

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our 60th Quarterly Newsletter, spanning 15 years since we started in 2003. This quarter marks a further small step in our development; we have said farewell to two of our founding Trustees and continue to recruit for more Trustees, volunteers and members. We are also continuing to develop our range of activities and have recently received funding for a two year community learning project.

Our programme of activities continues to expand and we look forward to seeing many of you in the coming months at one of our volunteer, training or engagement events.

Keith Martin and Chris Hern MBE

Keith and Chris are two of our founding Trustees and have been a great source of support and wisdom over the years. Both Trustees stepped down at the 2018 AGM after 15 years of service. We are hoping they will continue to work closely with FORCE – and you will notice from our Events list that Keith is continuing to run his very popular dawn chorus walks with us.

Community Learning Programme

For the last few years we have been working with The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) to deliver community learning events in and around Crane Park. Around eight practical sessions per year have been delivered, teaching age old land management practices for hedges, woodland, rivers and meadows. We are very grateful to Thames Water, who funded this programme over the last 2 years, and are delighted to announce that, with funding from LB Richmond Civic Pride fund and the Heathrow Communities Fund, we can expand this programme over the next two years.

We will continue to deliver land management work, teaching traditional skills such as hedge laying and scything, as well as working with shire horses to enhance habitats in and around Crane Park for wildlife and people. The new funding will also give us the opportunity to engage more families and schools, providing specially designed conservation projects and wildlife surveys, as well as encouraging them to explore the Crane Valley.

Some of these events are already listed in our programme below, and more will be added over the next few months, so keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for more details. If you would like to help out with this or any of our other activities then please get in touch.

FORCE Volunteer Events

Our regular monthly volunteer programme is in full swing with events every second Sunday of the month. The numbers attending continue to grow and, for the last few months, have been at or above 30 volunteers (come rain or shine!)



Working with D of E volunteers to create a new wildflower meadow in the Butts Farm area of Crane Park – Feb 2019

This Newsletter is funded for FORCE by: -



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As a result we have been able to deliver an increasing amount of work on each day – removing large amounts of litter; creating new and improving existing wildlife habitats; and enhancing the community value of open spaces through new and improved pathways etc. We have been pleased to welcome young people working for the Duke of Edinburgh Award joining us for the day. We welcome all ages to our events but under 18's must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

Bench Maintenance

In 2003 we installed the fox bench in Mereway Nature Park. Over the next 15 years we have installed a further fifteen benches throughout the lower Crane valley, all created by Paul Sivell at www.thecarvedtree.com Last summer we organised a bench maintenance programme to protect and maintain the benches – some of which had started to show signs of wear and tear.

The first phase of this programme is now complete and all the benches have received work – from a simple coat of decking oil to more extensive repair and paint jobs. We now plan to put all the benches into a rolling programme of maintenance. We also hope to continue installing at least one new bench every year – with the next one due to go on the Mogden stretch of the Duke's River this summer.



The fox bench at Mereway – following renovation

Walks and Talks

Our programme of walks to and talks continues with a minimum of one walk a month. Last year we trialed some events suitable for children and plan to include several in this year's calendar.

We are also linking our walks to national awareness events such as the Big Butterfly Count and the London Rivers Week. We are always keen to hear about potential new walk and walk leaders so please send us your ideas.

Water Voles and Mink

Water voles have been in decline nationally for many years as a result of reduced river bank habitat and predation by mink – as a result they are a UK BAP Priority Species for protection. Water voles are also an iconic species for the River Crane, and we have been working with partners for many years to increase their habitat and range beyond a core population on Crane Park Island.

Until recently this work has been very successful, and water voles have migrated upstream and downstream of the island along the River Crane, as well as becoming more established along the Lower Duke's River. However, a survey last summer discovered that water voles had recently disappeared from the Duke's River by the RFU stadium. Further investigations indicated they had been lost from other sites in the lower Crane valley – although the core population on Crane Park Island is understood to have survived to date.

At the same time we started to receive reports of mink being sighted in and around the river in Crane Park and Kneller Gardens. Mink are notorious for decimating water vole populations and are known to be in the west London area, with breeding populations to the west and south in the Hogsmill and Colne catchments.

Together with the Richmond Council Parks team we are developing a strategy for monitoring mink locally, using mink rafts in the river and local volunteers. We are also working with partners across London and the south east to understand more about the distribution of mink and the best ways of dealing with them. In the meantime please let us know if you see any mink or water voles locally.

Regards,

Rob Gray,
Chair of FORCE



Volunteer Days and Activities Programme 2019

Date	Event and Location	Activities
9 March 11:00 – 12:30	Mindfulness Walk. Shot Tower - Crane Park	A walk along the River Crane - including periods of mindful movement, meditation, silence and reflection
10 th March	Crane Park – Mill Road*	FORCE volunteer day
14 th April	Donkey Woods and Brazil Mill*	FORCE volunteer day
20 April 10:30 – 12:00	Spring walk along the rivers from Kneller Gardens to Isleworth	A walk on the River Crane and Duke's River, followed by an opportunity for a pub lunch!
5 May 04:30am – 06:00am	Celebration of the Dawn Chorus. Shot Tower - Crane Park	Celebrate International Dawn Chorus Day with an early morning bird walk led by an expert
12 th May	Duke's River – RFU reach*	FORCE volunteer day
31 st May 10:30 15:00	Donkey Wood * Brazil Mill Wood	Volunteer Day with Hounslow Countryside Rangers
5 th June	Community Learning River management	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
6 th June	Community Learning River management	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
9 th June	Crane Park – Hospital Bridge Rd*	FORCE volunteer day
9 th June 10:30 15:00	Crane Park	Volunteer Day with Hounslow Countryside Rangers
26 th June	Community Learning River management	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
27 th June	Community Learning River management	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
29 June 10:00 – 13:00	Three Rivers Walk 1: Kneller Gardens via Twickenham Rough to Isleworth	A walk taking in the three rivers ... Crane, Duke's and Thames; noting historical sites, ecology and wildlife
30 th June 10:30 – 15:00	Donkey Wood & Brazil Mill Wood	Volunteer Day with Hounslow Countryside Rangers
21 st July 10:30 – 15:00	Crane Park	Volunteer Day with Hounslow Countryside Rangers
24 July 10:30 – 12:00	Butterfly Walk Mereway Nature Reserve	A butterfly walk for families, to co-ordinate with the "Big Butterfly Count"
24 th July	Community Learning TBC	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
25 th June	Community Learning TBC	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
11 th August From 12:00	Crane Park	Community Fun Day
14 th August	Community Learning TBC	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
15 th August	Community Learning TBC	See www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond for details
17 August 11:00 -12:00	Photography for Children Kneller Gardens	A childrens' activity taking photographs of local plants and wildlife
28 August 7:50pm to 9:30pm	Bat Walk Kneller Gardens	An evening bat walk led by an expert

*Preliminary location for FORCE Volunteer Day. Check the web-site nearer the time for confirmation

Walk and talk events are free but registration is essential. Go the events page on the FORCE website <https://www.force.org.uk/calendar/> and follow the links. All other events are free, and no registration is necessary. More information is available through the FORCE and TCV web-sites.

There are three Green Gyms operating along the River Crane. All are free with no booking required. Everyone can join in this gentle exercise in a social environment whilst working together to improve local riverside spaces. You can turn up on the day (10.45am to 2pm) or contact TCV Green Gym for more information.

Pevensey Road Green Gym Rangers meet every Monday at Pevensey Road

Hounslow Heath Green Gym Rangers meet every Tuesday at the Hounslow Heath visitor centre

Richmond Green Gym meets every Wednesday at Kneller Gardens - – call Pablo on 07717 494476

All green gyms are designed to provide light exercise and social engagement whilst improving local open spaces. The sessions normally run from 10.45am to 2.30pm and everyone is welcome to join them.

For more information: <https://www.tcv.org.uk/london/richmond>

For more information about the volunteer sessions with Hounslow Countryside Rangers please contact countryside@hounslow.gov.uk