

Newsletter summer 2017



Launch of Friends' film

Tread lightly – water birds and drones

Acid grasslands and invertebrates

Rabbits

Spring-cleaning the Park

The Park in the world wars

Volunteers needed for the Visitor Centre

Mary Davies, our Visitor Centre manager, says: "We are looking for enthusiastic, friendly people to engage with our many visitors, who are also happy working with a till and handling cash. We all find volunteering at the Visitor Centre very rewarding and really enjoy our shifts there." For more information, please email Mary at mdpdavies@virginmedia.com or phone her on 020 8977 4776.



Azure damselflies mating by Russell Ritchin

Cards and gifts

The Visitor Centre by Pembroke Lodge sells gifts, greetings cards and postcards with beautiful images of the Park. Greetings cards are £1.80 each or four for £4.50.

The 2018 Friends' calendar will be on sale from the end of August, with 52 images of the Park and its wildlife. This stunning image of damselflies is just one of them!

Newsletter people

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Front cover photo

Little Owl
by Sue Lindenberg

See more Little Owls in
the Friends' film

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Peter Burrows-Smith strides on!

At the AGM Peter Burrows-Smith stood down as a Friends' Trustee and its Vice-Chairman, after twelve years. During this time, he has made an enormous contribution to the Friends including running our Walks programme and starting our Courses (an expert talk followed by a walk). We now have between 20 and 25 walks and courses each year.

He also started and chaired our Conservation & Ecology committee and has been responsible for many of the Friends' conservation initiatives. More recently, he started the weekly informal Friday bird walks, which each attract up to 30 people.

For many, Peter is best known for his Dawn Chorus bird walk in the spring, forcing us all to get out of bed at 5am, and his Introduction to Birds and Birds and Birdsong courses, which had birdsong echoing round the Pembroke Lodge tearooms. Both have inspired many people to become interested in birds.

Although retiring from the Friends, Peter is not retiring from the Park. He recently became Chair of the Park's Bird Group and will continue with his Friday walks. He is also still Chair of the Park's Police Panel, where he will continue to press for more and better policing. So he will still be a familiar figure striding out across the Park's grassland and woodlands.

Friends' AGM report

Around 120 members attended the Friends' AGM in April, the highest for many years, possibly attracted by the main item – a sneak preview of the Friends' film with Sir David Attenborough. After the screening, George Chan, its director, answered questions. He revealed that the most difficult thing to film was green woodpeckers feeding on ant-hills; the easiest was the wonderful shots of deer gamboling in Beverley Brook.

In his review of 2016, Friends' Chairman Ron Crompton talked about the two successful campaigns of the year – reducing



the number of discarded gel packs and protecting St Paul's view – and the less successful efforts to influence visitor behaviour. Hopefully the new film will help get the message across – promoting the film with the *Tread Lightly* message is the top priority for 2017.

Peter Burrows-Smith stood down as a Trustee. Mary Davies, who manages the Visitor Centre, and Vivienne Press, who produces the newsletter and calendar, were elected as new Trustees. Ron Crompton was congratulated on his 10th AGM as Chairman.

Photo: Peter leading a walk by Liz Coleman

Richmond Park Spring Clean

By Steve Sandham



“We thoroughly enjoyed it and we are surprised how satisfying it is to spend a few hours picking up litter!” said one of the 80 hardworking volunteers who turned out on a cold and blustery day to give Richmond Park its first ever *Spring Clean*.

This Friends of Richmond Park event coincided with Keep Britain Tidy’s *Great British Spring Clean* on the first weekend in March. All across the nation, teams of volunteers collected hundreds of tonnes of litter, including a tonne of it from Richmond Park.

Our volunteers set off, from each of the 7 car parks, in teams with designated patches, to maximise coverage of the park’s nearly 2,500 acres. They were shocked at the amount of litter that could be found lying around in the Park, even at this very early stage of the visitor season. One team said that an astonishing 90% of what they collected was

bagged dog dirt. If people had taken the trouble to bag it, why would they then leave it on the ground, on a park bench or hanging from the branch of a tree?

Everyone who took part felt it was a good use of their time and most thought it should be a regular event. But wouldn’t it be so much better if people did not leave litter in the first place?

Whilst it may be possible to educate some people not to drop litter, sadly it will always be a problem. Perhaps you can help? **If you are interested in covering an area of the Park, no matter how small, which you could proudly adopt as your own litter-free zone, do let us know.**

Please contact us on litter@frp.org.uk and we will help you get started.

Let’s protect our National Nature Reserve. Let’s make a difference!

Photo by Paula Redmond

Love and litter in the water

Once upon a time... There was a handsome male Egyptian Goose and a beautiful female Egyptian Goose who took a fancy to each other and paired for life on Pen Ponds. Everything was looking good until the male goose found something wrong with his legs. Some discarded fishing line had entangled them together. The more he struggled, the worse the problem became.

Park wildlife officers were alerted by a bird-watcher but every time they tried to catch the goose an off-lead dog frightened him and he flew off. Finally, swan sanctuary volunteers were called in to help.

Many Park visitors are aware of the problems that litter can cause to wildlife, especially the deer, but don’t always realise that water birds are equally vulnerable. Toxic cigarette ends may be ingested, shards of plastic from cups may pierce the bird’s gullet, string from kites can enmesh legs or wings. And whilst many dog owners are aware and responsible, some don’t realise that their dogs should be on a lead where birds are nesting or raising young.

And what of our Egyptian Goose pair? Sadly, there was no “happy ever after” to this story. After 6 days of attempts to rescue him he has disappeared. And you can still hear his bereft partner calling plaintively into the wind.

Droning on...

Two little owls enjoying the evening sun near their nest in a mature, leafy oak tree in the Saw Pit Plantation. Suddenly, something swoops down with a high-pitched, threatening buzzing noise. Startled, the birds take to the air and disappear into the sunset. And don’t come back.

A group of red deer grazing peacefully at Sawyers Hill. Two young males playfully clash antlers in a practice run for the rut later in the year. Out of the blue, something crashes noisily to the ground and the deer run off in panic towards the road.

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? And it’s not Superman, either. It’s a drone.

Drones are fun for people, but often terrify animals and birds, and so they are banned in Richmond Park, except on the Flying Field on the southwest corner of Sheen Cross. Here, enthusiasts can enjoy their hobby in a spacious and safe area. If you see a drone flying elsewhere in the Park, please protect the animals and call the Park police on 101.

*With thanks to **Alison Glazier** for writing these two articles from information on actual events earlier this year, received from **Paula Redmond** (water birds) and **Sula Riedlinger** (drones).*

Acid grassland and invertebrates

by Hugh Bradshaw

Any visitor to the Park cannot help but notice the low grass hummocks evenly spaced in many of its open areas. These small mounds are actually anthills and the work of industrious yellow meadow ants.



The presence of these anthills, which can be over 100 years old, are visible indicators of the importance of these areas of grassland. Their existence in such numbers shows that these grasslands have remained undisturbed for many years. Nationally, uncontrolled development or conversion to recreational use has made this habitat scarce. However, the Park has the largest area of acid grassland in the London area and this habitat helped acquire the SSSI status for the Park.

Acid grassland is special as its soil is low in nutrients and, as a result, coarse grasses do not thrive there. This allows an abundance of finer grasses and wild flowers to flourish. Such a habitat is also rich in fauna, in particular insects and other invertebrates.

Although the yellow meadow ant is one of the most numerous insects in the Park, as they live mostly underground, they are unlikely to be seen. The conspicuous anthills are made from fine particles of sand and within them the ants build passages and galleries where

they keep the colony's eggs and young. The mounds absorb the sunlight and, by retaining heat, enable a constant temperature to be maintained. If the temperature changes, the ants can move the eggs to the sunnier side of the mound.

By late spring, these grasslands can be awash with butterflies, including meadow browns, small heaths, skippers and small coppers.

The anthills create ideal sandy areas where male butterflies often bask, awaiting a brave female to fly over them, whereupon the males will launch themselves in aerial pursuit.

At night moths, including the rare double line moth, may be found. The anthills' sandy walls enable grasshoppers, as well as many of the Park's 150 species of solitary bees and wasps, to lay their eggs in them. The burrows of these wasps are not inconspicuous and a short wait beside one may reward the observer with a glimpse of the nationally scarce red-banded sand wasp, the mining bee or bee-wolf wasp.

Help protect the acid grassland

Always clear up after your dogs, as their faeces are rich in nutrients that encourage coarse grasses to grow which out-compete the rare flora.

Please keep to the paths, as the ant mounds are easily damaged by people stepping on them.

Mission: Invertebrates

By Ron Crompton



This summer and autumn Richmond Park will be alive with invertebrates, and with people working with and learning about them. The People's Postcode Lottery has provided £600,000 in funding for a Royal Parks project – dubbed 'Mission: Invertebrates' – to increase scientific and public knowledge of these critical but much-overlooked members of all the Parks' ecology.

In Richmond Park, much of the scientific work will focus on the anthills, the yellow meadow ants that build them and the root aphids they farm and whose honeydew they feed on. A 'citizen science' project will involve volunteers measuring the height, diameter and temperature of anthills to determine how habitat (dry grassland, bog) and past land management affects their size and to get data on their likely age.

Other work will improve the habitat for invertebrates, including creating new scrapes for burrowing bees and wasps on open grassland and a pollinator garden at Poets Corner (see page 13).

Photo Brown-lipped snail by Nigel Jackman

A trial of invisible (electronic) cattle fencing will see whether this is a viable way of extending the area of cattle grazing from the present wooden fenced area near Holly Lodge. Cattle graze differently from deer, pulling up grass and leaving bare patches for wildflowers and burrowing insects to colonise.

On the education side, a giant snail caravan (photo) will visit all the Royal Parks, with activities including storytelling, bug trails, creative crafting and invertebrate conservation missions. It is in Richmond Park from 22 to 26 July.

The project is also working with the Holly Lodge Centre to provide invertebrate-related activities for schools: the Centre, helped by the Friends' Discoverers volunteers, will have days of activities for disabled children and young people at Isabella and Roehampton Gate in late July and early August.



And for adults, the educational activities include a specialist course and walks organised by the Friends in the autumn (see page 15).

A hive of activity indeed!

Richmond Park film launched to overwhelming praise

Eighteen months of writing, filming and editing culminated on 25 April with the launch of the Friends' new film: **Richmond Park – National Nature Reserve**, presented and narrated by Sir David Attenborough. The objective is to help visitors understand the rich wildlife of the Park and the threats it faces, so that they want to protect it and Tread Lightly.

Nearly 650 guests were privileged to attend the premiere screened at the beautiful Royal Geographical Society in Kensington. They included Friends' volunteers and ballot winners, the Park's wildlife experts, people from key organisations linked to the Park, especially TRP, and a lively group of more than 200 children from local schools.



Enthusiastic applause greeted the end of the inspirational 21-minute film. This was redoubled when Sir David took the stage to answer questions posed by another local veteran broadcaster, Sir Trevor McDonald. Asked to name his favourite animal in the Park, Sir David chose stag beetles, but confessed that his real favourites were the children he sees delighting in the natural surroundings.

They were joined on stage by TRP head of ecology, Julia Balfour, the film's director George Chan, executive producer/FRP trustee Richard Gray and Dougie Poynter, bass player of McFly. Dougie raised a laugh when he said that he knew nothing about where to live in London so did a Google search to see where Sir David lived and made the decision to move to Richmond because it must be good if David Attenborough lived there!

FRP's Richard Gray said: "We're immensely proud of the film; it's made to the highest production standards but also evolved from considerable input from Park wildlife experts, TRP staff, brilliant film makers and, of course, Sir David".

The film was broadcast on London Live the night after the launch and tens of thousands have since viewed the full film online or a 4 minute version made specially for social media. There is a special film website www.richmondparkfilm.org.uk which has links to the film and more, or see it via www.frp.org.uk.

We now want everyone – and especially members – to do all they can to spread the word: *Tread Lightly* in Richmond Park!

A DVD of the film, with highlights from the launch including Sir David's interview with Sir Trevor, is on sale now at the Visitor Centre by Pembroke Lodge.

The event was introduced by Ron Compton, Chair of FRP, and the new TRP Chair, Loyd Grossman, spoke about the importance of the Royal Parks and the need to protect them. Local actor Julian Glover closed proceedings with a moving reading of excerpts from the FRP commissioned poem, *A Dream of Richmond Park*, by David Harsent.



Centre photo by George Chan; photos left and above by Thomas Wood



When the Park trained women for war

By Michael Davison

If 1916 saw some of the grimmest struggles of the First World War at the Somme and Verdun, 1917 brought no let-up in the terrible loss of life, causing serious concerns about the shrinking number of soldiers available to carry on the fight.



To relieve the situation, the government came up with a scheme to release more men from 'soft jobs' by recruiting women to replace them in certain roles.

Formed in January 1917, a new voluntary service, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), trained women to serve as clerks, telephonists, waitresses, cooks and driver-mechanics. One of the earliest WAAC units served in Richmond Park.

Although the women who enrolled did not have full military status, they were given titles corresponding to military ranks: officials (officers), forewomen (sergeants) assistant forewomen (corporals) and workers (privates). In April 1917, in recognition of the service by the women volunteers both at home and in France, Queen Mary was made Commandant-in-Chief of the WAAC, known thereafter as Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. More than 57,000 women served in the Corps before the Armistice.

For service abroad, members of the WAAC were put under the command of a Chief Controller (Overseas), Helen Gwynne-Vaughan. Although not on combat duties the volunteers had to endure shelling from heavy artillery and bombing raids by German aircraft. During one attack in April 1918, nine WAACs were killed at the Etaples Army Camp. British newspapers protested against this 'German atrocity', but Helen Gwynne-Vaughan pointed out that as the WAACs were in France as replacements for soldiers, the enemy was quite entitled to try to kill them.

In the Second World War, Richmond Park was again the scene of service by pioneering women. The anti-aircraft battery at Sheen Gate was the first in the country to employ women of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in the role of range-finders and plotters. In the words of Sir Frederick Pile, General Officer Commanding Anti-Aircraft Command: 'They became one of the wonders of the world. Women marching, eating, drilling and working with men!'

*Photo of Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in Richmond Park, 1917
From the Hearsum Collection, copyright © Jon Spence*

The rabbits of Richmond Park

By Nigel Jackman

Rabbits were originally brought to Britain by the Romans to be bred for food. After being reintroduced by the Normans many of them escaped and became established in the wild. Once classed as rodents, rabbits and hares have now been re-classified into a separate group, lagomorpha.



Rabbits are a common sight in the Park, especially at dawn and dusk as they are "crepuscular". Look out for worn trails between their warrens and feeding areas, or you may notice a pile of rabbit droppings in a prominent place. This may be a communal latrine and territory marker.

You can find them distributed in many of the open grasslands (e.g. Petersham Park, Spankers Hill Field) and in woodland areas as well as on the roadsides between Richmond and Kingston Gates, near Robin Hood Gate and Holly Lodge road.

Rabbit food (grass, green plants and tree bark) is hard to digest so they eat it

twice! Their first soft droppings look like shiny grapes and still have high nutritional value. They eat these, and then produce the familiar dry fibrous spheres.

Rabbit guards are installed at planting times to prevent damage to newly planted hedges and saplings. However, rabbit grazing makes a positive contribution to the quality of the Park's acid grassland. They keep coarser grasses in check and the ground they disturb provides a seedbed for more diverse flora. Seeds are also distributed in their droppings. Maintaining patches of openness in grasslands is important, particularly where there are anthills. One way of telling if an anthill is active is to look for rabbit droppings and grazing.

Rabbits are prey to a number of predators including foxes so mostly live less than one year. Their numbers are sustained because they mature early and breed all year. A doe can produce 30 kits a year and they can reproduce within six months of birth. Without predation or disease such as myxomatosis, rabbit populations soar.

Myxomatosis still occurs in the Park, resulting in population crashes. Before 2016 the Park's rabbit population was extremely low. Present numbers, believed to be in the hundreds, are still relatively low, and rabbits have not needed to be controlled except in the garden enclosures where they cause damage by eating ornamental plants.

Enjoy watching these entertaining creatures all year round (not just at Easter!)

Photo by Nigel Jackman

Quietway



Work on the Richmond Park section of the Bushy to Wandsworth Quietway was completed in the spring. Funded by Transport for London, it is intended for “cyclists who want to travel at a more gentle pace”. There are new speed tables at Ham Gate, Ham Cross and Sheen Cross to assist slow cyclists (and pedestrians) to cross the main

roads. There are also new 10 mph signs, surface markings and road edges on the middle road from Ham Cross to Pen Ponds car park to control speeds of faster cyclists. The Friends has long pressed for better crossing points for pedestrians and ways of slowing fast cyclists and we will be monitoring the effectiveness of Quietway in doing this.

Policing

A new sergeant, Colin Fox (photo) has been appointed in charge of Richmond and Bushy Parks, replacing Michael Boulton who has retired. He has been in the Met for 20 years, 10 of them in Brixton and last year in Hyde Park. We wish him all the best in his new role. Also, three new police officers have been added to the complement for Richmond and Bushy Parks combined, bringing it to 10 and giving better cover at peak times. While welcome, this increase in officers only means an average of 1.5 officers in Richmond Park at any one time, compared with 35 for the two Parks combined 10 years ago.



Shared Heritage exhibition

An exhibition exploring the shared heritage of Phoenix Park in Dublin and the Royal Parks, especially Richmond Park, will be at the Mall Galleries in central London from 27 July to 11 August, admission free. Both these Parks were enclosed as deer parks in the 17th century – the former by Charles I in 1637 with a brick wall, the latter by Charles II in 1662 with a stone wall. The two parks are the largest enclosed city parks in Europe, with Richmond Park slightly bigger.

The exhibition has a wealth of material through the centuries, much of it from the Hearsam Collection. It was recently in Dublin where it was opened by the President of Ireland, Michael Higgins, and visited by Prince Charles. Well worth seeing!

Photo: Quietway by Isabella access road by Ron Crompton

New Pollinator Garden

A new garden, providing a habitat for bees and other pollinators, is slowly emerging next to Poets Corner at the north end of Pembroke Lodge Gardens. This pollinator garden and its interpretation boards also give visitors ideas on how they can create a similar garden to help reverse the decline in pollinating species.

To create the garden, annual and perennial native wildflowers have replaced the lawn; a native hedgerow of nectar and berry-bearing plants with an understory of mixed wildflowers has replaced the holly hedge; and a mixed border of pollinator plants has replaced the border of iris.

Maintaining the Park

We often focus on big projects and building works in the Park but less often on small projects and maintenance, which are as vital. Here's a flavour of recent ones.

Isabella has a new cut-off path between Bog Garden and the main stream to ease pressure. Elsewhere in Isabella the winter saw a lot of re-planting.

White Ash Lodge and Kingston Gate Lodge have been refurbished. The former is let commercially and the latter is occupied by a Park employee. We are pleased that TRP continues to have key Park staff living on site in the Park.

More fencing of veteran trees around the Park is underway, to prevent compaction and damage by visitors. Part of it will replace chestnut paling with more permanent fencing. Recent newspaper photos showed Mick Jagger inside the fencing at the Royal Oak – unlike David Attenborough who was always photographed outside the fencing in the Friends' film.

New National Nature Reserve boards have been designed and installed at the Park gates. They emphasise the Tread Lightly theme.

Railings are being erected **around the south lawn at Pembroke Lodge** to protect the root zones of the many veteran oaks. The north lawn was done last year. There is also a new enclosed garden on the south side of the Lodge that will be used for wedding receptions and as an overflow for the terrace seating. The planting around it has a definite winter flavour to give year-round interest in the gardens.

The clearance of *rhododendron ponticum* from Sidmouth Wood is finally complete. The next clearance is from Spankers Hill. Clearance from Pen Ponds Plantation by the Friends' volunteers is progressing well and is now very visible from the middle road, with new fencing installed to replace the rhododendron along that side. The fencing has been renewed around the Plantation facing Pen Ponds, including an extension along the western bank, to protect the deer and the bird sanctuary from people and dogs.

New Friends' Trustees

Two new trustees were elected at April's AGM: Mary Davies and Vivienne Press.

Mary Davies helps to run the Visitor Centre. She moved to Hampton Wick 10 years ago and soon after joined the Friends and started to volunteer at the Visitor Centre. Mary says, "I really love volunteering there, meeting so many people who are enjoying the Park so much and of course knowing that the money we raise goes towards Park conservation projects."

Vivienne Press produces the Friends' Calendar, is Editor of the Newsletter and designed the new Tread Lightly leaflet and printed materials to promote the Friends' film. She lives near Richmond Gate and goes into the Park several times a week. Vivienne says, "I love the Park and have learnt such a lot from the amazing expert naturalists and photographers who so generously contribute to Friends' publications."

Enquiries

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

Park management: contact Park Manager Simon Richards, 0300 061 2200 or email Richmond@royalparks.gsl.gov.uk

Police non-emergency telephone number: 101

Membership and Subscriptions

If you wish to become a Friend, membership forms can be downloaded from our website www.frp.org.uk/friends/get-involved, or picked up from the Visitor Centre at Pembroke Lodge or by emailing me at membership@frp.org.uk. Individual membership is £10 and household membership is £15.

Members please note that membership fees increased in 2015. **Please update your standing order if you have not already done this**, so you continue to receive the newsletter and bulletin, and continue to support the work of the Friends of Richmond Park.

If you are a member and don't receive the monthly Friends' bulletin by email and wish to do so, please email bulletins@frp.org.uk with the subject 'Add to bulletin'. You can easily stop it at any time.

If you change your email or home address then please let us know by emailing membership@frp.org.uk and including your previous address.

Membership renewals for those paying by cash were due on January 2017. 1

With thanks
Chris Mason – Membership Secretary

We are trying out more eco-friendly paper for the newsletter—this issue is printed on paper which is 100% recycled.

Friends' Walks

All are welcome. Friends' Walks are free, last about two hours and start from a car park. All except Bird Walks are on Saturdays unless otherwise stated.

If you need special support or help with the walk, please phone Ian McKenzie on 020 8943 0632 in advance, or 07824 784335 or email walks@frp.org.uk only on the walk day itself. Also see our website: www.frp.org.uk

Please keep dogs under control.

Date	Starting at 10am from
5 August	Kingston Gate Car Park
2 September	Roehampton Gate Car Park
7 October	Sheen Gate Car Park (Deer and Walk the Wall)
4 November	Pembroke Lodge Car Park (Fungi)
2 December	Pen Ponds Car Park

Plus Informal Bird Walks every Friday at 9.30am from Pen Ponds coffee kiosk.

Photo by Brendan Blake: children on Discoverers' 'Deer in the Park' event last spring

Friends' Courses

Courses begin at 10am and are typically a 30-minute talk at Pembroke Lodge followed by a two-hour walk. Courses are for members of the Friends only and do not need to be booked – just turn up. There is no charge and coffee and tea are provided. The following courses are planned, and others may be added for September and December so please check at www.frp.org.uk

14 October	Deer	— led by Peter Burrows-Smith
11 November	Fungi	— led by Janet Bostock

DISCOVERERS
For families exploring Richmond Park



Discoverers is the Friends' activities programme for families and young people. For full details of our programme, including a Celebration of the Parks' butterflies, visit www.discoverers.frp.org.uk or

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www.frp.org.uk

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Six-spotted Burnet moth on ragwort by Anne Ross

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



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