

# Notes from the Nature Reserve

Green Gym Conservation Volunteers at East Ham Nature Reserve Spring 2018

The really important news is that East Ham Nature Reserve will be under the control of Newham Council and not activeNewham, as of the 1<sup>st</sup> June. It will be managed by East Ham Community Neighbourhood Team. Anna Yusuf is in charge of community groups, including us, but we are not sure what this change will mean for the management of the nature reserve. Anna's boss Nicola is agitating to get the building fixed as soon as possible.

Other news is that EHNR is going to be one of the venues for East Ham Arts Festival at the end of July. This is being arranged by Anna. There will be music in Central Park and activities and exhibitions in various venues including the library and the Market Hall. We are contacting artists in the area and liaising with Red Door Studios to create a sculpture trail through the nature reserve. We are hoping they will use natural materials, which will then change as they decay, demonstrating cycles of life.

## Animal of the month

### Grey squirrel - *Sciurus carolinensis*



grey squirrel

- Grey squirrels are very cute, but not very good for the plants and animals at the nature reserve. They were introduced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in several parts of the country and have now spread to everywhere except the Isle of Wight, Lake District and Scotland.
- Because grey squirrels are larger than the native red squirrels, they can compete for food and put on more fat, so they survive winter better than the native animals. They don't hibernate, but they do slow down and sleep a lot in winter.

- Grey squirrels carry the Parapox virus, which does not affect them but causes a fatal infection in red squirrels.
- Grey squirrels build a large, untidy looking nest, or drey, in the treetops or hollow tree trunks. The drey is usually lined with moss, thistle down, dried grass, and feathers. They have 2-6 young twice a year.
- They are mainly herbivorous, eating acorns and hazel nuts, berries, fungi and even bark, buds and shoots. They always beat us to the hazelnuts, getting them as soon as they are ripe. They will also eat insects, smaller rodents, bird eggs and nestlings, which is bad news for our other animals.
- Grey squirrels are also causing quite a lot of damage to our trees, gnawing the bark and stripping it off.



red squirrel

## Plant of the month

### Alder - *Alnus glutinosa*

- Alder trees are conical when young, spreading with age. You can see a few near the A13.
- It has long male catkins in early spring. The shorter female catkins become woody like little cones. They stay on the tree, making it easy to identify, especially in winter.
- Alder trees, like peas and beans, have root nodules filled with bacteria, which take nitrogen from the air and fix it so that it is available for the tree. Nitrogen is easily washed out of the soil so this is probably an adaptation to living in wet places like river banks, where alders are most often found.
- Alder wood does not rot in water, so most of Venice is built on alder piles. It was traditionally used for clog soles and to make charcoal for gunpowder.
- According to Celtic mythology, the first man was made of alder wood and the first woman of rowan.



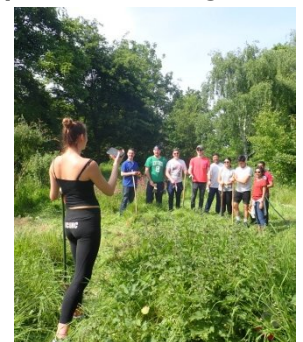
Find out more about trees at [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)

The slow worms appeared on 11<sup>th</sup> April, as soon as the weather started warming up. They are looking very fat and healthy with lots of babies. You might find roofing felt mats and bits of tin and carpet around the site. They are refugia for the slow worms to collect under, so please don't move them, although you can have a look.



MP Stephen Timms came for a short visit. He was disappointed not to get tea and biscuits because he was too early, but he gave a hand with cutting up and stacking hazel.

We have just had a group of volunteers from Price, Waterhouse, Cooper, who dug up brambles and a huge sycamore stump and planted wildflowers in the meadow. They also put up bird boxes that had been painted by family groups. Corporate volunteers are useful because they often get very competitive and do a lot in a day.



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