



Richmond Green Gym

Green Gym sessions aim to improve participants' mental and physical wellbeing with volunteers taking part in a range of weekly practical outdoor activities as part of ongoing site maintenance and improvement. Green Gym sessions have proven to have a positive impact and be an effective way to create and develop healthy and sustainable communities focused around a green space. There are 5 independent Green Gym's in London and over 100 TCV led Green Gym across the UK.

The Conservation Volunteers delivered 43 3-hours sessions covering a range of practical conservation activities, between 25 November 2015 and 26 October 2016 and welcomed 81 registered volunteers. Richmond Green Gym volunteers' contribution equated to 171 workdays in total. Richmond Green Gym was a pilot supported by London Borough of Richmond-Upon-Thames, funded by Richmond's Parks and Open Spaces, The Peacock Trust and Heathrow Community Fund secured through local charity Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE).

Based on two principal sites, Mereway Nature Park and Meadway Orchard in Twickenham sessions ran weekly on Wednesday's 10.45am – 2pm. In addition the group planted and maintained climbers and wildflowers along the renovated section of Duke of Northumberland River path, and a new hedge along the rail line fence behind Langford depot.



Volunteers planting up DNR verges, wood chipping Meadway Orchard, a friendly frog, and enjoying a tea break

Richmond Green Gym highlights

Publicity

Richmond Green Gym volunteers took part in opening the newly renovated DNR path with Councillor Fleming Richmond Council Cabinet Member for the Environment, and partners FORCE, Richmond Parks and Open Spaces and Carillion present. Regular Richmond Green Gym volunteer Margaret was interviewed by freelance journalist Anna Magee for national newspaper The Daily Telegraph. The article focused on improving health and wellbeing outdoors which Margaret talked about the benefits of taking part in Green Gym. The article was published in August 2016.



Richmond Green Gym volunteers with Councillor Fleming and FORCE trustee Frances Bennett at DNR opening; RGG volunteer Margaret McMichael being photographed for The Daily Telegraph article; "Why fresh air is the best medicine" published 16 August 2016

Mereway Nature Park



Richmond Green Gym volunteers prepare the ground and plant 2,000 bulbs and the bulbs in bloom spring 2016

Richmond Green Gym successfully applied for 2,000 free spring bulbs (a mix of daffodils, species tulips and hyacinths) from the Metropolitan Gardens Association, planted over winter 2015/2016. The results in spring saw local people congratulating volunteers on positive visual impact of their efforts to make the site more welcoming.



Mereway Nature Park outdoor classroom is maintained and insect hotel completed September 2016



The outdoor classroom at Mereway received some much needed attention with volunteers collecting materials from site to fill in the insect hotel. The surrounding area’s vegetation was cut back, litter picked, and wood chipped. Richmond Green Gym volunteers also supported the work of Friends of Kneller Gardens weeding and maintaining the flower border opposite the Pavilion café in preparation for the judge of London in Bloom’s visit. The Friends of Kneller Gardens received an Outstanding in the ‘It’s Your Neighbourhood’ category, with the contribution of Richmond Green Gym volunteers mentioned in the judge’s feedback.



Green Gym volunteer’s weeding Kneller Gardens, and tagging Mereway Nature Park’s Ash Tree for future monitoring

Conservation Skills

Richmond Green Gym volunteers took on renovating and creating new dead hedges at Mereway Nature Park. Dead hedges use materials found on site or sourced locally to form a physical barrier to unwanted pathways whilst creating a habitat for insects. The 2 dead hedges originally created at one of Mereway’s entrances had long since disintegrated. Volunteers were taught how to coppice hazel, identified coppice stools around the site, and learnt how coppicing as a woodland management practise helps diversify the ground flora.



Having renovated and built several dead hedges in their first 6 months, in May volunteers completed a new dead hedge started by FORCE volunteers. This dead hedge runs alongside the renovated Duke of Northumberland path where it backs directly onto Mereway Nature Park. An issue with persistent vandalism meant that the volunteers having to replace stakes and rebuild parts of the dead hedge regularly.



Completing the DNR dead hedge, DNR bank in bloom with poppies and climbers planted and cared for by volunteers

Engaging secondary schools in conservation volunteering

In May students and teachers from Saint Cecilia's secondary school joined Richmond Green Gym and were tasked to weed, rake and sow 2 wildflower strips alongside the Kingfisher bridge path, and the small meadow by the Fox bench on Mereway Nature Park. Their volunteering formed part of the students' participation in National Citizenship week for which they undertake a day of community volunteering.

In October students and teachers from local school Radnor House took part in a session of wood chipping the outdoor classroom and paths on Mereway Nature Park. The group completed all 3 paths around the Fox bench and outdoor classroom to DNR (through the woodland), mulching over 100metres to a depth of 3 inches in 3 hours! In addition the students helped volunteers put down a layer of woodchip over the new hedge (located behind Langford depot), which will act as a mulch suppressing weeds and retaining moisture. Their effort helped volunteers complete a task in 1 session that would have taken a regular group 2 sessions and we were very grateful for their contribution.

Walks and talks

Richmond Green Gym volunteers took part in The Butterfly Conservation Trust's campaign #BigButterfly Count in 2016. For 4 weeks volunteers met TCV Project Officer Nadia Ward before their regular sessions to count and identify butterfly species on Mereway Nature Park. Our participation culminated in a butterfly walk organised by FORCE and led by TCV's Rachel Hoyes on 3rd August. In September a TCV organised walk from the edge of Crane Park, following the River Crane through Pevensey Road LNR to Hounslow Heath NNR, gave volunteers from 3 Green Gym projects the opportunity to meet. This was a chance to discuss their sites, activities, gain an understanding of the bigger picture of conservation work by groups along the River Crane, and see the wide range of wildlife and habitats.



FORCE and TCV butterfly walk on Mereway and Meadway, and Green Gym volunteers on a joint nature walk

Meadway Orchard

This community Orchard, created by FORCE and TCV BAT West volunteers with fruit trees planted by local primary school children, was maintained throughout the year. The volunteers managed the sites paths, meadow and trees and fruit bushes (and sampled the produce!).



Volunteers mulching fruit trees at the 1ST session and spring bulbs in bloom April 2016

Richmond Green Gym volunteers were taught how to scythe by TCV BAT West leader Andy Flegg in August 2016.



Volunteers Sebastian, Amanda, Councillor Piers Allen scything and TCV's Andy Flegg demonstration



Part of a series of Community Workshops delivered in partnership with FORCE, volunteers from both groups worked together to renovate the meadow, joined by local Councillor Piers Allen.



Richmond Green Gym and TCV BAT West volunteers working together (and having tea) scything Meadway Orchard

Green Gym volunteers had previously planted spring flowering bulbs and replaced fruit trees and fruit bushes in their first 6 months on the Orchard. It seemed fitting for the group's final sessions that they create cages and supports to protect young trees from weather and wildlife damage, and woodchip the path almost a year to the day after the first session here in 2015.



Before and after Richmond Green Gym volunteers completed constructing a pair of rustic benches at Meadway Orchard

In addition Richmond Green Gym volunteers also built a pair of rustic benches at Meadway Orchard. Using an existing branch as a backrest, logs from site and gifted half timber sleepers they have created a lasting legacy of their presence on site.



Fruits of labour - redcurrants, apples, blackcurrants



Volunteers

Volunteers' feedback was very positive throughout the pilot. Volunteers expressed pride in making a tangible difference, returning to show friends and family the spaces their work particularly when the poppies were in bloom along the DNR path in June - July. Many members of the public complimented volunteers on their work on all sites – one local resident made tea and brought it to us at Meadway Orchard! Cyclists and dog walkers praised their efforts and impact on the DNR path and on paths that criss-cross Mereway Nature Park.

The last Richmond Green Gym session took place on 26 October 2016 with 6 volunteers attending. Frances Bennett and Rob Gray from FORCE thanked volunteers for their hard work and enjoyed looking at a photographic record of their conservation activities over the year to celebrate their achievements. We hope that volunteers will feel inspired to join other groups and continue to volunteer through TCV, SWLEN, FORCE and Richmond Volunteering Services. One of the Richmond Green Gym regulars has already joined another TCV Green Gym.



Meadway Orchard at the end last Richmond Green Gym session, 26 October 2016

Thank you to all Richmond Green Gym volunteers for their enthusiasm, support, time, and energy. We could not have done so much without you, had so much fun, and we hope to have inspired volunteers to continue to volunteer in local green spaces.



Heathrow Community Fund
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