

News from East Ham Nature Reserve April 2024

Dates for the next Saturday Green Gym Nature and Heritage Conservation Volunteers work sessions are March 30th and April 27th 10am-1pm Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm.

News



Sarah Dodd, who works for Parks Department of the Council and is responsible for the nature reserve, is doing a great job tidying up the visitor centre, where stuff has been accumulating for many years. It is possible to get to the toilets now without falling over things! Several problems with the building, including severe damp, have now been sorted out. School and other groups are now able to use the building, contact Sarah Sarah.Dodd@newham.gov.uk for information.

Some dead trees near paths have been felled in case they fall on people. The dead wood is stacked and provides a wonderful habitat for wildlife. Hazels that have been coppiced have been cut to the ground, but will grow again.

Animal of the month

Magpie - *Pica pica*

One for sorrow,
Two for joy,
Three for a girl,
Four for a boy,
Five for silver,
Six for gold,
Seven for a secret,
Never to be told.

There are several different versions of the rhyme.

These handsome birds are members of the crow family.

Unfortunately, they feed on small birds and their eggs as well as small mammals, insects, grain and fruit.

Magpies gather in 'parliaments' in winter to choose their mates.

The male brings material to make the large roofed nest and the female arranges it.

They have a sinister reputation and are associated with the devil.

Magpies are extremely intelligent and one of very few species of animal that can recognise itself in a mirror.

They are notorious thieves, especially liking a bit of 'bling'.



Bees and beehives newsletter

Grow Wild newsletter has several interesting articles including one called “which bees you are really helping”. Here is a link to the newsletter and an excerpt from the article:

https://growwilduknews.com/cr/AQjw7w0Ql_hdGJvujhYR3w30BsrUjk1tK-BUiUFGzF3X7BceA6vWfxnyU524ow

“Campaigns encouraging people to save bees have resulted in an unsustainable proliferation in urban beekeeping. This approach only saves one species of bee, the honey bee, with no regard for how honey bees interact with other, native, bee species.”

The State of the World's Plants and Fungi report, 2020.

Plant of the month

Bluebell - *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

Remember, most bulbs, including bluebells are poisonous. Poisoning usually happens when people mistake the bulbs for onions.

The UK is home to about half the world’s bluebell population.

In the language of flowers, the bluebell symbolises ‘everlasting love’.

The sticky sap of bluebells was used to glue feathers onto arrows in the Middle Ages. It was also used to stiffen ruffs in Tudor times.

Bluebells normally flower from late April to late May, but they are early again this year.

Bluebells are still common in the England, but are threatened by habitat loss and the increasing number of Spanish bluebells, which compete with the English ones.

How do you tell the difference between English and Spanish bluebells?



English bluebells



Spanish bluebells

English bluebells are more delicate plants with narrower leaves.

English bluebells are brighter blue and have flowers on only one side of the stem.

Flower stems of English bluebells curl over. Spanish ones are straight.

The edges of the bell on English bluebells curl up.

English bluebells are scented (not everyone can smell them).

What we have been doing

If you visit, you will find that some of the trees will soon look as if they are dying, with masses of dead growth in the crown. This is because, where trees have a heavy growth of ivy, we have started cutting it near the base of the trees.

The ivy does not harm the trees, in fact studies have shown that it may help to protect and keep them warm. Unfortunately, it also makes them top heavy and likely to be blown over by the strong winds we have experienced recently. As you walk around you will see some ivy-covered trees lying on the ground.

We are not removing the ivy, just severing it, so we don't disturb nesting birds. The cut growth will die and eventually fall out of the tree.



Sycamore with a heavy growth of ivy

Tasks for April



- Hoeing when it is not too wet and preparing ground for planting wildflower seeds.
- Planting seeds once the weather is more settled.
- Removing ivy in the woodland.
- Clearing goosegrass before it gets chance to set seed. Still lots to remove!
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.
- Noting any interesting graves.
- Making wood piles and dead hedges as habitats for minibeasts.
- Making woven fences using coppiced hazel.

Reptile survey

We will be doing a new reptile survey, to find out how numbers of slow worms and common lizards compare with the last survey in 2017.

You may see roofing felt mats like these and a few squares of carpet around the reserve. You can, very carefully, look underneath, but make sure you put them back exactly as you found them. Please try not to disturb anything you find underneath. **Look, but don't touch, is the rule!!**

We will be using the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) protocol to do six counts between March and October. Our results will be included in the National Reptile Survey.



If anyone would like to help with counting, probably on six Friday mornings, please contact Penny at newhamgg@gmail.com.

Benefits of being out in nature

According to a survey by The Woodland Trust, 70% of 255 doctors from across the country felt that time in nature should be available on prescription! 96% thought that the government should endorse time spent outdoors for the sake of the nation's health.



What are you waiting for? Get your prescription free at East Ham Nature Reserve. Walking in green spaces is good for mental health. You can sit and listen to the birdsong and imagine you are in the country. Even better, come to one of our work sessions and you can improve your physical health by pushing barrows, bending and stretching to remove goosegrass and ivy, or exercise different muscles using a saw or scythe.

Who needs boring gyms?

Please consider becoming a volunteer

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.



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

Email newhamgg@gmail.com or phone Frances 078 4597 3156.

Check out the website 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 friendsofehr@gmail.com