

Summer 2019



This green space is part of the 26 mile long, 10,000 acre Lee Valley Regional Park, which stretches through Greater London, Essex and Hertfordshire

Welcome



Musings from the Marshes looks at what has been happening across Leyton and Walthamstow Marshes. It's jammed packed with lots of interesting information about the wildlife, events, projects and people who can be found out on the marshes. Check out our [events](#) and [volunteering](#) pages online and see how you can get involved.

3 – 4. Ranger round-up



10. Volunteering on the marshes

5. Where on the marshes?



11. Lee Valley Ice - Centre re-development

6. Coppermill Orchid Banks



7. Bomb Crater Pond



8. Community events



9. Scents of the marshes



A big welcome to our new stock checking volunteer Lili Harges. Lili has been volunteering on the marshes for some years now but given her particular love of animals she was very keen to help out with our cattle as well. As well as bringing a wicked sense of humour and a strong work ethic she is famous for bringing bags full of liquorice for staff and volunteers.

Ranger round-up



The summer is well under way on the marshes. Many flowering plants are now going to seed and the fresh green of foliage is turning to golden browns. There are still some plants though which provide colour through the meadows - ragwort, meadow sweet, Common Vetch, Yarrow, Bird's-foot Trefoil are especially noticeable.

It's been a mixed summer season so far, not the prolonged dry and hot weather we all experienced in 2018, thankfully. After the mild drier winter and spring we've had, I'm glad to see some water being replenished on the marshes. The hottest day so far was 39 deg. C. on the 25 July which I'm sure we are all glad to hear was followed by cool weather and heavy rainfall for a short period.



North Marsh Meadows awash with colours



Tractor on the Lammas Meadows cutting the hay

The first set of annual hay cuts were carried out on the marshes this July. The meadows on the marshes require an annual hay cut each year to maintain them in good condition. Only 5 -10% of the total meadow area across the marshes are cut this early in the summer. The remainder of the meadows are then cut for hay in August and September allowing most areas to sustain plant life and insects later into the year. Each few years, these staggered cuts are rotated around the site so as no one area is cut repeatedly for too long. The areas of meadow cut earlier in the year, do experience regrowth and extend the flowering period providing for late appearing insects. The regrowth also provides ground cover to help reduce the impact of heavy footfall in some areas of the park when the ground is wetter and more exposed to erosion.

You may remember, one of the park's cattle who graze Walthamstow Marshes fell ill and died last year reducing the herd to just six cattle. Fortunately, our luck has changed this year and the herd has now grown by a two. The new cattle are young Hereford's and will spend May to August on the marshes. They'll then be moved to the nearby WaterWorks nature reserve end of August to graze the Great Meadow after it has been cut for hay. The Hereford's have settled in quickly with no problems. Slightly smaller than most of the other cattle, they have black and white coats and are often hidden by the tall grasses. Despite their small size they have shown healthy appetites and are not too fussy about what they eat. Like the Belted Galloways they're a hardy and versatile breed of cattle and I think they'll do well in this area of the park.



Cattle on the South Marsh resting in the shade of some poplars

Ranger round-up



Another season of judging for park awards has passed. Each year, Walthamstow Marshes is entered into the Green Flag and London in Bloom Awards. Judging this year took place in June and we showed judges around the park explaining how the park is managed and why. We spent nearly two hours walking around the park and were fortunate to do so on one of the sunniest and most beautiful days this summer. We spoke about improvements made to park areas, on-going and future projects, the history of the site, its management and the many challenges that accompany it. Both judges came away quite impressed and were very complimentary of the standards and achievements made by the park. Of particular note, was the high standard of cleanliness maintained on Walthamstow Marshes.



A glorious day on the marshes during



Lea Bridge Underpass re-opened

Lea Bridge Road Underpass has been the focus of much attention over the last 18 months. The 'Beast from the East' which swept through the country in 2018 caused pipes to freeze and burst. The two large black pipes carrying much of Walthamstow's water burst and flooded the underpass. Since then, Thames Water have been carrying out repairs and it's only in the last weeks that this work was finally completed. The banks either side have now been re-instated and access is open to all again.

To coincide with the underpass reopening, we decided to do some further work on the underpass itself. You might remember the art installation that went in under the bridge last year and this year, we've concentrated on the outside wall surfaces. To help, we brought in a local artist 'Angry Dan' who came up with a bright and simple design to bring some colour to the walls. His work can be seen around the local area and is often accompanied by simple rhymes or poetry. Angry Dan was also kind enough to replicate similar motifs at the Environmental Agency Station next to A V Roe Arches on the towpath and at the well heads further north along the Aqueduct Pathway.



New motif at Lea Bridge Road Underpass



Split trunk of a creeping willow

If you're familiar with the marshes and in particular, Coppermill Fields, you'll probably have, at one time or another, stopped to gaze up at the Creeping Willows and their large, tall winding limbs. Last winter, some tree safety works were carried out on some limbs overhanging the railway fencing. As a result, some of the weight bearing limbs were removed and the tree has fallen to one side leaving a large crack at the base of its trunk and many branches are now again overhanging the fencing. Though still alive, it's likely we'll need to remove a substantial amount of its crown in order to make it safe for visitors. Fingers crossed we can retain some of this charismatic tree.

Where on the marshes?

Walthamstow Marshes, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), is a stunning mosaic of wetland habitat set in the heart of north east London managed by Lee Valley Regional Park. The site is of great importance locally and regionally with significant recreational, historical and ecological value. Home to meadows, reedbeds, woodland, Water Voles, birdlife and rare breed cattle, there's much to see and explore.



Reed Warbler

Large Skipper

Dragonflies

Wild Carrot

Sand Martins

The Scrape

Sedge Warbler

Leyton Marsh

Walthamstow Marshes (SSSI)

South Marsh

North Marsh

Coppermill Fields

Lea Bridge Road

Coppermill Orchid Banks

The Coppermill orchid banks run either side of the Aquaduct Pathway north of the Coppermill mural underpass and features which could easily be missed by passer's-by. To most they most probably look like your average grassy verge.

However, there's more to these grassy banks than you might think. Unlike the marshes, these banks were the result of spoil which came from surrounding excavations, mostly likely the reservoirs and this has resulted in a slightly different compliment of plants growing on them. Their sloping south facing banks provide the perfect conditions for certain plants to grow.

One plant in particular stands out from the rest - the Bee Orchid. Growing up to 30cm, it can take five to eight years to flower. The flower is very unique, with its pink petals and a brown centre which looks like the body of a bee. Like most orchids, the flowers have evolved to attract a specific insect to help pollination. In the case of the Bee Orchid, it's widely agreed that the required insect is not found in the UK and it requires self pollination or a helping hand to do so.

The Bee Orchid is declining. Orchids, of many different kinds, have declined across the country as well. In the past, orchids have been picked for their attractive flowers. In the case of the bee orchid the single flower is the culmination of up to eight years growth and, if picked, the plant is unlikely to flower again and has lost its only chance of producing seeds.

The greatest number of Bee Orchids recorded growing at Coppermill up until 2018 had been 11. This year we counted a big increase of 40. To manage these areas we cut the grassland verges once a year, removing the hay. As of 2017, we extended the area and are looking to create more suitable habitat to help the Bee Orchids continue to flourish and for the many other plants as well.



Bee Orchids



One of the orchid banks at Coppermill



Meadow cutting areas along Coppermill

Bomb Crater Pond



Flowering Rush

Yellow Flag Iris

Celery-leaved Buttercup

Broad-bodied Chaser

V2 Rocket

During the second world war, several long range V2 rockets fell within the Walthamstow area . One of these exploded harmlessly on the marshes near to the Leyton boundary leaving a circular crater. The crater quickly took on water and is now locally know as Bomb Crater Pond providing a valuable source of water for wildlife and our cattle on South Marsh.

Over the years the pond has received periodic management to maintain it's compliment of wildlife and to prevent it silting up. More recently, in November 2018, we removed a build up of Common Reedmace which had taken over, opening it up to more light and exposing more water surface area.

With the recent works now completed, I wanted to get in to have a good look at what was using the pond and to see if any notable changes had occurred. I spent a couple of hours this June pond dipping to get a look at some of the creatures beneath the water surface. There was a wonderful array of water snails, Water Boatmen, Smooth Newts and even toad tadpoles visible from the edge off the water. Best of all were signs of Water Voles using the vegetation to feed.

Above the surface, a variety of aquatic plants were growing around the edges which had previously been shaded out. Plants such as Flowering Rush went from just one specimen growing in 2018 to 70 this year. There was also the unmistakable smell of mint in the air, a common plant which thrives in wet areas. It has flowers of varying colour from mauve to blue and pink, which grow in clusters at the end of the stems. The minty aroma is most distinctive when the leaves are crushed or rubbed.

Most striking of all were the numbers of dragonflies now using the pond. There were three species using the area - Broad-bodied Chasers, Emperor Dragonflies and Common Darters.



Common Darter



Smooth Newt



Bomb Crater Pond early summer 2019

Community events



Beating the Bounds

Save Lea Marshes (SLM), organised the “Beating of the Bounds” on Sunday 26 March. This is an ancient tradition that goes back to pre-Christian times but was adopted by The Church and held traditionally on 26 March, Rogation Sunday. It’s linked to the former boundaries of Leyton marking areas and periods where commoners were allowed to graze their sheep and cattle on the land.

In more recent times, Katy Andrews and the Lammas Lands Defence Committee, took up the tradition. Following the sad death of Katy, SLM have continued the tradition and do it partly in her memory but also to inform local people about the Walthamstow and Leyton Marshes and encourage their appreciation.

With permission from the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, willows were cut to use as poles (decorated with ribbons), to “beat” or mark the old boundaries. About 25 people joined the walk and we had the blessings of the land carried out by two Mexican healers, Emma Jane and Sarah. Also, some singing was led by Allegra, a Hackney-based singer/guitarist.



Written by Celia Coram



Participants scything an area of meadow

Community Haystacks 2019

People from around Walthamstow and Hackney descended, yet again, on Walthamstow Marshes to make hay, have a picnic, listen to music, ramble and learn about urban foraging.

The event was co-organised by the Community Haystacks group led by Kathrin Bohm and Lee Valley Regional Park’s rangers. The event took place on the 20 July ran all day.

Kathrin Bohm said, “Why are we scything on the marshes? To remind ourselves that this was common land, agricultural land, that this green open space has a collective and productive history. It’s good to remind ourselves of this possibility in London.”

This is the sixth consecutive year the event has run and with the help of Ida Fabrizio this year, over 300 people have now learned to scythe.

Local residents, conservationists, historians, activists, artists, families and scything enthusiasts joined together to recreate the pre-mechanical hay harvest and revive the traditions of scything and communing.

During the afternoon, Melissa Ronaldson of the herbalbarge.co.uk joined with Site Ranger Eamonn Lawlor to give a guided walk of the marshes. Members of the public were provided with a insight into several plants found growing on the marshes focusing on their medicinal properties and how they are important from an ecological perspective. The walk ended back on Mellissa’s barge where everyone was treated to some tea using herbs from around the marshes.



Guided walk



Scything workshop

Visit us at visitleevalley.org.uk/walthamstowmarshes

Scents of the marshes



Flowers are generally thought to be the fragrant parts of plants but many plants found on the marshes are not just scented in their flowers but also their leaves, stems, and roots. These scents can help any budding botanist with identifying plants and a waft of a particular fragrance can sometimes be the first indication that the plant is nearby. Walthamstow Marshes is home to several such plants:

Plants in the mint family are the first that spring to mind when thinking about aromatic herbs; sage, thyme, and rosemary are found in many of our gardens but many wildflowers in this family also have characteristic scents; Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* loves wet marshy ground and can be found in damp habitats such as Walthamstow Marshes. If a leaf is picked and crushed in the hand it smells unmistakably minty but perhaps slightly less pleasant than garden varieties. Keep an eye out along the banks of ditches and ponds for its small pale pink pom-pom flower heads.



Water Mint

The daisy family also has some fragrant members; at first sight Pineapple-weed *Matricaria discoidea* appears to be a daisy that has lost its familiar white petals but one whiff of the crushed flower will betray its true identity. It smells surprisingly strongly of pineapples. This plant prefers sun-baked bare ground so look out for it at the edges of well-worn paths.



Pineapple Weed

Tansy *Tanacetum vulgare* is a daisy relative with strong-smelling leaves, its alternative name of “golden buttons” captures the flowers resemblance to yellow upholstery buttons. And Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* has clusters of chalky white flowers and feathery leaves. Both of these plants can be found in meadows and are brilliant sources of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects. Both plants also have traditional uses including treating rheumatism, aiding digestion and as a tonic.



Tansy

While the scents of flowers are used to attract pollinating insects, the scents that are released when leaves are crushed betray a tactic to *repel* insects that may want to eat parts of the plant or drink its sap. These so called “secondary metabolites” are chemicals in the plant that are distasteful or even poisonous to some herbivorous insects such as caterpillars and aphids. The chemicals just happen to be useful for humans in medicine or food. However, some caterpillars have devised a use for themselves; while eating fragrant plants they can break down these chemicals and use them for their own defences; by making themselves distasteful, birds and even predatory insects avoid eating them.

If you do decide to use your nose please only pick a leaf or two as to not impact on the plant too greatly and please don't uproot any plant. I think getting a nose-full of a herby fragrance is a great way to connect with your surroundings, especially for children, and it adds a new dimension to the natural world.



Yarrow

Written by Matt Purkis, Assistant Ranger

Volunteering on the marshes



Whether it's carrying out practical habitat management, monitoring wildlife or running events and guided walks, there's a volunteering opportunity for everyone on the marshes. There are a number of groups who work throughout the year carrying out practical conservation work on the marshes:

Lee Valley Regional Park Volunteers (LVRP)

For more information on volunteering opportunities and tasks go to visitleevalley.org.uk/volunteers or contact the Rangers on 020 8988 7565

Lea Bridge Conservation Volunteers (LBCV)

LBCV meet on the first Sunday of every month. Contact: Colin Smith, lbcv.org.uk



We had a big turn out of volunteers for one of our conservation tasks on 10 July. Lee Valley's regular midweek volunteers were joined by staff from the local Leyton sixth form college who were helping as part of their annual wellbeing day. This is the second year running that they've joined us. With the extra people available, we focused on pulling invasive Goat's Rue and some of the Ragwort as part of the ongoing management of our grassland meadows.

Danny Hancock has been a regular volunteer this past year helping us monitor the mink rafts, water levels and assisting with other practical management duties. He has been a really big help at weekends.



Our 12 June task turned out not just to be well attended and productive day but one which marked an important date in one volunteer's calendar. Maurice Bond turned 80 this year. Everyone who attended celebrated with some treats and pictures of everyone gathered around. Maurice turned out in his best outfit for the day and was presented with a signed card by volunteers and staff who knew him. By far, Maurice is one of our most dedicated and loved volunteers. Every task he attends he brings with him his loveable, friendly and upbeat attitude. He has turned up on the coldest and wettest days and rarely does he attend without having brought a nice bit of cake for everyone.



Lee Valley Ice Centre redevelopment

A stunning new ice skating destination for London: have your say

Lee Valley Regional Park Authority recently announced plans to create a brand new twin rink ice centre to replace the ageing Lee Valley Ice Centre. The proposed new facility would cater for 557,000 visits per year, and would be more than just an ice rink, with the inclusion of a new gym, café and community spaces opening up the centre to everyone visiting the green spaces nearby.

The centre would act as a new gateway to Leyton Marsh and Walthamstow Marshes. The gym, café and community spaces would cater for all visitors to the area, providing a setting off point for walkers, runners and cyclists. LVPRA has been working closely with the London Borough of Waltham Forest on plans to improve access routes into the marshes and to sensitively open up views from Lea Bridge Road into this green space.

The new venue would be designed with sustainability at its heart, with innovative energy, construction and water re-use. As part of the plans, the surrounding landscape would be transformed, replacing areas devoid of ecological value with significant native planting and increasing wildlife in the area.



View of proposed new twin rink Lee Valley Ice Centre from Lea Bridge Road (artist's impression)



Proposed new Lee Valley Ice Centre masterplan (indicative illustration)

The last page

Have your say

The current Lee Valley Ice Centre is a well-loved community hub, particularly popular with young people, and has been part of Lee Valley Regional Park for 34 years. However, the venue is coming to the end of its operational life and is struggling to meet demand, open for up to 19 hours a day, seven days a week. Around a third of the 279,000 visits annually to the centre are from Hackney and Waltham Forest residents.



Have your say on the plans for the twin rink centre. A public consultation will run until Sunday 1 September. **To find out more about our plans and give your views, visit www.icecentreredevelopment.com**

You can also drop in to one of the following events in Waltham Forest and Hackney over the summer to find out more:

Thursday 15 August 09:00 – 17:00	Ridley Road Market Hackney E8 2NP
Sunday 4 August 14:00 – 20:00	Waltham Forest Mela, Chestnuts Field, Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, Walthamstow E17 4JF
Saturday 31 August 13:00 – 20:30	Chingfest, Ridgeway Park Chingford E4 6RS

In addition, an exhibition is on display at Lee Valley Ice Centre itself until 1 September.

For more information or if you have any questions on the plans, please contact LVIC@communitycomms.co.uk or call 0800 093 1716.

A big thank you to Giles Greenwood and Paul Lister for allowing us to use some of their fantastic images taken out on the marshes this spring and summer.



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