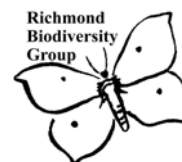




RICHMOND BIODIVERSITY GROUP 2004 NEWSLETTER



There is much to celebrate this summer and there are a lot of projects happening across the borough so it seems an appropriate time to re-launch the Richmond Biodiversity Newsletter! The Water Vole Species Action Plan has now been completed, the Crane Park Island Shot Tower Nature and Visitor Centre has been officially opened and a new officer is in post to oversee the production and implementation of the Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan.

The SUN Project – an EU LIFE-Funded Project Sustainable Urban Planning Networks for Green Spaces



The SUN project is a 3-year EU LIFE-funded project, which runs until August 31st 2006 and it aims to raise awareness and encourage people to get involved with the Biodiversity Action Planning process. A new SUN Project Officer has been recruited to help deliver the SUN objectives and implement innovative biodiversity projects across the borough, which directly relate to Richmond's Biodiversity Action Plan. You can find out more about the SUN project, and the other partners by visiting: www.sun-project.org.

Opening of the Crane Park Island Shot Tower

Crane Park Island Nature Reserve and the Shot Tower Nature and Visitor Centre was officially opened by Sir David Attenborough on June 22nd 2004 for local people to come and find out about the fascinating history and ecology surrounding this site.

For details about this project and its work as well as volunteering opportunities, please contact Alex Robb (Project Manager) on: 020 8755 2339 or e-mail: wildcrane@btopenworld.com

Bee Orchids on Hamlands Local Nature Reserve

As pictured below, bee orchids have been seen and recorded again this year on Ham Lands Local Nature Reserve. The Bee Orchid is a native plant and can be found growing in pastures, field borders, banks and copses on dry chalk or limestone soils. It often occurs on recently disturbed soils and prefers open or slightly shaded places. Bee Orchids flower between June and July and they usually have between 2 and 5 flowers that grow one above the other in a spike-like head. The Bee Orchid gets its name from the shape of the flowers. Although it looks like a Bee it does not use them as its main method of pollination; the usual way is by self-pollination.

The Bee Orchid is a perennial and the annual cycle is distinctive. The aerial part dries off after summer, leaving only the buried tuber, which sprouts again, when good weather arrives. This orchid, like many others, is mysterious in its appearance. It often appears in large numbers on disturbed sites, remains for a few years and then vanishes, which is what has happened on Ham Lands.



Water Vole Species Action Plan Completed

The Water Vole Species Action Plan has now been completed and actions are underway to protect and sustain populations of the vole along the River Crane, Beverley Brook, Duke of Northumberland River and Longford River. Volunteers are needed to help survey these stretches of water and monitor the water voles and a full training day will be given by London Wildlife Trust on **Sunday August 22nd 2004** at London's Wetland Centre in Barnes. If you are interested in attending this training day, please contact Charlotte Williams as soon as possible, as places are limited (contact details at end of newsletter).



Are you interested in Birds or more particularly Song Thrushes? Partners are needed to sign up and get involved with finalising the objectives and actions within the **Songthrush Species Action Plan**. Volunteers will then be needed to undertake surveys and record Songthrush territories throughout the borough. For more information or to get involved please contact Charlotte Williams

The **Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE)** is a local group, set up in 2003 to represent the interests of the environment, local residents and visitors to the corridors of the River Crane and the Duke of Northumberland's River within the London Borough of Richmond. FORCE has grown to over 300 members and is currently developing a management plan for the Crane Valley in association with the London Wildlife Trust. FORCE holds regular volunteer days on the Crane and the last, at the former Mereway Allotments site in June, attracted over 40 people to clear several tonnes of accumulated rubbish. FORCE is currently putting a plan to develop this site into a Nature Park and hopes to work with the Council and local schools to bring this to fruition.

Detailed lists are being developed of the flora and fauna on this and other sites on the Crane Valley and a number of BAP priority species are known to be present. Plans are being developed to improve the riverside management to promote the return of other species such as the water vole for example. If you would like to join FORCE or would like more information on their activities please e-mail FORCE@twickenham-online.co.uk or contact the Membership Secretary, Mike Day on: 0208 893 3503.

Barnes Common Local Nature Reserve

Much is happening on Barnes Common Local Nature Reserve and Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, thanks to the Friends of Barnes Common who proactively manage the site so well for wildlife and people. Work has been underway to fulfil the Countryside Stewardship Scheme obligations by effectively eradicating areas of bracken that are imposing on the acid grassland and woodland areas. It is hoped to create a compost area for all the bracken brush, so that it can be used in gardens and formal recreational grounds once it has rotted down. Along with clearing out the tadpole pond by BTCV volunteers and cutting back all the burnt gorse, there are now plans underway to create a wetland-reedbed habitat. The area is east of the footbridge from Barnes Green adjacent to the Beverley Brook, which is already rich in wildlife as four varieties of damselfly have been recorded this year: Banded Agrion, the Green Lestes, the Large Red and the Common Blue.

Heather Trials

Trials are underway to bring back heather to the common and restore a 1-hectare area to an important heathland habitat. Five trial beds have been prepared by Friends of Barnes Common and seeded with cuttings from Wimbledon Common, and tests are underway to see if and how best the area might be re-seeded with heather. For this purpose seed has been supplied from the autumnal heather cutting at Wimbledon Common, which is the nearest naturally occurring heather and which grows in similar conditions to Barnes Common. Control patches will also show whether there remains any heather in the local soil, as well as what other seed is likely to germinate and compete with the heather. In addition to these trial beds, the meadow will be assessed throughout the year to ensure the location of any rarer plants is identified and that they are protected in any plans going forward. This work directly relates to actions within the **London Heathland Habitat Action Plan** & will be now progressed through the SUN Initiative.

Blooming Wildlife Gardens

As we all know gardens can be a haven for wildlife if gardening is undertaken in a sustainable and sensitive manner, as encouraging wildlife to live and feed in your garden can also provide considerable pleasure. However gardening practices can also cause harm to the wider environment – for example through chemical pest control and the use of unsustainable resources.

This year Richmond Borough in Bloom has introduced a new competition category, with sponsorship from Serco, for the “Best Environmental Garden”. The key principles for a good environmental garden are:

- Using natural methods to control pests
- Recycling garden and kitchen waste for composting
- Applying water saving techniques
- Planting and encouraging native species and species attractive to wildlife
- Managing the garden area to provide a wide range of habitats for native plants and animals
- Providing food and water to birds and animals, particularly in periods of hardship
- Using local and replenishable materials, ideally recycled
- Using a part of the garden for the production of organic fruit and vegetables.

Everyone can garden in a more sustainable manner and here are a few thoughts and ideas:

- Produce your own leaf mould and/or identify a local source of manure, mushroom compost or other peat-free compost.
- Pesticides and chemical controls such as slug pellets can also harm other wildlife. Encourage the natural predators of your pests such as birds and hedgehogs, ladybirds and lacewings into your garden and use more natural control methods such as egg shells or wood ash around your plants and construct shallow beer traps for the snails and slugs.
- Nectar-rich and preferably native plants such as primrose, ivy and honeysuckle attract butterflies and bees. Night-scented plants such as night-scented stock and sweet rocket attract insects and bats. Birds like all types of berries and seed heads so do not remove these in the Autumn.
- Don't be too tidy; a pile of logs will attract beetles and fungi; leaves can provide shelter for hedgehogs and areas of longer grass provide cover for beetles, which in turn can keep down garden pests. Use your grass cuttings and wood chippings to help control weed growth.
- Ponds can provide a good habitat but don't take spawn from the wild. Wait for the animals to come to you; they usually will. Ornamental fish look nice but eat the native wildlife such as dragonfly larvae.
- Bird habitats can be introduced and enhanced by nesting and roosting boxes, bird tables and baths and the impact of your cat reduced by attaching a small bell to its collar. Natural roosts in ivy and bushes should be maintained and not disturbed during the breeding season.
- The procurement of wood and stone for decking and landscaping can be at the expense of its natural setting. It is preferable to use materials that would otherwise be going to waste or that are available locally. Garden lighting is also fashionable at present but could be considered wasteful and cause light pollution when used to excess. The use of tap water for garden watering is also discouraged and gardeners should look to store run-off from their property and not be too upset if the garden dries out to the end of summer; this is natural.



Stag Beetles Habitat

Stag Beetle Loggeries have been created within Petersham Lodge Woods by BTCV volunteers, to use the dead wood effectively and provide a good habitat for a range of invertebrates including stag beetles.



Stag Beetle loggeries at Petersham Lodge Woods

Stag beetles are a globally threatened species, which are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, and listed as a priority species for the UK, London and **Richmond Biodiversity Action Plans**.

The numbers of stag beetles have declined since the 1940s, which has been attributed to a number of factors, the primary one being the reduction of appropriate habitat - dead wood. The tidying up of woodlands, parks and gardens has led to the burning or chipping of dead wood, and stump-grinding of felled trees removes another vital source for the beetle.

How you can help the stag beetle...

- Retain as much dead wood - logs and stumps - as possible on site - the larger the better (which helps prevent burning, vandalism or removal). If possible some of this needs to be in the shade to avoid desiccation
- Leave windblown trees in situ, except where they pose a safety problem
- Make sure that most of the dead wood is lying on or close to the ground
- Ensure that a buffer zone is managed around large dead wood so that the soils and vegetation are protected as much as possible from disturbance. Ideally this should not be cut between May and September
- Avoid stump-grinding tree stumps wherever possible
- Identify the needs of stag beetle in site management plans, and provide particular prescriptions for management of dead wood

Tidal Thames Habitat Action Plan



A Habitat Action Plan is now being developed for the Tidal Thames. This Action Plan will raise awareness about the wildlife value of the River Thames and its banks, as well as highlight the impact of development upon many species such as the intertidal arthropod *Balea perversa*, commonly known as the two-lipped door snail, which is endangered under the Red Data Book. This snail is so rare because they rely on an inter-tidal habitat, which is being threatened by developers. To get involved with the development of this plan, please e-mail: rob@bert40.fsworld.co.uk



With the help of **Richmond**

BTCV volunteers, the two major footpaths which run from Ham Gate Avenue to the Sudbrook Golf Course through Ham Common Woods have now been opened up and wood chippings have been put down. **BTCV** has a number of practical conservation projects across the borough this summer and throughout the year, if you would like to receive a copy of their latest programme and get involved, please contact Richmond **BTCV** on: 020 8831 6150

Amphibian Species Action Plan – work is underway to survey all the ponds within the borough and record species such as common frog, toad and newts. If you have a pond in your garden or are interested in joining this group to help survey wetlands, please contact Charlotte Williams or Dave Donohue who is the lead for the Amphibian Species Action Plan. Dave's e-mail is: daved@fastmail.fm



Floating Rafts on Leg O'Mutton reservoir Local Nature Reserve



Thanks to a financial contribution from the Environment Agency and HSBC, London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames organised for contractors to install four new floating platforms with aquatic vegetation on Leg O'Mutton reservoir on Friday July 16th 2004. The platforms will help encourage the rich biodiversity of the site and allow a greater diversity of bird species to breed, nest and feed. Many species of birds nest and breed on the site such as great crested grebes, tufted ducks, mute swans, moorhens, coots, herons, common tern and common sandpipers.

Lorraine Groves from HSBC completed a project in Belize as part of the Earthwatch scheme and chose to spend the HSBC grant on a local project, which would in turn benefit water birds and help to regenerate reedbeds.

Leg O'Mutton Reservoir is a disused reservoir located beside the River Thames in Barnes. The site is now managed as a Local Nature Reserve and an active group called the Leg O'Mutton Management Advisory Committee advise on appropriate operations that need to take place in order to manage the site appropriately for both people and wildlife.

Tower Mustard (*Arabis glabra*) Species Action Plan

Tower mustard is a biennial plant of disturbed habitats on free-draining, sandy soils in grassy and wasteland places. It is nationally scarce and in decline, as is known from only about 30 sites in England. However, we are fortunate to have a very large population of tower mustard at Stain Hill Reservoir in Hampton. This is one of the largest populations in the country, surpassed only by a couple of East Anglian sites. This site is not open to the public and is maintained by **Thames Water** (Partner to the London SAP). Charlotte Williams is now the lead for this Species Action Plan for London and Richmond-upon-Thames, so if you would like to get involved and help monitor the populations on this site, please contact Charlotte below.

Tower Mustard (*Arabis glabra*)



If you would like to get further involved in any of the Species or Habitat Action Plans mentioned or are interested in joining the Richmond Biodiversity Group please contact Charlotte Williams via any of the contact details below:

Tel: 0208 831 6125

Write to: London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, Room 213, Civic Centre, 44 York Street, Twickenham, Middlesex TW1 3BZ

E-mail: C.Williams2@richmond.gov.uk

If you have some biodiversity news or information about a project you have been involved with and would like to write an article or advertise an event for the next newsletter, please contact Charlotte Williams via any of the above contact details.