



THE  
ROYAL  
PARKS

# volunteeringnews

Welcome to the autumn edition of Volunteering News. It's been a marvellous summer and once again our volunteers have helped make a success of the Education and Community Engagement Team's variety of events and programmes. It was great to see so many of you at the Volunteer Social Day at Kew Gardens, when we had an opportunity to thank you for the hours that you give to The Royal Parks, and it would be lovely if someone would write an account of the day at Kew for the next newsletter. Please submit your ideas for the next edition as soon as possible.

In November, we will be running a training course to train more volunteer guided walk leaders. It is only for those who are committed to leading walks and places are limited. Details are in the letter accompanying this newsletter.

Enjoy the season! "Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower" Albert Camus

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## HYDE PARK AND KENSINGTON GARDENS

WALKS, TALKS, AND GENTLE GIANTS:

AN AMAZING YEAR FOR HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS VOLUNTEER VIVIEN GATES

Where do I begin? Where do I finish? Nearly a year after picking up my volunteer's uniform, I can truly say that I have participated in a fantastic range of wondrous activities within the central Royal Parks. Mostly I have supported Nick Lane, Fred Strache, and Ruth Hayhurst on guided walks in Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, St. James's Park and The Green Park. Each leader showed me, and those attending the walks, hidden and obvious historical, scientific, and artistic aspects of the parks.

Naming trees in winter, on the Walking With Giants walk, was a tricky detection game and the Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens walk had us sad and reflective, especially when you see the branch where he spent the night. The Great Exhibition walk reminded us of the stunning showcase of British achievements accomplished over 150 years ago. As for the

260th Anniversary of the Royal Fireworks in Green Park walk, the appalling weather failed to dampen our excitement and we could almost smell the gunpowder and hear the "oohs" and "aahhs" applauding Mr Handel's music.

It is very satisfying to see, from the many varied

During the year, I have also attended two training days for volunteers at Bushy Park and Hyde Park, which opened up more areas of interest for me, namely aquatic and meadow invertebrates. Dr Nigel Reeve and colleagues share their enthusiasm quite generously. Pond dipping and meadow sweeping are

sure Prince Albert would have approved of these handsome animals and visitors were able to stroke and feed them and experience their gentleness. The horses are used at Richmond in an environmentally friendly way, being more sensitive to the ground than a tractor for example. We look forward to meeting their successors when Jed and Forte go into a well-deserved retirement.

From crickets and leeches to Shire horses and horse chestnuts; from the Holocaust Memorial and the Italian Gardens to the War of the Austrian Succession and Kensington Palace, I have had a truly memorable year.

My thanks are owed to Nick Lane, Ruth Hayhurst, Fred Strache, Dr Nigel Reeve, Claudia Watts, Samantha Wilkinson, Jen Estwick, Sophie Bryant, Hannah Pritchard and Toni Assirati.

questions that are asked, that the members of the public who attend the guided walks are impressed by the detailed commentaries and the amount of research that goes into them.

activities which adults do too infrequently!

In July, I helped support the visit of Jed and Forte, the Shire horses from Richmond Park, who were on show near the Albert Memorial. I am



L-R: Sandra Croxall (groom), Dave Carpenter, Vivien Gates, Lesley Kettle (volunteers)

## THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

By Liz Mullins – Programme Manager for the 2012 Games

Twenty-six Olympic and twenty Paralympic sports. Fifteen thousand athletes. Twenty thousand press and media. More than nine million tickets. Often described as the greatest show on earth, the Olympic and Paralympic Games are coming to London and to The Royal Parks in 2012. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and a challenge for The Royal Parks. Our volunteers will play a key role in making sure our parks look their best and offer a world-class welcome to visitors.

The Royal Parks is making

a significant contribution to the staging of Olympic and Paralympic events in 2012. Four of our parks will host events. St James's Park/Horse Guards Parade will host Beach Volleyball. Hyde Park will host Open Water Swimming and the Triathlon. Greenwich Park will host both Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian and elements of the Modern Pentathlon. Regent's Park will host both Olympic and Paralympic Road Cycling.

Up to four billion people are expected to watch the Games worldwide

and the spotlight will be on our parks like never before. Games organisers clearly recognise the uniqueness of our parks as historical landscapes, and their importance to local residents and park users. The Royal Parks will ensure that the Games organisers minimise the impact on our parks and return them to their pre-Games state.

But 2012 isn't all about sport. It's about the wider visitor welcome that our parks offer: the fabulous green space, the fascinating habitats and the amazing heritage – all aspects of our parks

to which our volunteers make a such a great contribution. With the Queen's Diamond Jubilee also taking place in 2012, there is going to be a huge sense of pride about being in London, and being in our parks in 2012.

As plans develop over the coming months, Games organisers will be talking to people locally, to make sure they know what's happening and when, and to respond to any questions; this is already happening for Greenwich Park. We will keep you posted, as plans progress.

You can find out more about the Games on the London 2012 website:  
<http://www.london2012.com>



### ST JAMES'S PARK

SUMMER VOLUNTEERING AT THE ST JAMES'S PARK ALLOTTMENT BY NATASHA GOODFELLOW

'Why have you taken all the leaves off the tomato plants?'

So began my first day's volunteering at the St James's Park allotment. Between the planting and the watering, the pricking out and the harvesting came question after question, only a fraction of which I could answer. 'Why is your sweetcorn so tall?' 'When did you plant the ornamental banana?' And, time and time again, 'How can I keep the slugs off my plants?' Happily, that day, I was lucky enough to be working with another volunteer, Blair, a retired lawyer with an allotment of his own who handled the barrage with ease.

But not even his wisdom could prepare me for the challenges of the following day – it was family activity week and some children wanted to 'help' me. It all started well enough, two young boys studiously listened and followed suit as we planted out a row of carrots. But then two others wanted to join in and all hell broke loose. 'They're my carrots,' whined one. 'No they're not,' yelled the other as his younger brother began to cry. It didn't matter whose they were, by the time their [continued on next page](#)

### continuation of St James's Park article

little fists had squished them into the earth, and they'd all but drowned them in a tidal wave of watering, a crack team of CSI officers would have struggled to identify them as carrots at all.

Sure, it was soul destroying, but at least they were interested, as indeed was everybody who visited the allotment. And it was that – seeing people's obvious pleasure and listening to their reminiscences about their parents' or grandparents' gardens – that made volunteering there so enjoyable. And as for the denuded tomatoes? Far from being the latest technique in gardening (as many visitors assumed) it was simply because they'd had blight – so leave those leaves alone!



## BUSHY PARK

**GOODBYE FROM SOPHIE BRYANT**  
Education and Community Engagement Officer at  
Bushy Park

I write this piece with mixed emotions: I leave The Royal Parks with eager anticipation of returning home to Australia, and the arrival of my first child in November, and with definite sadness, as three years in London draw to a close.

After teaching secondary History, Geography and English in Melbourne for over five years, I sought new experiences in London. Little did I realise the surprises in store as I taught for a year in an inner city London school! Exploring the city, historic houses, magnificent

gardens and many European destinations almost made up for the daily teaching challenges.

Since joining The Royal Parks in April 2007, I have had the opportunity to expand my skills and increase my knowledge of flora and fauna. I have had the honour of meeting and working with truly professional and inspiring people- many of them volunteers! The primary school education programme at Bushy Park relies on at least three volunteers a day to run in its current form. I have been very fortunate to

## REX HOLMAN



POND SIDE AT THE POND ANIMALS TRAINING DAY AT BUSHY PARK  
L-R: Sam Wilkinson (Ecology Officer), Nigel Reeve (Head of Ecology),  
Nigel Cowlin (Volunteer, Richmond), Rex Holman (Volunteer, Bushy Park)

I would like to make an apology to Bushy Park volunteer Rex Holman for getting his surname wrong in the caption for this picture in the Summer '09 newsletter. At the Bushy volunteer training day Rex was especially helpful both during the pond dipping and in personally explaining to me a variety of things about Bushy Park and the work the volunteers do there. Sorry about the mistake, Rex! Jen Estwick.

have such a supportive and committed group working alongside me, offering suggestions, making improvements and ensuring that I did not confuse a weasel for a wallaby or a stag beetle larva with a witchetty grub!

Bushy Park has been a haven, a world away from the confines of a teen-filled classroom! I have enjoyed expanding our education programme to include more primary

school visits, as well as developing links with nurseries and other community organisations. There is still so much to do but I will have to pass the unfinished business on to someone else, which is definitely not in my nature!

Thank you to the Bushy Park team and volunteers, as well as the wider education team! I look forward to visiting in summer next year with a nine month old baby.



Hannah Pritchard and Sophie Bryant

## RICHMOND PARK

THE RICHMOND PARKS WALKS PROGRAMME BY PETER BURROWS-SMITH



Peter Burrows-Smith (with back to the camera) leading a guided walk

I work as a volunteer in Richmond Park organising and leading the extensive walks programme. In addition to the regular monthly walks, we also have a series of special events, mostly featuring birds. On average 40-50 people turn up and we usually offer at least two options covering history and wildlife, which may have a special theme such as the skylarks.

Our special walks are always the most popular. Examples of these include the regular Spring and Autumn bird walks, the annual Summer Evening walk in mid July (owls and bats) and the 5am Dawn Chorus Bird walk, the first of which this year had a turnout of over seventy people and was a great success, despite the steady stream of early morning aircraft heading into Heathrow. Another

favourite is the Boxing Day walk, which last December had a turnout of over 100 people. I was forewarned when on Christmas Day I Googled "Boxing Day Walks" and found there were 200,000 results with three listings for Richmond Park on the first page! We have also trialled some night "stargazing" walks, as we have some good black spots in the park, but it was thick cloud on both days.

Overall, the programme in Richmond Park seems very successful and there are special moments such as the time a young father, with his family, was enthralled by the sight of a

kingfisher, which he'd only ever seen on TV before. My worst moment was the day I led forty people into the Isabella Plantation, and ended up with just twenty at Pegs Pond. There was unfortunately a gap in the line of walkers and one of our leaders took a different turning with part of the group. It took fifteen minutes to find them. I now keep well clear of this special area and leave it to the experts!

Our walks in Richmond Park are free and open to everyone. We therefore get a wide variety of walkers ranging from those really interested

in the park and special topics, to those just wanting to walk in a group. All are welcome. It is, however, preferable on the larger walks to have a subject expert and separate support people, who can both lead and if necessary act as a back-stop to rally stragglers.

Quite apart from the support from my colleagues in the Friends, we could not arrange such a programme without the regular support and enthusiasm from Richmond Park management and the wildlife groups who provide regular leaders. We do however sometimes have to enrol outsiders, such as the London Bat Group, and we are always looking for additional helpers either to help keep the walkers together, or people with particular expertise or an area of interest they'd like to share.



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