

# Wild Wanstead

With all the open spaces we have in and around Wanstead it is not surprising that there is a diverse array of flora and fauna on our doorsteps. Local naturalist **Paul Ferris**, who runs the website [wansteadwildlife.org.uk](http://wansteadwildlife.org.uk), highlights what to look out for this month.

**W**e are presented nowadays with some wonderful television programmes which show not only the great wildlife sights of - for example - the Serengeti, but also the wildlife of our own country, be it the Orkney Islands or a farm in Devon. But we don't need to travel to East Africa for a world-class wildlife experience, or take a wildlife holiday in or around our own shores, for right here - in Wanstead - whether it is in Epping Forest, one of our local churchyards or our own gardens, wildlife abounds.

Birds are usually the first choice when someone takes an interest in natural history and one of Wanstead's icons is that of the heron - the Grey Heron, to be precise. It is said that herons were introduced into Wanstead Park as an ornamental species by one of the Park's owners, Sir John Heron, when it was the grounds of the great house.



Grey Heron

It is quite common for birdwatchers to begin to notice butterflies when the birds are keeping a bit quiet - this can happen in the hot-heat of the summer, and it is then the butterflies are at their happiest. But amongst the butterflies, day-flying moths are also to be found, and in June the bright red and black Burnet Moths begin to fly. It is possible to go into grassy areas such as Wanstead Flats and find not only freshly hatched flying moths, but those just emerging from the pupa attached to a grass stem, or even the caterpillars as well.

Another favourite follow-on for bird-watchers are dragonflies and damselflies; the lakes in Wanstead Park are good places for these, as are Jubilee Pond on Wanstead Flats and even fortunate garden ponds. A relative newcomer to our local scene is the Small Red-eyed Damselfly, which was first discovered in Britain in 1999. They are quite easy to pick out - they are small damselflies with, as their name suggests, red eyes. However there is also a slightly larger species - the Red-eyed Damselfly - to confuse the issue; this does, though, help to illustrate the diversity of species even within one

group. Incidentally, you can tell a damselfly from a dragonfly because the former rest with their wings folded along their back and the latter hold them out like an aeroplane.

We often think of mammals as having four legs and - apart from domestic pets and foxes - as being hard to see around here, but in fact a warmish June night just after the sun goes down should provide the possibility of seeing bats - particularly the small Pipistrelle or - over open grass areas - the Noctule.

Looking towards the ground, it may be a surprise to learn that over 700 species of flowering plants have been recorded within Southern Epping Forest (which includes Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park, Bush Wood and nearby Leyton Flats and Gilbert's Slade). Some of them are abundant - but some very rare. One to look out for in June is Grass Vetchling. This can actually be quite plentiful in some areas - the top of the Glade in Wanstead Park, in parts of Wanstead Flats and Leyton Flats - but it can be difficult to spot. It isn't a grass, but a member of the



Banded Snail



Red-eared Terrapins



Burnet Moth



Grass Vetchling



pea family and its name comes from the fact that when it's not flowering, it looks just like the stems of grass in which it grows. When in flower the lovely crimson petals give it away.

All the wildlife we have looked at so far are native species. Many of our lakes and ponds, however, are now home to a voracious predator from North America - the Red-eared Terrapin. These are relics of perhaps a 'Ninja Turtle' craze of some years ago - bought as cute pets, they grow large and smelly and are typically released into a pond to wreak havoc on local wildlife. They'll eat just about anything, even - it is said - ducklings, if they get the chance.

Back to natives, and just to illustrate the diversity, what about snails? The common garden snail is pretty well known, but in gardens, churchyards, allotments and many of our open spaces, Banded Snails may be found. There are usually two species that may be present: the Brown-lipped and the

White-lipped, but the colour variations in each are enormous, from plain to fully-striped. It is the colour of the lip of the shell around the opening that gives them their name.

All the species highlighted here may be found in and around the Wanstead area in June, none of them are rare - but some of them may need searching out.

When I began to collect records of the wildlife in Wanstead, I naively thought it would take perhaps a few years to complete. I haven't finished yet, and probably never will. Once you begin to look at the broader spectrum of our wildlife, you begin to realise that there is enough variety even in our own gardens to keep us occupied, let alone in all of the habitats that we have so close to Wanstead.

**For more information on Wanstead's wildlife, visit [www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk](http://www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk)**