

# News from East Ham Nature Reserve December 2023

Dates for the next Saturday Green Gym Nature and Heritage Conservation Volunteers work sessions are 25<sup>th</sup> November and 30<sup>th</sup> December 10am-1pm. Friends' walks on the same dates at 1.30pm, everyone welcome. Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm.

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November is the start of National Tree week. We will be moving some small trees from the Norman Road meadow to the one near the A13, where they will eventually hide the horrible concrete fence. Please come and help us.

## News



After some problems we have managed to get the money from the 2021-2022 Community Assembly project. The green seats were installed in 2022, but the pond was not allowed. The money has instead been spent instead on equipment.

We will soon be installing two 1,000 litre tanks to catch rainwater from the roof of the visitor centre. These, together with a wheeled 110 litre water bowser, will enable us to water the trees we will be planting, greatly increasing their chances of survival.

Other equipment includes four little microscopes, which are a great success with children. For next summer we have two bat detectors, so we will have some bat walks. Our new laptop will be very useful in helping us to locate graves and can be connected to the microscopes.



## Animal of the month

Robin - *Erithacus rubecula*



Males and females look identical. Young birds have no red breast and are spotted with golden brown.

They eat a variety of foods such as worms, seeds, fruits and insects. This means they are well adapted to living in different habitats.

Robins sing nearly all year round. Along with blackbirds they sometimes sing at night next to street lights.

Some robins keep their territories all year round. Some, mainly females, migrate as far as Spain and Portugal in winter. Others come here from colder areas such as Scandinavia and Russia. You may have different robins in your garden in summer and winter, but hard to tell because they all look the same!

Robins may look cute but, unlike most animals, they will fight to the death to defend their territory. Probably partly because of this, robins only live 1.1 years on average, although they can live for 12 years in captivity.

In Victorian times the postmen were nicknamed 'robins' because they wore red coats. Since they delivered the newly invented Christmas cards the robin was associated with postmen so robins began to appear on the card.

There are various legends about robins. Here is a link:

<https://voice.gardenbird.co.uk/christmas-robin>

## Fungi

There have not been as many fungi as usual this year at the nature reserve, so here is a picture of fly agaric taken on Wanstead Flats.

Interesting fact about fungi - if you look at their DNA these are more closely related to animals than to plants.



## Plant of the month

### Holly - *Ilex aquifolium*



The name holly comes from Middle English 'hollin' or 'holm'. Place names like Holmstone and Hollington would have been places where holly grew.

Male and female flowers are carried on separate plants, so only female trees produce berries. In medieval times holly was considered a 'male' plant, in contrast to the clinging, 'female' ivy, so it was assumed that the berries were produced by the males, perhaps as a sign of virility. Because of this, Golden King is an all-female variety with berries, whilst Silver Queen, without berries, is actually male. Very confusing for gardeners!

Holly leaves were fed to cattle and sheep in winter especially in the area round Leeds, Manchester and Derby, dating back to prehistoric times. Apparently, in spite of the prickles, they have one of the highest calorific contents of any tree browsed by animals and are often eaten by deer. The tree tries to defend itself with prickles on the lower leaves. Above the browsing line, where animals cannot reach, the leaves have fewer or no prickles.

The berries are essential winter food for birds and also for small mammals when they drop. The dense foliage is good as protected nesting sites for birds.

In Christian tradition holly represents the crown of thorns of Jesus and the red berries represent his blood, as in the carol 'The holly and the ivy'.

Female holly trees need light to flower and produce berries. Our only female tree with plain green leaves is in quite dense shade in the woodland, so sets very few berries. The other female is the variegated one near Plum Tree Walk and the birds don't usually take the berries. Perhaps they are confused by the variegation and don't see the berries.

## What we have been doing



Some people came for the Remembrance Walk and we put poppy crosses on the war graves. This is the beautiful hanging with knitted poppies that was in the graveyard.

We have made good progress in clearing grass from the Norman Road meadow, so will sow a few seeds of yellow rattle now to let it have a cold spell to encourage it to germinate in the spring.

Some of our newer volunteers are clearing graves in the woodland ready for sowing with wildflower seeds in spring. This is Maureen, our champion ivy remover, working sitting on her chair.



## Tasks for December

- Moving trees from Norman Road meadow.
- Removing ivy in the woodland.
- Clearing goosegrass before it gets chance to set seed.
- Clearing brambles and digging out grass in the meadows to make spaces to plant flower seeds in spring.
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.
- Making wood piles as habitats for minibeasts.
- Coppicing hazel and pointing stakes.
- Laying part of the hedge using the hazel stakes.

## National Tree Week 25<sup>th</sup> November - 3<sup>rd</sup> December



The walk on 25<sup>th</sup> November will focus on trees. We will look at the live trees and see how they are changing to beautiful autumn colours as the weather gets colder. We will also look at dead trees like the elms.

Some people think they are untidy and should be removed, but we leave them standing as long as they are not in danger of falling on the paths. They are a really important habitat for invertebrates like boring beetles and bees. They also develop cavities which are nests and roosts for birds and bats.

When they become unstable they are removed to wood piles which are important as shelter and nest sites for small mammals. The logs eventually rot down, grow fungi and enrich the soil for new plants to grow.



This is a link to an article on the importance of deadwood that was in Treetalk for Halloween:

[https://open.substack.com/pub/treetalk/p/day-of-the-deadwood-halloween-special?r=30u9ge&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email](https://open.substack.com/pub/treetalk/p/day-of-the-deadwood-halloween-special?r=30u9ge&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email)



## Please consider becoming a volunteer



Please come along if you can make it. Winter work such as coppicing and hedge laying is very interesting and an opportunity to learn new skills. It's also a good way of keeping warm, whilst working off the excess food and drink of the season.

Our work sessions are very relaxed. You can work on something that interests you, at your own pace. You can leave whenever you like and there is no obligation to be there every week. We always stop for tea/coffee, biscuits and chat at 11.30. Some people leave after tea, others stay until 1pm.

Our Saturday walks are an opportunity to get out in our lovely green place and learn something about nature in a very relaxed way. You can get to know our plants and animals and see how things change throughout the year. Tea/coffee, cake and chat afterwards.



Please contact Penny at [newhamgg@gmail.com](mailto:newhamgg@gmail.com) if you have any suggestions of things to put in the newsletter or on the website.

Email [newhamgg@gmail.com](mailto:newhamgg@gmail.com) or phone Frances 078 4597 3156.

Check out the website [www.newhamgreengym.org](http://www.newhamgreengym.org) for more information about Green Gym, East Ham Nature Reserve Heritage and Conservation Volunteers.

If you would like to join the Friends of East Ham Nature Reserve and receive a newsletter by email each month please email [friendsofehnr@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofehnr@gmail.com)