Dulwich Society Wildlife Group 19.3.24

Present: Peter Roseveare(Chair), Dave Clark, Harry Rutherford, Sigrid Collins, Jeff Doodson, Glynis Williams, Sue Cope. Attending: Sharon O'Connor
Apologies: Steven Robinson, Emily Montague, Angela Wilkes, Sam Taylor.

Minutes of Meeting 16.1.24: Corrections to typos were made. Minutes agreed as accurate record of the meeting.

Matters Arising:
Bridget Furst has said that although she is interested in bats, she does not consider that she has the expertise to lead a bat walk. We discussed the availability of bat detectors and the best local areas to visit to detect bats. (Belair in particular).
The vandalised fencing in Sydenham Woods has been repaired and currently remains intact.

Discussion with Sharon O'Connor:
Sharon was welcomed to the meeting. There was discussion about items for the e-newsletter and about ways to include opportunities for readers of the e-newsletter and magazine to make comments. Twitter users are able to engage in discussion. Sharon will look into adding e-mail options to articles. We talked about the Swan that had recently been on the lake in the park and had had to be rescued when it became trapped in the area behind the footbridge. There was some caution about a request from a local beekeeper to ask Dulwich residents to look out for Asian Hornets. We had concerns that this might pose a threat to the wellbeing of other species that look not dissimilar but are of no threat to bees or any other wildlife.

Chair's Report:
Executive Committee:
PR had been successful in encouraging the Dulwich Society Executive to support a bid from Dulwich Park Friends to contribute towards maintenance work to be done on The Copse. There will be coppicing and replanting as well as improvement of footpaths. The Project will cost £10k. Half will be funded by Southwark Council and the other half equally by Dulwich Park Friends and the Dulwich Society.

Swift Box Project:
SR found a roofer to make and install boxes over the next four weeks. PR has successfully bid to the Dulwich Society Executive for funding, initially for twenty boxes.
The current focus is on East Dulwich in the roads already frequented by Swifts. The first tranche of twenty boxes are now nearly all spoken for and sites identified. PR expressed a hope that in due course Burbage Road might be included as having potential sites. There have been Swifts breeding there in the past. DC will provide SO'C with SR's contact details so she can ask him to prepare an item about the Swift Box Project for the e-newsletter. It was noted that JAGS and Bell House already have Swift boxes in place.

Herne Hill Velodrome:
The Velodrome have employed Charles Codrington, ecologist to replant the boundary area that had been cleared. There will be planting of trees and an understory of shrubs. Bird and bat boxes are included in the proposal. Species being planted include a disease resistant Elm (Ulmus New Horizon), Scots Pine, Yew and Oak. Planting will begin imminently. Southwark has acquired a number of the variety of Elmtrees which should resist Dutch Elm disease and be a potential plant food for our population of White-letter Hairstreak butterflies. The School Outdoors is still meeting at the Velodrome which does mean that the noise and footfall will probably deter full recovery from the wildlife loss resulting from the clearance of vegetation last year.

RSPB Big Bird Count: PR received fewer Bird Count duplicates this year than last year. The range of species reported locally was unchanged. Fewer Starlings are being seen in gardens. PR suspects that Song Thrushes might be under-reported because they are such secretive birds. Blackbird numbers are still down but there are signs that they are bouncing back after the Usutu virus.

Sydenham Hill Woods: (from Sam Taylor in absentia)
The footbridge opening has been delayed as a result of shipping of timbers being disrupted. No date for opening has been set yet. The very wet weather has resulted in topsoil being washed away on slopes and trampling beyond paths by people avoiding the worst mud. High numbers of dogs off leads are a risk to wildlife and many people continue to ignore signs asking for dogs to be kept on leads. A flock of over a hundred Redwings stopped off to feed before migrating north. There have been regular records of Firecrest. As in previous years a pair of Mallard have been residing on the Dewy pond but they have yet to actually breed on site. The first Brimstones have been seen and the mild January and February have resulted in early timing of spring vegetation. Wood Anemones are flowering, Bluebells are sprouting, Hazel and Hawthorn are in bud. Sam and volunteers assisted Joseph Arrowsmith from Southwark Council in planting a native mixed hedge along the South Circular boundary. Southwark may still have some trees left from this year's planting. Contact Sam to enquire if interested in planting in appropriate places on Southwark land.

Dulwich Park:
As well as the work on The Copse mentioned above, fences around the lake have been repaired, in part to restrain the geese from becoming over dominant.

Bird Report and other Sightings:
Firecrests are being seen more often including in Dulwich Park and Court Lane. Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps are heard in the local parks. A little further away Cetti's Warblers and Linnets are present in Burgess Park. Harry reported seeing three Siskin for a few days recently. Sharon is hoping the pair of Great Spotted Woodpecker in her garden will breed.
Harry reported that the wet weather has restricted his recording of moth activity but he has the impression than the moths that are around are appearing earlier than usual by up to a month. Jeff reported that recent Brimstone Butterfly sighting is two weeks earlier than his first sighting of the species last year.
Steven sent a report recording that frogspawn is earlier this year and Harry confirmed this and said that he actually already has tadpoles in his pond.
Jeff described his observation of Crows pecking around the seal of the car sunroof to gather moss and how this had actually triggered the opening mechanism of the roof. The car has now been washed thoroughly.
Sigrid asked about bird song heard before daybreak and its relationship to bright street lighting. DC proposed that the birds singing were almost certainly Robins and reminded us that the Berkeley Square Nightingale was probably a Robin. He also told of an example of Blue Tit nesting in a street light suggesting they are not troubled by street lights. However as Blue Tits have only one brood per year they are very vulnerable if the breeding season is wet.

AOB
The formal paperwork proposing and seconding Peter Roseveare as representative of the Wildlife Group on the Dulwich Society Executive was completed.

GW reported that Camberwell New Cemetery will be planting more wildflowers under the guidance of ecologist William Hague.
GW will inform the Tree Committee about the tree planting at the Velodrome.

DC is preparing a report on 15 years of surveying birds in Sydenham Hill Woods. He will also be doing two walks in Sydenham Woods for London Natural History Society and London Wildlife Trust, as well as giving a short talk at the AGM of Dulwich Park Friends.

Dulwich Society AGM date is 20.5.24

Date of next Meeting: Tuesday 21.5.24