

Bushy Park – November 2021 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; 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 AND REMAIN AT LEAST 50 METRES FROM DEER AT ALL TIMES.**

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.

The veteran waterside willows on the banks of Heron Pond and Leg of Mutton Pond will be assessed and some may require re-pollarding 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. Particular attention is directed at our horse chestnut population: they are faced with several pests and diseases to contend with and their decline is most evident in the felling of trees on Chestnut Avenue. More will have to come down as their structural integrity is compromised by these ongoing problems. Over the last twenty years, as a consequence of climate change and plant trade, many new pest and diseases have become endemic to the British Isles. Thankfully this year we have not had to add any new arrivals to those we already have to contend with!

Mushrooms In the autumn many types of wild mushroom enrich the Park's grassland and ancient trees. The underground 'mycelium' of these fruiting or spore-bearing bodies is otherwise hidden all year. Mushrooms play a vital role in the Park's ecosystem; they recycle nutrients, provide a source of food for wildlife and are habitats. Bushy Park has over 280 species including those that are rare and endangered. Removing any plant, animal or fungi from the Royal Parks can be very damaging and may lead to prosecution.

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.

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.