Dulwich Society Wildlife Group 22.10.24

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

Minutes of Meeting 20.8.24 were agreed as accurate following correction of the name of the Usutu virus (USUV) affecting Blackbirds.

Reports presented by the Chair:

Dulwich Park (report received in absentia from EM)
The American Garden will be mulched soon to encourage re-growth of the Rhododendrons. Steve Bolton of Butterfly Conservation is writing a maintenance plan for the wildflower meadow areas. Further investigations are taking place of the Lake Boardwalk but it seems the supports are rotting and will require expensive replacement. DC commented that wooden piers standing in water under boardwalk have limited life regardless of any preservative treatment. Funding has been agreed to extend the perimeter path boardwalk between Court Lane Gate and Fireman's Alley.

Sydenham/Dulwich Woods (report in absentia from Sam Taylor)
While in general this has been a poor year for butterflies, there has been a first siting of Brown Argus butterfly in the woods. Harry was able to confirm that there have been some local sitings of Brown Argus in the local area in previous years which gives increased credibility to the identification of the butterfly which can be difficult to distinguish from female Common Blue butterfly. The annual survey of the Bat boxes has shown no obvious trend, suggesting the Bat population in the woods is essentially stable. Soprano Pipistrelles and Leisler's Bats were found.
Bird information in the Woods (from DC): A pair of Hobbies did breed two chicks but the chicks were unfortunately predated. We surmised this was likely to be by Magpie or Crow.
Two Firecrests were counted on most recent bird survey in the Woods.

Fungus Walk Dulwich Park on October 13th
The walk led by Fabrice Boltho was arranged by Jeremy Prescott, Chair of the Dulwich Society Gardening Group. The walk was highly enjoyable and informative. Jeremy has provided our group with a report from Fabrice listing the species identified with a brief description of some of characteristics of each. Astonishingly thirty two species of fungi were identified in Dulwich Park during the walk.

Discussion with David Beamish about the future of the Tree Committee of the Dulwich Society

David Beamish is stepping down as Chair of the Trees Committee after six years. The membership of the committee has dwindled largely due to aging of members. GW does however remain an active member. Three new members were recently recruited but have to date attended only one meeting. There is thus no identified successor to David and the option of amalgamation with the Wildlife Committee is on the table.
A new Chair of the Trees Committee does need to be supported by a member willing to take minutes, especially now that minutes are published on Dulwich Society website. The Chair would need to feel confident in representing the committee at the Dulwich Society Executive.
While it is not envisaged there will be any conflicts of interest between the two groups there does need to be consideration as to whether amalgamation might be to the detriment of one or both group largely because of time constraints on availability of committee members to cover needs of both current groups. The option of interim rather than long term amalgamation has not been explored. An interim arrangement would need to have a putative Trees Committee Chair identified.

The Tree Committee has to date met quarterly at a time suitable to plan for the article on a specific Dulwich tree best seen at that season of the year. This has been a much appreciated contribution. The Tree Committee was also involved in producing the local tree trail map illustrated by Rosemary Lindsay which might now be ready for revision and reprinting.

GW and John Hughes have made maps of locations of trees on other areas locally such as Long Meadow, Gypsy Hill. The trees in the grounds of Dulwich Picture Gallery are mapped and available online. Southwark website also includes maps of trees.

There was an initiative to involve the Dulwich Society in site visits with the College Estate staff to consider tree removal but in practise David only attended one visit.

The committee has made grant applications to plant trees locally when opportunities have arisen. GW was instrumental in successfully getting funding and in advising on hedge and tree planting on the Dulwich Library site. She also reported that she recently put in a CGS (Cleaner Greener Safer) application for fencing on Peckham Rye to protect nesting birds.

Some local residents do have very specific specialist tree knowledge. Local experts include David Beamish, John Hughes, Mark Lane and Paul Millington. David Beamish has established a goodwill network and has indicated that these individuals would be willing to act in a consultancy capacity. GW has good links with the local network of tree experts. The Herne Hill Tree watch, set up by Paul Millington together with Jeff Segal, has had a successful initiative to encourage local residents to nurture their street trees. There are also professional local tree experts such as John Welton, and Oliver Stutter of the Dulwich Estate, who is purchasing several disease free Elms from the Elms for London project. Southwark council now have a Tree Planting Officer and Ecology Project Manager, Joe Arrowsmith, and Mandy Rudd of GiGL recently did an extensive survey of Greens for us.

There was concern that a combined committee would become unwieldy and a preferable option might be for the Wildlife Committee to take on the Tree Committee functions with invited experts attending meetings as need arises.

Action:
PR will approach current members of the Tree Committee including the new members to canvass their opinions on the way forward.

Sightings

Peter was pleased to be able to report there has been a further Hedgehog sighting since those reported at the last meeting. The most recent one was in Domehill Park Sydenham.

HR reported that even though the weather this summer had meant that moth numbers were down, he had identified six new species this year. He was able to report a sighting at least as remarkable as the recent return of Hedgehogs, that his sister had seen a Slow Worm in Tulse Hill.

PR has had Starlings and a Mistle Thrush in his garden. There have been migrant Blackbirds but numbers of Blackbirds are down all over the south east and have not recovered from the effect of the Usutu virus infection.

AOB:
Belair Park Flora Report 2023-24
Dave Clark reported that he has completed this report, co-working with the benefit of wildflower expert Frank Connor. Hopefully details of this comprehensive report will find their way to a wider circulation, possibly via the Dulwich Society Magazine.
The wildflowers growing in the areas replanted following flood alleviation work in Belair Park were surveyed regularly between October 2023 and August 2024. A total of 80 species were seen across the year with over 40 species at one time as peak.

Date of next Meeting: Tuesday 14th January 2025