

Animals in Clissold Park

Clissold Park was one of the first municipal parks in London in which bird and animal life was specifically provided. An animal enclosure was established before 1900 and contained donkeys, a wallaby and an aviary housing British birds as well as a herd of deer.

The small collection of animals now kept at Clissold Park consists of an aviary containing exotic birds, enclosures containing chickens, goats and a small herd of fallow deer. The animals have historically been for educational purposes, particularly for children and young people; this is purely visual and no contact between members of the public and animals takes place.



Fallow Deer

Males: Buck Females: Doe Young: Fawn
Lifespan: Up to 16 years, but rarely exceeding 8-10 years

Deer were first introduced to Clissold Park in 1890; a year after the park was opened as a public space. The first deer were Red Deer, given as a gift from Highbury Park. As the herd grew, Red Deer from Clissold were sent to four other London parks (Maryon, Victoria, Golders Hill and Battersea). We currently have a herd of seven Fallow deer at Clissold Park; one buck and six does.

Fallow Deer are one of six species of deer found in Britain. During Medieval times many deer parks were established to keep Fallow Deer and in Regency England it was fashionable to have a herd of elegant Fallow Deer in the landscaped parkland of large country houses. The free-living herds now widespread in England and Wales almost all started from escapes from these parks.

Fallow Deer are a lowland woodland species and in the wild prefer a mixture of woods and open farm land. In parks and enclosed areas they thrive on grassland, provided there are areas where they can retreat for some peace and quiet.

Fallow Deer are predominantly grazing animals, although they will browse on twigs, shoots and leaves from bushes and trees. In managed deer parks like Clissold Park they are fed a special deer feed as well as fresh vegetables like carrots and conserved forage like hay to supplement the grass. We also give them mineral blocks to lick so that they get all the nutrients they need.

Deer antlers are made from solid bone. Only male deer have antlers and these get bigger as the buck gets older (they can grow up to 70cm long!) – you can usually work out how old a buck is from the size of his antlers. Bucks shed their antlers every year between March and May and then grow new ones each year. The buck can do without antlers during this time



Chickens

Male: Cock or Cockerel Female: Hen or Pullet Young: Chick
Average lifespan: 5-10 years, depending on breed

We currently have six Dorking chickens at Clissold Park, one cock and five hens. This is a heritage breed of chicken which may have been present in the kitchen gardens of Clissold House when it was a stately home.

Chickens were first brought to Europe by the Romans who started to breed them for meat and eggs. Hens can lay more than 350 eggs a year; egg laying changes with the seasons – hens lay fewer eggs in winter because there is less sunlight.

Chickens are omnivores, this means they eat meat and vegetables; they also like scratching around for seeds, insects, spiders and worms. Hens need lots of calcium to help make egg shells – we supplement their diet with ground oyster shells which contain lots of calcium carbonate.

Chickens have a red 'comb' on top of their head and 'wattles' that hang down their cheeks, these help to keep the chicken cool.



Birds

We have a small collection of exotic birds in our aviary at Clissold Park. There has been an aviary at Clissold Park since the early 20th century and a new facility was built during the recent restoration project at the park. Historically birds were donated to the aviary at Clissold Park by members of the public, but we no longer accept donations.

Cockatiels

Cockatiels are natives of Australia and were first brought to Britain in the 1840's. They have an average lifespan of eighteen years.

Male cockatiels (cocks) have bright yellow faces and bright orange patches on their cheeks; female cockatiels (hens) have grey or brown faces and duller cheek patches and the underside of their tail is patterned. Young birds look similar to adult hens.

They are cheerful, quiet and gentle and are therefore a favourite for keeping as pets. Cockatiels like to eat seeds and some fruits like apples. They use cuttle fish and wood to wear down their beaks and claws – a bit like a human using a nail file!

Parakeets

“Parakeet” is the general name for lots of different small to medium sized colourful parrots with long tails, we have a number of different parakeets in our aviary; they have been popular pets in the UK since Victorian times. Parakeets are found in the wild in many warm regions including Australia, India and south east Asia. In the wild they usually form large flocks and are often seen as pests to farmers.

Ring necked parakeets – which are green with a red beak and a pink and black ring around its face and neck – are the UK's only naturalised parrot, found mainly in south-east England, particularly Surrey, Kent and Sussex and increasingly in London (including Clissold Park). This wild population is now thriving and is thought to have started from deliberate releases or escapes from collections. There are concerns about how ring necked parakeets will affect our native fauna, and about their possible impact on farmers and fruit growers in the UK.

Zebra Finches

Zebra Finches are native to central Australia and have also been introduced by humans to Puerto Rico, Portugal, Brazil and the USA. The average lifespan of a Zebra Finch is 5 years.

The male (cock) has a bright red beak, orange cheek patches and zebra-like stripes on his breast. The female (Hen) has duller colours and usually no stripes. Zebra Finches are seed eating birds and their beaks are specially adapted for cracking open small seeds; they also like to eat fresh fruit and vegetables.

Zebra Finches use songs and body movements to communicate with each other – each Zebra Finch has a unique song and they can recognise their friends by listening to this.

Budgerigars

Budgies are native to Australia and were brought to England in 1840. Budgies became very popular pets and by the end of the 1850's as many as 50,000 were being brought to England every year. The average lifespan of a Budgie is 10 years.

Budgies are still the most popular pet bird because they come in lots of different colours and are very adaptable and friendly – they are also very good at learning to talk and like to mimic people!

Budgies like to get wet in rain and preen themselves by applying oil from a special gland to each of their feathers – a bit like humans putting conditioner on their hair!

Lovebirds

Lovebirds are a species of small parrot native to Africa and Madagascar. Lovebirds are small and stocky (usually growing up to 16cm tall) with a short blunt tail and a large beak. Male and female lovebirds look alike and are brightly coloured, mostly green with varying colours around their faces and a prominent ring around their eyes. Lovebirds are affectionate, so named because of their strong pair bonding and tendency to spend long periods of time sitting together on perches.

In the wild, Lovebirds live in flocks and eat grasses, seed and fruit and can cause problems for farmers. They are noisy birds, making a variety of shrill calls in the wild in order to keep flocks together.