8852 9540 tylerfrantom@aol.com
Annual subscription: UK £5; overseas £10. Cheques made out to Friends of Greenwich Park with sae please, and sent to the Membership Secretary.

Greenwich Park (Tel: 020 8858 2608) is one of London's eight Royal Parks. The others are Bushy Park, The Green Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, Richmond Park and St James's Park. All have links with former royal palaces or hunting grounds. Between them they cover 2083 ha. (5000 acres) of historic parkland. The Royal Parks also manages Brompton Cemetery.
In Greenwich Park, there are police phone boxes at St Mary's Gate and at Blackheath Gate. In an emergency dial 999; for other calls Tel: 0300 123 1212

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Dates for Your Diary summary

London Marathon
Sun 22 April
The London Marathon starts in Greenwich Park.

Wildlife Open Day*
Sat 28 April 11am - 4pm
For full details see page 2

Annual General Meeting
Wed 16 May 7.30 for 8pm
(Members only)
The Theatre, Blackheath High School. For further details see left hand column. The AGM will begin at 8pm and finish at around 9.30pm. Wine and soft drinks will be served from 7.30pm.

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 26 May 1pm - 3pm

Jazz in the Park
Booking now **BOOKING NOW**
Sun 17 June 1pm - 3.30pm
Tickets from Friends of Greenwich Park, 52 Greenwich Park Street, SE10 9LT. Tel 020 8853 2150. Cheques payable to Friends of Greenwich Park.

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 30 June 1pm - 3pm

* The Wildlife Centre is near the south end of the lake in the Flower Garden. The 'Drop Ins' are organised by the Friends Wildlife Group on behalf of The Royal Parks and provide the chance for children and young people to find out about wildlife in Greenwich Park. Visit and watch any wildlife that is passing by. Included are wildlife-related craft activities and guided tours of the Nature Trail and Deer Hide.

Good turnout for the Annual Lecture

Despite overnight snowfall, there was a very good turnout for the Friends Annual Lecture on 5 February when local historian Horatio Blood treated his audience to a witty and entertaining insight into the goings on in and outside the Park during the Greenwich Fairs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His vivid recreation of the atmosphere of the times - the bawdy and licentious behaviour of the fairgoers and the allure of the attractions on offer - accompanied by copious illustrations by the cartoonists of the day, gave us a real flavour of the Park's colourful past life. Well worth braving the weather conditions for.