

EAST & WEST BANK NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER



Issue 12

Spring 2011

Baps, Haps and Saps: looking after Hackney's flora and fauna

It sounds like a children's game, but instead of being a modern form of hop, skip and jump, it's part of a plan which is designed to maintain and develop biodiversity both on our doorstep and all over Hackney.

Bap stands for biodiversity action plan and is a document which has been developed by the council with a lot of input from local groups, like (and including) ours which are interested in ensuring that biodiversity is at the forefront in any planning or green space development in the borough.

If you're not familiar with the term, biodiversity gives us a measure of sustainable development - growth today that doesn't diminish the quality of life of future generations as so much growth does these days. It encompasses the whole variety of life on earth including all species of plants and animals and the ecosystems of which they are part.

We're fantastically rich in green spaces (and thence, biodiversity) in Hackney - not only the big ones like the parks and reservoirs, but also smaller green areas like our East Bank-West Bank land, Allen's Gardens and many others. So it's crucial that decisions made by developers within or outside the council and which affect our green spaces are ones which are not damaging and are indeed enhancing to nature.

For example, many buildings no longer have nooks and crannies which used to be great nesting places for house martins, so we have to try to ensure that developers build in specific types of brick which encourage their nesting. Such matters are dealt with in the Haps or habitat action plans, which themselves form a large part of the biodiversity plan, and include many recommendations for improving habitats for rare (and less rare but often disappearing species of flora and fauna.

In addition, certain species are considered important enough to be included in the Sap or species action plan. For instance, the black poplar is a tree which will be a flagship species within the Sap. Likewise, in the animal kingdom the hedgehog and the song thrush will be given special attention by appearing in the Sap. There are many others, too many to mention here.

The draft Bap is due to go out to public consultation in the near future, so check the biodiversity section of LBH's website (<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/biodiversity>) to see more of the habitats and species which have special mention.

In the meantime you can look out for some of the many species which have been observed on or over our little site: anything from lesser celandine to butterbur, jay

to red kite, and cherry to field maple.

And do let us know if you see anything you think is unusual. We're hoping to be putting up our owl box soon, so within a year or two it might be a tawny owl you have to report!

Lorraine Tillett



AGM 2011

Our AGM is being held on Monday 4 July from 7pm at Ajax House on East Bank. Everyone is welcome so please come along and find out how we've been looking after the reserve over the last 12 months.

Water, water everywhere: hidden rivers

A financial burden adding to the misery of balancing one's budget is the water bill. Not all that long ago water rates were dismissed as trivial. Unfortunately they have now joined the elevated ranks of other public utilities' financial demands.

Walk westward from Stamford Hill Station along Amhurst Park and you will soon reach the junction with Seven Sisters Rd where remarkably, bridged by the thoroughfare, there is a slow-moving water course. It is the New River, 'new' only that it was so when constructed circa 1605. Remarkable because it flows here at a high geographical elevation, rather than is the norm, through a valley or flat plain.

Fed by wells near Hertford and allowing for a gentle descent to achieve a moderate current, it essentially follows a geographical contour made obvious locally by the steep artificial embankment lying between Finsbury Park and the road junction. A hundred yards or so downstream it feeds the Stoke Newington reservoirs, thus contributing to London's potable water supply system.

Water is pumped from the East Reservoir via a deep tunnel to the Coppermills water treatment centre. Another spur connects the Stoke Newington shaft to the New River Head in Islington, all part of the 80 km London Ring Main which is accessible from the surface via various inspection and pump-out shafts.

Walk across Clapton Common, then down Spring Hill passing Springfield Park on your right (yes there is a spring there). Continue over the River Lee by footbridge. Onwards by Walthamstow marsh and then under the railway bridge (mind your head, there is only about 5ft clearance). Pass the original copper mill on your left and arrive at the Coppermills Water Treatment Centre. This establishment is connected via a deep tunnel to the Stoke Newington shaft. The Coppermills plant is an important constituent of the London Ring Main.

If you draw a straight line on the map between the above mentioned road junction and Stamford Hill station and extend it eastwards, it will cross the

Coppermills centre. Draw another along Fairholt Road, extend this likewise and it too will cross the centre. The two lines embrace the eastern reservoir and as they converge also embrace both West Bank and East Bank, so it is likely that the deep water main spur leading to Coppermills runs under the railway cutting.

A number of books have been published on London's lost or hidden rivers. The Fleet is a well known example, the lesser known Hackney Brook another. They run sub-surface at near-basement level of properties along their routes. It has been suggested that there is a correlation between the numbers of residents suffering rheumatism problems and the proximity of such streams.

The Ring Main tunnels are 100 inches in diameter, concrete lined and typically about 130ft deep so it is unlikely that anyone dwelling in East Bank or West Bank will suffer rheumatism from this cause. But you never know!

Ian Lemco



Trees of the reserve: hybrid black poplar

Of the large trees that line the reserve, a good but decreasing proportion are hybrid black poplars. Poplars belong to the willow family (Salicaceae), and the English black poplar, *Populus nigra*, is Britain's rarest native timber tree.

The reasons for its rarity reflect changes in land use, principally the drainage of flood plains that provided the ideal habitat for these moisture-loving trees. John Constable's famous picture, *The Hay Wain*, depicts black poplars as a backdrop to Willy Lott's cottage in the valley of the river Stour. The cottage can be visited to this day; the poplars unfortunately no longer exist.

Far more frequently encountered is the hybrid black poplar, a cross between the European black poplar and the North American eastern cottonwood, a transatlantic pairing that results in typical hybrid vigour, with the trees growing very fast to a potential height of 40m. The trunk of the tree is very distinctive, having deep fissures and bosses. The leaves are triangular and have the quality of sussurating in the gentlest breeze

so that from a distance the whole tree appears to be shimmering. Poplars are dioecious, males and females are on separate trees. Catkins are produced in May, the female catkins subsequently producing copious quantities of fluff surrounding the seeds. When climatic conditions are right, a veritable snowfall of seeds occurs, with drifts several inches deep piling up, each piece of fluff enclosing a seed. Some people object to this wilful profligacy, and male trees tend therefore to outnumber females.

Naming the particular hybrid that occurs in the reserve is difficult as there are a multiplicity of varieties, however it may very well be *Regenerata*, commonly known as the railway poplar, from the Victorian habit of lining the newly-built railway tracks with this variety. The railway was constructed in 1872; if the trees were planted soon after this, they are now well over 100 years old and possibly coming to the end of their life span.

Even after felling, these venerable trees continue to serve a purpose: left *in situ* they serve, as does all fallen wood, as food and home for

many invertebrate and fungus species. Look out for the inkcap fungus (*Coprinus micaceus*) that appears regularly on the fallen stump in the stretch of reserve opposite the sorting office on East Bank.

The reserve trees are all pollards, the tree having been cut at an early stage in its life, after which it grows new branches. Pollarding serves to stabilise the tree, limit its height and potentially make available a crop of branches for woodcraft. Despite pollarding, our poplars are now being eyed askance, following the abrupt collapse of two trees within the last few years: one onto a car (fortunately empty at the time), the other crashing downhill towards the railway line.

The remaining poplars may not be with us for much longer. We need to make decisions about what should replace them. We could replace them with young poplars to maintain the historic link, or choose altogether different species. Do you have views on the subject? Let us know!

Ruth Lewis

The Green Line: waste and recycling

As part of maintenance of the reserve, we remove items that are dumped in the reserve because they adversely affect the animals, birds, plants, shrubs and trees. These items include old furniture, car parts, and even garden waste which in fact isn't beneficial for the reserve, and instead smothers small plants growing wherever it's dumped.

We ask Hackney Council to remove items that are dumped in the streets adjacent to the reserve because we like to live in a pleasant environment and to discourage further dumping. Many items come from afar but some come from nearby, and it would make our work easier if local residents use one of the many waste disposal services offered by Hackney Council instead. If you have garden

waste or bulky items to be disposed of please utilise the following services:

Garden waste: Hackney collects and recycles garden waste using the brown wheelie bins. If you don't have a brown bin, you can order one on 020 8356 6688. For more information go to: <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/recycling-brown-bin.htm>.

Bulky Rubbish: The Council will, free of charge, remove up to five items per collection and make up to four collections per household each year. They also have a free furniture re-use service. For details go to <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/ew-household-waste-special-collection-for-large-items-528.htm> or ring 020 8356 6688.

Skips: The Council places skips for public use across Hackney: the next one in this area will be at the intersection of East Bank and Linthorpe Road during the third week of July. See <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/skips-for-household-use.htm> for the skip schedule.

Haringey Recycling Centres: Hackney does not have its own recycling centre. Hackney residents can use the Haringey recycling centres at Hornsey and Park View Road. For addresses and the extensive list of items that can be recycled see http://www.haringey.gov.uk/index/environment_and_transport/refuseandrecycling/reuse_recycling.htm or ring 020 8885 7700.

Who are we?

The East and West Bank Nature Reserve Group was set up by local residents in 2002 to help with the management of the reserve, keeping the area tidy and working to increase biodiversity.

We organise monthly activity days when we do everything from planting new trees and flowers to litter and dump clearing, and by doing so, the quality of life will be improved for everyone

living and working in the area.

Everyone is welcome to join and get involved, so please come along and say hello!

How to get involved

If you would like to get involved with the group, either use the contact details below or just turn up at one of our monthly workdays. Everyone is welcome and no

experience is necessary, so come along, even if you can only spare an hour. Everything is provided, including work gloves, litter pickers, refuse bags and other tools, but please

wear sturdy footwear and old clothes you don't mind getting muddy or snagged on branches. Warm and/or waterproof clothing might also be required, depending on the weather.

Activity day schedule

Activity days are held on Sundays:

- 3 July
- 7 August
- 4 September
- 2 October
- 6 November

We meet at 10am at the corner of West Bank and Dunsmure Road, and generally work until lunchtime.

If you can't make that time (or it's just too early for a Sunday!), come along when you can and you'll find us somewhere along East or West Bank.

More information

Contacts:

John Yeudall (Treasurer)
020 8800 8209
eastwestbankreserve@googlemail.com

Waste disposal:

If you want to dispose of bulky items or recycle your waste, use the free service from Hackney Council. Call **020 8356 6688** for more details.

Reporting dumps:

If you want to report dumping or talk to someone about the way your street is being maintained, call Hackney Council on **020 8356 6688** or **020 8985 4681**.