

Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group

Evaluation, education and enjoyment

A mission to survey

- If we don't know what we have, how do we know how to protect it? The collection of data on all flora and fauna is vital to instruct measures to improve biodiversity. And this is one of Wren's missions. We share this data via online portals (such as eBird and iRecord) and advertise the wonders of nature locally with residents who live in our core area around the southern tip of Epping Forest: Forest Gate, Leytonstone, Manor Park and Wanstead – and primarily Wanstead Flats and Wanstead Park.
- Over the years, we've been able to help many local people on a journey to better understand their local area and, in many cases, help them learn how to identify and record our biodiversity for themselves.
- The spreads that follow are not intended to be comprehensive – that would require a large document – but rather to provide a taster of some of the taxonomic groups.



Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*

Birds

- The Wanstead Flats/Park ‘patch’ has gained a reputation as one of the best London sites away from the Thames and Lea. In addition to breeding Skylarks, and Little and Tawny Owls, parts of Wanstead Flats have built a reputation as one of the capital’s best locations for passage migrant passerines in autumn, especially Wryneck, Northern Wheatear, Whinchat, Common Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Pied Flycatcher. There have been at least six Wrynecks in recent years.
- 187 bird species have been recorded locally in the last two decades, including national rarities and scarcities: Ferruginous Duck, Blyth’s Reed Warbler, Rustic Bunting and Ortolan Bunting, for example.
- Wren has carried out two comprehensive breeding bird surveys (2015 and 2023), mapping 1,250 territories and indicating both positive and negative status changes.
- There has been a continuous run of >1,000 days of eBird entries (broken only recently).
- Nocturnal migration recording has produced many interesting records of passage migrant species, including Quail, Common Scoter, and 15 species of wader.
- Wren activities include regular walks and an invitation to join our migration watches.

Fieldfare, *Turdus pilaris* (Tim Harris)



Bees and wasps

- More than 98 bee species recorded, 13 of which are “near threatened” or scarce.
- Wanstead Park has been supporting a good population of *Macropis europaea*, a nationally notable bee that is totally dependent on Yellow Loosestrife.
- More than 47 wasp species, two regarded as scarce; there are more solitary wasps to be found!
- Most of the bees and wasps on site are associated with acid grassland.
- Many of these bees and wasps are ground-nesters, making use of compacted paths, desire lines and vegetation-free, poached areas by water and on banks.
- It is important to preserve and manage standing dead trees and pithy-stemmed plants (brambles, etc.) to provide nesting sites for the aerial-nesting bees and wasps. For example, our isolated populations of the nationally scarce Small Blue Carpenter Bee (*Ceratina cyanea*) are vulnerable where they nest in bramble stems subject to flailing. Standing dead trees can house 20 or more different species of solitary wasps and bees.
- Wren activities include regular and *ad hoc* recording using iRecord; bee and wasp walks for public engagement and education; and bumblebee recording transects.

Female cuckoo wasp, *Hedychrum rutilans* (Denise Rooney)



Bugs (Hemiptera)

- Under-recorded, this group of insects is a useful indicator of environmental well-being in grassland and woodland habitats. A total of 189 species has been recorded on site in recent years.
- Dalman's Leatherbug (*Spathocera dalmanii*) is an example of the rare squashbugs associated with sparsely vegetated acid grassland on Wanstead Flats.
- Rambur's Pied Shieldbug (*Triomegas sexmaculus*) is found on Black Horehound and so far only in the far south-east of England – but it has reached Wanstead Flats.

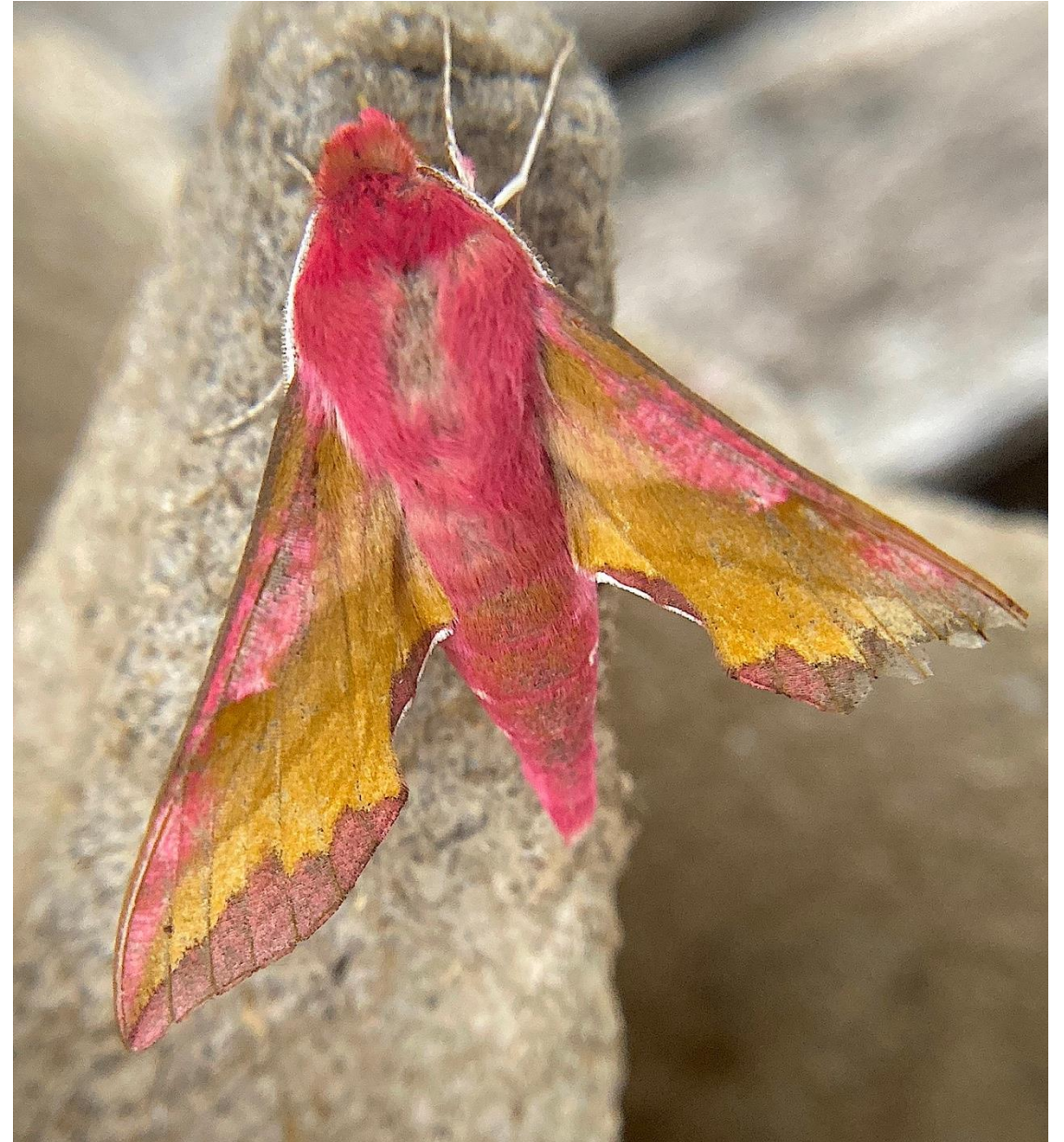
Tortoise Shieldbug, *Eurygaster testudinaria* (James Heal)



Butterflies and moths

- There is a long history of recording moths in the south of the Forest, dating back to 1980. In recent years, 716 species of Lepidoptera have been noted around Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats, comprising 686 moths and 30 butterflies.
- Butterflies include the Forest's biggest population of Green Hairstreak and good numbers of grassland species Small Heath and Small Copper. There are small populations of Common Blue and Brown Argus.
- Moth records include several London/Essex scarcities and rarities. Many oak specialists are associated with Wanstead Park and Bush Wood.
- A good range of grassland and Broom species are found on Wanstead Flats, including Broom-tip (*Chesias rufata*).
- Almost 6,000 moth records have been uploaded to the Butterfly Conservation recording portal in recent years.
- The Wren Group runs a weekly butterfly transect in Wanstead Park and encourages people to look, share, record and – if unsure – ask for identification help.

Small Elephant Hawk-moth, *Deilephila porcellus*,
near Bush Wood (Tim Harris)



Dragonflies

- In recent years, 21 species have been recorded.
- New discoveries in the last decade have included Scarce Chaser and Green-eyed Hawker dragonflies, and Willow Emerald damselfly – all in Wanstead Park.
- With maintenance of water levels in Shoulder of Mutton, Heronry and Perch ponds, and conservation of emergent vegetation, the park has the potential to be one of London's best locations for this beautiful group of insects.

Green-eyed Hawker, *Aeshna isosceles*,
Heronry Lake (Tim Harris)



Spiders

- More than 100 species have been recorded in Wanstead Park and on Wanstead Flats, including several nationally scarce and rare spiders.
- Wanstead Flats is one of the most important locations nationally for some spiders, including *Philodromus buxi* and *Philodromus rufus*, both denizens of mixed grassland and oak.
- Many jumping spiders are associated with the bare, poached areas within the acid grassland.
- Wren incorporates a spider search in its Wildlife Weekend.

Female *Philodromus buxi* (James Heal)



Botany

- Wren member Paul Ferris comprehensively mapped the botany of Wanstead Park and Wanstead Flats in the 1980s.
- There have been great floral changes since that time, but botanical recording has been piecemeal.
- Wren plans to survey the eastern part of the Plain, in Wanstead Park, in 2025 to set a new baseline for this area, which is now seasonally grazed by cattle.

Grass Vetchling, *Lathyrus nissolia*, with nectaring
Common Blue butterfly, Old Sewage Works (Tim Harris).



Plant galls

- More than 100 species of gall-causer have been identified, broken down as follows:
- 31% by mites
- 26% by gall midges
- 20% by gall wasps
- 10% by fungi
- 8% by bugs

A nail gall caused by the mite
Eriophys tiliae (James Heal)



Ups and downs

- Comparisons of the 2015 and 2023 breeding bird surveys showed some alarming trends, most probably driven by macro factors, such as climate change, declining insect numbers etc.
- In particular, the drought of summer 2022 had a big negative impact at the time and for breeding birds in 2023. This highlights the need to build climate resilience into the environment.
- Notable declines include losing Meadow Pipit as a breeding species, battling the Skylark declines, and almost losing Mistle Thrush and Chaffinch as local breeding birds.
- Positively, Song Thrush numbers are holding up, and we had a pair of Nightingales on territory in spring.



Meadow Pipit, *Anthus pratensis* (Tim Harris)

A helping hand

Wren would consider the following to be priorities locally:

- Improve the quality of the acid grassland; consider rotational mowing/scything and more scraping.
- Maintain and improve the emergent vegetation in and around our water bodies.

And in the wider forest:

- Continue the exciting wood pasture programme.
- Consider improvements that can be made to buffer land; Patmore's Field has been very successful.
- Bring SSSIs up to a good condition.