

# THE VICTORIA PARK LAKES, Autumn 2011

## INTRODUCTION

On October 14<sup>th</sup> 2011, I happened to find Victoria Park's east and west lakes both drained for restoration work, with parts of their newly exposed muddy beds already re-colonised with native and alien vegetation.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, John Archer and I secured an opportunity to examine these beds in closer detail, when a total of 147 flowering plant and bryophyte species were identified.

On approximately 50 of the flowering plants were also recognised specialised parasitic fungi (spots, blotches, powdery mildews, downy mildews and rusts). These are mostly named, too.

I offered to undertake, as a voluntary project, the task of preparing this report and species list.

## LIKELY ORIGINS

We may reasonably infer several origins of this mixed flora.

Resurrected dormant seedbank, previously submerged, could well account for such rapid colonisers of the wetter mud as Celery-leaved Buttercup, Watercress and the various rushes.

Windblown seed or spore from elsewhere in Victoria Park (some even derived from nearby canals) could logically account for a large number of the weedy herbaceous annuals and perennials which are more characteristic of (periodically or permanently) drier ground.

Alien introductions like Common Millet and Cock's-Spur grass are often spilled into the wild from commercially purchased birdseed mixtures.

Ducks and geese introduce both seeds and vegetative propagules of many indigenous marsh plants and aquatics on their webbed feet, and small tree birds regularly void seeds of fruit like Hawthorn and Apple which may then germinate where they fall.

Duckweed, once introduced as above, simply floats and divides its fronds. Here the two species present were mostly stranded on mud, but will certainly survive until re-floated.

Broom, Buddleia, Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Aspen and Laburnum are shrubs or trees whose spontaneous seedlings are, in these urban circumstances, reasonably attributable to recent or historic arboricultural source.

The bur-shaped fruits of Burdock, Trifid Bur-Marigold, Goosegrass (Cleavers), and Wood Avens and the barbed-shaped fruits of Barren Brome grass are all designed to catch free lifts on the fur of mammals and the socks of humans.

Creeping Cinquefoil, Creeping Thistle, Creeping Buttercup and Creeping Bent grass propagate widely from vigorous stolons or rhizomes, and have thus spread into the study area from raised lakeside verges, typically needing no seed at all to increase their stronghold with.

Crack Willow propagates itself only from detached fragments of branch or twig, while a planted Corkscrew Willow is included in the list merely because it creates significant overhang above the east lake.

Two bramble taxa also marginally qualified for the list because several non-rooting stems had slightly invaded the study area underfoot, taking advantage of a temporarily bare niche.

### INDIVIDUAL SPECIES OF INTEREST

The great majority of plants noted were of widespread, common species, as one would anticipate. Their habitats ranged from truly aquatic (duckweeds only), through tall riverside and pondside perennials, to natives of marshy turf, damp meadow and dry pasture, to disturbed-soil colonists of garden, roadside and wasteland.

In the latter category, the widest and weediest group of all, we found not only many familiar native species, but also a number of foreign ones, including four in particular which have increased to become firmly established in the London area only within the last one to three decades. These are Sumatran Fleabane, Water Bent grass, Tall Nightshade and Narrow-leaved Ragwort. (Hoary Mustard's big population explosion occurred in the hot mid-1970's)

Of these four, Tall Nightshade is especially interesting, known since the nineties in parts of LB Southwark around Bermondsey and more recently along shrubberies by the Regents Canal boundary of Victoria Park as well. In a single season only, some 30 - 40 examples of this species, some of them quite robust, had established themselves on the west lake floor, all seeded from mature specimens growing along the security fence nearby.

More remarkable still were a similar number of Pampas Grass seedlings, again some quite robust, which had also spontaneously self-sown on the west lake floor. The parent plants were obvious enough, grown as massive ornamental landscape subjects on the lake edge as well as around the island in the middle. However for this South American species to self-generate sexually off its own bat in Great Britain is exceedingly unusual.

Most remarkable of all was another, much smaller, grass of which I detected a single example growing in the same general area as the Pampas grasses. Like the four aliens above, it has also dramatically increased in the London area over recent decades, although it is arguably a native (formerly restricted to the Channel Islands, the Scillies and The Lizard in Cornwall). It is called Early Meadow grass, a slender, ephemeral annual normally flowering in February/March, thence rapidly drying out to pale crisp straw by April. Therefore its appearance hereabouts in early spring would no longer be remarkable nowadays, but a sole plant showing up in mid-autumn has got to be unheard of. Its narrow, slender, tiny-flowered appearance was totally distinct from our ubiquitous all-months-of-the-year-flowering Annual Meadow grass which was growing next to it. It showed no evidence of hybridity with that species (nor has such a cross ever been confirmed anywhere as far as I am aware).

Several native plants in the east lake were notable, too.

Six or seven specimens of Marsh Dock were found, a species considered nationally rare although probably more frequent in the Lee Valley Park than anywhere else in the country.

A robust stand of a narrow-leaved sedge is likely to be the Hybrid Graceful Sedge (a cross between Lesser Pond Sedge and the true Graceful Sedge) which I first identified on Walthamstow Marshes in 1980 but have since realised to be widespread in the Lee Valley Park and nearby localities. Elsewhere in Britain there may only be a handful of records.

A single large, spreading plant of Narrow-leaved Everlasting Pea was undoubtedly the most extraordinary of our east lake observations, a species not only new to London's East End but also way out of its normal habitat in, for example, some of the ancient woodland fragments which still survive in Thames-side north Kent. This plant alone was considered important enough to take special conservation measures for, to rescue before the lake was re-filled, to hold in a safe place until a suitable translocation site be decided upon.

To economise on space and time, the following species list gives a bare minimum of information, quoting scientific and English names as appropriate, but generally excluding extra details as to which lake(s) a species had occurred in, what its condition or quantity may have been, or the identity of any parasitic fungi found associated with it. These data are retained in my memory in the unlikely event of a need arising to consult them further. For only the tallest marginal vegetation and only the more mature adjacent trees and shrubs are expected to survive the operation of restoring these lakes to full water capacity. By now, at the time of writing (January 7<sup>th</sup>2012), I anticipate that this work will have been completed.

## SPECIES LIST

### 131 flowering plants (including trees, shrubs and grasses)

<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Horse Chestnut
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent grass
“ <i>stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent grass
<i>Alopecurus myosuroides</i>	Black grass (Annual Foxtail)
<i>Arctium minus</i>	Lesser Burdock
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i> var <i>bulbosus</i>	False Oat (bulbous variety)
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Mugwort
<i>Aster x salignus</i> (= <i>A. lanceolatus</i> x <i>novi-belgii</i> )	Common Michaelmas Daisy
<i>Atriplex x gustafssoniana</i> (= <i>A. prostrata</i> x <i>longipes</i> )	Hybrid Orache
“ <i>prostrata</i>	Spear-leaved Orache
<i>Ballota nigra</i> ssp <i>foetida</i>	Black Horehound
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy
<i>Bidens tripartita</i>	Trifid Bur-marigold
<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	Cabbage
“ <i>rapa</i>	Wild Turnip
<i>Bromus</i> (= <i>Anisantha</i> ) <i>sterilis</i>	Barren Brome grass
<i>Buddleia davidii</i>	Buddleia (Butterfly Bush)
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	Shepherd's Purse
<i>Calystegia</i> species or hybrid (indeterminate without flowers)	One of the common Bindweeds
<i>Cardamine hirsuta</i>	Hairy Bittercress
<i>Carex hirta</i>	Hairy Sedge
“ <i>pendula</i>	Drooping (Pendulous) Sedge
“ <i>riparia</i>	Greater Pond Sedge
“ <i>x subgracilis</i> ? (= <i>C. acuta</i> x <i>acutiformis</i> , but indeterminate without flowers/fruits)	

Cerastium fontanum	Common Mouse-ear
“    glomeratum	Sticky Mouse-ear
Chenopodium album	Fat-hen
“    rubrum	Red Goosefoot
Cirsium arvense	Creeping Thistle
“    vulgare	Spear Thistle
Coronopus didymus	Lesser Swine Cress
Conyza canadensis	Canadian Flelabane
“    sumatrensis	Sumatran (Guernsey) Fleabane
Cortaderia selloana	Pampas grass
Crataegus monogyna	Hawthorn
Cytisus scoparius	Broom
Dactylis glomerata	Cock's-foot grass
Deschampsia cespitosa	Tufted Hair-grass
Echinochloa crus-galii	Cock's-spur grass
Epilobium ciliatum	American Willow-herb
“    hirsutum	Hairy Willow-herb
“    tetragonum	Square-stemmed Willow-herb
Festuca rubra ssp rubra	Red Fescue grass
Galium aparine	Goosegrass (Cleavers)
Geranium pusillum	Small-flowered Cranesbill
“    pyrenaicum	Pyrenean (Mountain) Cranesbill
“    robertianum	Herb Robert
Geum urbanum	Wood Avens (Herb Bennet)
Gnaphalium uliginosum	Marsh Cudweed
Hirschfeldia incana	Hoary Mustard
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog (grass)
Hypochaeris radicata	Common Cat's-ear
Iris pseudacorus	Yellow Flag
Juncus bufonius	Toad Rush
“    effusus	Soft Rush
“    inflexus	Hard Rush
Laburnum anagyroides	Laburnum (Golden Rain)
Lactuca serriola	Prickly Lettuce
Lamium album	White Dead Nettle
Lathyrus sylvestris	Narrow-leaved Everlasting Pea
Lemna minor	Common (Lesser) Duckweed
“    minuta	Least Duckweed
Leucanthemum vulgare	Ox-eye Daisy
Linaria vulgaris	Common (Yellow) Toadflax
Lolium perenne	Perennial Rye-grass
Lycopus europaeus	Gipsywort
Lythrum salicaria	Purple Loosestrife
Malus domestica	Apple
Malva sylvestris	Common Mallow
Matricaria recutita	Scented Mayweed
Medicago lupulina	Black Medick
Myosotis scorpioides	Water Forget-me-not
Panicum miliaceum	Common Millet (grass)
Persicaria lapathifolia	Pale Persicaria

<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>	Redleg (Common <i>Persicaria</i> )
<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	Reed Canary grass
<i>Picris echioides</i>	Bristly Ox-tongue
<i>Plantago coronopus</i>	Buck's-horn Plantain
" <i>lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain
" <i>major</i>	Greater (Rat's-tail) Plantain
<i>Poa annua</i>	Annual Meadow-grass
" <i>infirmata</i>	Early Meadow-grass
" <i>trivialis</i>	Rough Meadow-grass
<i>Polygonum arenastrum</i>	Equal-leaved Knotgrass
<i>Polypogon viridis</i> (= <i>Agrostis semiverticillata</i> )	Water Bent grass
<i>Populus tremula</i>	Aspen
<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	Creeping Cinquefoil
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup
" <i>sceleratus</i>	Celery-leaved Buttercup
<i>Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum</i>	Watercress
" <i>palustris</i>	Marsh Yellow Cress
<i>Rubus armeniacus</i> (= <i>procerus</i> ) 'Himalayan Giant'	Garden Blackberry
" species in Section <i>Corylifolii</i> (indeterminate without flowers and fruits); one of the native Bramble x Dewberry hybrids	
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	Curled Dock
" <i>obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock
" <i>palustris</i>	Marsh Dock (one or two plants had basal leaves suggestive of hybridity with <i>R. crispus</i> , but without fruits this cannot be confirmed)
" <i>sanguineus</i> var <i>viridis</i>	Wood Dock
<i>Sagina procumbens</i>	Mossy Pearlwort
<i>Salix alba</i> (red-stemmed variety)	White Willow
" <i>caprea</i>	Goat Willow (Pussy Willow)
" <i>cinerea</i> ssp <i>oleifolia</i>	Common Sallow
" <i>fragilis</i> (probably var <i>russelliana</i> )	Crack Willow (probably Bedford Willow)
" <i>matsudana</i> "Tortuosa"	Corkscrew Willow
" x <i>reichardtii</i> (= <i>S. caprea</i> x <i>cinerea</i> )	Hybrid Sallow
" x <i>sericans</i> (= <i>S. caprea</i> x <i>viminalis</i> )	Hybrid Pussy Willow
" x <i>smithiana</i> (= <i>S. cinerea</i> x <i>viminalis</i> )	Hybrid Osier
" <i>viminalis</i>	Osier
<i>Senecio inaequidens</i>	Narrow-leaved Ragwort
" <i>squalidus</i>	Oxford Ragwort
" <i>vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Scrophularia auriculata</i>	Water Figwort
<i>Silene dioica</i>	Red Campion
<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i> var <i>leiocarpum</i>	Hedge Mustard (glabrous fruited variety)
<i>Solanum chenopodioides</i>	Tall Nightshade
" <i>dulcamara</i>	Woody Nightshade (Bittersweet)
" <i>nigrum</i> ssp <i>nigrum</i>	Black Nightshade
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly Sowthistle
" <i>oleraceus</i>	Smooth Sowthistle
<i>Stellaria media</i>	Common Chickweed

Taraxacum species in Section Ruderalia

Trifolium pratense

“ repens

Tripleurospermum inodorum

Tussilago farfara

Typha latifolia

Urtica dioica

Veronica persica

Vicia cracca

“ hirsuta

“ sativa ssp segetalis

Common Dandelion (indeterminate without flowers; also leaves of normal spring morphology required)

Red Clover

White (Dutch) Clover

Scentless Mayweed

Coltsfoot

Reed-Mace (“Bulrush” in some books)

Stinging Nettle

Buxbaum’s (Common) Speedwell

Tufted Vetch

Hairy Tare

Common Vetch

16 Bryophytes, comprising 15 mosses and 1 liverwort

Amblystegium serpens

Bryum argenteum

“ capillaris

“ dichotomum (= B. bicolor)

“ klinggraeffii (a member of the B. rubens aggregate)

Barbula convoluta

“ unguiculata

Brachythecium rutabulum

Ceratodon purpureus

Dicranella ?schreberiana

Eurhynchium praelongum (= Kindbergia praelonga)

“ swartzii (= Oxyrhynchium hians)

Funaria hygrometrica

Leptodictyum riparium

Marchantia polymorpha

Phascum cuspidatum

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