

= Gunnersbury Triangle =

Gunnersbury Triangle is a 2 @. @ 57 @-@ hectare (6 @. @ 4 @-@ acre) Local nature reserve in the London boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow , immediately to the east of Gunnersbury . It was saved when , for the first time in Britain , a public inquiry in 1983 ruled that a planned development of the land could not go ahead because of its value for nature . It opened as a nature reserve in 1985 .

The area consists mainly of secondary birch woodland , with some locally uncommon willow carr or wet woodland and a small area of acid grassland along the track of the former Acton curve railway . The reserve supports a varied population of plants , birds , amphibians , insects and other wildlife . It is managed by the London Wildlife Trust .

The reserve has free admission . It is maintained by London Wildlife Trust staff with the help of volunteers . There is a varied programme of activities including wildlife walks , fungus forays , open days and talks . The reserve is used regularly by school and community groups , and for team @-@ building work days by corporate groups . Its entrance , with a wooden five @-@ bar gate flanked by hedges , is on the south of Bollo Lane , a few yards from Chiswick Park tube station .

= = History = =

The area is shown on 19th @-@ century maps as orchards and gravel quarries . The triangular area now occupied by the reserve was delineated by three railway lines , two belonging to the District Line (now part of London Underground 's sub @-@ surface lines) , and the now defunct London and South Western Railway (LSWR) . There was once a bridge into the triangle from the west , and in the 1940s it was used as railway allotments (vegetable gardens) , but when London Transport 's Acton Works was built , the bridge was abandoned . The area , thus disused , was colonised naturally by grasses and trees in a " secondary succession " .

In 1981 , the site was proposed for commercial development , provoking an energetic campaign by the Chiswick Wildlife Group , formed in March 1982 , which became the local branch of the London Wildlife Trust . The threat to the site was one of the first to be highlighted by the London Wildlife Trust on its formation in October 1981 . The campaign led to a Public Inquiry in July 1983 , which determined that the site should be devoted to nature conservation . This was the first time anywhere in the United Kingdom that a Public Inquiry had ruled in favour of nature in a city , and the Gunnersbury Triangle example became a test case .

According to the New Scientist , writing in 1985 , " the celebrated Gunnersbury Triangle ? an undisturbed piece of woodland surrounded by railways including the District Line .. was bought and preserved by Hounslow borough from British Rail with a GLC grant of £ 58 000 . The GLC also gave expert ecological advice when Hounslow council contested a public inquiry to save the Triangle . "

The London Wildlife Trust has managed the Gunnersbury Triangle on behalf of the London Borough of Hounslow since 1985 . The London Borough of Hounslow formally designated the Gunnersbury Triangle as a Local Nature Reserve in 1987 . The London Borough of Ealing formally designated the part of the Gunnersbury Triangle that lies in Ealing as a Local Nature Reserve in 1991 .

In 1993 , recalling the dramatic events , the President of the London Natural History Society , David Bevan said :

On November 19th 1987 , ... The Gunnersbury Triangle was declared by Hounslow Council . The circumstances that led up to this important declaration are vividly described in David Goode 's book . This was emphatically not a rural site . It was surrounded on all three sides by railway lines and had only been in existence for a mere forty years . "

Bevan quoted Goode as saying " It had none of the features which , in traditional nature conservation terms , would make it a place worth preserving " , going on to explain this remark as follows :

Nevertheless , the woodland that had grown up on it provided the only genuinely wild place for miles around and it was greatly cherished by local people . British Rail , who owned the site , had

applied for planning permission to put up warehousing over the whole of the triangle . This was refused by Hounslow Council and a public inquiry followed in 1983 . The Inspector ruled that the development should not be allowed because of the considerable local ecological value .

In 2016 , the Triangle 's volunteers won an RE : LEAF Acorn Award for their " particular contribution to promoting or conserving trees " .

= = Reserve = =

Gunnersbury Triangle is a classic " railway triangle " , the 2 @. @ 57 @- @ hectare (6 @. @ 4 @- @ acre) space in between three curving railway lines . To the west is the Richmond branch of the London Overground ; to the south , the District line ; and to the northeast , the disused track of the London and South Western Railway (there remains the Piccadilly line a little further north , crossing Bollo lane) . Much of the area is now wooded . It is a Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation .

= = Habitats = =

The following compartments are identified in the reserve 's management plan :

Compartment 1 : Secondary birch woodland

This covers most of the reserve . Silver birch is dominant , with a few crack willow , goat willow , some wild cherry and sycamore in the canopy . Shrubs include hawthorn , elder , holly , yew and rowan , with garden escapes like buddleia , Oregon grape , cotoneaster , privet . There are some saplings of pedunculate oak , mostly around the edge , and holm oak . The field layer is mainly thick bramble , with ivy in denser shade . Ferns include male fern , broad buckler fern and the less common lady fern .

Compartment 2 : Secondary willow woodland

Willow carr (locally uncommon wet woodland including the " mangrove swamp ") with goat willow , grey willow , and some crack willow , with hybrids . The shrubs and field layer are similar to compartment 1 ; there is some honeysuckle and common horsetail , hemlock water dropwort , gypsywort , yellow flag , pendulous sedge .

Compartment 3 : Eastern bank and hedgerow

Rough grassland with false oat @- @ grass , Yorkshire fog , yarrow , cat 's ear , with bracken at the south end . There is an uneven hedge of hawthorn and buckthorn . The sunny south @- @ west aspect encourages butterflies including holly blue , Essex skipper and small skipper .

Compartment 4 : North neutral meadow (anthill meadow)

Very uneven meadow with mounds formed by the yellow meadow ant *Lasius flavus* , fox earths , and spoil dumped during former gravel works . Grasses especially false oat @- @ grass , Yorkshire fog ; also cock 's @- @ foot , common bent and sheep 's fescue . Herbs include common vetch , meadow vetchling , white clover , yarrow , ribwort plantain .

Compartment 5 : North acid meadow (railway track acid grassland)

On the former Acton curve railway , with a substratum of gritty sand and ballast (hard acidic rock) . Small fine grasses especially sheep 's fescue , with fine @- @ leaved sheep 's fescue , hard fescue , squirrel @- @ tail fescue , early hair @- @ grass . Herbs include sheep 's sorrel , mouse @- @ eared hawkweed , cat 's ear and yarrow .

Compartment 6 : Southwest meadow (picnic meadow)

Coarse grasses such as cocksfoot , Yorkshire fog , false oat @- @ grass , annual meadow @- @ grass . Broom has colonised on the site of an accidental fire .

Compartment 7 : Main pond

Main pond , dug in 1986 , with seasonally fluctuating water levels . Most vegetation has colonised naturally , with among others common reed , purple loosestrife , yellow iris , water @- @ plantain , water figwort , soft rush , gypsywort , water starwort , curled pondweed , common duckweed , water forget @- @ me @- @ not , water mint , brooklime .

Compartment 8 : Small pond

Seasonal pond with water plantain , celery @-@ leaved crowfoot , bittersweet , water figwort , and introduced yellow iris .

Compartment 9 : Tall herb meadow (beside ramp path from entrance)

Small meadow of tall ruderal herbs , changing with natural succession , held back by cutting , with plants such as cow parsley , hogweed , stinging nettle , false oat @-@ grass , garden escape daffodils and irises .

Compartment 10 : Gardens

Entrance yard gardens sown with wild flowers ; hedge mustard , hoary mustard and other ruderal species invading ; hedges with native trees and shrubs ; hops scramble up the hedges .

Compartment 11 : Infrastructure

Hut , sheds .

= = Usage = =

The Gunnersbury Triangle is regularly visited by school parties , totalling some 1500 students per year , mainly in the summer when they can work outside . They study grassland , woodland and pond ecology .

According to the TES (formerly the Times Educational Supplement) , " From April , holly blue , peacock and brimstone butterflies abound . Following the illustrated guide , you wind among wild cherry and rowan , under archways of hazel branches to a pond where damsel @-@ flies dance in early summer . A sparrow @-@ hawk nests in a silver birch , a jay comes visiting , bees and wood @-@ mice also live here . " The TES continues : " There are open glades for picnics and , in autumn , blackberries to gather . The aim here is to manage the woodland as a natural piece of countryside in town , and if , from time to time , you glimpse a tube train , you hardly notice it , beyond the trees . "

The reserve is open to the public . The London Wildlife Trust runs guided visits such as Fungus Forays and wildlife walks every year . On open days , staff and volunteers organise activities to enable children and adults to learn more about nature conservation in a relaxed environment .

From time to time , companies provide teams of volunteers to work for a day on tasks such as clearing scrub and repairing paths and fences .

The London Wildlife Trust 's long @-@ term management objective for the site is " to manage the nature reserve to conserve its natural biodiversity , and to conserve its matrix of woodland , wetland and grassland habitats through appropriate management " , which includes coppicing , clearing scrub , mowing , and controlling invasion by non @-@ native species , while " preserving the feeling of ' wilderness ' " .

= = Value = =

The Mayor of London 's Biodiversity Strategy comments " Over the last few decades , many exciting places have been established where city people are able to enjoy the natural world , often on sites which at the outset had seemingly little to offer . These include Camley Street Natural Park in King 's Cross , Gillespie Park in Highbury , Gunnersbury Triangle in Chiswick , ... " and explains " The important message conveyed by these projects , regardless of their size , is that significant achievements for nature conservation are possible even in the most urban of settings , and often on modest budgets , provided there exists a cocktail of goodwill , optimism , commitment and professional back @-@ up . Moreover such projects often yield social benefits , providing a community focus . "

= = = Biodiversity = = =

These photographs , all taken in the Gunnersbury Triangle nature reserve , illustrate a little of its biodiversity .

= = = Activities = = =

These photographs illustrate some of the educational and conservation activity on the reserve .