

Frognal Gardens Ltd

Hampstead wildlife.

Redington Frognal is widely famous for its green heart, Hampstead Heath, but its wildlife value is much wider than just the Heath. Old gardens, cemeteries, and countless other wildlife havens are to be found all over the area.

Let's start with the more noticeable creatures. Mammals are well represented, with the red fox (*vulpes vulpes*) and grey squirrel (*sciurus carolinensis*) probably topping the bill, though not necessarily top of the popularity stakes, both of these animals having unfortunate and unlovable habits, such as digging up new plants, bulbs and lawns, and raiding dustbins.

A much better behaved (and so less well known) mammal is the Muntjac Deer (*muntiacus reevesi*) which are common on the heath, and increasingly invade gardens all over Hampstead. These non-native deer from India are "premium selective browsers", and specialise in eating seeds, young shoots and flowers of a wide variety of plants, so I foresee a bit of conflict with gardeners as they become more common, but for now I have not heard a complaint from Redington Frognal.

Other mammals I have encountered are Hedgehog (*erinaceus europaeus*) wood mouse (*apodemus sylvaticus*) badger (*meles meles*), bank vole (*clethrionomys glareolus*), pipistrelle bat (*pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and of course the ubiquitous and unloved brown rat (*rattus norvegicus*) and house mouse (*mus musculus*). Hedgehog has declined badly in recent years, and badgers are hard to detect, so rarely reported, but nonetheless present.

Birds are definitely the most popular of urban wildlife, and Redington Frognal has a good collection, with all the common garden birds you would expect, and plenty of more special ones, like sparrow hawks (*accipiter nisus*) kestrel (*falco tinnunculus*) great spotted woodpeckers (*dendrocopos major*) and green woodpeckers (*picus viridis*) and until recently the tiny lesser spotted woodpecker (*dendrocopos minor*), which I last saw in 1999, but it is declining nationally, and I am told hangs on in this area, but is certainly very hard to find.

One of the most spectacular Hampstead birds is the rose – ringed parakeet (*psittacula krameri*), a newcomer to the area. Native to India and thereabouts, introduced birds are rapidly becoming one of the commonest London birds, and the noisy flocks of bright green parrots are now a familiar part of Redington Frognal's avifauna.

Reptiles are represented only by slow – worms (*anguis fragilis*) – not a worm, and not slow – a legless lizard. Grass snakes (*natrix natrix*) are nearby of the heath, but not actually "in" the area.

Half of the 6 British species of amphibian are found within Redington Frognal, with smooth newt (*triturus vulgaris*) common frog (*rana temporaria*) and common toad (*bufo bufo*) all widespread, but still much too often greeted with hostility by garden owners.

Moving down the evolutionary scale, invertebrates (a term which conveniently lumps together everything from butterflies and spiders to worms and snails) abound everywhere. Tiny small copper butterflies (*lycaena phlaeas*) bejewel gardens near the heath, big tropical-looking bush crickets (several species) chirp everywhere in hot weather, lesser stag beetles (*dorcus parallelipedus*) chomp away at rotten tree stumps at the bottom of many a garden.

As for plants, Redington Frognal is a famously "leafy" place, and an impressive array of plants, from ancient gnarled oaks to tiny creeping mosses and ferns occupy niches everywhere.

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