Dulwich Society Wildlife and Tree Group 18.6.25

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

Minutes of Meeting 8.4.25 Minutes agreed.

Introduction of new member Czech Conroy was welcomed to the group. He has a long-standing interest in birdwatching and biodiversity and since retiring has taken up wildlife photography, particularly of Dragonflies and Damselflies.

Matters Arising and Chair's Report
The invitation to Philip Louis to attend a meeting is currently on hold as Philip Louis is on paternity leave.
The new Chair of the Gardens Committee is Celia Randell; Peter will invite her to attend a future meeting to discuss how to incorporate her interest in trees into the Wildlife and Trees Group.
The Railway Sidings Development has been opposed by the Dulwich Society. The application is now with the Mayor's Office.
Oliver agreed to firm up details for a Rare Trees of Dulwich walk in late summer. Fifteen was suggested as the maximum number of attendees.

Reports
Trees and Botany
After following 'no mow May', Peter has been rewarded with two Bee Orchids in his lawn. Oliver reported that the Dulwich Estate practice of withholding mowing in places until July has seen both Bee Orchids and Pyramidal Orchids.
We did discuss that some birds, notably Green Woodpeckers and Starlings, prefer short grass to enable feeding. Charles has taken to mowing half his grass to benefit the short grass loving birds.
Peter reported that the tree planting on the Velodrome site is now well established, although some saplings are very close together. Some species are faring better than others. As yet, Peter cannot give us a report of return of the birdlife that was previously abundant on the site, and given the amount of footfall on a daily basis at the Velodrome there is concern about the return of the bird population.
Disease-resistant Elms have been planted at Turney Road Sports Ground.

Dulwich Park Trees: A mature Horse-chestnut tree needs removing because it is diseased and at risk of shedding branches. Oliver gave us the interesting information that many park Horse-chestnut trees share identical genetic makeup because the Victorians cloned Horse-chestnuts from a limited source of parent plants. This means collectively these trees carry the same risk of vulnerability to disease or weather resistance. Emily said that the tree will be replaced with a sizeable specimen but it has not yet been decided what species it will be. An Oak tree in the park is currently cordoned off to protect the public from Oak Processionary Moth caterpillars. it is no longer practice to spray to kill the moth larvae.

Birds
Steven has reported on Swifts and is very pleased that three young Swifts are thriving in his Swift box. The Swifts arrived early in the UK at the end of April this year and are being seen locally, particularly over parts of East Dulwich. There is currently no news on whether any Swifts have yet nested in the new boxes that were put up in the recent Dulwich Society Swift box initiative.
Jeff asked whether it is possible that House Martins are also flying and there can be confusion as to whether both species are in the sky simultaneously. The consensus was that there have been no local House Martin sightings for some years.
Unfortunately, Dave Clark was not available to provide bird records and observations for this meeting. There were some interesting anecdotal observations from members. Charles has a video record of both Green Woodpecker and Great Spotted Woodpecker simultaneously pecking on his lawn in close proximity. Sue described observing a Sparrow predating a newly emerged Damselfly

in way that seemed to harness extra energy for a high-speed dart at the insect from appearing to tread air in an almost stationary airborne position. Jeff observed Starlings in the garden and Charles is particularly pleased to have a pair of Song Thrushes in his garden. It was noted that Song Thrushes have become less common in Dulwich Park, possibly as a result of loss of undergrowth in last few years. Blackbird song has been enjoyed during the recent warm weather even though numbers of Blackbirds are down substantially. Peter had a Robin's nest in his garden, but unfortunately no chicks survived possibly because of food shortage in the dry weather. Gillian has had young Robins and a group of unidentified small birds feeding on seed heads, which the group surmised were probably fledgling Goldfinches, yet to develop their characteristic recognisable plumage. Stock Doves are breeding in the woods and Harry has seen them in his garden.

Insects

Of particular note this year have been the Spindle Ermine Moth webs and caterpillars on the Spindle trees in Dulwich Park. This seems to have been a particularly good year for the Ermine Moth. Harry noted that he has seen a lot of evidence of Willow Ermine moth at the Olympic Park as well as our local Spindle Ermine Moth. While the Spindle trees do look devastated by the caterpillars and shrouded in the webs, the trees are expected to recover.

Jeff considers this year has been a better year for insects than last year. While numbers of insects are less than in the past there is an expected range of species being seen. However, this is the second year with no bat sightings (to date) over the Alleyn's playing fields, which may be a result of fewer insects. Damselflies are emerging and Czech has seen Dragonfly species. Jeff found a set of dragonfly wings intact. Gillian is pleased to have Stag Beetles in her garden and Glynis is very happy to have found a Lesser Stag Beetle in her house. Harry has seen White Letter Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak Butterflies. He had a Summer Chafer in the moth trap recently.

Harry agreed to write an article for the next Dulwich Society Magazine focussing on the findings of the upcoming Mothtrap Opening Session on June 29th.

Discussion:

There was discussion about recording sightings and the importance of doing so. Harry sends his moth records to the county moth recorder and or i-record. We discussed how the Natural History Museum garden is one urban site where there has been thorough monitoring and recording. i-record, i-naturalist and GiGL are all options. A strategy for recommending a system might be further discussed. Members of the group also highlighted information available on Southwark Action for Wildlife website and the London Wildlife Trust website.

The Fire Brigade had to extinguish a fire at Low Cross Wood last week. Emily highlighted the risk of fire posed by disposable barbecues which have caused fire in Dulwich Park in the past.

We had some speculative consideration as to whether we might expect Badger sightings locally. Years ago there were reports of Badgers both in Norwood and Catford.

AOB

Suggested Wildlife Tips for the e-newsletter of the Dulwich Society: Peter is planning to include reminding people to provide water for wildlife during the hot weather. This could be as little as leaving out a dog bowl of water available for birds and insects. Gillian admitted that she had only recently become aware of and visited Marston Road Wildlife Garden and thought this is likely also to be the case for many others. It was agreed that it was an excellent idea to draw attention to Marston Road in the next e-newsletter.

Communication between group members: Peter agreed to circulate all members of the Wildlife Group with each member's email address. This will facilitate members sharing sightings as well as articles or information about webinars or lectures of interest.

Biodiversity Grants: Friends of Nunhead Cemetery have successfully bid for a biodiversity grant to build and maintain a pond at the cemetery.

Oliver said that Dulwich Estate efforts to successfully bid for Biodiversity Grant money would be greatly enhanced if the Dulwich Society were to endorse such bids. Oliver will write a formal request for such an endorsement that Peter, as a Dulwich Society Trustee, can then put forward to the Executive Committee.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 19 August 2025