

Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve Newsletter



Issue 29 April 2015

Dear Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve,

It has been a great winter with a lot of work achieved by the fabulous Crossness volunteers. We've been litter picking, bramble bashing, reed cutting, willow cutting and much more. The results are fabulous as seen by the forthcoming photos.

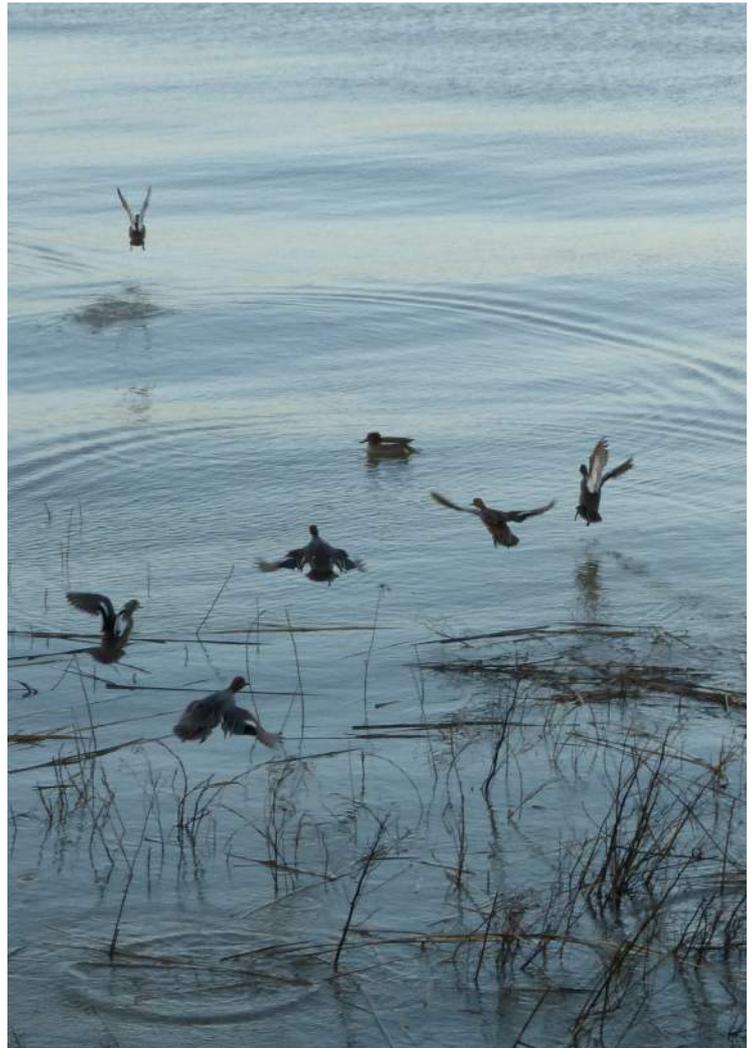
We took advantage of the non-breeding season to have some work carried out by contractors too. New fencing has been installed; the pond-dipping platform replaced; the sand martin bank modified; tern rafts deployed and there's still much more to come. We are about to replace the tired old Southern Marsh/Belvedere Road boundary fencing with green mesh fencing, as was recently installed on the Protected Area. This is far more aesthetically pleasing and is much more secure too.

As I write this in April, the reserve is definitely coming back to life. The first Green-veined White butterfly of the year was recorded on March 30th and was in fact the first of 2015 recorded nationally with Butterfly Conservation! Our first queen bumblebee was spotted as early as 20th February, and Skylark soon after on 25th February. The first Sand Martin, House Martin and Swallow were seen on 6th April, with Wheatear returning on 9th April. Blackcap were seen and heard at the beginning of April also. Common Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Sedge Warblers were recorded on 15th April, and the first Cuckoo on 17th April. Since the 'firsts', there has been lots of breeding activity taking place across the reserve, as seen in the photo opposite!

It's been a good time for raptor recording of late too, with two Marsh Harriers seen frequently since Feb (one very distinctive female with missing secondary feathers), a Buzzard and Hobby seen on 9th April, and numerous sightings of Kestrels and Peregrines.

If you haven't already done so, now is a great time to visit Crossness. Going by previous records, I'm told that we can expect a Ring Ouzel on the 21st Apr too, so do keep your eyes peeled and enjoy!

Karen Sutton – Biodiversity Team Manager



A lovely, evocative winter shot of Teal on the river by **Ursula Keene**



Mating Little Ringed Plovers by **Mike Robinson**

Wildlife records – Oct-Dec 2014

Species	No. throughout quarter	Peak no. recorded	Species	No. throughout quarter	Peak no. recorded
Angle Shades Moth	1	1	House Sparrow	40	20
Barn Owl	14	2	Kestrel	16	2
Black Redstart	2	1	Kingfisher	23	2
Blackbird	31	10	Lapwing	2342	200
Black-headed Gull	2815	900	Lesser Black-backed Gull	37	20
Black-tailed Godwit	2253	219	Linnet	172	30
Blue tit	2	1	Little Egret	59	4
Brown Rat	4	2	Little Grebe	18	3
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	1	1	Little Gull	1	1
Canada Goose	151	55	Long-tailed Tit	13	10
Carrion Crow	24	13	Magpie	42	22
Caspian Gull	1	1	Mallard	61	15
Cetti's Warbler	55	8	Meadow Pipit	197	20
Chaffinch	135	30	Moorhen	54	14
Chiffchaff	28	4	Mute Swan	15	3
Clouded Yellow	4	1	Peregrine Falcon	45	2
Comma	1	1	Pheasant	11	7
Common Carder Bee	2	2	Pied Wagtail	95	12
Common Darter	9	6	Red Admiral	3	1
Common Gull	6	3	Redshank	3535	200
Common Sandpiper	24	2	Redwing	18	18
Common Seal	2	2	Reed Bunting	38	6
Common Snipe	77	7	Ringed Plover	2	2
Coot	20	6	Ring-necked Parakeet	2	2
Cormorant	334	70	Robin	12	3
Curlew	14	2	Seal	3	2
Dunlin	5762	550	Shelduck	514	60
Duncock	12	3	Shoveler	273	30
Feral Pigeon	10	10	Skylark	24	7
Fieldfare	5	5	Small White	1	1
Gadwall	649	30	Song Thrush	5	3
Goldfinch	318	40	Southern Hawker	1	1
Great Crested Grebe	11	3	Sparrow Hawk	4	1
Great Skua	10	4	Starling	189	100
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	1	Stock Dove	12	11
Great Tit	4	2	Stonechat	80	3
Greater Black-backed Gull	3	3	Teal	13011	630
Green Sandpiper	5	1	Tufted Duck	1	1
Green Woodpecker	7	1	Water Rail	32	4
Greenfinch	1	1	Weasel	1	1
Greenshank	31	1	Wheatear	1	1
Green-veined White	1	1	Whinchat	1	1
Grey Heron	33	5	Wigeon	778	30
Grey Wagtail	50	5	Wood Pigeon	168	150
Greylag Goose	81	35	Wren	2	1
Herring Gull	58	25	Yellow-Legged Gull	5	1
House Martin	6	6			

No. throughout quarter = total number of times species has been recorded during three month period.

Peak no. recorded = peak number of particular species seen at any one time (better indicator of number using the site).

Wildlife records – Jan-Mar 2015

Species	No. throughout quarter	Peak no. recorded	Species	No. throughout quarter	Peak no. recorded
Barn Owl	4	2	Lapwing	3000	370
Blackbird	16	2	Lesser Black-backed Gull	34	28
Black-headed Gull	1650	1000	Linnet	298	110
Black-tailed Godwit	564	175	Little Egret	2	1
Blue Tit	1099	7	Little Grebe	18	2
Bumblebee (unidentified)	2	1	Long-tailed Tit	19	5
Canada Goose	91	35	Magpie	15	3
Canada/Greylag hybrid	44	12	Mallard	44	12
Cetti's Warbler	44	4	Mallard/Gadwall hybrid	1	1
Chaffinch	238	40	Marsh Harrier	12	1
Chiffchaff	26	4	Meadow Pipit	160	12
Common Gull	2	1	Mistle Thrush	1	1
Common Sandpiper	33	1	Moorhen	103	15
Common Seal	4	1	Oystercatcher	27	11
Common Snipe	186	19	Peacock butterfly	2	1
Coot	59	25	Peregrine Falcon	27	3
Cormorant	67	67	Pheasant	21	4
Curlew	14	2	Pied Wagtail	68	16
Dunlin	8686	750	Pochard	20	3
Dunnock	4	1	Red Admiral	3	1
Feral Pigeon	12	12	Redshank	661	55
Fox	2	1	Redwing	3	3
Fieldfare	7	7	Reed Bunting	50	6
Gadwall	1294	90	Ring-necked Parakeet	3	2
Goldfinch	111	14	Robin	27	5
Great Black-backed Gull	16	6	Rock Pipit	1	1
Great Crested Grebe	33	4	Rook	4	3
Great Tit	13	4	Shelduck	836	80
Green Sandpiper	27	2	Shoveler	994	119
Green Woodpecker	13	1	Skylark	16	7
Greenfinch	2	2	Small Tortoiseshell	6	2
Greenshank	33	1	Song Thrush	27	3
Green-veined White	1	1	Sparrowhawk	4	1
Grey Heron	14	3	Starling	111	30
Grey Seal	3	1	Stock Dove	99	50
Grey Wagtail	26	3	Stonechat	81	4
Greylag Goose	11	2	Teal	11071	735
Greylag/Canada hybrid	6	1	Tufted Duck	123	24
Herring Gull	28	20	Water Rail	16	3
House Sparrow	27	17	Water Vole	2	1
Jack Snipe	1	1	White-tailed bumblebee	1	1
Jackdaw	1	1	Wigeon	1214	52
Jay	2	2	Wood Pigeon	108	42
Kestrel	25	2	Wren	6	1
Kingfisher	12	1	Yellow-legged Gull	9	4

A gentle reminder, that unless numbers are provided alongside species in records that are submitted, I have to assume that only one was recorded. So if you put 'Black-headed Gulls, Crossness Outfall' for example, there were quite possibly hundreds, but without being quantified, I have to assume that only one was seen, which skews the data.

If you are able to give an approximate number, it is very helpful. If you're doubtful, if for example there's certainly more than 100 but you wouldn't like to say how many exactly, please record as 100, so that we have a conservative estimate. After all, 100 is better than 1! Many thanks.

H2O 4 Life activity day

On Saturday 11th October, Thames Water's Crossness Nature Reserve and Crossness Sewage Treatment Works hosted lots of Rainbows, Brownies and Girlguides groups from across the Bexley borough.

As the first borough to receive our rolling metering programme, we thought it was important to engage with our younger stakeholders to learn about water efficiency, and to learn about our Bin It - Don't Block It campaign where we encourage responsible use of drains, requesting that residents do not put anything other than human waste and toilet paper down the toilets (including the supposedly 'flushable' moist wipes) and do not put fat down the sink which creates blockages in the form of the famed 'fatbergs.'

The younger audiences (Rainbows and Brownies, aged 5-10) received tours of Crossness Nature Reserve, where they were able to see, and hear about, the newly extended Sewage Treatment Works from the top-storey of the bird hide; see the Crossness outfall and the Protected Area of the reserve. As well as learning about the importance of the reserve for its flora and fauna, they learned about how it is possible to measure water quality biologically by looking at the species diversity and abundance in rivers, ponds and ditches.

The Girlguide groups were treated to full tours of Crossness STW – one of Europe's largest Sewage Treatment Works, and they learned about the processes in place to deal with sewage in a fun and engaging way.

A fantastic space was hired at The Link Thamesmead (containing a climbing wall!!!), where all groups undertook a variety of fun, but educational, games and exercises designed by Thames Water's Water Efficiency team.

The H2O 4 Life partnership with Girlguiding was short-listed in this year's Sustainability Leaders Awards in the Stakeholder Engagement category.

We got so many young people attending on the day, that it was a bit of a whistle-stop tour of all areas. The Rainbows and Brownies groups are arranging return visits to the nature reserve so that they can see more of the site, and so that they can have a go at pond-dipping, mini-beasting and other wildlife-based activities.



Top 100 things to do in London

Lastminute.com has listed Crossness Nature Reserve as one of the '100 things to do in London'!!

If you follow this link (<http://www.lastminute.com/inspiration/100-things-in-london/>) and click on the water vole image, it tells you that Crossness Nature Reserve and Crossness Southern Marsh are a water vole stronghold.

Although it only makes reference to the new 1.2ha reedbed in Island Field, the whole of the Crossness ditch network is in fact populated by Britain's fastest-declining mammal.

The screenshot shows the top section of the '100 Things in London' website. The title '100 Things in London' is prominently displayed in white text on a dark background. Below the title, there is a call to action: 'Click on the images below to read intriguing stories and little known facts about London's best bits, and where to find them.' A navigation bar includes categories like 'London Landmarks', 'People', 'Museum & Galleries', 'Beautiful Buildings', 'Theatres', 'Parks & Gardens', 'Streets', 'Hotels', 'Wildlife', and 'The Underground'. There are also social media sharing options for 'Tweet' (46) and 'g+1'. A 'Shuffle' button and a 'Showing 100 things...' indicator are also visible. The main content area displays a grid of four images: a brick building with graffiti, an interior view of a modern building, a large red brick building, and a classical building with columns.

This block contains a collage of seven images related to London. The top-left image is a close-up of a brown water vole. The top-middle image shows a large, classical building with a prominent dome and a red ball on top. The top-right image features a person in a red and black uniform, possibly a member of the Tower of London Yeomanry Guard, with social media sharing options for 'Tweet' (46) and 'g+1'. The bottom-left image shows the entrance to Shaftesbury Theatre with a sign that reads 'STAGE DOOR' and 'SHAFTESBURY THEATRE'. The bottom-middle image is a view from inside a car, showing a person wearing sunglasses. The bottom-right image shows a bar with a bartender in a white suit and a display of lemons.

Great Silver Water Beetle

The story of the Great Silver Water Beetle being discovered at Crossness Nature Reserve, made for some interesting news pieces!

As well as appearing in the Bexley News Shopper in October, and the Bexley Wildlife website and Facebook page (bexleywildlife.org), it also appeared in the Western Daily Press and in the Greenwich Mercury.



Harvest Mouse nest hunts at Crossness provide a negative record this time around

Twelve of us braved the very wet weather to search for Harvest Mouse nests on Crossness Nature Reserve on 12th November, and another seven went a-hunting on the Southern Marshes on 26th November. Unfortunately however, despite very determined efforts, we failed to find unequivocal evidence that Britain's smallest rodent was present here.

Both the nature reserve and the southern marsh produced examples of what could have been a disintegrated nest in stands of bramble, but the fact that no definite nests were found despite extensive searching by our volunteer teams, suggest that Thames Road Wetland (where several nests have appeared this year), and Crayford Marshes to the north of there (a single record from 2007) may be the only locations in Bexley for this BAP species.

A large woven structure of coarser material of about rugby ball size, and another of 15cm across at ground level, have been found at Crossness recently (the latter on the 26th), but these are thought to be above-ground Water Vole nests, made where there were unsuitable conditions for burrowing.

'Negative records' like this, however, can be incredibly valuable, so we shouldn't be too down-hearted, however it won't stop us from further searching.



Volunteers used sticks to tease apart the vegetation in the hope of finding some Harvest Mouse nests



Ann Turvey is determined to find a nest in the reedbeds



Chris Rose shows attendees what to look for with a Harvest Mouse nest from the nearby Thames Road Wetland



Martin Petchey getting lost in the reeds with his determined approach to nest searching

The value of volunteers

I thought that members of the Friends scheme might like to know, that in the 2014/15 fiscal year, you volunteers kindly contributed a whopping 1,458 hours at Crossness!! This is broken down as follows: 1040 hours by my regular twice-weekly volunteers; 348 hours through the wider community volunteer days; and 70 hours through corporate volunteering. That's a very impressive figure isn't it? And it doesn't even take account of surveying/monitoring hours which, unfortunately, are too difficult to calculate but would considerably add to this figure.

If we monetise this, based on the new London Living Wage rate, 1458 person hours of hands-on volunteer output per annum equates to £13,340.70!!!

This deserves a huge round of applause for our incredibly dedicated volunteers and a massive thank you. Your contribution is invaluable and makes Crossness Nature Reserve the fantastic place that it is; thank you so very much.



Winter bird walk

A fantastic winter bird walk led by Ralph and Brenda Todd, was attended by 26 people. Sixteen of the attendees were Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve, and a further ten came as a result of reading about it in the Bexley RSPB newsletter.

It was a cold and icy start, followed by some lovely morning sunshine which made for some lovely displays on the river particularly.

While we did introductions, a Peregrine Falcon posed on the chimney of the Sludge Powered Generator on the adjacent Crossness Sewage Treatment Works, and a Little Grebe caught a fish right in front of us on the Great Breach Dyke.

A Common Sandpiper on the river was rather special, along with a Greenshank, and a Little Egret in flight. There were lots of Wigeon calling beautifully, Teal, Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwits, plus hundreds of Black-headed Gulls and the odd Grey Heron and Cormorant.

On the Great Breach Lagoon towards the east of the nature reserve, a male and female Stonechat displayed nicely atop some vegetation, and a Reed Bunting plucked away at the seedhead of a Common Reedmace. Three Skylark were seen on the Cory Fields, and over lunch, a Kingfisher was spotted on the wader scrape.

Species seen were: Blackbird, Black-Headed Gull, Black-Tailed Godwit, Cetti's Warbler (heard only), Chaffinch, Common Sandpiper, Coot, Cormorant, Crow, Curlew, Dunlin, Gadwall, Greenshank, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Lesser Black-Backed Gull, Little Grebe, Little Egret, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Peregrine Falcon, Redshank, Reed Bunting, Robin, Shelduck, Shoveler, Skylark, Snipe, Stock Dove, Stonechat, Teal, Wigeon, Wood Pigeon, Wren

I would like to thank Ralph and Brenda for leading such a lovely, well-attended, walk – thank you.



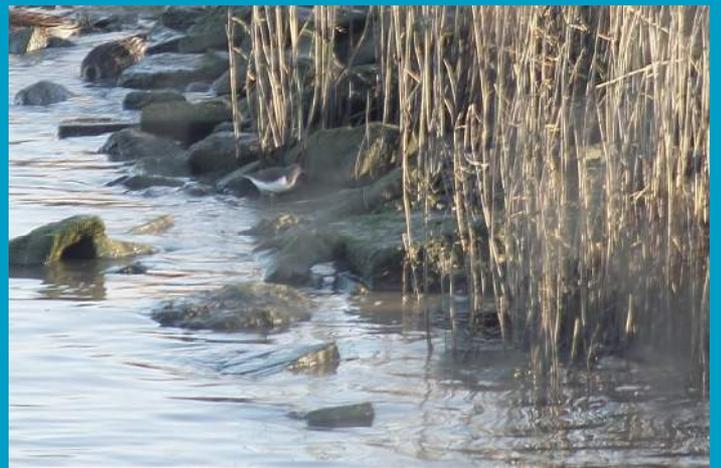
Winter bird walk attendees on the Thames Path watching the birds on the river. Photo by Karen Sutton



Bird watchers by the Great Breach lagoon and new pond and dipping-platform. Photo by Karen Sutton



Wigeon and Black-headed Gulls in winter plumage.
Photo by Martin Petchey



Common Sandpiper on the river. Photo by Martin Petchey

More problems...

We experienced a few more anti-social behaviour problems at the back end of last year with the windows being smashed in the new bird hide, a camper who chose Crossness as his temporary home and some illegal grazing.

As a result of this, and other problems experienced last year, we have replaced the main Protected Area frontage fencing with high security fencing. This is actually more aesthetic than the palisade fencing with a less industrial feel, but is more secure and easier to monitor for security breaches. This is the sort of fencing that is now being installed in prisons and around schools, with variable specifications according to the requirements. We are also replacing the palisade fencing that fronts the Crossness Southern Marsh (on Belvedere Road) with the same spec fencing.

In addition to this, we are installing a CCTV tower with two cameras to monitor the Protected Area. This will provide visibility of the bird hide and our storage containers and hopefully prevent further unlawful access and anti-social behaviour.



Walking the bee – by Martin Petchey

For two years I have been carrying out a survey of bumblebees at Crossness. The purpose is to learn which species are present and to get an idea of the numbers of each. Eventually it might be possible to learn which species are increasing and which are declining.

UK bumblebees have been in decline for decades, although the decline is difficult to quantify. This matters because they are important pollinators of some crops, e.g. soft fruits, and because they are one indicator of general environmental health.

Two years ago I knew very little about bumblebees, but the basics were not difficult. For insects, they are large, easy to see and to approach. There are 26 species of bumblebees in the UK of which 12 (probably!) have been recorded recently at Crossness. So it is necessary to learn only six or seven common species and to carry identification aids for anything that looks a bit different.

Bumblebees are best counted in good weather. Dry days that are warm but not too hot are good. What is needed is a few people to spend a few spring and summer hours walking on the reserve recording any bees they encounter. This would greatly improve the coverage and therefore improve the statistics.

So, volunteers, please raise your hands.....



Count me in!

Fabulous photo by Martin Petchey

How can you resist? Please help us learn more about the Crossness bumbles. We have two rare species at Crossness (Shrill Carder Bee and Brown-banded Carder Bee) and you could help us find more!!

Winter reed cutting

We had our annual reed clearing event in the Protected Area reedbed in December. Seven volunteers cleared around one hectare of reed in order to retain the health and structure of the reedbed. Rotational cutting prevents succession of reedbed to Willow-carr and ultimately to woodland, so in order to keep our wetland wet, it has to be managed. In addition, management provides different age and sward structure favouring different species. Some warblers, for instance, prefer a drier reedbed with plenty of leaf-litter, while others like a young, wet reedbed. So in order to maintain species diversity, we must also create habitat diversity, even within that same habitat.

With so much cutting taking place over the winter, we have more habitat piles than we have room for, and we are therefore forced to burn some of the arisings. We retain a lot of the cut vegetation for reptile hibernacula for example, or for its overwintering Lepidoptera larvae, but if we didn't burn some it, we would have more dead-vegetation piles than nice healthy stands of living reed.

A big thank you to our hard-working volunteers whose raking and forking skills are second to none.



Sand Martins and Spring – by Eric Brown

Whoosh ! With a blur of wings, a flash of white belly and a strangled call that sounds like nuts rattling in a tin the brown bomber whistles past. It is March, Christmas excess has been walked off and I've been awaiting the arrival of this brown-feathered rocket to confirm spring is here.

Swallows and martins arrowing through our skies remind us it is time to buy the sun cream.

A first glimpse of Sand Martin each year lifts the heart and promises long days ahead filled with buzzing insects, picnics and holidays. Sand Martin is among our first summer visitors to arrive, sometimes appearing in February but more usually March after a long flight from Africa. My own earliest date is March 18.

They often visit Crossness. Last year's records, published in the previous newsletter, indicate they turned up later rather than earlier. There were no reported sightings between April and June but from July to September, 12 were noted with a maximum count of four.

Maybe that will increase. A sand martin bank is being restored at Crossness to encourage breeding Sand Martins. They nest in burrows and accept ready made accommodation, the most common being pipes sunk into a muddy bank or concrete wall.

In natural conditions a colony will be based maybe in sand or gravel with each pair excavating a tunnel with their claws at an upward incline for about 80cm.

This ends in a nesting chamber around four to six centimetres in diameter which protects the four or five young from predators. Sand Martins can be choosy though. The artificial bank at Minsmere in Suffolk has been a great success but no Sand Martin has sampled the bank erected for them at Bough Beech reservoir near Ide Hill since it was completed seven years ago. There is a theory that sand martins prefer excavating themselves and if artificial holes are provided they must be filled with sand.

The earliest references to Sand Martins in London came from famous naturalist Gilbert White in 1774 at Whitechapel and St George Fields. Andrew Self's superb Birds of London reports a 19th century colony of 100 pairs at Hanging Wood, Charlton, with more colonies at Blackheath and Dartford. Now Sand Martins nest in holes in the concrete walls of Surrey Docks.

In the late 1960's Sand Martin numbers crashed due to drought in the Sahel but they are gradually recovering. Latest population estimates say about 300,000 pairs visit the UK each year.

So watch out for the brown bomber whizzing back and forth on insect hunting flights over Crossness.



Our newly restored Sand Martin bank at Crossness NR – fingers crossed that we have some inhabitants soon!

Dinosaur bones found at Crossness...sort of

The public footpath that runs along the bottom of the Crossness Nature Reserve, is a pleasant wooded path with plenty of Ash, Hazel and scrub. Unfortunately however, the path gets heavily littered with rubbish blowing in off of the adjacent dual carriageway (the A2016).

On the Crossness Southern Marsh, our landholding starts further west, but the entrance to it from Eastern Way is particularly susceptible to fly-tipping, in addition to the windblown litter from Eastern Way. At this time of the year, with the trees devoid of foliage, it becomes a real eyesore and makes for a very unpleasant entrance to both sites.

Fortunately for us, thirteen hardworking volunteers turned out for the Great Big Litter Pick. In addition to tyres, chairs, large plant pots, and other items too large to bag-up, the Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve collected 34 rubble sacks of rubbish, clearing the way for the spring bluebells and daffodils, and, once again, creating a pleasant connecting path for the two sites.

The most unexpected find of the day was dinosaur bones!! Yes, that's right, dinosaur bones. Ok, they were plastic, but it caused a bit of excitement and we dreamt up all kinds of pranks in which they could play a part on unsuspecting colleagues. The finders of this bizarre article, were long-serving husband and wife volunteers, Martin and Elisabeth, who model the bones nicely in the picture below. Last year, our strangest find was a sawn-off parking meter! There's always something slightly unusual to be found.

The hard work was rewarded by the sighting of a Marsh Harrier. Just as we were eating lunch in the bird hide, birder Steve Carter spotted the large and majestic bird of prey flying in from the west. It flew over the Wader Scrape right in front of us, over the West Paddock, and settled – as had been seen the day before – on the Great Breach Lagoon.

The dodgy photos below were taken of it the day before (10th Feb) roosting low-down in the reeds that fringe the lagoon to the east. I didn't have my camera with me, so this was unfortunately just my phone camera held against binoculars. The quality is poor, but it is sufficient to show that it is in fact a Marsh Harrier. Other highlights on the same day, were a Water Vole leisurely feeding on the bank of the Great Breach Dyke, where we had also just witnessed a Kingfisher flying!





One of the rubbish piles before we set to work



How it looked once the volunteers had worked their magic



Dinosaur bones found by Martin and Elisabeth



The hard-working volunteers, minus 3 who were still working

And yet more litter!!

Despite a cold and frosty start, the sun shone on nine of us as we undertook a major litter pick adjacent the Crossness Southern Marsh.

Some recent illegal grazing under the flyover next to the southern marsh, revealed a horrendous amount of wind-blown litter from the Eastern Way flyover above. It was an absolute eyesore; an eyesore that I had to see every day on my way into work.

As we made our way into the area, I saw as hearts sank at the appalling mess and the challenge of clearing it all. In fact somebody commented on the fact that it was the worst accumulation of litter that they had ever seen, and that it would take weeks to clear it all. But clear it they did! Fifty-five rubble sacks full, plus large items (car bumpers, crates, water tanks) that weren't baggable.

It has transformed the area and I am immensely grateful to those hardworking volunteers for brightening up this little area.

A hay bale remained from the illegal grazing. This, coupled with a 'men at work' sign from among the rubbish, made for a good photo opportunity at the end of what was a very challenging, but productive, volunteer event.



Before!!



During



During



After... transformed!



A dedicated team of litter pickers

Crossness is the best Bexley site for mammals - FACT!

By Chris Rose

A new report available from the BexleyWildlife.org website at <http://www.bexleywildlife.org/mammals-in-bexley/> has shown that Crossness hosts at least 20 of the 28 species of free-ranging mammals in the Borough, several more than any other location. 21 of 29 if you include the humans! Its riverside location gives it an advantage over inland sites of three regular species - one Cetacean and two Seals - that is only shared with Crayford Marshes. Joydens Wood might come close, but there is inadequate data to know at present.

The 'PROVISIONAL CHECKLIST AND ACCOUNT OF THE MAMMALS OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY' pulls together historical and modern day records to paint a picture of the distribution of these relatively poorly studied animals and highlights the gaps in our knowledge about their occurrence in our area. Two species, the Red Squirrel and Hare, which were present at Lesnes Abbey up until the early 1920s, are now extinct in Bexley. The Stoat was also in the woods there at that time, but there are no records of it anywhere since. These, along with several one-off or very occasional Cetacean passers-by, with records going back to the 1600s, have not been included in the Borough's present day species total.

The proven species at Crossness are Wood Mouse, House Mouse, Bank Vole, Field Vole, Water Vole, Brown Rat, Grey Squirrel, Common Shrew, Pygmy Shrew, Mole, Fox, Weasel, Daubenton's Bat, Noctule Bat, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Serotine Bat, Common Seal, Grey Seal and Common Porpoise.

In addition, Hedgehog and Leisler's Bat have been found so close to Crossness/Southern Marsh that it is likely that they also occur here, and there is a question mark over the presence of Harvest Mouse, which cannot yet be completely ruled out. Two Common Bottlenose Dolphins were actively feeding in the Thames off Rainham Marshes RSPB reserve on 7th April 2014, so this is a species that could possibly start appearing off Crossness.

Here is just a small selection of the mammals that have been photographed at Crossness this year:



1 Grey Seal and 1 Common Seal photographed at the Thames outfall by Mike Robinson on 30th March 2015



A Water Vole captured by Ursula Keene on 12th March 2015



A Wood Mouse photographed by Martin Petchey on 20th January 2015

Bexley RSPB Crossness bird trip

Thirty-two attendees braved the cold and wind to join the Bexley RSPB Crossness Nature Reserve trip and record 50 bird species. The trip was led by Stuart Banks and George Kalli, and included among attendees were a few regulars, but the large majority were unfamiliar with Crossness. There were even a couple of young people attending, together with their own binoculars, which is always good to see.

The event started well, with Marsh Harrier, Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon being seen at the entrance gate before we'd formally begun the walk! In fact, it was a good day all round for viewing raptors. A Kestrel was seen roosting on the Thames Water Sludge Powered Incinerator, seemingly keeping out of the wind as it hugged tightly to the wall and it was soon joined by another Kestrel before going off to hunt over the West Paddock. Several views of Peregrine could not be topped by the one that flew low, and immediately overhead while we were on the river wall.

Ducks included a pair of Wigeon on Island Field, along with Mallard; a pair of Tufted Ducks on the Great Breach Lagoon; Shelduck and Shoveler on the West Paddock. Plenty of Teal and Gadwall were on the Thames, as well as Great Crested Grebe (2). Little Grebe (3) were seen on the Great Breach Dyke West. Coot and Moorhen were seen across the reserve.

Waders included a single Lapwing on the West Paddock, a Green Sandpiper by the Great Breach Lagoon dipping platform, a Common Sandpiper on the river along with Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher (2), Redshank, Dunlin, and Common Snipe (4) which was particularly well received. Several Canada Geese were seen, alongside Greylag Geese (2) on Island Field and a Cormorant posed nicely on a rock at the river.

Other birds seen were Cetti's Warbler along the ditch margins, Skylark (2) and Goldfinch (4) on Norman Road Field, Meadow Pipits (2) on Stable Paddock/East Paddock, Pied Wagtail, Long-tailed Tits (2) in the Protected Area of the reserve by the bird hide, Black-headed Gulls, a Lesser Black-backed gull, Herring Gull, Grey Heron, Stock Dove, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Jackdaw, Starling, Robin, Wood Pigeon, Blackbird, Wren, Dunnock, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Reed Bunting. Just as we were finishing up, a Little Grebe was seen eating a fish on Great Breach Dyke North, and four Mute Swans flew immediately overhead as we headed towards our cars; a nice fly-by with which to end a cold, but rather successful event.



Lovely to see kids coming along. One lady brought her granddaughter who watched a pair of Wigeon on Island Field, whilst taking ID tips from Ralph Todd



Attendees watching Peregrine Falcon activity at the east end of the reserve, and waders and wildfowl on the River Thames from the Thames Path

Bramble bashing and Willow removal

It is important to prevent our riparian habitats from getting scrubbed over. As such, much of our winter works is dedicated to cutting alternate sections of ditch banks to prevent scrub growth. Bramble is an incredibly successful plant which colonises quickly and grows very rapidly. Whilst we retain a lot of it on site for nesting and foraging opportunities (including foraging of the human variety!), we try to prevent too much growth on the marginal habitat, where it otherwise outcompetes with all other riparian flora.

As such, eight volunteers came along to help us remove bramble from the banks of the Great Breach Dyke on 15th January. Not put off by all that hard work, a further 12 volunteers returned the following week (23rd January) to help us remove Willow from the reed bed at the top of the wader scrape. Like Bramble, Willow grows quickly; without management, a reedbed will soon develop into Willow Carr. Without intervention, a wet woodland eventually dries out and is succeeded by woodland, so it is very important that we don't allow Willow to take over. All the saplings, having first been checked to ensure that they weren't supporting Willow Emerald, were removed and treated.

Many thanks to all of our very hard-working volunteers. This site is only as valuable as it is because of you!



Above: Clearing cut bramble on a sunny winter's day. Below: clearing Willow the following week



Must-have bird books – by Eric Brown

We probably all buy too many bird books. Our shelves are stuffed with them until we can wedge no more in and they start overflowing onto the floor.

But if there is one book anyone interested in nature should have it is Andrew Self's excellent *Birds of London*.

This amazing historical reference covers the London Natural History recording area which stretches over a 20 miles radius from St. Paul's Cathedral.

Many familiar zones lie within its scope such as Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, and Erith, Dartford and Swanscombe Marshes - that means Crossness too.

There are some huge surprises among rare bird sightings listed. Macaronesian Shearwater in Welling, Tengmalm's Owl near Dartford and Sociable Plover on Dartford Marsh are among the greatest.

The book, which includes a 32-page photographic section, is the first avifauna to document the current and historical status of all 369 species recorded in the LNHS area which include Red Kites, Peregrine Falcons and Common Buzzards in increasing numbers. Species accounts feature the Storm Petrel that dropped from the sky and landed in an open car boot in Crayford and the White Storks seen at Woolwich and Seasalter plus Black Stork at Sevenoaks.

Andrew Self, the county recorder for Greater London and a regular visitor to Crossness, has produced a monumental work of significance to Kent birdwatchers and commuters. *Birds of London*, published by Bloomsbury, costs £50.

Wildlife film maker David Cobham's tale *A Sparrowhawk's Lament* is much more than simply a book about the hedge-hopping hunter. Sub-titled *How British Birds of Prey are Faring*, it contains a chapter on each of Britain's 15 breeding raptors. His sad and emotive account of unrelenting persecution driving most of them to near-extinction has the power to leave you spluttering with frustration and rage. Hen and Montagu's Harriers have suffered deplorably at the hands of those who hunt, trap, shoot or poison these birds illegally.

Other methods of wiping out birds of prey guaranteed to get you in a lather include chilling eggs with ice cubes in the nest. Illustrated with artist Bruce Pearson's drawings, *A Sparrowhawk's Lament* traces population trends, includes interviews with leading conservationists, features personal contacts between author and birds and examines the future for our most majestic avian inhabitants. A shocking yet gripping story. Published by Princeton at £24.95.

For 35 years *The Birdwatcher's Yearbook* has been THE essential work of reference for birdwatchers.

Checklists for birds, butterflies and dragonflies allow you to tick off sightings daily and trip lists can be entered in the spaces of a daily diary.

The 2015 edition is a 328-page encyclopedia including a section on 370 nature reserves with maps, national tide table information, birding events calendar, contact details for official wildlife bodies in the UK and abroad and special features like Best Wildlife Books of the Year, Hen Harriers Last Stand and New Hope for British Birding.

The Swarovski Optik-sponsored publication is just £18.50. If you are planning ahead you can order next year's at a discount by contacting Buckingham Press,

55 Thorpe Park Road, Peterborough PE3 6LJ or call 01733 561739.

Member Crossness photos – Oct 14-Apr 15

Do you have photos taken at Crossness that you could contribute to future newsletter issues?



Great Skuas, 14th Oct 2014, by **John Archer**



Wood Mouse, 14th Oct 2014, by **Roger Taylor**



Caspian Gull, 8th Nov 2014 by **John Archer**



Grey Wagtail, 12th Nov 2014, by **Mike Robinson**



Kingfisher, 2014, by **Donna Zimmer**



Peregrine Falcon on SPG, 6th Dec 2014, by **Martin Petchey**

Member Crossness photos continued



Stonechat, 2014, by **Donna Zimmer**



Green Sandpiper, 6th Dec 2014, by **Martin Petchey**



Barn Owl, 3rd Dec 2014, by **Mike Robinson**



Shoveler, 8th Dec 2014, by **Mike Robinson**



Teal on Thames, 10th Dec 2014, by **Ursula Keene**



Caspian Gull with a lot to say for himself, 14 Dec 14, by **John Archer**

Member Crossness photos continued



Common Snipe, 2014, by **Donna Zimmer**



Pair Stonechat, 23rd Dec 2014, by **Mike Robinson**



Peregrine with Pigeon kill, 29th Dec 2014, by **Martin Burke**



Grey Seal, 2014, by **Donna Zimmer**



Common Seal, 17th Jan 2015, by **John Archer**



Greenshank, 22nd Jan 2015, by **Mike Robinson**

Member Crossness photos continued



Dunlin, 23rd Jan 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Curlew, 6th Feb 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Shoveler, 6th Feb 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Stonechat on teasel, 15th Feb 2015, by **Mike Robinson**



Black-tailed Godwit, 25th Feb 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Kestrel, 29th Feb 2015, by **Martin Petchey**

Member Crossness photos continued



Kestrel, 29th Feb 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Kestrel, 6th Feb 2015, by **Richard Spink**



Weevil, 6th Mar 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Marsh Harrier with missing secondaries, 6th Mar 2015, by **Martin Petchey**



Grey Heron, by **Richard Spink**



Black-headed Gull (non-breeding plumage), by **Richard Spink**

Member Crossness photos continued



Green Sandpipers, 10th Mar 2015, by **Mike Robinson**



Water Rail at Thames outfall, 10th Mar 2015, by **Mike Robinson**



Bumblebee, 11th Mar 2015, by **Ursula Keene**



Redshank, 11th Mar 2015, by **Ursula Keene**



Black-tailed Godwits, 11th Mar 2015, by **Ursula Keene**



Grey Seal, 2015, **Richard Spink**

Member Crossness photos continued



Grey and Common Seal, 30th Mar, by **Mike Robinson**



Green-veined White – the first record of the year according to Butterfly Conservation! 30th Mar, by **Mike Robinson**



Redshank, 2015, by **Richard Spink**



Orange Tip, 7th Apr 2015, by **Mike Robinson**



Little Ringed Plover, 9th Apr 2015, by **Richard Spink**



Green Sandpiper, 9th Apr 2015, by **Richard Spink**

Member Crossness photos continued



Peacock butterfly, 7th April 2015, by **Mike Robinson**



Pochard, 7th April 2015, by **Mike Robinson**



Kestrel, 2015, by **Richard Spink**



Grey Seal, 2015, by **Richard Spink**



A strutting cock Pheasant, 10th April 2015, by **Ray Charter**



Ring-necked Parakeet looking exotic on Crossness Southern Marsh, 10th April 2015, by **Mike Robinson**

All photos used with kind permission

Forthcoming events 2015

Crossness Nature Reserve events

PLEASE BOOK YOUR PLACE ON THESE EVENTS by emailing karen.sutton@thameswater.co.uk or texting/phoning on 07747 643958

Date	Event	Meeting details
Weds 20 th May 10:00 – 14:00	CROSSNESS WILDFLOWER WALK – A wildflower identification event led by Tony Wileman. If you would like to improve your botanical skills, this one is for you. Don't forget your flora key if you have one. Refreshments provided.	10am at the entrance to the Protected Area. The Norman Road gate (DA17 6JY) will be open and vehicle access permitted
Fri 29 th May 10:00 – 14:00	BIRD SONGS AND CALLS WITH DOMINIC COUZENS – Learn how to identify birds by their song and calls; the all important prerequisite for breeding bird surveys. We have been very fortunate to secure the renowned Dominic Couzens for this event. He is the author of many bird books that are no doubt on your shelf, and I'm hoping that he'll bring a few more with him to add to your collections. Don't forget your binoculars! Refreshments provided.	10am at the entrance to the Protected Area. The Norman Road gates (DA17 6JY) will be open and vehicle access permitted
Fri 19 th Jun 10:00 – 14:00	DRAGONFLY AND DAMSELFLY IDENTIFICATION – Join us for a dragonfly and damselfly walk with Tony Canning, who will be helping us determine those key identification features. Refreshments provided.	10am at the entrance to the Protected Area. The Norman Road gate (DA17 6JY) will be open and vehicle access permitted
Weds 15 th Jul 10:00 – 14:00	BUTTERFLY WALK – Peter Riley from Butterfly Conservation (Kent Branch) will lead this event, showing us how to identify the numerous butterflies and caterpillars present at Crossness. Refreshments provided.	10am at the entrance to the Protected Area. The Norman Road gate (DA17 6JY) will be open and vehicle access permitted
Fri 11 th Sept 19:00 – 21:00	BAT WALK – A nocturnal walk around the nature reserve after sunset, identifying bat species with the use of bat detectors. Hopefully we'll see some other nocturnal species too. Bring a torch if you have one, and you might wish to wear some insect repellent. Sorry, there are no refreshments provided for this event	19:00 at the entrance to the Protected Area. The Norman Road gate (DA17 6JY) will be open and vehicle access permitted

I am hoping to arrange a moth trapping evening. If this might be of interest, please register your interest by phone or email and I'll contact you once we have further details.



A lovely panoramic shot of the Great Breach Lagoon and beyond, with Lagoon Field in the foreground – photo by **Richard Spink**

Crossness Southern Marsh events

**PLEASE BOOK YOUR PLACE ON THESE EVENTS by emailing karen.sutton@thameswater.co.uk
or texting/phoning on 07747 643958**

Date	Event	Meeting details
Sat 4 th Jul 10.15 – 16:00	LNHS ECOLOGY AND ENTOMOLOGY DAY – The entomological experts of the LNHS are making a return visit to Crossness, this time to see what invertebrates frequent the Southern Marsh. These people know their stuff and it is a great opportunity to learn from them and to get a comprehensive species list. The LNHS are meeting at Belvedere Station at 10.30am and walking to the east end of Southern Marsh. I suggest that other attendees meet me at 10.15 at the other end, on Belvedere Road, and we'll walk across the marshes and meet them. This is quite a long event and not everybody will be able to stay till the end, so if you park on Belvedere Road or in the Southmere Car Park, people are then free to leave whenever they are ready without having to wait for gates to be unlocked. Refreshments provided	10:15am at the vehicle entrance to Crossness Southern Marsh (palisade gates, under the red flyover on the left-hand/east side of Belvedere Road, Abbey Wood, SE2 9AQ). Parking available on Belvedere Road or in the Southmere Lake/ Lakeside Complex car park off Belvedere Road
Fri 14 th Aug 20:15 – 22:30	BAT WALK – A walk round Southmere Lake and Crossness Southern Marsh, identifying bat species with the use of bat detectors. Daubenton's bats will be putting on a show over the lake, and Pipistrelle bats – and hopefully other species – will be hunting over the marshes. Feel free to bring children along. Bring a torch if you have one and you might want to wear some insect repellent. Sorry, there are no refreshments provided for this event PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT THIS DATE MAY NEED TO BE CHANGED. PLEASE BOOK ON IF INTERESTED IN ATTENDING AND I WILL UPDATE YOU IF THERE IS A DATE CHANGE – THANK YOU	20:15 at the Southmere Lake/ Lakeside Complex car park off Belvedere Road (SE2 9AQ)

Thank you!!

So many volunteers play an enormous part in the management of Crossness Nature Reserve and Southern Marshes. I thought they deserved some recognition for their efforts. Here is a list of the people (in alphabetical order) that have helped, one way or another, in this financial year (April 2014 – April 2015). I am only listing names and tasks, which doesn't nearly do them enough justice, but I, and the rest of Thames Water's Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability team, am immensely grateful for your help and support – THANK YOU!!

John Archer	Event delivery; wildlife records; photos	Toni Piccolo	Workday volunteer
Alan Ashby	Workday volunteer	Mike Robinson	Wildlife records; butterfly transects; amazing photos; workday volunteer
Eric Brown	Editorial proof reader	Chris Rose	Event delivery; workday volunteer; Bexley Wildlife website and Facebook coverage
Joe Burns	Workday volunteer	Yvonne Sharpe	Workday volunteer
Norma Burns	Workday volunteer	Chris Smith	Workday volunteer
Jim Butler	Wildlife records	David Sorrell	Workday volunteer
Steve Carter	Wildlife records; workday volunteer; photos	Richard Spink	Wonderful wildlife photos
Nick Dodd	Workday volunteer	Ken Spowles	Workday volunteer
Rosa Guzzetta	Workday volunteer	Roger Taylor	Site mngt; workday volunteer; data input
Ian Jackson	Workday volunteer	Ralph Todd	Event delivery & planning; workday volunteer
Ursula Keene	Workday volunteer; fabulous photos	Brenda Todd	Event delivery and planning!
Bernard Leahy	Workday volunteer; wildlife records	Ann Turvey	Workday volunteer; event volunteer
Kevin McConaugh	Workday volunteer	Martin Watts	Workday volunteer
Dorothy Nears	Workday volunteer	Harry Whitehead	Workday volunteer
Reg Northam	Site mgmt; workday volunteer; lunch!	Donna Zimmer	Workday volunteer; photos
Martin Petchey	Bumblebee walk volunteer; workday volunteer; amazing photos	Paul Zimmer	Workday volunteer
Elisabeth Petchey	Workday volunteer		