

## Bushy Park – December 2018 Diary

### Feeding the deer

**Please don't remove conkers!** Whilst the deer browse on trees and grass during the summer, they really do rely on seeds such as acorns, chestnuts and conkers to build up fat reserves for the winter. The available food varies from year to year so to ensure the deer are always in optimum health they are given supplementary feed in the winter as well as hay (harvested from the Brew House fields in the Park) which also ensures they receive all the essential vitamins and minerals. If we experience heavy snows and food is less available, the feed is increased to ensure their health and welfare. Depending on the weather, feeding starts middle of November and goes on until March.

### Woodland Gardens

The volunteers have been clearing brambles and ivy from the ornamental plants on Alder Island and on the stream sides near Canada Glade. This will improve the health of the established plants and make the areas more attractive. A bed in the Pheasantry is having a revamp, the sick plants have been disposed of and any healthy plants are being moved and replanted, new plants will be purchased to fill any gaps that are left.

The Garden staff have nearly finished collecting up the leaves which get composted and returned to the garden as a mulch on the beds.

A shrub worth seeking out this month is *Viburnum x bodnantense* "Dawn" Which is located in the secret glade opposite the outflow of the Waterhouse Pond. It has sweetly fragrant pink flowers and is a particularly fine specimen.

### Birds

We have now reached a fairly quiet time of the year; the last of our regular winter visitors should have reached the United Kingdom's shores and be enjoying the slightly milder conditions here. With the warming effect the Gulf Stream offers, birds such as the Redwing that have travelled from either Iceland or Russia are usually able to find plenty of food. The normal plentiful supply of berries; Hawthorn, Holly and in towns and cities, Cotoneaster are normally eaten first. When this larder is bare, they then hope that the ground is soft enough for them to feed on worms and other invertebrates in the soil or under leaves. The Park normally has a few Redwings feeding in quiet corners and wooded areas, they are quite nervy and not very approachable, taking to the trees if frightened. If we have a sudden cold snap then these birds could be joined by a larger member of the thrush family, the Fieldfare. This is a very attractive bird with its slate blue head and rump, chestnut back, black tail and golden chest with dark streaking. Apart from these overseas visitors there is another member of the thrush family and one that has a small resident population. This is the Mistle Thrush and can you guess where it can be found feeding? That is right, on the Mistletoe berries. It is also the time of year when the Little Egret, a bird whose breeding range has spread up from southern Europe, arrives in the Park. Until the late 1970's it would have caused 100's of twitchers (very enthusiastic bird watchers) to come flocking to see it. We have had a bird return to winter in the Park since 2010; it was accompanied by a second bird in 2013. This bird can sometimes be found feeding on the stretch of the Longford River that exits the park at the western end of Lime Avenue or the channels in the Woodland Garden and recently by the steps in the river by the Brew House. These areas also offer you the chance of seeing the Park's Kingfishers; listen out for their piping call.

Further information can be found on The Royal Parks web site or via email  
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