

Bushy Park – November 2017 Diary

Deer With no predators and approximately 100 births annually, the deer population would increase beyond the Park's carrying capacity without human intervention. To prevent starvation and malnutrition, the deer are selectively culled during September and November. This ensures a healthy herd of 320 with the correct balance of ages and sexes. The high point of the rut will soon be over and the lean bellies and hindquarters of the stags bear witness to their recent exertion. They regain condition by feasting on sweet chestnuts, horse chestnuts and acorns, building up winter fat reserves. Removing chestnuts deprives the deer of essential food. PLEASE LEAVE THE CHESTNUTS FOR THE DEER.

Tree Work Throughout the year members of The Royal Parks arboricultural team monitor the trees in the Park on a cyclical programme of inspections. These inspections identify risks posed by the trees as a consequence of storm damage, decline associated with age, or pests and diseases. Subsequently tree work may be specified which can include a variety of options to mitigate risk such as the reducing of crown size, shortening of individual branches, monolithing of dead trees, or ultimately, felling. Monolithing and felling are options for trees that have died. Standing dead wood monoliths provide high value habitat, as does deadwood around the base of trees. Most wood removed from trees remains in the Park and is treated this way; this enhances habitat. Pollarding of trees such as willows (*Salix* sp.) and poplars (*Populus* sp.) is also undertaken over the winter months as these fast growing trees become very vulnerable to storm damage. Recently some poplars have been pollarded near Millenium Wood. The veteran waterside willows on the banks of Heron Pond and Leg of Mutton Pond will be assessed and may require repollarding this winter. They will have been pollarded many times before, and we tend to re-pollard on a seven year cycle, but this is not a hard and fast rule; an assessment of the extent of the re-growth will determine our actions.

Mushrooms and toadstools In the autumn many types of wild mushrooms and toadstools enrich the Park's grassland and ancient trees. The underground 'mycelium' of these fruiting or spore-bearing bodies is otherwise hidden all year. Removal of the mushrooms and toadstools is illegal as it affects reproduction and removes food for dependant wildlife. Some rare insect species depend entirely on a particular type of mushroom.

Woodland Gardens Autumn has arrived with the leaves turning a range of colours from yellow to red throughout the garden. It is a good time of year to see wild fungi on dead wood and in the lawns. Please do not damage them as they need to set spores for future generations. The Volunteers have started burning *Rhododendron ponticum* prunings that have accumulated in various sites around the garden to prepare for future garden developments. The Garden staff are commencing leaf clearing so that we can produce compost for the garden.

Birds – By November almost all of our summer visitors will have left. The Park's position near the River Thames and the large water bodies in SW London means that there is still the chance of a late House Martin or Swallow passing through. Chiffchaff, another summer visitor and breeder in small numbers in the Park, may also still be found feeding alongside the Longford River, particularly in the Woodland and Water Gardens. These birds however, may have bred in north-eastern Europe and will have chosen not to continue their migration to southern Europe and Northern Africa, but to stay here in the UK hoping the weather remains relatively mild. Being insectivorous, a sudden prolonged cold snap will mean almost certain death to these and any other insectivorous birds, e.g. Goldcrest. A woodland wader and favourite of the shooting fraternity, the Woodcock, will already be arriving by the start of the month; large numbers navigate on clear moonlit nights and can turn up in any wooded area, including back gardens. They will have to be on the lookout for our local Peregrine Falcons; this species has recently been shown to hunt in the dark, not that the skies over the capital are ever really

dark due to the ambient lighting. By examining the remains of birds at their cache sites, Woodcock regularly appear on the Peregrines menu. If we are unlucky enough to have a cold spell, it is worth checking the areas of birch and alder for Siskin, Lesser Redpoll and the even scarcer Common Redpoll. The best time to be out in the Park and looking for birds is when the wind is blowing from the east or south-east.