FRIENDS OF GREENWICH PARK
NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020 Registered Charity No: 1029933 Number 85

The Lockdown Edition

The Flower Garden looking its best *Photo: Jonathan Chandler*

Graham Dear, Park Manager writes

At the start of my eleventh year at Greenwich Park I would not have believed that 2020 would prove to be an even more extraordinary year than 2012, but for very different reasons.

No-one could have predicted the global pandemic that coronavirus has become and its impact on all our lives. From a personal point of view, I contracted the virus early in March and was ill for a month, but I consider myself to be lucky. I know this virus has tragically affected our Greenwich Park community and our thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones.

Throughout this troubled year Greenwich Park has remained open and has proved to be a lifeline for so many people. Managing the restrictions to ensure that the park is as safe as it can be for visitors has been a challenge. Our gardeners, police, park staff, cleaners, gate lockers, caterers, maintenance staff, tennis coaches and contractors have all worked tirelessly to keep the park open and endeavour to get the park back to some normality.

By the end of July, we hope to open the car park (at least partially), the playground and the boating lake and see a return to cricket matches.

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The Spring and Summer weather has been the best I can remember. How the park is used and by whom, has changed during the lockdown and this has been fascinating to observe. Despite the car park being closed the park has been busier than at any time in my tenure. So many families use the park and the socially distanced picnics across the whole site will be an abiding memory. In the latter weeks the park has been a much-needed resource for younger adults to meet up with friends. Many are perhaps facing an uncertain future with employment.

It's true there has been an exponential rise in refuse collected, up to six-fold on last year and the number of cycles even more, as visitors find new ways to get to the park. Some of the changes may be here to stay and we will need to review the way we manage the park in future.

The Royal Parks are launching a summer campaign under the heading #bekind. I think this is something we can all relate to; be kind to the park, be kind to each other. It has been and still is a most challenging time, but Greenwich Park has been here for nearly 600 years and will continue to welcome visitors for many more years to come.

Best wishes to you all.

The Queen's Orchard: Lockdown Latest

Like many parts of Greenwich Park, the Queen's Orchard closed during lockdown, just as volunteers were reporting for their spring and summer duties. The beautiful iron gate being shut didn't mean that life within the orchard stopped though, and in the capable hands of Royal Parks staff member Alex Andrews the plants and wildlife have flourished.

The "rosea nigra" hollyhock has been a highlight of the summer so far, as have the artichokes. Wild flowers have sprouted up through the long grass in the meadow section of the orchard, and the apple and pear trees look set to produce an excellent crop of fruits in the coming months. Also enjoying the absence of humans has been a family of foxes, with adorably cute cubs emerging from their den under the mulberry trees in the centre of the orchard to the delight of Alex each morning.

Equally delightful for Alex was the news that volunteers could return to give her a helping hand from 8 July. Working two at a time, in morning and afternoon slots from Wednesday to Sunday, the eager volunteers have got stuck in, tending the fruit and vegetables that have carried on growing regardless, and doing lots of weeding – all bearing in mind social distancing guidelines.

When the public will be allowed in is still being debated, and the Open Day scheduled for September is in doubt. But when the gate does reopen and visitors flock back, they can rest assured that Alex and the volunteers have done everything possible to keep the Queen's Orchard as beautiful and bountiful as ever.

Cliff Wilkinson

The Queen's Orchard *Photo: Alex Andrews*

Friends' Programme of Music in the Park Cancelled

The programme of music in the Park including the Midsummer Jazz on 21 June and the bandstand concerts scheduled for the summer have all had to be cancelled. The Royal Parks Board has decided, because of the continuing Covid-19 situation, to cancel musical events in all the Royal Parks for the rest of 2020. This sadly means that all our bandstand concerts including those scheduled for August will not now take place.

Wildlife Volunteering by Sue Yates

Our last Drop-in was Saturday 29th February and, of course, lockdown then intervened. Our Wildlife Centre is in the Flower Garden, which is at least now open but that is not much help. Our building is long and narrow (it was a bulb store in its first incarnation). At the best of times, the layout is not ideal but with Covid 19 it is an impossible design for safety. On a warm afternoon in summer we might get 150 visitors and with the park as busy as it is currently, who knows.

We have been thinking that we could perhaps bring some activities and displays outside into the Flower Garden but our explanations and demonstrations are usually carried out at quite close quarters. In addition, many of the volunteers are retired and in the grouping needing to take the greatest care. So, there will be meetings and risk assessments and hopefully later in the year we will be able to offer something, if not the full experience.

Outings

Again, no firm dates for activities have been fixed at this point. The need to travel not on public transport and be able to park a car and be suitably distanced during the event means we will have to wait a little longer before resuming activities. The same reservations apply to the Bird walks.

Updates

As circumstances change updates will appear on the website and on the Friends notice board outside the Park Office by the Blackheath Gate and inside the Pavilion Café, if it has opened up by then. If you have signed up to receive emails you would also hear what progress has been made via that route. If you don't already receive emails but would like to in the future please go to our home page http:/friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk to request them.

The new Birds of Greenwich Park booklet by Joe Beale

We aim to release this booklet to coincide with the next newsletter when we expect that the Park's office will be open again. Once the booklet is launched in the October newsletter it will then be available for Friends and visitors who pop into the office. During the delay, Joe has however continued to add sightings, so it will be even more informative. So that is something to look forward to.

Greenwich Park Wildlife, Spring 2020

Cherry Blossom in the Spring *Photo: Jonathan Chandler*

The spring was exceptionally dry and warm and grass growth was rather poor, exacerbated by the increased footfall due to the Covid-19 crisis, until towards midsummer when more rain started to fall. In April and May Red Kites, Buzzards and Peregrines were seen flying over on most days. The quietness of lockdown made it easier to hear birds calling as they migrated and this resulted in some unusual records including Mediterranean Gulls, Wigeons and a Greenshank. A Little Owl was seen a few times, and a Pheasant was around in early spring. A Rook in March and Yellow Wagtails in April were good finds passing through – both are less than annual visitors here. The more typical Park species included three Chiffchaff territories, plenty of Blackcaps and Stock Doves and a Whitethroat singing from the brambles on Castle Hill - though it is not clear if he attracted a mate. A pair of Treecreepers in the Flower Garden Glade in late June was an intriguing find – are Treecreepers nesting in the Park again? A Burnet Companion moth was seen at the new meadow flower plantings in the Rose Garden while colourful Toadflax Brocade caterpillars were at One Tree Hill. Emperor, Black-tailed Skimmer and Southern Hawker Dragonflies all appreciated the long grass and rewilded areas in the Park. Twenty butterfly species have appeared so far (with another two or three species due around early July) including many recorded during the monthly butterfly transect surveys I am walking as part of the Greenwich Park Revealed project. These are all species that would be expected and include the three common Skipper species, a few Marbled Whites, good numbers of Commas, a few Small Tortoiseshells and one or two Brown Argus and Small Coppers. Plenty of Peacock larvae were on the nettles at One Tree Hill in June. There were also above average numbers of Brimstones this spring; it may be worth adding a few Alder Buckthorns – the larval foodplant – to hedgerows this autumn to further encourage this beautiful species. Other interesting invertebrates included Speckled Bush-cricket in the Glade and the shiny blue leaf beetle Chrysolina oricalcia at One Tree Hill. There were further sightings of the Elm Zigzag Sawfly – a relatively new species for Britain, whose larvae make zigzag patterns in Elm leaves as they eat.

Joe Beale

Planting Summer Bedding whilst in the midst of a Pandemic

There were a few considerations before planting the summer bedding this year due to the pandemic. After careful consultation with the bedding team, it was agreed that we should plant with one person to each bed, not the usual 2-3. This was because the beds weren't quite two metres and so the required social distancing would have been difficult. It was daunting at first, as there are about 1,000 plants in each bed, plus some heavy centre or 'dot' plants, difficult for one person to lift. Thus, these heavier plants were put in as quickly as possible, each gardener facing away from each other, so as to minimise face to face contact. Each person had their own hand tools, which were sanitised at the end of the day.

The Bedding Team - Rob, Kerry, Tom, Bev and James.

As time went on, something unexpected happened. Each person began to take ownership of their beds, altering or adding to a design. Each gardener became a designer, sometimes advising each other or just taking the lead and making it their own. They had to be coaxed in when it was break times and were out again straight after! They worked quickly, but with great care and detail. I think there's something very different and special about this year's bedding display. I think it may be pride.

I would like to add that, although some of the designs are ours, most of them are from Michael Loughnane, Assistant Park Manager, and Adam Stoter, Technical Assistant, and were only changed a little, so credit to them for designing such lovely flower beds.

We take regular walks around the beds, discussing what worked well, what we would like to repeat next year and what we would very much like to change! But overall, we're very proud and pleased with the results.

Beverley Meeking

Membership

Recruitment was excellent in 2019 and we finished the end of the year with 1793 members, an increase of over 200. There were 322 new members, mostly recruited at the Jazz and Bandstand concerts with many paying by PayPal. Understandably the numbers joining this year are low and members are urged to pay this year's subscription if a Renewal Form is enclosed with the Newsletter. It has not been possible to send membership cards to all those renewing by PayPal this year and if one is needed they should contact the membership secretary (tylerfrantom@btinternet.com).

Remember you will need a current membership card if you wish to claim your discount, particularly at the cafes and kiosks in the Park.

FRIENDS' AGM

In view of the current circumstances the Friends Committee has decided that there will be no AGM in 2020 and that the next AGM will take place in May 2021. This means that committee members will run for a 2 year term instead of the normal one year.

The trials of wildflowers in a few beds in the Rose Garden have proved very successful *Photo: Tony Butler*

Friends of Greenwich Park

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Annual subscription: UK £5; overseas £10. Cheques to Friends of Greenwich Park with sae please, and sent to the Membership Secretary, or pay online via PayPal at the Friends' website: www.friendsofgreenwichpark.org.uk

Greenwich Park (Tel: 0300 061 2380) 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: 020 7161 9740.

Printed by Greycot Press Limited, Unit N5, Europa Trading Estate, Fraser Road, Erith, Kent, DA8 1QL
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