

Group Newsletter No 68 March 2026

RSPB NE London Local Group



LOCAL GROUP

Dear All,

Welcome to the March 2026 newsletter

Our next meeting is 8pm 14 April 2026

The planned speaker has, unfortunately, had to pull out of the meeting. Instead we will welcome

Iain Boulton presenting

The Effect of Global Warming on the UK and Invasive Species and New Arrivals

There's a raging discussion at the moment on the impacts of invasive species, or new arrivals, including birds as the weather gets warmer and more tropical in the UK.

This is sure to be an interesting and stimulating evening

12th May 2026

Ivan Aguilera

A Journey Through the Birds of Columbia

Birding guide Ivan Aguilera will take you on a magical journey through one of the most biodiverse countries on Earth - Colombia, home to more bird species than anywhere else in the world. From the misty cloud forests of the Andes to the valleys of the Magdalena and Cauca, from the vibrant Chocó rainforests to the wide-open Llanos, each region reveals its own palette of colours, songs, and stories

Best wishes

Your Friends on the Committee

Website - group.rspb.org.uk/nelondon

Contact us by email - nelondonRSPB@yahoo.co.uk

Facebook www.facebook.com/nelondon

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

Guided Bird Watching Walks

April – Sunday 19th

9am start

Thorndon Country Park

A new site to visit for us that offers up a mixture of habitats. This park attracts many resident woodland birds and we'll be listening out for our returning summer migrants

May – Saturday 2nd

4.30am start

Dawn Chorus Walk around Copped Hall Gardens

After last year's lovely visit, we return to these beautiful grounds which we are sure will again prove to be a magical morning. The dawn chorus is at its best at this time of year; well worth getting up this early!

Note the May Dawn Chorus Walk is very popular and booking will open 4 weeks before the event - 4th April

To join the walks, please leave a message on our email :

nelondonrspb@yahoo.co.uk

or alternatively, ring Richard on 07582 996315 and he will get back to you to confirm joining arrangements.

In the Garden

One Plant and a Fungi

As mild summer sun begins to replace the cloudy rainy days of this winter, I begin to venture out of the house a little more into the garden, to see what has survived the winter and what if anything has started to grow.

I head down to bottom of the vegetable patch to the nettle area on the right-hand side. We have a patch of stinging nettles which are allowed to exist provided they stay in the same place. Unfortunately, they send out runners and they pop up in a range of different places. This means I have to dig up the runners and the new plants which are growing from them. I do sometimes soak the nettle leaves and use the liquid as a feed for the vegetables. I could also try nettle soup, but haven't managed that yet!

However growing next to the nettles was this plant. Initially I thought it looked like Comfrey, but on closer inspection I decided it was slightly different. A photo, and running an AI programme, produced the answer Green Alkanet. Further research produced the following information. Green Alkanet was introduced into the UK from continental Europe as a garden plant by the seventeenth century. The 'Green' refers to the evergreen leaves of the plant and 'Alkanet' indicates it is a plant traditionally used to make dyes. Of more importance it is described as being important for insects. Its nectar-rich flowers are attractive to pollinators, including bees, hoverflies and butterflies, and its leaves are food for the larvae of the exotic-looking scarlet tiger moth. They also form dense ground cover, providing habitat and shelter for various creatures including ground-active invertebrates. On that basis I think it can stay.



Moving on to the front garden on the drive way I came across this fungi. I don't know much about fungi and I somehow assumed that they were mainly seen in the Autumn. Growing amongst the paving stones of the front garden was this. The AI told me it was a cup fungus, most likely from the genus *Peziza*. Apparently, there are about 100 varieties and if you want a definitive identification of the actual type, you need to get a microscope out, as there are a lot of differences between the varieties which cannot be seen with the naked eye.

At this point I decided to leave it alone, and just wondered how it got there.



February Walk Report

Belhus Woods Walk

Despite the rain and the low temperatures we still had a good turnout for this walk, we started by watching the Blue Tits and Great Tits coming and going at the feeders next to the visitor centre. They were quite oblivious of us standing only a few feet away!

A Dunnock hopped about unobtrusively underneath the feeders and several Redwing flew overhead; a Great Spotted Woodpecker was also briefly seen nearby.

As we then made our way along the woodland track, a pair of Stock Dove were seen flying through the trees and a Robin perched up in a holly bush had started to sing a welcome sound on this cold and wet morning!

We stopped at the edge of the wooded area to look and listen for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. We had great success at this spot last year, but alas we found no sign of them.



We did, however, see a flock of 30 Siskin swirling around and eventually they perched up 'twittering' away with some birds preening. It was especially nice to see the male's colourful green and black plumage through the scope!

Various waterfowl species were on the small lake; a male Mute Swan swam over to us and clambered onto the bank, but was soon disappointed when no bread was on offer!

Other waterbirds present included pairs of Tufted Duck and Mallard with Coot and Moorhen grazing on the nearby bank, a Heron stood motionless and a Little Egret was spotted skulking through some overhanging vegetation.

We moved on into another part of the woodland. A Song Thrush sang out of sight and a family of Long-Tailed Tit moved through the trees feeding and calling to one another, while some noisy Jays voiced their 'harsh' call alerting all the denizens of the wood to their presence.

Back at the visitor centre, we grabbed a welcome hot drink and a snack whilst having nice views of a Redwing feeding on some ivy berries and a Collared Dove picking off the seeds underneath the feeders.



To finish off we had a quick look at the area on the other side of the car park. A decent flock of Chaffinch were moving around and a Green Woodpecker flew up from the ground while a Wren skulked in the brambles. On the larger lake we saw pairs of Wigeon and Gadwall and some noisy Canada Geese were squabbling with each other nearby. By now the weather was certainly not getting any better so we called it a day, always good to get out though!

Total different bird species seen : 35

Words Walk Leader - Richard Nelson , Pictures Paul Townsend

Get Ready for 'No Mow May'

No Mow May is a simple but powerful way to support birds and wildlife by pausing our lawn mowing during May. This annual campaign was started by the conservation charity 'Plantlife' and is supported by the RSPB.

One of the most immediate benefits of No Mow May is the boost it provides to insect populations. When lawns are left uncut, wildflowers such as dandelions, clover, and daisies are able to bloom. These plants produce nectar and pollen that are essential food sources for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. As insects form the foundation of many food chains, so an increase in their numbers directly benefits birds and small mammals that rely on them for food.

In spring a lawn rich in insects becomes a valuable feeding ground for birds with young. Species such as robins, blackbirds, and sparrows can often be seen foraging in longer grass, taking advantage of the increased insect activity. Also, taller grass and denser vegetation provide shelter and safer nesting opportunities, protecting birds from predators and human disturbance. Small mammals like hedgehogs and field mice benefit from the extra cover too. Longer grass offers protection as they move around, reducing their exposure to predators. It also creates a more stable microclimate, retaining moisture and supporting a wider variety of plant and insect life. This, in turn, enhances biodiversity within even the smallest urban or suburban gardens.

How to 'No Mow' Effectively

You don't have to leave the whole lawn wild. Mow paths, seating areas, or a border strip around the edge of long grass patches. This keeps the garden accessible. Over the longer term, if you have the space, you could try cutting the grass different lengths – some areas left unmown all year, some cut 2-3 times a year, and some mown monthly. This creates a mosaic of habitats for different species.

You might find that after May, keeping a 'low-mow' routine (mowing once every 4 weeks) during the summer is better for biodiversity than going back to weekly mowing.

Words Jane Reiners

Picture Paul Townsend

