



*A not-for-profit community group helping local wildlife to survive and thrive*

## **Newsletter December 2023**

### *What a Wild Year!*

*Read on to discover what we've been up to in the past 12 months.*

#### **TALKS**

Our popular public talks this year covered a wide range of topics by expert speakers with a passion for wildlife.

##### **BEAVERS ARE BACK**

Sean McCormack from the Ealing Wildlife Group and Elliot Newton from Citizen Zoo gave us the lowdown on these industrious creatures and their incredible role in increasing local biodiversity and helping flood prevention. Did you know that beavers have recently been introduced in Paradise Fields, Ealing?

##### **BUTTERFLIES GALORE**

Ruth Brooks from Kew Gardens shared her enthusiasm for butterflies and explained how we can help attract more of them to our gardens and green spaces.



*Photo credit: Mukti Jain Campion*

#### **HOW TO TAKE GREAT WILDLIFE PHOTOS**

Andy Sands, owner of Chiswick Cameras, shared tips from his own long experience as an award-winning photographer and showed us his amazing macroscopic photos of insects and fungi, many of which are invisible to the naked eye. We hope to have Andy back to speak again next year.

#### **THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WASPS**

Iona Cunningham-Eurich from the Natural History Museum gave a fascinating insight into wasps. Who knew that Britain is home to thousands of different species – and that not all of them are pesky?!

**We are very grateful to have the continued support of St Michael's Church in Elmwood Rd as a venue for our talks and this year we were thrilled to also be able to hold an event in central Chiswick, thanks to Christ Church on Turnham Green.**

**We welcome your suggestions for future talk topics.**

## WALKS

In the summer, Catherine Day led a Swift Walk across Bedford Park to see if these wonderful birds were still visiting their old haunts. We did indeed see quite a few before repairing to the pub. Catherine founded the original Chiswick Swift Group before handing it over to WildChiswick earlier this year.

The sandy paths around Chiswick House are home to some intriguing digger wasp activity as our local bug enthusiast Mick Massie demonstrated on a group walk on a sunny September day.



*Photo credit: Mukti Jain Campion*



*Photo credit: Jo Gilbert*

And we returned to Chiswick House later in the autumn with Philip Briggs from the London Bat Group for another delightful dusk walk. Armed with sonic bat detectors, we were lucky enough to encounter three types of Soprano bats and watch the Daubentons elegantly skimming the surface of the lake.

## HEDGEHOG HIGHWAYS

Did you know that a hedgehog can travel over a mile a night to find food? But fences and walls create barriers which make it difficult for them to roam freely. Once a common sight, hedgehogs are now in serious decline.

So this year we ran another campaign to create more hedgehog highways across Chiswick. Volunteers from Good Gym helped us distribute 500 leaflets across Grove Park which led to invitations to drill 16 fence holes, with more pending.



*Photo credit: Jo Gilbert*

We have found that the best way to create hedgehog highways is when a “Street Champion” speaks to their neighbours so we can drill fence holes in as many adjoining gardens as possible. Can YOU be a Hedgehog Street Champion? Get in touch for more info.

## SWIFT ACTION

After receiving a grant from Hounslow Council we were all set to install 12 swift boxes across 6 sites. But thanks to the sterling work of the Chiswick Repair Café who volunteered to build us more boxes, we were able to exceed our goal and installed 22 boxes across 11 sites! Some were private homes, others were public buildings such as Grove Park School, Orchard School and St Michaels Church, Elmwood.



*Photo credit: Jo Gilbert*

We distributed 600 leaflets asking people to invite us to install more or join in monitoring swift numbers. So far we have received tip-offs from 12 Swift Spotters. This information will help us decide where to put up more swift boxes next year.

Would you like to be a Swift Spotter or help to install the boxes? Get in touch!

## WILDLIFE ALLOTMENT

We started renovating the neglected wildlife plot at the Staveley Road allotments last autumn. This year saw lots of volunteers transforming the area. The old pond which had disappeared under vegetation was cleared, re-lined and re-filled. Almost immediately the newts returned and a huge array of damsel and dragonflies visited during the summer.



*Photo credit: Mukti Jain Campion*

Chiswick Horticultural and Allotment Society donated plants for the pond which have been growing well. A further grant from Hounslow Council enabled us to put in 130 plug plants around the pond which should start giving a lovely display and haven for more wildlife from next Spring.

We had help from Hounslow Good Gym to dig a path and will soon have students from Chiswick School to help us build a bug hotel.

It has been very rewarding to see the new wildlife area take shape. Thank you to all the great volunteers who have made it happen. We will need to continue the good work here so do add your name to the volunteer pool if you have a few hours a month to spare.

## PHOTO COMPETITION

It was a simple challenge: Go out and really observe the wildlife around you, take a snap and then submit online along with a paragraph about why you were drawn to taking that image. We were thrilled that our first ever photo competition received 167 fabulous entries from Chiswick residents of all ages! A huge thanks to Chiswick Flower Market for their sponsorship.

The winners were announced at a ceremony in early November and their photos and those of the runners up have since been exhibited in various venues around Chiswick. You can also see the photos online at [www.snapwildchiswick.com](http://www.snapwildchiswick.com)



*Photo Credit: Natasha Gavin*

## OUT AND ABOUT

We want more people around Chiswick to join us and help wildlife to survive and thrive. So we frequently set up our stall at the monthly Chiswick Flower Market and other public gatherings such as the Hounslow Greener Living event at Strand on the Green.

Founder Jo Gilbert regularly goes into local schools and community groups to talk about local wildlife and the work of WildChiswick.

WildChiswick volunteers have also contributed to the work of other like-minded groups such as those who rescue newts and toads from the drains at Chiswick Business Park.



Toad in a hole! *Photo credit: Clare Arnold*

## WILDCHISWICK WINS A COMMUNITY AWARD

Here's founder Jo Gilbert collecting a Chiswick Calendar Community Award from broadcaster Jeremy Vine and Bridget Osborne of the Chiswick Calendar.



*Photo credit: Anna Kunst*

## VOLUNTEER, COLLABORATE, CONNECT, DONATE

**We'd love to hear from YOU!**

Join us for more wildlife action in 2024. Checkout our new website (thanks Ian Longshaw) [www.wildchiswick.com](http://www.wildchiswick.com). Follow us on social media or email us at [hello@wildchiswick.com](mailto:hello@wildchiswick.com)