

# Prime Meridian

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2<sup>nd</sup> edition

Above: Looking across Sydenham Hill Wood, in the southern suburbs, towards central London on September 9, 2012.

Focusing in on a habitat about 5.5 km W of the Meridian.

A major South London nature reserve celebrates three decades.

A report from Daniel Greenwood (Conservation Project Officer, Sydenham Hill Wood, LWT).

On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2012, the London Wildlife Trust celebrated 30 years of managing Sydenham Hill Wood as a nature reserve.

The day was a great success with the Wood's team of devoted volunteers raising money through home-made cakes and a tombola, as well as the welcome donations from visitors to the Wood. The day included three walks and one for kids to celebrate and teach the public more about the wild and cultural history of Sydenham Hill Wood. All the money earned on the day will be spent on the management of the Wood for the benefit of wildlife.

Below left: Construction of an invertebrate habitat. Below right: Victorian garden folly.





Sydenham Hill Wood is one of the last remaining remnants of the Great North Wood, a once vast working woodland that stretched from Deptford to Penge and is believed to have origins in the wild wood that colonised after the last ice age some 10,000 years ago. The surrounding woods are mentioned in the Domesday book of 1086. The aim of London Wildlife Trust's work at the Wood is to maintain the amazing diversity of plant and animal life which indicate an ancient and largely undisturbed environment.

The character of Sydenham Hill Wood is all the more enchanting for its cultural history, and how many of the species have been able to survive the damage done to the landscape through the development of large Victorian villas on the hill and the construction of a train line - the Crystal Palace high level railway - and Crescent Wood tunnel.



Species like wood anemone, wild strawberry, English bluebell and wood sorrel have managed to cling-on despite the upheaval, with wood anemone a notoriously slow grower, taking 100 years to spread 2 metres across the ground. The Wood is currently supported by a Project Officer funded by Southwark council, leading a band of volunteers on regular weekly workdays. The volunteers keep the site in good condition, picking litter, maintaining paths, building dead-hedges and path-edging to protect the young plants and trees from trampling and soil erosion. In 2011, with the aid of SITA Trust funding, London Wildlife Trust worked with the Dulwich Wood landowner, the Dulwich Estate, to dredge the Ambrook (below left) and Dewy Pond (below right), beginning a 3-year long process of restoration. The Dewy Pond is now home to southern hawker dragonflies, and it has been planted with water mint, purple loosestrife and water avens to increase its biodiversity.





Above: Visitors to Sydenham Hill Wood gather around information tables manned by volunteers.

### **Status of the Peacock butterfly.**

Martin Heath (Editor): I spotted this colourful butterfly, the Peacock (*Aglais io*), whilst strolling along the margin of a field at West Kingsdown in Kent on August 14, 2012 (right), and it alighted nearby. Three quarters of the UK's butterflies have declined, but according to the key study "*The State of the UK's Butterflies 2011*," published by the organisation *Butterfly Conservation*, some species have thrived: "*the Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood and Ringlet have continued to spread rapidly northwards in mainland Britain . . . There is convincing scientific evidence, that the increases in distribution and population levels of these species have been caused by climate change*" and "*The Peacock has undergone a major recent expansion of its range in northern Scotland.*" Alone of these four butterflies, the Peacock has declined in numbers (by 24%), whilst its range has expanded (by 17%). Note that any benign early trends do not necessarily detract from potential long-term harmful global consequences of climate change.



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Images: M. J. Heath.

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