



HACKNEY MARSHES USER GROUP: ANNUAL REPORT September 2008 – August 2009

1. Tree Nursery and Edible Forest Garden

The Tree Nursery is the centre of activities for HMUG. The nursery is open twice weekly, 9am – 11am on Friday mornings, from noon – 3pm on Tuesday afternoons and on the first Saturday of every month from noon until 3pm. This year we have held 109 sessions, averaging 10 volunteers per session. Sessions involve a range of activities and include the continued extension of planting and maintenance of the Edible Forest Garden, watering, and the re-potting and general care of young trees and shrubs. The tree nursery offers a quiet and safe place for children and volunteers to work. Equipment is stored in two lock ups. Polytunnels provide shelter to work, and a space for meetings, to display materials and to grow food.

A general meeting for all volunteers is held following each Friday session at 11am. At these meetings the day's work is recorded, future activities planned, relevant issues discussed and information shared. Work often continues after this meeting well into the afternoon, especially when the weather is good.

A summary of our work is presented below:

- Planting and caring for trees - More fruit and nut trees have been planted, mulched and watered in the Tree Nursery and Forest Garden. The water-holding tanks and guttering on the polytunnels has enabled us to harvest rainwater more efficiently.
- Tree Holding Bed – The majority of the trees in the holding bed have now been planted out on Hackney Marshes. At least 100 trees were adopted by Greenpeace for their set at Glastonbury festival and they have since been planted out on Michael Eavis's farm there in return for a donation. We still offer many native and exotic trees and shrubs to local community groups and individuals in return for a donation. At least another 25 trees were planted in Abney Park Cemetery.
- Growing seeds and young trees - Young trees are being raised in pots for planting out, either on the Marshes or in other open spaces in the borough.
- Ponds and bog garden – the butyl pond has lost a lot of water and may well have been punctured; we hope to be working on that this winter. Both the ponds support damselflies and dragonflies and are occasionally visited by mallards.
- We have maintained the 3 outdoor raised beds outdoors for annual crops. Vegetables grown and harvested included peas, lettuce, beetroot, beans, kale and pumpkins in addition to other annual crops.
- The three raised beds in one of the polytunnels continue to provide us with a range of familiar produce, including lettuces, onions, radishes, tomatoes and basil.
- A variety of edible climbers have been planted along the fence between the Tree Nursery and the council depot including grape vines, hops and Kiwis. This will provide us with an edible green fence!
- We had our first crop of apricots that proved to be very popular with both people and birds.
- Our first crop of edible mushrooms appeared at the bottom of the fruit trees where we had inoculated fresh woodchips with spores that we had bought.
- Sam Parry is in a new post as Parks Development Manager. He is our primary liaison person with the council and has been very active in responding to our requests/questions etc..

- John Wade has been appointed Head of Green Spaces in Hackney, and HMUG have met with him on a number of occasions.
- We have hosted many national and international permaculture visitors who have heard about the forest garden through the website.

2. Wick Woodland

- We have continued to work in Wick Woodland alongside the Tree Musketeers. Areas of willow and hazel were coppiced over a number of weekends (7th Dec., 3rd and 4th Jan., 7th and 8th Feb.) and the materials used for structures in the tree nursery.
- More wildflower bulbs planted in the woodland include wood anemone, wild garlic/ramsons as well as English bluebells and lesser celandine.
- An invertebrate walk and survey in the woodland took place on 8th August, led by Neil Anderson, the ** (need to check which) recorder for the London Natural History Society
- Three new Woodland signs were designed and installed in the woodland with help from Hackney Council.
- A woodland management plan has now been produced and this will guide work in the woodland. It will also be a changing document responding to the maturing woodland ecology and its use.
- Members of the Ecology and Conservation Society from Birkbeck College joined HMUG members to explore and record the botany of the woodland on May 30th.
- Much of the activities in the woodland have been funded by the Forestry Commissions' London Woodlands Grant Scheme.
- A member of the Forestry Commission team visited the woodland and was very impressed with the site.

3. Activities on Hackney Marshes

Regular walks with different wildlife 'themes' take place throughout the year on the Marshes and in Wick Woodland, including plant identification, dawn chorus and birdwatching walks and evening bat walks.

- On June 12th Jim Seymour from the Environment Agency did a presentation about the various factors impacting on the quality of the River Lea. He also informed us about his role and the work the EA is doing to improve conditions. This was followed by a walk, led by Nick Atkins, to look at the river and further discussions. Nick has a keen interest in the river and its wildlife. He has been monitoring the river and provides us with regular updates.
- A second planting date on East Marsh is scheduled for later in November 2009.
- A Dawn Chorus Bird Walk was held on the marshes on May 3rd
- Wild food and drink – walk and preparation on 25th May
- Bat walk – August 7th
- Further tree planting to thicken up the woodland areas around Main Marsh cannot proceed until the marking up of the re-located football pitches from East Marsh has taken place.
- East Marsh has been requisitioned for the creation of parking facilities for the Olympics. On Feb 22nd, we had one big planting session along the northern perimeter of East Marsh to help ensure that the rooting areas of the existing mature trees are protected from encroachment.
- A second planting date on East Marsh is scheduled for later in November 2009.
- HMUG members were involved in meetings and correspondence with the Council about the proposed sports hub to be located on south marsh. In summary, we have been opposing the location of the new building, which instead of occupying the footprint of the existing changing rooms, is to be built on existing grassland. We also discovered when looking at the plans that the East London Community Recycling Project community composting area was to be subsumed by a car park. We subsequently discovered that ELCRP had not even been consulted. We appealed to the Planning Inspector about the location of the hub, but were unsuccessful and can only hope that we can have a positive influence on the development.

- Objections were also made to the plans for the Olympics Media Centre on environmental grounds.

NOTE: Records from all HMUG walks and surveys are posted on Surveys page of the website as are any consultation documents and objections to proposed developments. (www.hackneyenvironment.org.uk/HM).

4. Education

During the year the TN&EFG has run a varied programme of activities. These included the following skill-share sessions, which were funded by the London Woodland Grant Scheme and Awards for All.

- Starting out with Bees 27th and 28th March
- Grafting apple trees 20th and 21st March
- Introduction to Forest Gardening on 25th April
- Installing a small, 12 volt, off grid solar system on the portakabin on 2nd May
- Introduction to Flower Essences on 24th May
- Art in Nature – sculptures with children on 28th May
- Building Hazel Screens and Supports around the new portakabin on 6th June
- Wildflower I.D. on 13th June
- During May and June the Tree Nursery hosted a practical introduction to Herbal Medicine course. This was run by Melissa Ronaldson and WEA and this proved to be so popular that we hope to run it again next spring.

5. Other Activities

- Bees – after two Starting out with Bees skill-shares we now have our first bee hive. Many thanks go to Ian Bailey from Hackney City Farm, not only for the recently caught swarm that he kindly gave to us but also for the ongoing mentoring he is kindly offering to us as we learn more about these fascinating new additions.
- Members of HMUG have attended numerous public consultations regarding the Olympics development and on a number of occasions met with representatives of the London Development Agency.
- Members have also been consulted and attended meetings concerning the development of the new sports hub that is to be built on the Main Marsh. Our comments on this proposal and others can be seen on the HMUG website.
- Annie Chipchase and Russell Miller are both on the Management Committee of the Hackney Parks Forum, which represents all the User Groups in the borough, and regularly attend these meetings.
- We held our now annual winter solstice celebration drinks and walk on 19th December.

6. Other Developments during the year

- The Tree Nursery and Edible Forest Garden was again successful in winning a Green Pennant, an award for community green spaces run by volunteers and we were also entered into Hackney in Bloom competition.
- We now have a portakabin that was kindly donated by the council. This is being used as an office space and allows an increased presence on site as it enables all weather working, as well as providing a home for the administration work and our book library. We have since had mains electricity hooked up to the office thanks to the council, as well as an alternative 12 volt system powered by solar panels funded by Awards for All.
- Our two shipping containers of tools and equipment have now been moved into the more secure fenced area of the Tree Nursery.
- Compost toilet – we now have a shed for the compost toilet built last year and this means that we no longer have to depend on the council buildings being open to use their facilities.

- We have been increasing the layering within the edible forest garden, including more edible ground cover.
- We received a grant from Awards for All for £9,900 to continue our programme of skill-share days and walks. The grant also paid for the refurbishment of the portakabin and the shed for the compost toilet.

7. Business

- Insurance cover continues to be provided via B.T.C.V.
- We continue to be members of the Permaculture Association of Great Britain and the Urban Food Growers Network.

8. Plans for the coming year:

- More coppicing and woodland management sessions as well as a further programme of skillshares thanks to a further grant from the London Woodland Grant Scheme.
- We are currently putting together stage two of a grant application to the Local Food Fund, for a year of skillshares within the Tree Nursery and Forest Garden.
- We hope to be part of the patchwork farm project initiated by Growing Communities.
- A second bee hive has been built and we hope to receive a second nucleus of bees in the spring to populate the new hive.

9. Funding and finances

HMUG is grateful for funding from the following sources,

- London Woodland Grant Scheme - £5,000
- Awards for All - £4,900

These grants were used to run free and low-cost skillshare/training workshops, tools and materials and woodland management. It is hoped to continue to develop these activities as they constantly prove to be very popular.

10. Publicity

- Events, activities and news updates are advertised through notice boards on Marshes, HMUG and TNEFG website, mailing lists (both email and snail mail), ecoACTIVE, London 21 and other relevant email lists, local health food shops, growing communities box scheme, Hackney Gazette and Hackney Today. If you have ideas for places to advertise our activities then please do get in touch.

11. Acknowledgements

We would particularly like to thank the following who have all made a significant contribution to the work of HMUG through their support over the past year:

- The Hackney Council Tree Gang, Ian Graham, Steve Mayhew, Paul Foinette and other council staff at the Hackney Marshes Council Depot.
- Local Tree Surgeons who have supplied and delivered wood chips – we always need more so please get in touch if you can help.
- East London Community Recycling Project who have donated leaf mold and compost.
- All the amazing volunteers who put so much time and effort into working for HMUG and the Community Tree Nursery and Edible Forest Garden.
- We would especially like to acknowledge all the help and support Prue Poulton gave to HMUG over the years, before her untimely death earlier this year. A group of memorial trees to her will be planted on Hackney Marsh, near to Cow Bridge, this winter.