

# Hackney Marshes User Group

## Annual Report for September 2007 – August 2008

### 1. Tree Nursery and Edible Forest Garden

The tree nursery is the centre of activities for HMUG. The nursery is now open twice weekly, 9am - noon on Friday mornings and from noon - 3pm on Tuesday afternoons. This year we have held fifty sessions, averaging 10 volunteers per session. We have also started opening on the first Saturday of each month from noon - 3pm. 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.

Quiet and safe place for children and volunteers to work. Equipment stored in two lock ups. Polytunnels provide shelter to work, space for meetings and for children, to display materials and to grow food (for the first time this year).

A general meeting for all volunteers is held following each Friday session. At these meetings the day's work is recorded, future activities planned, relevant issues discussed and information shared. A summary of our work is presented below:

- \* Planting and caring for trees - A total of 30 fruit and nut trees have been planted, mulched and watered in the Tree Nursery and Forest Garden. Watering has been a major preoccupation given the dry winter and subsequent intermittent rainfall. The new water-holding tanks and guttering on the polytunnels have 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.
- \* Native shrub species have been planted and managed to create a wind-break along the south-west side of the tree nursery and provide nesting and foraging habitat for birds.
- \* 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. Thickening 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.
- \* Ponds and bog garden - the butyl pond is doing very well and has had regular visits from a pair of mallards and a heron. Both the ponds support damselflies and dragonflies.
- \* New activities within the past year have been the building and maintaining of 3 new outdoor raised beds for annual crops. Vegetables grown and harvested included peas, lettuce, sweetcorn, beetroot, beans, kale and pumpkins in addition to other annual crops.
- \* Three raised beds have been built in one of the polytunnels. These beds, designed to be useable for children and wheelchair users, have provided a range of familiar produce, including lettuces, onions, radishes, tomatoes and basil. In addition, we have also been experimenting with peppers, chillis, aubergines and melons.
- \* A flower-ring was designed and planted that will be used for flower ID and flower essence skill-shares.
- \* A variety of edible climbers have been planted along the fence between the tree nursery and the council depot.

## 2. Wick Woodland

\* We have continued to work in Wick Woodland coppicing areas of willow and hazel and using these materials for work at the tree nursery. Some willow coppice was used to build a hurdle at the Cann Hall School wildlife garden in Waltham Forest.

\* We have thinned out and ring-barked some of the birch and poplar to open the canopy in places, thereby increasing the biodiversity of the understorey and ground layers. The felled timber was used to build the greenwood shelter and for mushroom cultivation.

\* Wildflower bulbs planted in the woodland include wood anemone, wild garlic/ramsons as well as English bluebells.

\* A winter tree ID talk took place in Wick Woodland on February 2nd .

\* Coppicing in Wick Woodland with Tree Musketeers took place over the weekend of February 9th and 10th.

## 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. This year we were fortunate to get experts from the London Natural History Society to lead three walks:

\* Invertebrate ID on Hackney Marshes - May 4th and August 3rd

\* Spider ID on Hackney Marshes - July 27th

Records from all HMUG walks and surveys are posted on the website ([www.hackneyenvironment.org.uk/HM](http://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 Our Space, Our say:

1 Plant and wildlife ID. Maintaining survey records. - October 30th

2 Planting fruit and nut trees- planted 15 new trees - November 4th

3 Training trainers for volunteer co-ordination - November 13th

4 Mushroom cultivation - inoculating logs and tree stumps - December 1st

5 Raising young trees; planting, protection and aftercare - December 4th and January 13th.

6 Propagation - grafting and cuttings (20 new apple trees grafted) - March 2nd

7 Weekend introduction to Permaculture and Edible Forest Gardens - March 8th and 9th.

During April and May, the tree Nursery hosted a full Permaculture design course run by Naturewise. During the course participants built a compost toilet, for which a willow screen has been built, and a greenwood shelter on which we are growing grapevines. This will provide a much-needed refuge from the sun, as well as a meeting/relaxation space for volunteers. Participants also worked on designs for new sections of the forest garden.

## 5. Other Activities

- \* On 11th January, 2008, at the invitation of Natural England, HMUG did a presentation (powerpoint and all!) at a conference held to brief planners about the value of the work of community groups at the Greater London Authority building.
- \* On February 21st, during the half-term break, the tree nursery hosted a day for children and their parents, which involved them in planting vegetable seeds and native shrubs.
- \* On March 28th, the tree nursery hosted a Spring networking, seed swap and tree nursery open day. Activities consisted of walks in Wick Woodland, an introduction to forest gardening, a workshop on flower essences and a slide show and talk about the inspiring stories of New York's community gardens.
- \* 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 concerning the development of the travellers' site and work on the new access gates to the depot and tree nursery.
- \* Members have also been consulted and attended meetings concerning the development of a sports strategy for the Marshes.
- \* 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.

## 6. Other Developments during the year

- \* We took delivery of two wonderful painted wooden 'Tree Nursery' signs that were made and then erected at the site by the Youth Offending Team working with Ecoactive.
- \* The Tree Nursery and Edible Forest Garden was 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.
- \* More rewarding than any green award was our first work placement scheme that took place at the Tree Nursery with Wilf Clark. Each Tuesday afternoon Wilf, who attends Mossbourne Academy and lives with high end of the spectrum autism, came along to the tree nursery with his teacher Christine and sometimes his mother Ingrid. Wilf took part in all our regular work activities over an eight week period. It was both a challenge and a joy for all involved and one that we hope to repeat with a new student in the coming year.

## 7. Business

The following policies have been drawn up and are now in place:

- \* Health and Safety, including hazards and risk assessments,
- \* Protection of Children,
- \* Equal Opportunities.

Insurance cover continues to be provided via BTCV.

- \* We have become members of the Permaculture Association of Great Britain as well as London Food Link and helped set up the Urban Food Growers Network.

\* HMUG now has its own bank account with the Co-operative bank and all HMUG money has been transferred from the H.E.F.2 account.

\* HMUG met with the travellers' liaison officer for the council prior to the arrival of the relocated travellers on the new site next to the tree nursery. As nothing then happened, we introduced ourselves to our new neighbours and invited them to participate in our activities. We hope to source funding to enable us to run workshops with the children from the site.

\* The building of the travellers' site necessitated the creation of a new entrance for the council depot. This entailed a certain amount of disruption and a health and safety hazard around the tree nursery entrance for many months. The work is now complete and the tree nursery also has a new entrance gate. We are in the process of planting up the new fence-line to improve the appearance of the driveway.

\* We decided that work with children should not take place on site this year due to the unpredictable hazards presented by the construction work around the entrance to the site. We hope that work with local schools will resume over the coming year.

## 8. Plans for the coming year:

\* We await the arrival of a portacabin, which is being relocated from Hackney Downs. This will be used as an office space and allow an increased presence on site, more efficient all-weather working as well as providing a home for the administration work and our expanding book library.

\* We also await the moving of our two shipping containers of tools and equipment into the more secure fenced area of the tree nursery.

\* With the help and guidance of a local bee expert we will be looking to introduce a bee-hive onto the site next spring.

\* We will be increasing the layering within the edible forest garden, including more edible ground cover.

\* We will be applying for a grant from Awards for All to continue with a programme of skill-share days and walks, as well as refurbishment of the portacabin and a shed for the compost toilet.

\* Other funding applications planned are the Local Food Fund, to continue developing the work in and around the edible forest garden, and Access to Nature to undertake further work and training in Wick Woodland.

\* We would also like to secure funding to work with the children from the travellers' site.

## 9. Funding and finances

H.M.U.G. is grateful for funding from the following sources,

\* London Woodland Grant Scheme - £4,000

\* Groundwork - Our Space Our Say - £1,000

These grants were used to run free and low-cost skillshare/training workshops and purchase new stock for the forest garden. It is hoped to develop these activities, as they proved very popular.

HMUG is also grateful to Hackney Environment Forum for the use of its bank account that they kindly allowed us to use up until this past year when we set up our own HMUG account at Co-operative bank.

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

- \* Ian Graham, Steve Mayhew, Paul Foinette and other council staff at the Hackney Marshes Depot.
- \* Local Tree Surgeons who have supplied and delivered wood chips.
- \* East London Community Recycling Project who have donated leaf mould.
- \* Eco-active and Youth Offending Team provided new signs for the Tree Nursery.

## 10. Publicity

- \* Events, activities and news updates are advertised through notice boards on the Marshes, HMUG and TNEFG website, mailing lists (both email and snail mail), Eco-active, London 21 and other relevant email lists, local health food shops, Growing Communities box scheme, Hackney Gazette and Hackney Today.
- \* HMUG Archives - Anne Woollett ensured the safe future of photos and other archive material by donating them to Hackney Archives as she has now moved to Norfolk and we are unable to house such valued information at the tree nursery
- \* New leaflet produced 'Future Food - Growing Food in Hackney', 1,000 printed and distributed via above networks and has proved to be very popular.

In finishing this report we would particularly wish to voice our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Anne Woollett, who chaired HMUG for twenty years and without whom HMUG would not have achieved the success it has. Anne was at the forefront of the creation of Wick Woodland and the Tree Nursery, as well as fighting off various threats to the Marshes. Anne and Paul have moved up to Norfolk to tend a woodland of their own and we wish them good growing.