

Bushy Park – March 2018 Diary

Woodland Gardens

The Narcissi are starting to flower throughout the gardens at the start of the month while the Snowdrops (*Galanthus*) will be at the end of flowering.

Camellias are now flowering with increased vigour as the weather warms up, the collection looks to be an interesting one with a selection of historic varieties that are less common in cultivation, work will commence on labelling specimens as they are identified.

Volunteers have continued with their valuable work clearing areas of ponticum near the bog garden and Waterhouse pond. These cleared areas provide scope for replanting in 2019.

The garden staff will be renovating the shrub beds on the south side of the Pheasantry garden, the size of the beds will be reduced and plants added or moved to provide an aesthetically pleasing display with a longer seasonal interest.

The Friends of Bushy Park and Home Park will be holding their postponed planting day this month and they will be planting up Triss' Island with a selection of Rhododendrons and Azaleas that they purchased for the job.

Bird News

Hopefully we have seen the worst of the winter weather, and the birds will be starting to proclaim their territories ahead of attracting a mate. Luckily the heavy snowfall and bitter winds at the end of February only lasted 5 days. Birds really struggle to find food during these times and species that are normally found on farmland go looking for slightly warmer locations. Bushy Park tends to be a little warmer, not much but enough and as with our last heavy snowfall in 2013 it again attracted a flock of over Lapwing (60). There was also a large numbers of Fieldfare and Redwings. This winter we have had 1 or 2 Dartford Warblers have over-wintered in bracken east of the Diana car park. This insectivorous species is a UK resident, and suffers terribly if there are long cold spells; fingers crossed that our birds managed to find enough to eat.

Skylarks, some of which may have over-wintered, will be staking a claim to a territory. They do this by soaring high in the sky and singing, before parachuting back down to the ground and chasing off any males that may have come too close. In recent summers we have taken steps to control the spread of Bracken in certain areas. Skylarks are a grassland species whose numbers in the United Kingdom have dropped by over 61% in the last 40 years. The Skylark breeding zone in the south-east corner of the Park has signs asking all dog walkers to keep their dogs on a short lead during the breeding season. This is very important and should not be flouted.

As the month nears its end our first summer visitors may be arriving. It is impossible to say though if these early Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps have wintered in the UK or made use of a breeze that has carried them up from Southern Europe. Warm sunny days are ideal conditions for seeing large raptors, particularly Common Buzzard and Red Kite. These birds make use of the warm thermals and can attain great heights, which can cause them to drift away from their breeding areas further west in the Thames Valley.

For more bird news check out www.regentsparkbirds.blogspot.com which also covers Bushy Park - By Tony Duckett

Further information can be found on The Royal Parks web site or via email bushy@royalparks.gsi.gov.uk