

# Brent Island Trust

## Newsletter, February 2021



### Wildlife on The Island

This year, the dark and (as ever in Brent) damp winter has been particularly hard to get through for most of us. Late mornings and early evenings leave us deprived of vitamin D, and chilly weather makes it harder to get out, enjoy the fresh air and take the opportunity for a rare, non-Zoom-based hello to our friends and neighbours.

But, down on The Island, the first signs of spring are making themselves known and offering a glimpse of sunshine we can all look forward to.

Amidst colours of green and brown, the edges of the meadow are still brightened by the coppery leaves of beech trees clinging on well past autumn, while fascinating lichens, mosses, ferns and fungi can be found in every direction, thriving in the mist and rain.

Right at the entrance to the Island, next to the bridge, golden catkins have turned the hazel tree into a spectacular chandelier. Having first appeared as small brown stubs at the start of winter, these male flowers are now opening, and soon tiny red tendrils will begin to appear from the bud-like female flowers just above the catkins.

Robins, wood pigeons and great tits can be heard and seen enjoying the trees around the meadow and will be joined by many more as Brent's birds shake off the winter chill and start up the dawn chorus. I had my favourite wildlife encounter of the year so far last week on the Island, when an unusual bird call caused me to spin around just in time to catch a flash of vivid electric blue; a kingfisher dashing off up the river.



For springtime hopefulness, however, there is nothing quite as wonderful as the humble snowdrop. Along the riverbank at the south west corner of the meadow, the first few shining buds have appeared, surrounded by plenty of green shoots that promise a beautiful white carpet of flowers to come. In honour of that, I'll leave you with Alfred, Lord Tennyson's very apt poem, simply entitled *The Snowdrop*.

*Many, many welcomes,  
February fair-maid,  
Ever as of old time,  
Solitary firstling,  
Coming in the cold time,  
Prophet of the gay time,  
Prophet of the May time,  
Prophet of the roses,  
Many, many welcomes,  
February fair-maid!*

Bridie Kennerley

## Good News for the 'Elephant' Beech Tree

One of the comments on the AGM voting forms was about the fallen 'Elephant' Beech tree which was in full leaf in the summer of 2020 despite its new horizontal resting position. A member suggested that *"It will continue to be a valuable habitat and visual spectacle for decades to come - provided it is not removed or 'tidied up'."* As promised, we discussed this at our next committee meeting and decided to seek the opinion of the Westcountry Rivers Trust in the form of Ben Gallant who led the team responsible for the highly successful riverbank repairs near the Linhay. His response was *"...if it isn't impeding fish passage and flow in any way or causing a nuisance in other ways, I'd be all for keeping it. The members are right about the habitat it will create both in-river and bankside, it provides great refuge for fish. It will also change the channel morphology. Often people lean towards removing fallen trees and I can understand this where they pose a flood risk, but if that isn't an issue for you the habitat benefits it creates will be of great benefit to the local ecology."* The upper branches of the tree lie on Network Rail land on the far side of the river and contractors may remove them but the tree on our side and that above the river will remain until such a time as it becomes unsafe.



The elephant beech tree last summer

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## Working Party

We would normally be planning our spring working party at this time but clearly we need to wait until group activities are, once again, allowed. Despite that, we have been assessing what needs to be done and there are some bigger jobs on the horizon:

- The barbed wire fence along the path leading down to the gate is rusting and collapsing. This will be replaced with new (non-barbed) wire and posts.
- The path between the gate and bridge needs additional aggregate – and possibly some drainage to help keep it dry.
- Mortaring between the granite sets behind the linhay
- Placing boulders on the beach area where there are signs of erosion
- .... and all the usual activities.



The December 2016 working party.

We'll let you know when we can set the date.

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## Brief Notes

- Our AGM is usually in late June or early July but this year we'll wait for the latest government guidelines before setting any plans in motion. We hope we can return to the village hall but who knows?
- Easter Saturday falls on 3<sup>rd</sup> April this year which makes it far too soon to guarantee that the Easter Egg Trail can happen. This will almost certainly be another casualty of the lockdown.
- We hope that things will have recovered to (near) normal by the end of the year and so our Christmas Stall should enjoy a welcome return on 4<sup>th</sup> December.
- The Leat repairs reported in the last few newsletters have proven to be successful and we now await the return of the contractors, Castelford Engineering, to inspect the fish ladder and weir when the flow of water has dropped sufficiently for them to safely reach them.

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