

## WINTER SURVIVAL - WILDLIFE

During the cold spell of weather before Christmas it was difficult enough for us humans, but was especially hard on the wildlife. Even though our British winter is not nearly so cold and severe as polar and even European winters, animals still have to be able to adapt to low temperatures and a shortage of food. Freezing temperatures turn water into ice so that animals cannot drink.

Mammals, such as foxes, badgers and squirrels etc., grow thicker coats as the extra fur helps them to keep their body temperature constant during very cold weather. Mice and voles make themselves cosy underground nests during the winter, and sleep there on the coldest days. Hedgehogs and bats hibernate after fattening up by eating as much as possible in the autumn. During its deep sleep, a hibernating mammal's body temperature drops well below the normal 37°C (it feels very cold to the touch), its heart beat slows to as little as three or four per minute, and it breathes only every two minutes or so. Hedgehogs and bats do not stay asleep for the whole winter, they will wake up on warmer days and look for food or water. Every time they wake up a great deal of energy is used up, so a long, cold winter is better for these animals than a winter with lots of warm spells.

Many birds, including blackbirds, song thrushes and starlings, are residents i.e stay in Britain all year, while others fly in from their northern breeding grounds Russia, Greenland, Scandinavia or the Arctic to avoid the extremely cold conditions of those places. Winter migrants include redwings, fieldfares and bramblings coming in seeking fruits and seeds as their winter food source. Birds also fluff out their feathers on cold days to help keep up their body temperature. Luckily, we have duvets!

Invertebrates (animals without backbones) and vertebrate fish, amphibians and reptiles, are said to be 'cold-blooded' because their body temperature changes with that of their surroundings. Low temperatures make it difficult for these creatures to remain active in winter. Snakes, lizards, frogs, toads and newts slow down all their body processes almost to a stop in very cold weather. This is known as diapause. They hide away under stones, logs, in compost heaps, old mouse burrows – all sorts of places where they can be safe from predators.

Many invertebrates also hide themselves away somewhere secluded, perhaps under a log, stone or in a hole, and stay there throughout the cold months. This includes caterpillars, some butterflies, slugs, snails, queen wasps and bumblebees, slowing their body process right down to conserve energy. This state is called torpor. Special chemicals are released into their body fluids to prevent them from freezing, in the same way that anti-freeze works in the radiator of a car.

# NEWSLETTER 54

**Winter: January 1st - March 31st 2010**  
**A Happy New Year to Everyone**



**Events.** All events are free and open to members and non-members alike. Donations always welcome.

**Saturday 30th January. WINTER BIRD WALK**

**Meet 9.30 am on the mansion steps.** For this walk you will need to wrap up as a certain amount of standing around is called for when watching birds and the weather could be chilly.

**Sunday 14th February. NESTBOX WORKSHOP**

**Meet 1.30 pm in the Visitor Centre.** Come along and make a bird nestbox for your garden, on St Valentine's day, when the birds are traditionally supposed to choose their mate. Cost of materials for each box is £5.00.

**Sunday 14th March. NATURE WALK**

**Meet 2.00 pm at the mansion.** A walk around the various diverse habitats of the park, the ancient woodland, the river Ravensbourne, the meadow etc.

**Conservation Workdays on Saturdays 9th Jan, 6th Feb and 6th Mar.**

**Meet on the mansion steps at 10.00am. Please try to be on time.** Only light work is carried out; no tree felling and we usually only work for a couple of hours. Gloves, tools and instruction provided.

**Mansion Access.** Sometimes the mansion cannot be accessed at short notice due to bad weather/ maintenance etc, so if making a special journey for indoor events, you may like to check with us on one of the links below.

### **About The Friends Events**

All our events are free, but any donations to funds are much appreciated. Most last about 1-2 hours, but you can join in for as long or as little as you like. It is advisable to wear stout walking shoes, as the paths do get very muddy. Walkers are individually responsible for their own safety during our events. Minors are welcome, but must be accompanied by parent or guardian. Dogs are welcome, if kept under control. Walk leaders always carry water and mobile phone.

**CONTACTS.** If anyone has any comments, ideas, articles etc. get in touch through any of the contact venues or in person at the Visitor Centre in the mansion.

Opening times:- Sundays 1.30pm-3.30pm.

THE FRIENDS OF BECKENHAM PLACE PARK, THE SECRETARY,

18 GREYCOT ROAD, BECKENHAM, KENT BR3 1TA

TEL: 020 8325 8781 E-MAIL [bpp.friends@ntlworld.com](mailto:bpp.friends@ntlworld.com)

**Website: [www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk](http://www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk)**

## **WINTER SURVIVAL - PLANTS**

For years botanists have been researching ways in which some plants survive intense cold. Temperatures as much as five degrees warmer than the surrounding air have been recorded in some species flower buds, and you may notice around some plants that in the immediate area the snow has melted. These higher temperatures are generated by rapidly growing plant tissues, although if the plant were to keep up these growth rates to withstand a prolonged frost it would quickly use up its food reserves and starve.

Some plants, such as garden dahlias, die immediately there is a frost, while hardy plants, such as snowdrops, can freeze solid and then recover when they thaw. They do this by closing up the reproductive parts and withdrawing water from their cell structures into the minute intervening air spaces. Here, ice crystals can form without causing harm. On thawing, even hardy plants can wilt; starved of water, the plant may be horizontal for a couple of hours before recovering and resuming its former vitality. Evergreen trees, such as many conifers, often have narrow, needle-like leaves and a thick waxy coating, and these adaptations help them to conserve water during winter.

### **Local News.**

**Muntjac Deer.** A local lady emailed the Friends to say she has seen a muntjac deer in her garden in Rangefield Road, Downham in November. This is not so unexpected as it seems as it is recognised that many animals used the railway tracks to get around. They are very small deer and usually very shy so this lady was lucky to see it.

**Little Egret.** A little egret was spotted landing on a tree on 23rd December in Martin's Hill recreation ground, Bromley, during the very cold snowy weather.

**Dog Control Order.** The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (CNEA) introduced new powers and fixed penalties for local authorities to counter and reduce environmental crime. This includes irresponsible dog owners through the introduction of Dog Control Orders. On November 16th 2009 Lewisham Council adopted a borough wide Dog Control Order. An offence under the Dog Control Order can result in an on the spot £75 fine or fines of up to £1000.

**For more information or to report an irresponsible dog owner contact Lewisham CallPoint on 020 8314 7171.**

**For advice & useful contacts visit [www.lewisham.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/dogs)**

## **Recent Events Report**

### **Friends AGM. Sunday 11th October**

Not a great number of people came along, but it was an enthusiastic group and David Hansom, who has remained as Chair, gave an excellent summation of the appraisal and conservation management plans of the mansion carried out in the summer. Two people volunteered to join the re-elected committee. Thank you to Pam and Ron. The usual issues were covered in discussion i.e. composting scheme, cycle paths, motor bikes, dog walking numbers and more. The next AGM will be provisionally on Sunday July 11th, confirmation of date and venue nearer the time.

Thanks to everyone who came along.

### **Trip to the Cator Family's Tomb. Wednesday 11th November**

The weather was wet, but it was a really nice walk and the churchyard of St George's in Beckenham proved very interesting. Although it had been researched, there were a couple of elusive headstones and the group said it was more fun to search, and find, than just be shown where everything was. The lovely church was open (and warm) so we were able to look around in there too. A good time was had by all.

### **Short Walk. Tuesday 1st December**

The weather was good, very cold, but bright. There were seven walkers and we strolled and chatted our way to Crab Hill. Very obligingly, in the field there was a picnic table so we could sit and tuck into mince pies, a selection of fruit juices and share a chocolate orange all provided by the Friends. Thus fortified we walked back to the mansion by a different route. Thanks to everyone for a lovely afternoon in the park.

**December Festive Fare in the Visitor Centre** was enjoyed for two weekends, but the weather and Christmas holidays have thwarted the rest. The café and VC are closed Jan 3rd, but we hope to re-open VC 10th Jan.

**2010 membership is now due.** Thank you for your continued support.

**Conservation Workdays.** The weather was fine this year for our three days. Two sessions were carried out on the gorse as keeping the bramble down over the last few years has helped it to thicken the gorse. Our last session was spent in Stumpshill Wood, which runs alongside Beckenham Hill Road. There didn't seem to be much woodland work to do as leaving the housing screened seemed to be the best idea, but fear not we didn't just go home! The resulting litter pick gave us six very big sacks of rubbish. Thanks to our volunteers for all their hard work.

### **Biodiversity, Climate Change and You**

Gardens and allotments host a range of plant and animal species. One of the major determinants of a good garden for wildlife is the attitude of the owner, and the interest that he or she takes in wild animals and plants. The contribution of gardens to biodiversity would be particularly enhanced by more house-owners providing those habitats that are least frequent in the countryside: for example, ponds (particularly with easy amphibian access, some marginal cover and no fish), old trees, light weeding and unsprayed cultivated ground, less frequent mowing and untreated medium-length grassland, annual or perennial flower meadows, moist shady corners, stone or brick walls, and open compost heaps. More widespread organic gardening, the avoidance of chemicals so far as possible, would also contribute to more species being able to flourish, with a natural balance of 'pests' and predators.

Gardens serve many purposes. They are a place of leisure and relaxation, playing a part in maintaining physical and mental health. They act as 'green lungs' in built-up areas, and have a part to play in combating climate change by absorbing carbon and facilitating drainage.

Most naturalists started their careers because of encounters as children with wildlife in their own backyards and, with the declining contribution of natural history in schools, gardens rich in wildlife are needed more than ever.

**Reference:** Article by Tony Marshall, British Wildlife, December 2009

### **Lewisham Local History Society.**

Meetings for first four months in 2010. All on Fridays at 7.45pm at Methodist Church Hall, Albion Way, SE13

**January 29th The 21st Century Almshouse Madelaine Adams**

**February 26th Wyberton House, Lee Terrace -  
The Story of Lee Neil Rhin**

**March 19th. This meeting is at Civic Suite, Lewisham Town Hall,  
Catford**

**AGM followed by A Political Journey in Lewisham Jim Dowd**

**April 23rd Naval Victualling In Deptford Janet MacDonald**

**Ring-neck Parakeets.** Changes to wildlife law do not mean it is open season on parakeets and anyone shooting them without a good reason faces prosecution, the RSPB has warned. These parakeets have been added to the general licence by wildlife watchdog Natural England. This means from January 1, 2010, land owners can kill the birds by shooting or trapping, without obtaining special permission.

### **DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE MANSION AND HOMESTEADS**

**David Hansom (Chair of FoBPP)**

Much has happened in the past 2 months in the on-going 'campaign' to keep the mansion, Beckenham Place, as both the central, public feature of the park and also to put pressure on Lewisham Council to fulfil their statutory duty to maintain the fabric of this Grade 2\* listed building.

While the main impetus continues to come from the Friends, who raise the issues of the mansion's condition and future use at every meeting of the Beckenham Place Park Working Party (the forum at which 'stakeholders' in the park, representing the various user groups, meet on a regular basis with the Council) we have recently been joined by another substantial (and influential) local body, the Lewisham Environment Trust, in our efforts. How has this come about? And what is happening?

In the summer, the Council commissioned 2 reports :

Rees Bolter Architects into the fabric of the mansion within its heritage context;

Ken Burlton Consultancy into possible future uses of the mansion.

I presented a summary of these reports to the Friends' AGM and this was printed in our last newsletter. Following the AGM, I prepared a note which summarised the views of our members and forwarded this to the Mayor and the Council's Head of Buildings, Steve Gough (who is charged with overseeing future development of the mansion). The intention of the note was to provide a 'user context' within which the Mayor could consider the reports. I reproduce the note below :

We wish strongly to remind Lewisham Council that the main findings of the public consultation conducted in 2008 by Continental Research found a very strong public desire for the mansion to remain in public ownership, with a public/'non-commercial' use and as much public access as possible. All future consideration of the mansion should recognise this context.

We therefore urge the Council strongly to consider public domain and charitable uses for the mansion above purely commercial options.

We believe that there are many potential uses within the general definition of 'public use' for which the mansion would be eminently suitable. Several of these were discussed in the Burlton Report. We would particularly commend any uses that encompass :

education and training, particularly if benefiting the school and college population of Lewisham. We note specifically that Beckenham Place Park could serve as a more convenient, more environmentally-friendly and more flexible alternative to the use of Horton Kirby by the primary schools of the borough;

heritage, archive and display. The mansion affords considerable scope for the storage and display of important aspects of local historical and natu-

ral historical documents, pictures and artefacts. These include several Lewisham collections, several of which are currently without homes. It would be relatively simple to include permanent and periodic displays in several parts of the building. In addition the use of the upper floors for storage and scholarly study shows considerable potential; areas for local clubs, meetings, functions and displays; uses by Lewisham Council (environmental, heritage as well as more public-facing departments). We remind the Council that the mansion would have made a very fine Register Office – and that similar uses could be sought; as a focal point for many of the events that Lewisham currently holds elsewhere and might additionally plan for the future.

We urge the Council to consider favourably any community or charity led initiatives that might be forthcoming as a resolution to the current ‘stale-mate’ situation at Beckenham Place. The Friends of Beckenham Place Park would actively support such an initiative and would hope to be involved in the preparation of such a solution.

We recognise the various issues that surround access to the mansion and would ask that, if at all practical, the balcony to the south of the building be retained and that any additional work to ease access between floors be as non-intrusive as possible.

By the same token, the Friends of Beckenham Place Park would wish to be involved with the Council in the formulation of policy regarding the future use of the mansion – and in initial discussions with any outside interested party.

In the meantime, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Lewisham Environment Trust to update them on developments with the mansion and park – as they, quite rightly, saw the future of the park as a critical issue within the Borough of Lewisham. I took the LET through both the AGM presentation and also the note I had sent to the Mayor. This had the effect of galvanising the LET into action – not least because we were all aware that the Mayor would be meeting Steve Gough shortly to consider the implications of the 2 consultants’ reports. The meeting agreed that the next step forward should be to approach the Council formally with a statement of intent to form a Development Trust that would take forward the future planning and management of the mansion – as a realistic alternative to placing the mansion into private hands via the proposed tendering process outlined by Burlton. Various members of LET were confident that such a route would also be able to secure funds that would not be available to a building administered by a local authority.

A meeting was arranged and, in the meantime, Nicholas Taylor (LET Chair) prepared a document that summarised the feelings jointly of FBPP and LET. There was little time as we discovered that the Mayor’s meeting would take place the following

week. We all met again to review the new document and, with some minor ‘last-minute’ amendments, it was submitted to the Mayor’s meeting – which took place later that day (18<sup>th</sup> November). In summary, the document requested the Mayor as a matter of urgency :

- (i) to make the Mansion weatherproof and to carry credibility with future funders by authorising immediate repairs to the roof, eaves and gutters, as scheduled by Rees Bolter Architects ;  
to arrest deterioration of the Homesteads (the former stables) and to carry credibility with future funders by authorising emergency works of weatherproofing ;

to authorise an urgent review of security arrangements at the Mansion, in order to make it less vulnerable to arson, theft and vandalism ;

- (iv) to authorise an immediate feasibility study, jointly with the Lewisham Environment Trust and the Friends of Beckenham Place Park, into the establishment of a Development Trust to provide permanent management of the Mansion, attract suitable future uses for the building and fund-raise for its rehabilitation ;
- (v) to authorise in particular the submission by officers of an ‘expression of interest’ 22 January 2010, via the Development Trusts Association, to Round Four of the Advancing Assets for Communities programme funded by CLG (following the Quirk Review) ;
- (vi) to make rapid decisions on the rehabilitation, future use and management of the Homesteads, as a Parks depot or to accommodate the various proposals in the Land Use Consultants report.

Copies of the full document are can be accessed at Visitor Centre and on the Friends’ website.

Since the submission of this ‘statement of intent’, Nicholas Taylor and I have had a meeting with Steve Gough and various other Council Managers who are involved with the future of the park and mansion. We have been assured that our submission has been read by the Mayor and that the proposed process of considering the future of the mansion will include our proposals for a Development Trust. This process will start later in the New Year and will initially involve the Council asking for outline submissions. We are assured that our current document already qualifies us for the next stage of the process.

As a group, the Friends remain strongly committed to the retention of the mansion within the public domain and are now actively engaged in finding the best ‘mix’ of uses to achieve this aim. We are extremely grateful to all those offers of help that have been received from park users and others in the past and would encourage all our members and their friends to think positively with us so that we can achieve this goal.

May I wish you all a very happy 2010 and a secure future for our wonderful park and mansion.