Dulwich Society Wildlife and Tree Group 8.4.25

Present: Peter Roseveare (Chair), Emily Montague (host), Jeremy Prescott, Jeff Doodson, Sue Cope, Harry Rutherford, Glynis Williams, Oliver Stutter, Gillian Wolfe
Apologies: Charles Newman, Steven Robinson, Annie McGeoch, Dave Clark

Minutes of Meeting 27.1.25 - Minutes agreed.

Matters Arising
Peter confirmed that he has presented Sigrid Collins with a bouquet on behalf of the Dulwich Society in recognition of her longstanding contribution to the Society, including latterly her much appreciated hosting of Wildlife Group meetings. Sigrid will no longer attend meetings but will receive minutes of meetings. There have been enough offers to host future meetings to make rotating the venues a viable option. Peter will, however, explore further what quid pro quo might be offered to enable the option of meeting at Bell House without incurring cost. Gillian also suggested that Dulwich Library may offer free use of a room on Monday evenings.
Harry confirmed that he will be able to host a Moth Trap Opening session and suggested a provisional date of Saturday June 28 at 7.30am.
Oliver is willing to do a guided walk Rare Trees of Dulwich Park in late summer. He suggested that Philip Louis, the Tree Manager for Dulwich Estate, might wish to do a Village Tree Walk. Peter will invite Philip Louis to attend a future meeting to meet the group and talk about his work. Oliver reported that hedge planting has been completed on Gallery Road. The Dulwich Estate has also now planted disease-resistant Elms in various sites around Dulwich. These Elms are part of the Elms4London initiative and the new trees are establishing well and are supporting White-letter Hairstreak Butterflies, which are dependent on Elms as their food source.
Bulbs and Primroses planted in the Burial Ground and Orchard are in bloom. Jeremy was congratulated on his involvement in this Dulwich Society planting project.

Chair's Report
The Dulwich Society AGM will be on 19 May at The Crown and Greyhound. The Chairs of the individual groups will be confirmed as trustees of the Society. Peter has agreed to continue as Chair for the next year, but informed the group that in view of his age and health, it is his intention to stand down after one year. The group will need to plan to take over not only his role as Chair and Trustee, but also Peter's function as point of contact to identify and record local wildlife sightings and his contribution of regular articles for the Dulwich Society Journal. The group was, at this stage, lost for comment but wished Peter well and thanked him for continuing as Chair for the next year.

The East Dulwich Sidings Development has been rejected by the planning group of the Dulwich Society both because of access difficulties but also because it interrupts wildlife corridors.

Big Birdwatch: Peter has had eleven reports from Dulwich Society members and the results are in line with those of the last two years. Robins, Blue Tits and Great Tits were prevalent and most people recorded Dunnocks, Wood Pigeons, Carrion Crows, Magpies, Parakeets and, surprisingly, Coal Tits. Blackbirds, absent from gardens over the last year were now present, but some may have been migrants. House Sparrows still confine themselves rather exclusively to chosen gardens, where they may represent populations immune to avian flu. Just one Song Thrush was recorded and no Starlings, which mirrors the recorded national trend of their decline. One report of a winter Blackcap is consistent with previous years. A more detailed discussion will be in the Journal.

Reports

Dulwich Park: Emily reported that the specialist assessment of the state of the Boardwalk had confirmed that it was beyond repair and that replacement cost would be of order of £200K. Unfortunately, replacement is not being considered at the moment because the priority for major spending in the park is to replace the playground surface which will cost a not dissimilar sum.

Playground resurfacing is likely to go ahead. There was some discussion of whether there might be other funding options to replace the Boardwalk. It was recognised that many people would really like to see the Boardwalk replaced if it cannot be retained.
Dave Clark's Dulwich Park bird count for March found an abundance of over fifty Robins in the Park but a marked fall in numbers of duck on the pond, with only two Tufted Ducks and four Mallard. The suspicion is that the low duck numbers are the consequence of Avian Flu. Dave also reported two Song Thrush, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Nuthatch. No one at the meeting knew for sure whether waterfowl numbers are also down in Brockwell and Burgess Parks.

Dulwich/Sydenham Woods: No new report from Sam. Cox's Walk has reopened. As well as the preservation of the Oaks that were at risk, one new tree has been planted. Tree planting in the Woods is not usual policy as natural regeneration is preferred in the ancient woodland. The Dulwich Society continues to support LWT. Sam continues to manage the volunteers in clearing Cherry Laurel and creating dead hedges.

Glynis confirmed that fencing will be put up around the Peckham Rye Gala Festival site to provide some protection for nesting birds. She has also made a successful bid for "trees for all seasons" for more street trees in her road from the Cleaner Greener Safer Project. She has been involved in selecting trees in collaboration with Joe Arrowsmith, Tree Planting Officer. The four trees chosen are Holly, Arbutus, Whitebeam and Winter Flowering Cherry.

Gillian has had a Green Woodpecker as a new visitor to her garden. Glynis downloaded the Merlin Birdsong App and was very pleased to have eight species of bird identified by their song in her garden.
Beeflies, Brimstones and Orange Tip Butterflies along with some early Bumble Bees have been seen over recent weeks. These are always welcome early sightings heralding spring.

Discussion

Tree Watering:
Emily stressed that although the Southwark Park and street trees are nurtured, it is difficult at this time of the year when weather is dry. The bowsers used in the park to water recently-planted trees have only limited capacity to cope with the amount of watering needed.

No Mow May:
The Estate will be putting up signage highlighting areas not being mown as part of No Mow May. Oliver reported that benefits of not mowing had resulted in both Bee Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid appearing in the Orchard. Peter also had a Bee Orchid appear in his garden grass last year.
No Mow May was proposed and agreed as the Wildlife Tip for the next e-News.

Tips about gardening for wildlife: Gillian stressed how valuable it is to be given specific advice on how to encourage wildlife in the garden. There was discussion about how nuanced and complex it is to optimise conditions. Harry spoke of the findings that brownfield sites are generally more biodiverse than greenfield sites, how poor soil will benefit wildflower species as opposed to soil with additional fertilisers. There was reference to the Sheffield studies of gardens and biodiversity where, although native species may support more insect species, non-native species of plants also have benefits. Peter described the example of cotoneaster berries being attractive to Redwings, and Harry the example of bees attracted to non-native Achillea in his garden. Nettles are sometimes helpful, but only under certain conditions and other plant options might have as much benefit. Not mowing grass during May definitely benefits pollinators and other insects which in turn benefits birds.

Date of next Meeting: Tuesday June 10th. Venue: Emily Montague offered to host again (TBC)