

# RICHMOND PARK DIARY

## MARCH

**NESTING BIRDS:** The courtship behaviour of breeding birds is starting to become evident and Skylarks are performing their fantastic displays in various locations. As ground nesting birds they are particularly vulnerable to disturbance. Dogs have a habit of running randomly away from paths and so the dogs-on-leads zone will again be marked out from March. Since this policy was introduced the numbers of breeding Skylarks has increased from about 3 singing males to more than 20.

Last year was the first time that the dogs-on-leads request was introduced at Pen Ponds. Although a minority of dog walkers did not adhere to the signs, sufficient numbers did. It was also the first time for at least 3 years that cygnets survived. Hopefully this success will continue in the forthcoming breeding season.

**PEGASUS CROSSING:** Last month saw the official opening of a new road crossing linking Richmond Park with Wimbledon Common. Situated just outside Robin Hood Gate, the 'Pegasus' crossing is designed to be used by horse riders as well as pedestrians. It now means that riders can safely enjoy very long rides between to 2 open spaces and add interest and variation to routine walks. Previous to the crossing being installed, the pedestrian footbridge was unsuitable for riders who had to risk crossing the busy A3 road.

**TERN RAFT:** This spring will see the installation of a new bird breeding raft in pen ponds. We have had a small raft in the pond for a couple of years and in 2009 a pair of Common Terns stayed for most of summer and attempted to breed.

Their interest in the ponds was also due to re-stocking the ponds with a number of smaller fish a few years ago. The Friends of Richmond Park have therefore generously sponsored the new raft through money raised from sales in the visitor centre at Pembroke Lodge. The new raft is 8' x 4' and fitted with Perspex sides. These protect the chicks from falling in the water and help prevent other birds such as geese and gulls from monopolising the available space.

**MAD MARCH HARES:** Hares behave excitedly in March which is their mating season. Their lively behaviour involves jumping and boxing and will actually continue for several months. Lewis Carroll referenced this behaviour in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland – "*The March Hare ...as this is May, it won't be raving mad – at least not as mad as it was in March.*" The expression 'hare-brained' meaning mad, is also derived from Hares behaviour at this time of year. Unfortunately Hares have not been seen in the Park for some time. They were still around on the golf course until 1972, at least. They are longer-limbed and can run faster than Rabbits (up to 30 or even 40 mph) but unlike Rabbits they do not breed underground and are therefore vulnerable to dogs and changes in farming practices.

**DEER:** The cull of male deer takes place in February and is usually completed by early March. By keeping the ratio of male to female deer at no more than 1:3, the aggression levels between males is kept low, yet there are still plenty of deer with antlers to be seen and the number of young born each year is not too excessive.

PAC 01/03/10

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The Royal Parks are: Bushy Park, The Green Park, Greenwich Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, The Regent's Park & Primrose Hill, Richmond Park and St James's Park.



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