Dulwich Society Wildlife Group 20.8.24

Present: Peter Roseveare (Chair), Sigrid Collins, Jeff Doodson, Glynis Williams, Sue Cope
Apologies: Charles Newman, Sam Taylor, Harry Rutherford, Steven Robinson, Dave Clark, Emily Montague

Minutes of Meeting !7.6.24 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

This meeting took the form of an informal discussion as there were so few attending.

Tree Committee:
The possibility of amalgamation of the Dulwich Society Tree Committee into the Wildlife Committee. PR has been asked to consider this. David Beamish is standing down as the Chair of the Tree Committee and there is no successor identified.
It was agreed that combining Tree and Wildlife is more appropriate that incorporating the Tree Committee into any other sub group of the Dulwich Society.
We considered that while there was interest in the Wildlife Group in trees in general and in our local Dulwich trees, we would need to be able to call upon some more specialist expertise. We also considered that at times there could be contentious issues arising about local trees. In the event of it being agreed that the committees do amalgamate it is hoped that David Beamish will attend at least some of our meetings. Members of the group shared their appreciation of the hard work that David has put into the Tree Committee and into his many other activities such as u3a. Among the potential sources of expertise around tree matters we identified Herne Hill Tree Watch, John Welton, arborist, and the Dulwich Estate tree consultant. Reminiscences were shared about Tony George the now retired Dulwich Estate tree expert, remembered in particular for his sartorial style which was more city gentleman than practical woodsman. Peter will open further discussion about the future of the Tree Committee with James Thompson.

Dulwich Park:
We have not had a formal report about the Park for this meeting. We noted there was no further progress on the Boardwalk. We assume inspection of underwater piers is still outstanding. We discussed possible effects on the water fowl of the closure of the boardwalk. PR reports that numbers of both Coot and Mallard are down but there cannot be any conclusions as to whether this might be influenced by closure of the boardwalk.

Interesting Sightings:
Hobbies have been seen in Sydenham Woods. They have bred in the Woods in the past but not known whether breeding there this year.
Following reports of a Hedgehog in allotments by Sydenham Woods at the last meeting there has been a further report of a Hedgehog in a garden in Court Lane backing onto the Park. The e-newsletter is going to include an item encouraging Court Lane residents to provide a Hedgehog corridor by making gaps in fences.
Sigrid is pleased to have a Wasp nest in the air bricks at the front of her house. This is particularly welcome as this year there have not been as many Wasps as usual.
Peter has received a photograph of a White-letter Hairstreak butterfly taken locally by Matthew Frith. Peter suggested that this relatively rare butterfly should benefit from the planting of disease resistant Elms in local sites such as the velodrome.
The Elm and Oak saplings planted at the Velodrome are thriving but Alders that were planted have not survived.

More Blackbirds have been observed this year which may mean they are now escaping the Usutu virus which is the probable cause of their decline.
A raptor spotted by volunteer gardeners at Bell House feeding its young was almost certainly a Sparrowhawk which had probably nested there or nearby.
Steven Robinson has reported that although 21 Swift boxes have now been put up in East Dulwich this has been a disastrous year for Swifts that have nested in existing boxes. The fledglings born this year did not survive because there were no insects for them to feed on because of wet weather at the crucial time for their development.
Glynis has had the pleasure of having a Robin nest in plant pot on a window ledge easily visible from inside her house.

This has not been a good summer of insects. Aphid numbers were low which has not been good for the many species that feed on them. Ladybirds have been few and far between as a result. Stag beetles have been seen. Small numbers of Shield bugs and Bush crickets have been seen. Butterflies have been very scarce this summer compared with previous years but the following species have been observed Brimstone, Small White, Large White, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Peacock, Gatekeeper, Holly Blue as well as Jersey Tiger moth. No-one had seen an Orange-tip this year. Sue and Jeff have seen several species of both damselflies and dragonflies this year, including observing Southern Hawkers emerging as adult dragonflies.

Peckham Rye:
Glynis attended a debriefing event after the Gala Festival run by a company now called Method. She was concerned that the commercial ecology report that the company commissioned concluded that the music event had no effect on wildlife. She complained that there was no mention of issues she had raised and in particular no reference to SongThrush nesting she had reported to the company and there was no mention of possible use of additional fencing to protect nesting birds. Glynis did get an agreement that her concerns will be put on the agenda next year and the use of protective fencing as an option will be revisited. The flood alleviation work on Peckham Rye is unfortunately now presenting a further assault on the area of woodland where Thrushes were thriving.
The work on Peckham Rye involves the building of bunds and associated ditches.
Glynis was congratulated on her success at ensuring that risks to wildlife remain on the agenda for the organisers of the Gala Festival.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 22.10.2024