FRIENDS OF GREENWICH PARK
NEWSLETTER

Spring 2013 Registered Charity No: 1029933 Number 63

Park looks set to be in better condition than before the Games

LOCOG handed back all the northern end of the Park to The Royal Parks by the end of November, as scheduled.

The stabling area, which was vacated earlier on had already been reseeded and greened up well, but this approach was not viable so late in the year for the Queen's Field, the site of the arena. The best option here was to decompact and prepare the ground and then lay turf. Readers may have seen the huge rolls of turf being delivered and then unrolled by tractor across the area like giant lengths of carpet. Sourced to order from a specialist firm, some 35,000 square metres of quality grass grown on Romney Marsh will have been laid in total. As with all the grassland renovation, this work, though paid for by LOCOG, has been carried out by the Park's own experienced contractors under the expert eye of the Park manager and his assistant manager. In spite of snow in January halting progress for a while, the Queen's Field was finished on 28 February.

By mid-March all the ground left untreated in the training area will have been prepared and reseeded, though some will remain fenced off for a while to allow the new grass to become adequately established. Late spring should see all the Park's amenity grassland looking good and in many areas of a better quality than previously.

The acid grassland restoration programme is also on target, though some slopes took a hammering from January's sledging activities. Areas which fell within the cross country track will be scarified in April to create an open sward. In June and July a hay crop will be taken from acid grasslands and the collected seed cleaned and used to over-sow the cross country track in autumn. Soon all trace of the track will have disappeared. The same process will be applied to the larger degraded grassland areas selected for habitat enhancement as a lasting legacy for the Park.

Roads and paths

No one will have failed to notice the extensive works taking place along the Park's roads and footpaths since early January. Their condition was assessed before the 2012 events and after the temporary structures were removed. Some had deteriorated during this time, but some were already in need of general repair.

By augmenting LOCOG's reinstatement funding, The Royal Parks have been able to undertake a major refurbishment programme of the whole of Blackheath Avenue and The Avenue. When finished, this will have involved a complete resurfacing of both these roads as well as the parking bays on Blackheath Avenue; the removal and re-laying of the granite gullies along both side of the roads; and levelling off the crown of Blackheath Avenue where repeated overlay has resulted in excessive height in places, affecting parking access.

Some footpaths, mainly at the lower end of the Park, are being closed off temporarily for renovation. The Royal Parks aim to get these open again as quickly as possible.

For some reason during the twentieth century the broad central path of Bower Avenue was widened and black tarmac footpaths added on either side right up to the trunks of the trees. Many of them, including some veterans dating back to the original 1664 avenue plantings, are now suffering from dieback and are under stress from soil compaction and drought, with half their root zones under the tarmac.The Royal Parks have taken the opportunity to commission additional work with the roadworks contractor to remove these tarmac footpaths to return them to grass. This will not just improve the landscape setting of Bower Avenue, but, more importantly, it will substantially improve the health of the trees. The new turf should have settled in well before the Marathon takes place in April.

All this, particularly the need to close the early morning and evening vehicle through route for safety reasons yet again, has meant

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more disruption for park users and local traffic, but the end result, including the final phase of the Blackheath Gates rebuild, will be a significant improvement for the Park and the southern entrance to the World Heritage Site.

Turfing in Bower Avenue

Friends to sponsor Bandstand concerts

Due to cuts in their government grant, The Royal Parks no longer fund Sunday bandstand concerts in the Park. Those concerts are very much part of summer in the Park, and it would be a great pity if we were to lose them. The Friends have therefore decided to step in and, with the park manager's agreement, will be sponsoring at least four bandstand concerts this year. Please see the details in the forthcoming events listing elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Wanted: editor for the Newsletter

Would you or someone you know be interested in being editor?

Three times a year the Friends of Greenwich Park newsletter is delivered to about 1600 households and corporate Friends.

The editor's job is to draw together four pages of readable and informative news with some photographs. The bulk of material for each edition is written by people well used to providing copy, with some space for pieces by other contributors.

The editorship is part of a well-oiled machine. We have good helpful printers who also do the layout. The tasks of providing labels, arranging stuffing of envelopes and delivery of the newsletters are dealt with separately elsewhere by other volunteers.

If you would like to find out more about the editorship please contact Liz Coyle 020 8852 8831 or email lizcoyle@waitrose.com

Wildlife Notes *by Sue Yates*

Progress on the Dig-ins

For three years now a small group of people have been meeting from November through to February to do work on the Nature Trail and other projects.

The Nature Trail, entered via the Wildlife Centre, had become very overgrown with ground ivy, brambles, bracken and holly and laurel trees. These were keeping out the light and choking off more interesting species, so the team have been systematically removing them. In some cases the Park's arboriculturalists have removed larger specimens. In their place we have reintroduced native species, with particular emphasis on nectar or berry-producing varieties to benefit moths, butterflies and insects and thus the birds. This is an ongoing process. For more information on what will be planted, see the detailed plan on our website. We have also planted a mixed hedgerow (hawthorn, blackthorn and dog roses) which runs from the Flower Garden gate up to the Wildlife Centre.

It has now been decided that much better results will be achieved if we meet on a monthly basis throughout the year, so the last Friday of the month, 9.30am-12.30pm, has been earmarked, starting in April. If you would like to join us, (and it does not mean you have to come every month), please call Sue Yates (*see back page*). Equipment is provided as well as refreshments.

Wildlife Open Day

Saturday 27 April 11am-4pm

In and around the Wildlife Centre, Flower Garden

The Friends support this event each year so that it can be free of charge to all visitors. We expand out of the Wildlife Centre into six surrounding gazebos and it is a real team effort by the volunteers, with something for everyone.

This year there will be wildlife-themed craft activities, the planting of vegetables in take home pots, moths and caterpillars and hopefully a few developing tadpoles. There will be tree walks for the children, guided tours of the Nature Trail - usually full of bluebells at this time of year - together with some activities from the Field Studies Council, the environmental education charity now based in the Park.

Barn owls Sundance and Moneypenny

However, the stars of the show will be a pair of hand-reared barn owls. Sussex Owls will be with us for the day and will explain the difficulties that barn owls are currently facing. So, as well as being able to see these beautiful creatures close up, we will learn about the changes to the ecology that are making their lives more difficult.

The outing to the Natural History Museum

The aim of the outing was to reintroduce the Natural History Museum to people who perhaps had not been since their children were small. The January date was over subscribed and so another group went on 22 February, which unfortunately was in the half term holiday - never visit at half term unless you have a child in tow and can't avoid it!

We started with a tour of the new 'Treasures' exhibition of items which the museum considers to be its 22 most significant from the 77 million in the collection.This has excellent supporting electronic signage with exhibits ranging from the stuffed form of Guy the Gorilla to a first edition of 'The Origin of Species'.

From here we took a brief look at one of the very attractive geology galleries, full of natural light, with specimens presented in a very traditional way.

We then entered the Cocoon (that is its shape), the last part of the new Darwin Centre to be completed. The building is beautiful and the presentation is very interactive. Data can be stored on a Nature Plus card and retrieved from your computer at home. A large part of the Cocoon is devoted to the storage of precious specimens, but you can also talk to the scientists who work there. Here we were met by Renee Miller (a Friend of Greenwich Park), who explained the work that she does there, as a volunteer, on fossilized coral from Indonesia formed 25 million years ago. The analysis should tell us a lot about the climate at that time.

Finally we attended a showing of the interactive programme "Who do you really think you are", which explains how scientists have researched the Tree of Life back to the earliest cellular creatures. Sadly this film was out of commission on our second visit in February.

I am already getting reports of people revisiting the museum under their own steam, which is brilliant.

THE VIEW from the Park

Graham Dear, Park manager

Today is officially the first day of spring, although to be honest it doesn't feel like it. The temperatures have been below freezing for some weeks.

Despite the weather, the Blackheath Gate works are nearing completion and it will be a welcome sight to see the beautiful cast iron gates back in place following a year's absence. The new design, with its elegant curved railings, will make a fitting entrance to our wonderful park.

Another long standing project which is nearer completion (as far as any garden is ever complete) is The Orchard. For the last two years a hive of activity has been going on behind the high brick walls beside the playground. Our own gardeners, assisted by volunteers from the Friends' Wildlife Group, have been busy landscaping and planting up the latest addition to Greenwich Park. The earliest recorded use of this land as an orchard was on a plan dated 1693, when it was known as 'The Queens Orchard'. In recognition of this name and to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012, the land will once again be known as the 'Queen's Orchard'. You can see the name picked out in lettering on the beautiful new pedestrian gate, which gives access to the garden, beside the Park's Creed Place entrance. The gate was designed by local artist, Heather Burrell, following workshops with pupils from Millennium

Primary School, John Roan School and some more mature members of the Friends of Greenwich Park. Inside the garden the nineteenth century well discovered three years ago has an iron cover, also designed by Heather.

The Queen's Orchard will be open to visitors on Sunday mornings starting 28 April. Inside you will be able to see the orchard planted with heritage varieties of apples, pears, cherries and plums, a wildlife pond, ornamental pond and display beds of heritage vegetables. It is certain to become a favourite with visitors to the Park.

Another favourite spot in the Park is the playground, now home to five life-size carved wooden sheep, which started life as one of the jumps in the 2012 Equestrian Olympics. Over the years the playground has been added to with an eclectic mix of play equipment which, whilst popular, does not form part of a cohesive design. The Royal Parks has now commissioned a master-plan for the playground which guides its refurbishment in the future. The intention is to enhance the play value at the same time as producing a design that fits well in this historic park. The design will be presented for consultation during the school Easter holidays.

Beside the cricket pitch, on Blackheath Avenue, the first of a 'host of golden daffodils' blooms are beginning to open. Spring must be on its way after all.

Herbaceous Border to be redesigned

The herbaceous border is one of the prime horticultural features of the Park, but over the years bindweed has taken hold and has proved impossible to eradicate. It grows insidiously through the stems and root systems of other plants and cannot be eliminated without damaging them.

Sections of the herbaceous border had to be removed last year to accommodate the overlay for the Olympics and this offered The Royal Parks the opportunity to clear it of all plants over the winter of 2012, and then treat the bindweed during the spring of 2013. They also saw this as an opportunity to redesign the border to create a first class horticultural attraction to complement the historic buildings - the Queen's House and Old Royal Naval College - that give on to it.

The Royal Parks have now appointed a prestigious garden designer (to be announced shortly) to produce a design for the herbaceous border of the highest quality. Planting will take place during the autumn of 2013. In the interim, the vacant space left by the removal of the old plants will be filled with an annual wildflower mix to ensure flower colour throughout the summer months of 2013.

Michael Loughnane, assistant park manager

Other-worldly wisdom

This year's Annual Lecture 'Cosmos and Culture' by astronomer Marek Kukula attracted an audience of some 120 people who were treated to a scintillating (surely the appropriate word) guide to the earth, the stars and more than just our own universe. Much of what you didn't know about these things was brought into focus by Dr Kukula, whose entertaining lecture linked astronomy to biology and to our human imaginings of our place in the universe.

The slides were stunning. A fern sprouting through the soil took us, in one step, to the whorl of a distant galaxy that shared a similar mathematical form and, suddenly, there was a dung beetle navigating by the Milky Way in order to push his provender in a straight line.

Amongst many other things, we learned that, in order for us to 'see' what is in space, photographs of galaxies and nebulae are coloured to show radiation beyond the visible spectrum. Dr Kukula persuasively demonstrated that NASA scientists have chosen (almost certainly unconsciously) a palette that comes directly from the Hudson River school of painting. Next time you look at photographs of distant galaxies, just ask yourself how much of their visual impact is owed to those 19th century American painters.

The lecture ended with something that one might find either bleak or inspiring. No less than 74 per cent of the universe comprises Dark Energy, of which, at present, we know nothing. Despite that, the optimists amongst us might well agree with Mort Sahl, the American comedian who once memorably said 'The future lies ahead'. If you are going there, you might just want to take Dr Kukula as your guide.

Friends AGM is on Thursday 13 June 7.30 for 8pm

The 21st AGM takes place on 13 June 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:
John Mitchell and Ann Hutchinson will stand down at the AGM. Tony Butler, Clive Corlett, Brendan Hicks, Lesley Hodsdon and 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.

Visit to Elmley Marshes on 16 May

We are proposing an outing in May to Elmley Marshes on the Isle of Sheppey in North Kent.

It takes just over an hour to drive there from the centre of Greenwich, but it is like entering another world. Remote, wide vistas and beautiful marshland, right on our doorstep. There have been previous trips by the Friends: in September 2011, as a mini hurricane was sweeping through; and in March 2012, having delayed from February when all was ice. With Elmley the place may be the same, but the bird population is ever changing and in May the breeding season will be in full swing. We would hope to see avocets, lapwings, reed warblers and marsh harriers, but there is always something unexpected.

As before there will be a car sharing scheme, which seems to work well and enables those without transport to go on the visit. The funds raised support the Wildlife Open Day.

The Phoenix Dixieland Jazz Band is back for our Midsummer Jazz Concert

The Friends' renowned Midsummer Jazz Concert is on Sunday 16 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 still available, will be £6)

The Garden will open at noon for picnics, and the band will play from 1pm to 3.30pm. There will be a bar and an ice cream stall.
Complete the booking form enclosed with this newsletter.

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: Liz Coyle lizcoyle@waitrose.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.

Dates for Your Diary summary

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

London Marathon
Sun 21 April

Wildlife Open Day*
Sat 27 April 11am – 4pm
For full details see page 2

Outing to Elmley Marshes, Isle of Sheppey ***Booking now***
Thurs 16 May 11am at RSPB Car park
Tickets from Friends of Greenwich Park, 34 Hyde Vale, SE10 8QH. Tel 020 8692 1760.
Cheques payable to Friends of Greenwich Park.

'Drop In' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sat 25 May 1pm - 3pm

Annual General Meeting
Thurs 13 June
(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.

Jazz in the Park
Sun 16 June ***Booking now***
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 29 June 1pm - 3pm

Bandstand concert
Sun 7 July
Lewisham Schools Steel Band

Bandstand concert
Sun 14 July
Southwark Concert Band

'Drop in' at the Wildlife Centre*
Sun 27 July 1pm – 3pm

Bandstand concert
Sun 28 July
South London Jazz Orchestra

Bandstand concert
Sun 25 August
Greenwich Concert Band

* **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.

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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