

Issue 128 | Spring 2023

Wild London

The magazine for London Wildlife Trust members

RESPECTING RESERVES

How to minimise your
impact on sensitive
wild spaces

GARDENING ON A BUDGET

Top tips for protecting
wildlife and your purse

BRITISH WILDLIFE

Where the grass is greener

We explore the diversity and wildlife of grassland,
an essential but often overlooked habitat



Welcome Burst into spring

Maya Gadjourouva



The desire to maintain a low, neat sward of grass seems to be part of the human condition. But this year, we're calling on gardeners to embrace a new-look lawn for the benefit of wildlife and the environment. By cutting your grass less often (once every three or four weeks) and learning to love

daisies, dandelions, clovers and other naturally flowering plants, you can provide vital food for bees and butterflies, help reduce flooding and keep our towns and cities cooler. Discover all the benefits of reimagining your lawn at wildaboutgardens.org.uk.

Grasslands are hugely overlooked and under-valued ecosystems and they're under threat. Today, precious wild flower meadows are one of the rarest habitats in the UK. Yet they are vital for wildlife and key allies in the fight against climate change. Find out more about why grasslands matter on page 16.

As part of our commitment to making the capital wilder, we're working with the Mayor of London to enhance, restore and create wildlife-rich habitats across the city. Funding totalling £850,000 is supporting a range of projects, including the reintroduction of beavers and harvest mice to West London, and the creation of new wildflower meadows. Get a little bit wilder and discover a project close to you at wildlondon.org.uk/rewildlondon

As we work to protect and improve the capital's nature reserves, we need your help to keep these places wild. More people than ever are enjoying being outdoors in nature, and the human footprint on our most sensitive wild places and wild species is taking its toll. Please read our article on page 20 and help share our message about respecting reserves by leading by example.

Thank you for your continued support and enjoy spring!

Gordon Scorer
Chief Executive, London Wildlife Trust



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London Wildlife Trust



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London Wildlife Trust

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Under appreciated but vital for all kinds of life, grasslands are not all the same. The Wildlife Trusts' Claire Cornish reveals the complexities of this overlooked habitat

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Meet some of the people who help London Wildlife Trust keep our city full of wildlife. This issue: Lirayen Valencia, Keeping it Wild trainee

London Wildlife Trust *Get in touch*

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Our vision for London
A London alive with nature, where everyone can experience and enjoy wildlife



Cover image: Brown hare © Andrew Parkinson

Four ways you can support London Wildlife Trust

Volunteer

Could you spare some time to join our powerful volunteer team across London and help our city's wildlife thrive? Whether you're a nature novice or an ecology expert, everyone's welcome. Get outdoors, have fun and make new friends. To find out more about how to volunteer with us, visit wildlondon.org.uk/volunteer

Donate

You can help build a better future for London's wildlife by donating or helping us to raise money for our vital conservation work. By donating to London Wildlife Trust, you'll be playing an important role in protecting the capital's wild spaces and their inhabitants – now and for the future wildlondon.org.uk/donate

Visit a reserve

Our 37 nature reserves span much of the capital. They range from small, inner-city havens and spacious woodlands to buzzing wildflower meadows and thriving wetlands. Our Wild spaces section (page 10) showcases the best places to explore right now. Discover a new favourite this spring wildlondon.org.uk/nature-reserves

Leave a lasting legacy

Protect your city's wildlife for tomorrow by remembering London Wildlife Trust in your Will. Leaving us a gift is a great way to make a lasting contribution to nature in the capital. Every gift protects our wildlife for the future. For more information, call us on 020 7803 4272 or visit wildlondon.org.uk/legacies

Your wild **spring**

The best of the season's wildlife and where to enjoy it in London

Delights of the downs

The undulating chalk downs stretching across London's southern suburbs burst into life this season. From April, constellations of cowslips spangle in rolling meadows, their clusters of cheerful yellow blooms nodding around tall stalks like dancers circling a maypole. As the weeks unfold, patches of grassland take on a purplish tinge as common spotted and pyramidal orchids emerge, accompanied by wild thyme and dog violet.

All this is food and drink to wildlife – literally, in the case of spring and early summer butterflies, including Britain's tiniest, the scarce small blue. Its caterpillars feast on the kidney vetch that thrives in chalk downland, while adults flutter between common bird's-foot trefoil and horseshoe vetch from May through the summer. You might see one at our Hutchinson's Bank reserve. Small blues are joined by dozens of other butterfly species – various skippers, blues and fritillaries, among others – plus diverse other insects. The result is a feast for birds, bats and other vertebrates.

Chalk downs provide an audio-visual spectacle in spring, too.

Listen for the cyclical trills of the whitethroat, newly arrived from its winter sojourn in Africa, and the madly burbling song of the male skylark as it shoots upwards and hovers before floating back to earth. You might be lucky and spot some of the habitat's cooler residents basking in warm sunshine – slow-worms, common lizards and even adders.

Curiously, this distinctive landscape of southern England has been shaped by people, and needs our intervention to maintain. After being cleared of woodland in past centuries, the downs were typically grazed by rabbits and sheep, which fertilised the land with their dung. From the 1950s, these grazing pressures declined and it was quickly repopulated by scrub. That's why we welcome rare-breed sheep and cattle to munch on reserves, such as Hutchinson's Bank or Saltbox Hill SSSI, since they help to maintain and restore this special habitat and others.

To roam among wildflowers and butterflies this spring and summer, visit our south London reserves such as Chapel Bank, Hutchinson's Bank, Riddlesdown, Saltbox Hill SSSIs or West Kent Golf Course.

Did you know?

'Cowslip' is actually a distorted pronunciation of 'cow slop', so named because the flowers are associated with cow pats in meadows and fields.

SPRING FUNGI

ST GEORGE'S MUSHROOM

Fungi are associated with autumn, but many species fruit in spring, including this large, pale mushroom. It has a mealy or cucumber-like scent and grows in fields and roadsides.



ArgenLent

FAIRY INKCAP

Watch for dense clusters of these tiny, buff or cream mushrooms sprouting at the base of steps in woods or even railway stations and other urban settings.



A.Koloz

CHICKEN-OF-THE-WOODS

Look for thick, sulphur-yellow brackets with crimped lips growing in dense tiers on the trunks of deciduous trees, usually from May, in ancient woodlands with old oak trees.



Youghn Matthews

EVENTS

Get closer to nature

Get together with friends and family and discover the great wildlife that's right on your doorstep this spring!



Karina Duffey

Get outdoors and meet new people at one of our events

Camley Street Natural Park Guided Walks

Once a month on a Sunday

What makes Camley Street Natural Park so special, locally and internationally? What wildlife can be found around the reserve? What is the park's history? Find out the answers to these questions and many more on a guided walk around the reserve, led by our experienced, friendly guides.

Urban Tree Festival

11am-5pm, 20 May, Camley Street Natural Park

Come and celebrate trees with the Urban Tree Festival at Camley Street Natural Park. Enjoy a diverse programme of free activities for all ages and cultures, followed by a ticketed performance of tree songs and readings by the Morris Folk Choir from 7pm.

David Lindo's Bird Walk at Walthamstow Wetlands

Saturday, 8 July

Join the Urban Birder and London Wildlife Trust Ambassador, David Lindo, for a guided walk to discover the wonderful wildlife of Walthamstow. Born and raised in London, David is passionate about urban birds and devotes his time to promoting the appreciation and conservation of the birds that share our cities. These unforgettable walks with David always sell out quickly so visit our events page to book your place today:

wildlondon.org.uk/events



Throughout summer, London Wildlife Trust sites will be holding various activities for kids and adults to enjoy, including café lates, wildlife-drawing classes, outdoor cinemas and more. So keep an eye on our events page! wildlondon.org.uk/events

Many happy returns

Spring skies welcome some of London's fastest, lightest and noisiest seasonal visitors: swifts. By the time these acrobatic migrants start their screeching, swooping flights from mid-to late April, they've flown thousands of miles from their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, young birds returning to England may have been in the air continuously, feeding, preening, drinking and even sleeping on the wing for a year or more without touching down.

But those 'screaming parties' of a dozen or so circling and calling swifts aren't just refuelling on insects they pluck from the air mid-flight. They're here to breed – and they need our help. Numbers in Britain have declined as suitable urban nest sites – high crevices and loft spaces – are lost when buildings are renovated, insulated or demolished. If you'd like to see more of this spectacular flyer, consider installing a swift box at home, or visit Walthamstow Wetlands reserve where a large swift tower provides space for nesting birds.



Dilemaki

Swifts are easy to spot as they look like arrows whirling through the sky

Early birds and distinctive nests

Many avian parents are sticklers for tidiness. Admire a chaffinch or goldfinch nest in a low tree or bush for a textbook exemplar of a beautifully neat, round moss-woven construction.

Not so the mistle thrush. This early nester – it may already have completed the build as far back as February – is focused more on a rapid breeding start than aesthetics. Look closely at the untidy woven grass-twig-and-mud affair and you might make out scraps of paper or other waste stuck into the construction – bits of plastic aren't unusual. And though nests are typically wedged into a tree fork high up alongside the trunk, they're sometimes squeezed into the unlikeliest spots – even in traffic lights.

There are plenty more distinctive nests

to seek out this spring:

- Long-tailed tit – look for a beautifully woven round or bottle-shaped nest of moss, lichen, feathers and spider silk, with a slightly offset entrance hole, also built from February.
- Reed warbler – as the name suggests, you might spot its cylindrical sling-like nest woven between a few reed stems at our Walthamstow or Woodberry Wetlands reserves from May.
- Grey squirrel – a roundish, untidy mass of twigs that's at least 30cm across with leaves still attached is likely to be a squirrel's drey.



Rosova Svetlana

Mistle thrush



Andrija

Long-tailed tit

Flower power

Summer's the season when we warm to the sight (and buzzing sound) of bees, beetles, flies and butterflies flitting between flowers, unwittingly performing the important task of pollination. Those species that bloom in early spring need their pollen carried between individual plants, too – and a cadre of often unsung insect heroes are on hand to take the early shift.

Some of these workers will be familiar: spring butterflies, bumblebees and honey bees, foraging for supplies to feed the colony from April. Others don't tend to get so much attention, though they're bustling around before many other insects are on the wing. Hoverflies, some species of which sport black-and-yellow stripes and can be confused with bees or wasps, are incredibly important pollinators, as are other types of fly and various solitary bees.

Here are three species to look for in spring among London's gardens, parks, hedgerows and reserves.



Daniel Greenwood

Hairy-footed flower bee

One of the earliest solitary bees to emerge in spring, this species works hard for primroses, dead-nettles and lungworts. You may see a blond-haired male following an all-black female.



Chris Lawrence

Dark-edged bee-fly

As you'd guess, this early-emerging insect looks and sounds a little like a bumblebee, and uses its long, straight proboscis to feed from violets and primroses.



H.Wall

Red mason bee

Taking its name from its marmalade-orange hair and its habit of nesting in walls (though it also likes bee hotels), this species is a useful pollinator of apple and other fruit trees and plants. It's one of the first to emerge, from late March.

How to wildlife garden on a budget

It doesn't cost the Earth to make a wildlife-friendly garden. Indeed, the less money you spend, the better for your pocket, wildlife and the planet.

Rather than buying plants grown in peat-based compost and plastic pots, grow them from seed in your own compost and an upcycled container. Take cuttings and dig up and divide plants to propagate more, and if you have too many, why not share them with friends and neighbours who might return the favour?

It's a good idea to save seeds rather than buy fresh every spring, but don't forget how good birds are at farming. If you've ever watched a goldfinch feeding on knapweed seed, you'll know that half of it ends up on the ground where it will hopefully grow into next year's larder.

Look out for berrying seedlings, such as holly and hawthorn, at the base of fences and other spots where birds like to perch. With the landowner's

permission, you may be able to dig them up and move them to grow in your garden for free.

It's not just gardening that can be done cheaply. Want a log pile? Keep an eye out for neighbours doing tree work and ask if you can have a log or two. Or why not make your own nestbox? There are plenty of easy-to-follow instructions online.

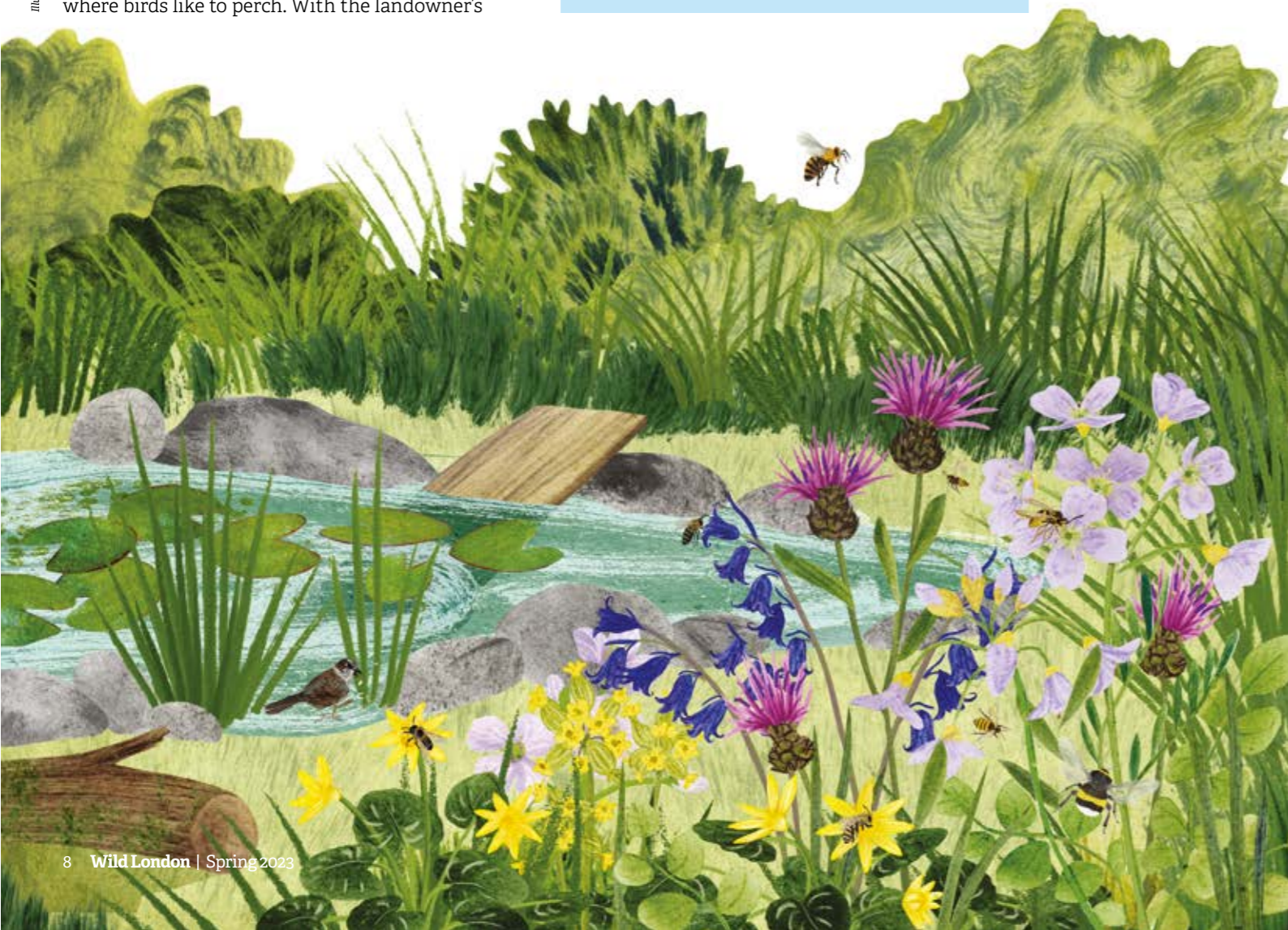
Other ways to help wildlife require no money at all: let your grass grow long around the edges, avoid cutting back plants and start a nice open compost pile at the end of the garden. Nature costs nothing, we just have to let her in.

Get more tips for helping nature at home from wildlifetrusts.org/gardening



Kate Bradbury is passionate about wildlife-friendly gardening and the author of *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone and Everything* in association with The Wildlife Trusts.

Illustrations by Hannah Bailey, photo © Sarah Cuttle



Kate's eight top tips

- 1

Grow annuals from seed
Pollinator-friendly favourites such as cosmos and sunflowers are easy – simply sow the seeds in pots of peat-free compost and plant them out in early summer.
- 2

Make new plants from old
Dig up herbaceous plants like nepeta and crane's-bills and use an old bread knife to slice the rootball in two, with intact stems. Replant and water well.
- 3

Take softwood cuttings
Cut 10cm shoots from shrubs like lavender, remove lower leaves and push into pots of moist, gritty compost. Cover with a plastic bag sealed with an elastic band and keep on a bright windowsill for eight weeks.
- 4

Make a log pile
Are your neighbours pruning or cutting down a tree? Ask for some logs. Piled up in a corner or beneath a bench they provide an easy, inexpensive habitat for wildlife.
- 5

Be less tidy
Let an area of grass grow long, allow leaves to pile up in borders, and try to deadhead and cut back your plants less often.
- 6

Make your own habitat boxes
From bird and bat boxes to hedgehog feeding stations and even toad abodes, there are plenty of instructions online on how to make your own bespoke wildlife homes.
- 7

Grow your own bird food
Home-grown bird food is free: avoid cutting back seed-bearing plants like lavender, knapweed, grasses, sunflower and *Verbena bonariensis*, and watch the birds flock to feed from them.
- 8

Enjoy free gifts from birds
Birds make great farmers. Watch out for holly and hawthorn seedlings, which are often found at the base of fences or other 'perches'. Seek the landowner's permission to dig them up and plant them in your garden!

Our wild spaces

Great days out this spring

Thanks to your support, London Wildlife Trust protects, restores and collaborates on a myriad of wild places around London – and they're free for everyone to enjoy.

Did you know?
Hounslow Heath is one of the most important sites within London for reptiles. One of only four known adder populations in London lives here.



London Wildlife Trust

Dartford warbler
Andy Rouse

Hounslow Heath

Hanworth Road, Hounslow, TW4 5LJ

Wildlife to spot common lizards and stonechats

Great for heather, gorse and heathland wildlife

Find out more: hounslow.gov.uk/hounslowheath



Adder
Niall Benvie

Located to the west of Hounslow town centre and managed by Hounslow Council, the Heath is a large, open area of scrub and lowland heath – one of the rarest habitats in Britain. Shaped by people over the centuries, this habitat is historically significant.

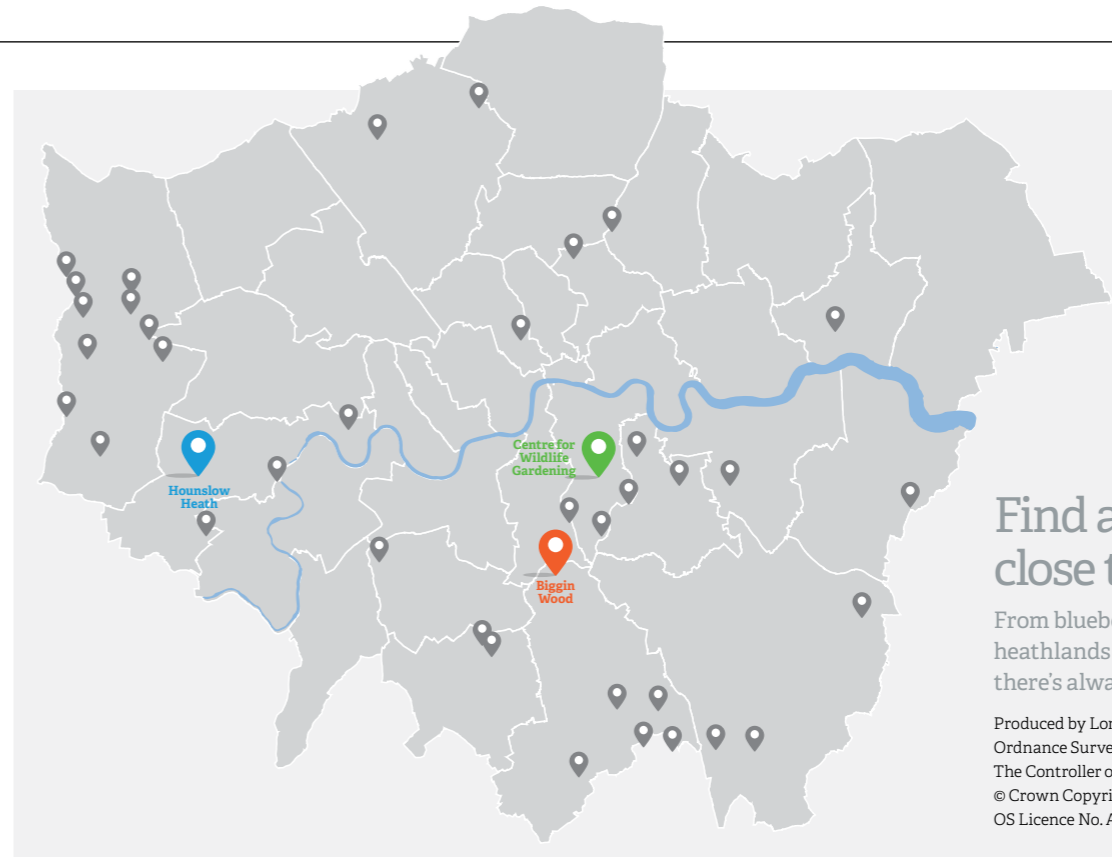
Evidence has been found of an Iron Age village, while a 1,000-year-old bronze boar was found by farm workers in the 1800s. A Roman road, now the Staines Road, crosses the northern edge of the heath, and Oliver Cromwell famously used the heath as a military camp during the English Civil War in the 1600s. A series of markers take visitors through the history of the heath.

The heath is home to a number of rare species, including Dartford warblers, adders, water voles and stag beetles. Dartford

warblers are a rare breeding bird here and can be elusive, though you may see one perching atop a gorse bush to proclaim its territory in spring. Along the heath's edge there are ancient oak trees, making this a good place to find fungi in autumn.

A popular spot for walking, cycling, picnicking and wildlife watching, along the west edge of the adjacent golf course runs the River Crane. There is the chance to observe grey herons and listen for the 'pop' of water voles diving into the water from their bankside burrows. Look out for neatly cropped 'lawns' where they feed.

The London Loop crosses through the heath's heart, allowing for walks to Richmond Park to the east or following the Crane north towards Cranford.



Find a wild space close to you

From bluebell woodlands and historic heathlands to family-friendly urban gardens, there's always something exciting to discover

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Daniel Greenwood



Centre for Wildlife Gardening

28 Marsden Road, Peckham, SE15 4EE

Wildlife to spot blackcaps, toads, newts, butterflies, hairy-footed flower bees

Great for a family day out or getting away from it all

Find out more: wildlondon.org.uk/nature-reserves/centre-wildlife-gardening

Hidden away between Peckham and East Dulwich is an urban oasis. Our award-winning Centre for Wildlife Gardening is a favourite spot for local families, gardeners and wildlife watchers, and offers a perfect place to learn and relax in a welcoming outdoor environment. With all manner of ponds built across the garden, it is a haven for amphibians, and in spring an abundance of bees and other pollinators visit the many different flowers in the wildflower areas and raised beds. Foxes are easy to see here, as well as lots of birds including blackcaps, chiffchaffs, jays, sparrowhawks and once even a kingfisher. The garden is a great place to spend a restful couple of hours and learn more about the history of London Wildlife Trust. There are plenty of examples of wildlife gardening techniques and micro-habitats to inspire you to create your own wildlife garden.

London Wildlife Trust



Biggin Wood

Upper Norwood between Norbury Hill and Biggin Road

Wildlife to spot nuthatches, wood anemones, oaks

Great for appreciating the amazing biodiversity of ancient woodland

Find out more: wildlondon.org.uk/great-north-wood

Biggin Wood is a surviving fragment of the Great North Wood owned by Croydon Council, a site that is unknown to many people, despite being just a short walk from the well-visited Streatham Common.

Chiffchaffs and blackcaps can be heard in the dense scrub in areas of recently coppiced oaks north of Covington Way. Where water collects in muddy pools, look out for nuthatches collecting mud to line their nest holes. The enigmatic woodpeckers of the Great North Wood can be heard throughout Biggin Wood, the laughing cry or 'yaffle' of a passing green woodpecker and the unusual timbre of the great spotted woodpecker knocking on wood.

Biggin Wood has a fabulous display of bluebells in the spring, as well as a several patches of the dainty wood anemone – an indicator that this is an ancient woodland (continuously wooded since 1600).

WILD NEWS

Regional and national wildlife news

30%

Among the 2030 goals, countries pledged to protect at least 30% of terrestrial and marine areas.

Harvest mice have undergone rapid declines across the country due to habitat loss, and remain rare in London

Global deal to reverse nature loss by 2030

On 19 December 2022, world leaders adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This arguably historic outcome contains goals and targets to protect and restore nature. Will they make a difference to the catastrophic declines in biodiversity – species abundance and diversity, and the quality of the habitats they require – that many people have been calling for?

The 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in Montreal was the biggest of its kind in a decade. Many concerned eyes had watched October's COP27 Climate Change summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, with unsurprised disappointment at the failure of national leaders to commit to drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions required to prevent global temperatures from rising above 1.5°C. And this had at least caught the attention of the media.

The UK Prime Minister didn't attend the Montreal summit; nevertheless, the

government called "on the world to unite and agree a deal that delivers for nature and ends species extinction."

While the case for greening cities was made at COP15, many of the GBF commitments align with the current trajectory of policies and practices for making London richer in nature. Not only in the ambitions, but also some of the challenges and flaws.

But the Mayor of London announced £3.8m of funding to boost green spaces and plant trees as negotiations took place in Montreal. The money will come from the second round of the Green & Resilient Spaces Fund to help the city adapt to climate change.

In March, the Mayor's London Rewilding Taskforce – a time-limited advisory group – published its report on the opportunities to bring about larger and more connected wild spaces in and around the capital.

Find out more and download the full report here: bit.ly/3K0tuic

Protecting biodiversity

The Global Biodiversity Framework has four long-term goals for 2050 and 23 action-oriented global targets for urgent action over the decade to 2030. These include:

- Restore 30% degraded ecosystems globally (on land and sea) by 2030;
- Stop the extinction of known species;
- Reduce risk from pesticides by at least 50% by 2030;
- Reduce pollution risks by 2030 to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions;
- Reduce global footprint of consumption by 2030, including through significantly reducing overconsumption and waste generation and halving food waste;
- Tackle climate change through nature-based solutions;
- Secure the safe, legal and sustainable use and trade of wild species by 2030;
- Green up urban spaces.



DKW/Imagines

Stag beetles are one of the most spectacular insects in Britain and are a joy to watch!

WILD NEWS

Join the great stag hunt

Terry Whittaker

Have you ever seen a stag beetle? You have a better chance of encountering one of these important insects in London than almost anywhere in Europe!

From May, adult beetles take to the wing after spending four to six years underground as larvae. Look for them on warm, calm evenings across south-east to south-west London. The adults may only have a couple of days or weeks to fly around

in search of a mate. The males find females by detecting the tantalising trail of chemical pheromones they release.

With huge mandibles similar to deer antlers, it's the males that give this famous beetle its name. Don't worry – they're used for wrestling other male stag beetles and are entirely harmless to humans.

Females lack the sci-fi headgear, though they are larger and more robust than the

similar-looking lesser stag beetle, which can also be found across London.

If you do see a stag beetle of either species (alive or dead), please submit your sighting online. You can also help stag beetles by leaving standing dead stumps with good amounts of wood decaying underground or building your own loggery.

There's more information on our website here: wildlondon.org.uk/stag-beetle



Dragons and damsels

We're looking for dragonfly detectives to help us find London's hawkers, chasers, skimmers and damsels as they take to the wing this spring and summer.

From May to September, London's streams, rivers and ponds are brought to life by the incredible colours and sparkling displays of these charismatic insects. Dragonflies and damselflies are good indicators of healthy ecosystems because they spend much of their life underwater before emerging into the world above.

We need to know more about their distribution in London, so please help us create a map of where they live in the city. Add your sightings to our online database via our website: wildlondon.org.uk/dragonfly



Ruddy darter



Willow emerald damselfly

Agostino Campodonico

Andrew Holloway

Black-tailed skimmer

Chris Lawrence

WILD NEWS

David Tipling



Council approves development of precious skylark habitat

A local campaign group and high-profile environmentalists have reacted with dismay to the news that a significant nesting site for skylarks is threatened by the development of sports facilities.

Warren Farm, a large greenspace near Southall, is one of a handful of remaining breeding sites for skylark in London. Last year, only 50 pairs bred in the capital, meaning that Warren Farm's 12 pairs account for a quarter of the city's entire skylark population.

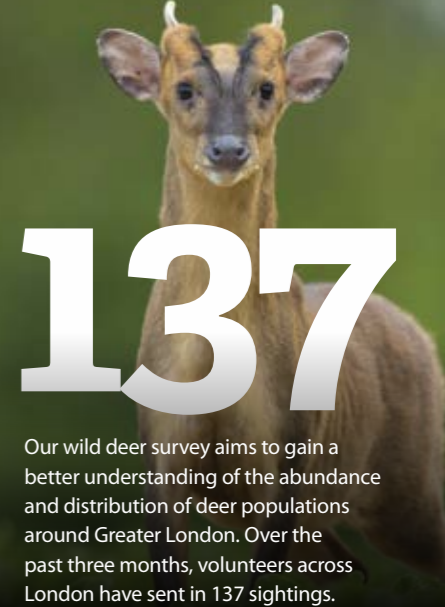
Campaigners want Ealing Council to protect Warren Farm by designating it as a Local Nature Reserve. They said: 'Nowhere else in the borough has the wide, open space that skylarks need to nest safely on the ground, and the abundance of plant and insect species they need to feed their chicks. That's why they don't breed anywhere else in the borough. Skylarks are a threatened species in Britain and facing local extinction. This proposal would make them extinct in Ealing.'

We support their ambitions for Warren Farm and join them in opposing proposals to develop this wild space. The plans threaten to undermine the collective efforts of the community to create a space in our city that benefits both nature and people.

You can help to protect ground-nesting birds like skylarks by avoiding trampling over long grass and letting dogs off the lead when walking in areas with skylarks. And by reading more about the campaign: warrenfarmnaturereserve.co.uk

Together we're stronger

Here are some of the ways **your membership** has been bringing people together to protect your local wildlife and wild places.



137

Our wild deer survey aims to gain a better understanding of the abundance and distribution of deer populations around Greater London. Over the past three months, volunteers across London have sent in 137 sightings.

Jamie Hall



2,000

In the school year since September 2022, we have delivered 89 school sessions and engaged 1,971 school children with nature. We have also delivered free family learning activities to over 2,000 people.

54

Our Keeping it Wild programme aims to help improve diversity and access to the environmental sector. Since 2018, we've worked with 54 trainees: 78% of which were from Black, Asian or minoritised ethnic backgrounds. Many are now employed at the Trust or by environmental organisations.

Lois Donegal



One

2022 was a year of firsts for Walthamstow Wetlands. The reservoir recorded its first-ever white-tailed eagle flying over in March, had its first breeding pairs of barnacle geese (two pairs attempted to breed among a summer flock of 20, which is unusual in itself). And the first red-breasted merganser in five years was seen in November, a scarce sight in London.

Community group raises £100k to save ancient woodland

Local residents in Lewisham have raised more than £100,000 to save Gorne Wood, a rare survivor of south London's historic Great North Wood.

Tucked between houses and the Forest Hill to New Cross Gate railway line, Gorne Wood is home to veteran trees and ancient hedgerows, as well as protected species including hedgehogs and toads.

The charity, The Fourth Reserve Foundation, will now pay for a compulsory purchase order through Lewisham Council. A council spokesperson told the BBC: "We are looking to improve the planning protections for this site by designating it

as Metropolitan Open Land. This would prevent inappropriate development such as housing from taking place."

The Fourth Reserve Foundation has been successfully running the Buckthorne Cutting Nature Reserve, which is adjacent to Gorne Wood and along the same railway embankment, since 2018.

The purchase will give the community access to the woodland. It will also support environmental education during a time of climate emergency, when the need for children to be able to experience nature has increased, particularly in the city. Read more at: gornewood.wordpress.com



London Wildlife Trust



Lois Donegal

81%

Nature Nurtures, our conservation and creative arts collective for young people aged 16–25, is nearing the end of its first year. It aims to help shape future volunteering opportunities for young people at the Trust. Out of 50 participants, 94% enjoyed meeting other people, 93% learned new creative skills, and 81% felt more connected to nature.



Neil Aldridge

Trees get most of the credit for storing carbon, but grasslands are vital storers of carbon emissions, too. Old, semi-natural grasslands are important landscapes in combatting climate change.



Claire Cornish has spent three happy decades surveying, assessing and restoring swards from Suffolk to Penrith, Ulster to Derbyshire. When she's not restoring meadows, she's celebrating them in her stained-glass artwork.

Grass Roots

Grasslands are huge reservoirs of biodiversity, yet they are the most threatened habitats on Earth. Grassland officer **Claire Cornish** explores their variety and importance.

Anyone who's ever had a garden will know that, if left to its own devices, grass gets everywhere. Leave any area of soil unturned for longer than a fortnight and fine green shoots will emerge, challenging our attempts to control it with neat borders and gravel. The same is true beyond our gardens. Grass is a supreme survivor. It can grow in most soils: wet, dry, salty, sandy, or even toxic. As a result, natural grassland can be found almost anywhere – from the coast to high mountain tops.

You might think that two fields of grass look much the same, but there's an amazing number of different

types of grassland. Britain is home to around 160 species of grass, growing in different communities alongside diverse wildflowers, which produce a range of grassland habitats. A coastal grazing marsh is very different to a chalk grassland or an upland hay meadow. Some of our richest grasslands contain dozens of different species of grasses and flowers in just one square metre.

The main factors that dictate the species found in a grassland are location – whether it's in the uplands or lowlands – and the type of soil it grows on. There are calcareous grasslands on shallow, base-rich soils like those over chalk and

limestone; acidic grasslands on sands, gravels, and siliceous rocks; and neutral grasslands on clay and loam soils.

Grasslands are heritage landscapes, shaped by people over more than 8,000 years in Britain. Until the advent of the 20th century, small-scale farmers maintained meadows as we know them through hand-tilling and ox-ploughing, hand-scything or through low-intensity grazing. Under this sort of management, the richest grasslands have developed over rocks such as limestone or chalk. They can be found from Scotland down to The Lizard in Cornwall, Northern Ireland across to the Lincolnshire



Browsers like deer help maintain areas of open grassland

Wolds. Around 50% of the world's chalk grasslands can be found in England. The chalk forms a 'E' shape that cuts across southern England, up through London, Cambridgeshire and east Anglia, into Norfolk.

Full of life

The rich variety of plants found in a healthy grassland is ideal for insects, so these habitats often buzz with life. Wildflowers attract pollinators such as bees, beetles and butterflies, offering protein-packed pollen and sugary nectar.

Indeed, grasslands are some of our best places to see butterflies and moths, whose caterpillars chomp on the juicy stems and leaves of grasses and other plants. Some species are particularly picky about their grassland, such as the mountain ringlet, which is found only on montane slopes in the Scottish Highlands and the Lake District.

The abundant insects in turn attract hungry birds and small mammals, like voles. Strong-billed birds such as sparrows, goldfinches and, in some places, twite also feast on the seeds of plants and grasses. The tussocky structure of meadows provides the perfect nesting cover for birds, including skylarks, yellow wagtails and larger birds, too. Redshanks, lapwings, and especially curlews use the tall herbage to hide their nests.

It's a complicated story underground, where the roots of many species grow

The rich variety of plants found in a healthy grassland is ideal for insects, so these habitats often buzz with life.

deep into the soil to find nutrients, using fungi on their root hairs to draw these up into the plant. These are swapped in turn for the sugary products of photosynthesis from the plant's leaves.

This kind of relationship is common in low-fertility habitats, but is much rarer for grasslands that have had lots of fertiliser applied, and hardly present at all under arable crops. Some old, unploughed and unfertilised grasslands can be home to spectacular displays of colourful waxcaps – tiny, glistening umbrellas of orange, red, green or pink.

Graze expectations

Left alone, grassland is generally a temporary habitat. Over time it develops into longer grass with brambles or bracken, then scrub, and eventually woodland. These are all important habitats in their own right, but they support different species to wildflower-rich grasslands. To stay grassy and open, most grasslands need the influence of grazing animals. In Britain this comes

from a variety of herbivores – rabbits and hares, geese, deer, and more often domesticated goats, sheep, cattle and horses or ponies.

Grazing can be a by-product of farming for meat and milk, or it can be done purely with wildflower and habitat conservation in mind – sometimes, with the right animals, it can be both. While most grazing will help prevent grasslands developing into scrub, the seasonal timing of grazing and the density of animals play a part in determining the end result.

The choice of animal is important too, as different species and breeds have different food preferences and feeding styles. Overgrazing can be very bad for grasslands, preventing flowers from growing and damaging the soil.

Wildlife Trusts across the country undertake conservation grazing to preserve precious meadows and other vital habitats, using livestock to replicate more traditional farming methods, or the herds of large herbivores that would once have shaped the landscape. This is also a key component of rewilding initiatives, which seek to reinstate natural processes.

Allowing animals to roam over a large area and browse or graze at will generally reduces grazing pressure. This intermittent grazing, or light grazing over a period of time, can allow a mosaic of scrub, trees and grassland to develop, providing a wider variety of habitats that support more wildlife.

The grass is greener

Grasslands have a big role to play in battling the climate crisis. They have huge potential for locking up carbon, thanks not only to the diversity of plants they support, but also their relationship with fungi in the soil. Britain's grasslands hold two billion tonnes of carbon in their soils, but this carbon can be easily released by human activities. From 1990–2006, 14 million tonnes of CO₂ was released as grassland was converted to arable farmland. It's vital that our grasslands are managed sensitively to lock in carbon and keep it in the soil.

Having healthy fungal networks in the soil also reduces the need for fertilisers, which are often produced using carbon-emitting manufacturing processes. Deep-rooted scrub, trees and grassland are better at combatting field run-off triggered by high-intensity rainfall, which is likely to increase in frequency due to the climate emergency.

Bare ground left over winter in arable systems has a loose soil surface that can be swept away into our rivers and seas, carrying with it high levels of nutrients that throw nature off balance.

Grow your own grassland

The state of grasslands across the country is in flux. The loss of the basic payment scheme for farmers, dramatic changes in

weather patterns and the rising cost of fertiliser and fuel are putting pressure on the livestock industry. Some are opting for smaller animals and lower input systems, others for more ploughing and reseeded, while some estates may opt for rewilding options.

The Wildlife Trusts are helping to safeguard and enhance native grasslands. We are working to restore meadows, both on our nature reserves and with farmers and landowners. We're also introducing wildflowers and pollinator-friendly habitats into school grounds and urban areas, and providing inspiration and advice for anyone who wants to improve grasslands in their local area.

Grasslands are so ubiquitous, we often take them for granted. Nearly any grassland, if given the chance, can offer much to the smaller creatures that live alongside us: birds, mice and voles, butterflies, moths, spiders, beetles and flies, and not forgetting the tiny soil fauna and fungi that help power the whole system. Even a private garden can make a difference to local wildlife, so let some of your grass grow longer and leave wildflowers to flourish. Try 'No Mow May' in 2023, then sit down for a few minutes and watch your own tiny Eden.

For more tips on how to make the most of your green space, visit wildaboutgardens.org.uk

It's not all just grass!

Here are five places where you can enjoy London's finest grasslands this summer



1 Totteridge Fields

These ancient hay meadows are criss-crossed by old hawthorn and blackthorn hedgerows, and marked by veteran oak boundary trees.

2 Hutchinson's Bank and Chapel Bank

A chalky oasis in south Croydon, home to rare orchids, and butterflies such as the small blue and grizzled skipper.



3 Saltbox Hill

Recognised by Sir David Attenborough for its importance, you'll find wonderful displays of oxeye daisies, among shuttling butterflies and basking lizards, here.

4 Fray's Farm Meadows

One of the finest examples of rare wet grazing meadows in London frames the meandering, wildlife-rich Frays River.

5 Huckerby's Meadows

Not your average meadows, here grasslands have been created in the northern half on the site of an old airport car-park.



Grasslands provide food and a home for rare insects like the marbled white butterfly



Respect our reserves

The Wildlife Trust movement is built on personal connections with nature. But every time we step into a wild place we have an impact. Daniel Greenwood explores how we can tread more lightly...

Here at The Wildlife Trusts, we know how important it is that everyone has the chance to get out and enjoy nature in reserves and other wild places for their wellbeing and enjoyment. Across Britain, the Trusts look after around 2,300 nature reserves to help ensure that, no matter where you live, you can enjoy a walk on the wild side. But nature can be sensitive: animals are easily disturbed, plants are at risk of trampling. Our presence in nature reserves has an impact on the places and their wildlife. In the current biodiversity crisis we all have a responsibility to act in nature's best interests. Let's explore some of the issues that occur when we set foot in wild places from the perspective of wildlife.

Take the lead

Nature reserves often ask owners to keep dogs on leads and under control. This is to ensure that dogs, which have natural hunting instincts, don't harm ground-dwelling wildlife, either by attacking it or by flushing birds from low nests.

Wild animals see all dogs as a potential threat. Even if your pet doesn't chase birds, squirrels, deer or other animals, its presence can cause them to stop feeding, feel stressed, and even temporarily abandon a nest. Many birds nest or feed on the ground, where they're vulnerable. When a dog wanders off the path, it has the potential to disturb even more wildlife.

Dogs also have a chemical impact on

nature reserves. Flea treatments can leach from their fur into ponds, lakes and rivers, harming wildlife. And the introduction of nitrogen-rich urine and faeces act as fertiliser for the soil, negatively impacting reserves where rare plants and fungi are adapted to low-nutrient levels.

Ancient woodlands and grasslands can lose their unique species diversity if nitrogen enrichment occurs, as nutrient-loving plants such as nettles, brambles and hogweed become dominant, shading out smaller plants. In ancient woodlands, treasured blooms such as bluebells, wood anemone and violets can be lost when they are crowded out. It goes without saying that everyone should pick up after their

Fercus/Shutterstock



Low-nesting birds such as wrens are especially vulnerable to disturbance

dogs and be aware that simply flicking excrement off the path still has a damaging effect on woodland soils.

Low-nesting birds

It's not widely known that some woodland birds breed close to ground level. Robins, wrens, blackcaps and chiffchaffs make their nests in shrubs at a height that's often below the average person's waist. In open landscapes, declining species such as skylarks, lapwings and nightjars nest directly on the ground. These birds are highly vulnerable to dogs off leads, walkers venturing off paths and cyclists 'off-roading'.

Fencing in an area as protection is not always possible, but where you do see a fence, you know it's there for a reason. Help us respect local wildlife by keeping your dog on a lead, staying on the paths and avoiding riding your bike through sensitive habitats. If you see a bird in distress, follow the signs to seek help and advice. Don't pick up small birds that may have fallen from a nest unless you've made sure the mother isn't returning to care for it, and only offer aid if a wild animal is clearly injured.

Wild foraging

Wild foraging can be fun, but when too many people take too much from the environment, it causes problems for wildlife and wild places. In nature, there are a surprising number of edible species, and many of them only grow in certain locations in London. Wild garlic is much sought-after due to its versatility and potent flavour. It's a plant of ancient

woodland that carpets old hedgebanks and verges in rural areas. But in some London Wildlife Trust reserves, the species is still recovering from damage done to its populations in the 19th and 20th centuries.

One issue with foraging can be that when lots of people roam around in search of wild foods, other plants or the garlic itself can be trampled. The soil becomes compacted and the viability of those plant communities is reduced. There are many guides and courses about foraging for wild plants where you can learn about ethical and sustainable foraging practices.

Please read our statement on foraging by clicking on the link you can find here: wildlondon.org.uk/conservation-policies



Wild garlic is also known as ramsons

Uthya Larysu/Shutterstock

Five ways to be a better visitor

Wildlife only

It's important to follow access requests in nature reserves.

Take the lead

Birds nesting on or low to the ground need space. Keep all dogs on leads during the breeding season from February to July.

Feeding the wild

Don't put up bird feeders in woodlands. Wild birds will visit gardens if they are unable to find enough natural food sources.

Let it be

Leave fallen or dead wood where you find it and never plant anything or sow any seeds without permission.

Stay on track

Whether you're walking or cycling, try not to leave the path as you could be trampling sensitive plants and compacting the soil.

Don't feed grazing animals

Traditional-breed cattle, sheep and ponies are there to do a job. Give them plenty of space and don't feed them.

YOUR VIEWS

Please note: letters may be edited for length and house style

MY WILD LIFE

We love to hear from you! Please send your letters and photos to magazine@wildlondon.org.uk

★ STAR PHOTO



Win!



Top striker

I'm passionate about watching wildlife, particularly in Bushy Park, Teddington, where I spotted this grey heron hunting successfully.
Sue Lindenberg

The star photo wins a copy of *London in the Wild* by London Wildlife Trust, published by Kyle Books and worth £15.99.

Hedgehogs need help

Are the numbers of hedgehogs in London decreasing? I used to see them in our garden but not any more. **Miriam, Wanstead**



London's hedgehogs are in trouble

vulnerable to collapse. Overall, the outlook is unlikely to improve until night-time traffic is reduced and fewer pesticides are sprayed on gardens and in parks, reducing their prey.

To help us keep track of London's hedgehogs, please add your sighting here: wildlondon.org.uk/campaign/record-your-sightings/hedgehog

Talk to us...



magazine@wildlondon.org.uk



twitter.com/wildlondon



[instagram.com/LondonWildlifeTrust](https://www.instagram.com/LondonWildlifeTrust)

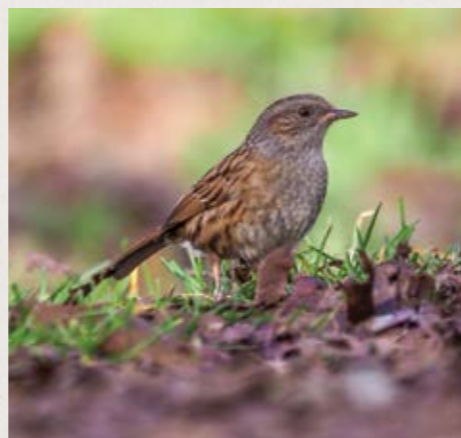


[facebook.com/LondonWildlifeTrust](https://www.facebook.com/LondonWildlifeTrust)

Your wild photos



I came across this green woodpecker in Roxeth Recreation Ground, Harrow.
Wendy Knight, via email



I am a 14 year old amateur photographer. I took this photo of a beautiful dunnock on my local patch at Walthamstow Wetlands. I go most weekends to birdwatch and take photos. Nature is my passion and I would like to pursue a career in conservation and sustainability. **Sam O'Donnell**

I spotted the first peacock butterfly of the year at Braeburn Park on 2 February.
Matt Goodall



Lirayen Valencia

Keeping it Wild Trainee and birder



I am the daughter of refugees from Latin America who came to England in the 1970s and 80s. I've lived in south London ever since.

Growing up, my grandparent's back garden in Streatham was the only green space I had regular access to, and I was fascinated by their garden snails. I marked and named one Patrick – my first pet! I never grew out of my snail-loving stage and from a young age decided I wanted to work with wildlife.

I soon learned this career choice comes with challenges. The lack of support in the education system, being a person of colour and not being able to afford to volunteer were just some of them. These challenges led me to give up on my dreams and after university I worked a job I hated for almost two years. It took the pandemic for me to realise how important working with wildlife was to me.

I wasted too much time stressing over the fact I couldn't afford luxury experiences and believing this would hold me back. You can gain just as much valuable experience from volunteering in your local area – and it's the easiest way to try out different roles

within the sector. If, like me, finances make it difficult for you to volunteer, stay as local as possible to save time and money, and seek organisations that contribute to your travel and/or food like London Wildlife Trust!

We can always improve how eco-friendly or green our local areas are, especially in London!

In spring 2020, I started a community garden with my neighbours. We had nothing – just a small patch of green on our road that was overgrown with bramble and cow parsley. By the end of the year, we had harvested enough crops to feed our entire neighbourhood. Our community garden is now a successful vegetable patch with crops growing all year round. We produce everything we need to make a wholesome meal, from pumpkin to pak choi!

For a long time, I felt alone and believed I was the only one facing certain barriers. Now I've met some amazing people who are making big moves in the environmental

sector (especially for people of colour) through events held by Flock Together and Black Girls Hike. Both of these groups are a must for anyone from under-represented backgrounds who want to meet like-minded people. The sense of community you feel at their events is life changing.



Applying for the Keeping it Wild Traineeship was one of the best decisions I've made for my career and an experience I'll remember forever. Before, I had no hope of finding a job in the environment sector as

I lacked the skills, experience and confidence. This well-rounded programme gives young people a chance to explore different roles – all while being paid!

The most amazing thing is the programme is specifically targeted at people from under-represented and low-socioeconomic backgrounds who would otherwise struggle to gain experience. Check it out: www.wildlondon.org.uk/keeping-it-wild



Protect the wildlife you love by leaving a gift in your Will

After you have taken care of those closest to you, please consider remembering London Wildlife Trust in your Will. Every gift, however large or small, makes a difference. Even 1% will help our city's wildlife and wild spaces to thrive for generations to come.

Gifts generously left in Wills by our supporters have enabled us to:

- Protect vulnerable wild spaces in the capital
- Take on the management of nature reserves for wildlife
- Inspire new generations to access, enjoy and love wildlife



To leave a gift in your Will and find out about our free Wills offer, please visit wildlondon.org.uk/legacies or scan the QR code.

