

Dear

**Welcome to the new Friends Groups**

2020 has been one of the most difficult years of our generation. So much has changed and there has been a lot of suffering. In the midst of this we have all learned about the huge value our communities place upon their greenspaces and the work of the Friends Groups is crucial to this.

Despite everything this year we have started five new groups. The Friends of Rochester Churchfields and the Esplanade (FORCE), the Friends of Eastgate House have a new Eastgate House Gardens group, Friends of Vinall Park in Twydall, Friends of Millennium Green in Luton and the Friends of Rainham Recreation Ground are all now up and running.

We now have 16 fully constituted groups and over the coming year it is very likely will see many more new groups start up.

A huge thanks to Marion Phillips and the Greenspaces Team at Medway Council and to the MUGs Forum team for all the hard work that has been done to make this happen.

**Birdwise have News About Wintering Birds**

Winter is a really exciting time for birds as migrants from as far away as Siberia fly here to find food during the colder months. Obviously, due to current restrictions we are all staying local but that doesn't mean that there's nothing to see. Just gaze out of the window, even it looks onto a busy road, we guarantee that there will be birds flying past, or perching on a roof opposite.

All the pictures in this blog were taken in a small urban garden in Gillingham so you don't need a huge space to attract wildlife.

During a recent online quiz, we were surprised to discover the UK's most common bird is not a pigeon or sparrow, it's actually the tiny Wren! They can be found in scrubland, hopping in amongst brambles, in the local park and in hedges.



Another regular garden visitor which shares similar space to the wren is the dunnock, which is also known as the hedge sparrow.



Its cousin, the house sparrow, also likes hedges...despite being fairly numerous in many of our gardens their numbers have been declining in recent years.



Here are some more colourful species you might spot around the garden this time of year:

Blue Tit



Great Tit



Chaffinch



The male chaffinch is much brighter and more colourful than the female, this is known as sexual dimorphism. It is suggested the brighter the male, the more attractive he is to females. In some species though, such as the Robin, it is almost impossible to tell the difference between the sexes.

[The RSPB has lots of information to help you identify birds you might have spotted](#)

If you're enjoying spotting birds, why not join the [RSPB 'Big Garden Birdwatch'](#) any time between the 29th - 31st January? It's a relaxing hour in a busy world!

If you are able to visit the coastline as part of your local exercise, please check out the [Bird Wise website](#) for more information on our coastal birds.

Next time we'll be taking a look at the birds that breed locally as we head towards Spring.

**Next Forum Meeting - 4th February 6.45 pm for a 7.00 pm start**

Our next meeting will be on the 4th February and as usual it will be done on Zoom. It is an open Forum but spaces are limited so if you are interested in attending please let us know [by email](#).

The meeting will have a presentation from Birdwise, news about the Urban Tree Challenge Fund and our new I-SPY Calendar, so please come along.

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**Climate Change and Trees - UTCF**

Medway Council has successfully secured funding from the Forestry Commission for thousands of new tree across Medway. We had hoped to have a big mass tree planting event in February this year but sadly the COVID crisis prevents this.

However, Medway Norse, the Council's parks contractor have kindly agreed to plant the trees for us. More details of this will be announced at the Forum meeting on the 4th February, but basically as part of our climate change emergency response Medway will have many new trees this year!

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**News highlights**

*New President reinstates Climate Change agreement in America*

On his first day in office the new President Biden has signed an order allowing the USA to re-join the Paris Climate Agreement. This means that America is now once part of the global initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the world.

*Hoo Infrastructure Fund*

[Have your say](#) on the new development proposals for the Hoo Peninsula by the 7th March this year.

*Herbicides in Medway*

And finally .... Following the successful campaign to stop the use of herbicides on our greenspaces, throughout 2020 Medway Council carried out a trial of using alternative vegetation control. This trial proved extremely successful and the Council committee looking into this has recommended to the Cabinet that Medway will continue not to use herbicides in its parks and play areas. Hand weeding and environmentally safe methods to control vegetation on pathways and shrub beds will be used instead.

This is great news for our bees, butterflies and all our wildlife, and compliments the Council policy to grow more wildflower meadows in our parks and along our roadside verges. [Read more.....](#)



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