

volunteeringnews

Welcome to the summer edition of Volunteering News.

The Community Engagement and Education team is in the midst of its busiest time with numerous projects underway, many of which are supported by our volunteers. We would like to say thank you to all of you and welcome to those who have joined us since the last newsletter.

The Look Out in Hyde Park has now been closed so that a brand new education building can be constructed on this site and building work is scheduled to start later this year. Education and Community Engagement programmes still continue in Hyde and Kensington, and the opening of the Allotment in Kensington Gardens is bringing in more visits from schools and community groups, as well as being open to the public seven days a week.

Thanks to all the volunteers who wrote articles for this newsletter. Please submit ideas and articles for the next edition as soon as possible.

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KENSINGTON GARDENS

MARVELLOUS MARROWS AND PERFECT PEAS

By Nick Lane - Community Engagement and Education Officer



Nick Lane with pupils from St James's & St Michael's CofE Primary School

Have you ever wondered what it takes to live the Good Life? Well now the perfect opportunity awaits you in Kensington Gardens. Six months ago, a corner of Kensington Gardens lay forgotten and undiscovered. Several months of hard work, inspiration and creativity later and a brand new allotment exists, nestled among the park shrubbery for all to see and enjoy.

Launched on the 26th May 2010 and open seven days a week between 9.30am and 4pm, there is something for everyone



with fruit, vegetables, and herbs all jostling for your attention and colourful flowers, heady scents and somewhere to sit and take in the relaxing atmosphere. If you haven't already discovered this little oasis of horticultural calm, now is your opportunity.

You can find the allotment near the Education Offices, just north of the Magazine and Serpentine Bridge. The nearest tube station is Lancaster Gate on the Central Line. From Buckhill Lodge it's a five



Park Manager Tom Jarvis with pupils from St James's & St Michael's CofE Primary

minute walk, if you follow Buck Hill Walk towards Magazine Gate it's on your left, just before The Magazine.

Of course, such a delight doesn't look after itself so following your first visit, if you feel inspired and would like to volunteer to help maintain this wonderful allotment, please call Nick Lane on: 020 7298 2083 or email: nlane@royalparks.gsi.gov.uk



BUSHY PARK

POND DIPPING BY ANNE KIBBLE (BUSHY PARK EDUCATION VOLUNTEER)



It's 9.45 am when the coach arrives and disgorges thirty noisy children looking forward to a day off school. So they seem somewhat surprised to be shepherded into a classroom – this wasn't what they were expecting. They thought they were going pond-dipping. They look half-heartedly at the line-drawings of mini beasts displayed on the wall, colour-coded according to what each eats. They smile when told that the mini beasts they are going to catch are not as big as the drawings suggest. There is a spark of interest when they realise the mini beasts might eat each other. Soon they are outside, carrying the nets and trays needed. At last they are going pond dipping. The atmosphere is electric with anticipation. After a safety talk by the ponds about not going to the water's edge without an adult, there is a bit of disappointment when they can't start pond dipping until there is water in the trays. But

when they empty the nets into the waiting trays and start examining what they have caught the excitement is back. They now realise just how difficult it is to spot the tiny mini beasts. Are they really supposed to also catch them? Tadpoles are easy but the rest are much more difficult. Fortunately they like the concept of trying to catch

even lunchtime.

One of the volunteers has already left in order to sort through the specimens back in the classroom. Little do the children realise what is yet to come but the atmosphere is definitely different when they take their seats again. They are now going to look at what they have caught using the trinocular: a



them without killing them and now see how useful paintbrushes are for encouraging the mini beasts into the spoon. All is now quiet. Energy is being focused onto searching in the mud for leeches or fast moving specimens. The children prove expert at spotting and catching specimens. This is fun, so it's a bit of a letdown when it is time to clear up and return to the classroom and it isn't

microscope connected to a 37 inch television screen. They have taken great care to separate the carnivores from the herbivores and ensured that the omnivores didn't eat everything else. They now want assurance that everything will be returned to the pond alive. At last they are appreciating the natural world around them.

We start off with something they recognise

like the louse (just like the woodlouse) or a pond snail. The tiny ramshorn snail looks beautiful when magnified. And what's that moving? Yes, they can clearly see the heart of the snail beating just like their own. Lunch is now forgotten, this is something really different. They marvel at the beautiful markings on the slimy leech and learn the difference between larvae and nymphs. They hear about the mayfly which only lives for a short while once emerged from the pond, as it hasn't got a stomach. Reluctant to go to lunch we remind them that they haven't done the nature trail yet and we need a rest. Their enthusiasm is palpable and there isn't an electronic game in sight. At the end of their visit their smiles as they wave goodbye tell us we have opened their eyes to what is around them and they have enjoyed it. Every visit is different but we do have fun and enjoy it too. And the beating heart of a 10mm snail never fails to amaze.



NEW COMMUNICATIONS

KATIE PILLMAN, THE ROYAL PARKS STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

The Royal Parks has launched two exciting new communications ventures: an external newsletter, Grass Roots, and a Royal Parks' Facebook page.

Grass Roots contains news and feature stories from The Royal Parks. The newsletter is distributed to a range of our stakeholders and is also available on our website at <http://www.royalparks.org.uk/about/publications/newsletters.cfm>. You can register to receive a copy of Grass Roots in electronic or printed format by emailing pa@royalparks.gsi.gov.uk. We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter and would welcome any feedback you have on Grass Roots.

Breaking into the world of social media, The Royal Parks has joined Facebook. Do join our Facebook page to keep up to date with park news, and upload your photos to share with other fans. The page can be found if you search for 'The Royal Parks, London' on Facebook search. YouTube and Flickr sites will be coming soon, so watch this space.....

GREENWICH PARK

GREENWICH WILDLIFE VOLUNTEERS TRY SEED SOWING
BY ELAINE WARRELL (Royal Parks and Friends volunteer Greenwich)

The Annual Wildlife Open Day, organised by Friends of Greenwich Park Wildlife Group on behalf of The Royal Parks, went with a swing on the 17th April, with good weather, some 300 visitors and popular events.

We try to have one new idea a year to try out. Three years ago Greenwich volunteer Faith Keymer suggested inviting the Dartford Bird Ringing Group to show us how small birds are caught, weighed, measured and ringed. That was such a success that it is now an annual fixture. Last year our moths and butterflies expert, volunteer Harry Whitehead, brought along bright emerald green oleander hawk moths that he had bred and now his displays are set to

be a regular feature.

For 2010, Toni Assirati, The Royal Parks Head of Education and Community Engagement, suggested seed sowing and donated biodegradable pots. I provided organic compost and a range of seeds for the young visitors to plant and grew demonstration plants to show the children what their seeds would turn into.

I chose seeds of plants that children would already know about like sunflowers, courgettes and Little Gem lettuce or were big and easy to handle like broad beans but I also chose 'patio' vegetables like the Hestia Dwarf runner bean, the pea Half Pint, carrot Mignon and the neat

tomato Vilma, which could be grown in small gardens or even on a balcony. Because it was a wildlife day I took along some of the teasels that had ripened in my garden and some of their seeds which are so loved by the local goldfinches.

The event proved very popular. We quickly ran out of pots and had to use disposable coffee cups instead. Most of the children loved handling the compost, filling the pots themselves, choosing and planting seeds and adding a label. A few didn't like getting their hands dirty but perhaps they will have changed their minds by next year. It looks as if we have another regular activity to add to the list for the Greenwich Park Annual Wildlife Open Day 2011.



Teasell plant - Seeds - Elaine Warrell tending the teasels

VOLUNTEER TRAINING - HYDE PARK AND KENSINGTON GARDENS

Bird Identification Training Day

WORDS: Anne Charvet (Volunteer) PHOTOS: David Darrell-Lambert (Trainer) - Taken on the day



Volunteers out with David



Atlantic Cormorant



Grey Heron

Bird identification was the subject of a most informative as well as enjoyable volunteer training day, held indoors and outdoors in Hyde Park and Kensington Garden, on 11 May. David Darrell-Lambert is a full-time ornithologist who conducts ornithological surveys of sites for potential developers, leads groups on field trips and gives talks and training for birders of all abilities, from absolute beginners to the most experienced. Our group fell mostly into David's "B" category!

David showed excellent photos (mostly taken by himself) of birds likely to be seen in the Royal Parks, water birds as well as woodland and garden species. We were told about the concept of "jizz" - the general sense of a bird's character and appearance - and were given such a vivid imitation of a dunnock's posture that an encore was requested. He explained how knowledge of a bird's habitat and behaviour helps towards their identification. For example, he told us that

the mistle thrush tends to feed in the open while the song thrush tends to feed near the cover of shrubs and bushes. This was perfectly demonstrated when we stepped out of the Kensington Garden Education Centre into Hyde Park for the first of our two mini field trips and saw a mistle thrush in the middle of a swathe of grass and a song thrush feeding under a bush. We were warned, however, that such generalisations are never infallible.

I had particularly hoped for some help with identifying bird songs and calls. This hope was met as David had brought some recordings with him and actively drew attention to songs on our two walks, pointing out a grey wagtail singing on a distant post in the Serpentine, by no means an everyday occurrence. There were also around twenty swallows and sandmartins feeding low over the Serpentine on their migration, which was an unexpected bonus.

We all felt we had benefited from the day's training, besides having a very good time. David gave us his website address for follow-up: www.birdbrainuk.com



European starling

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