

Nature Note (*changing places*)

This month's Nature Note comes from New York. What? Nature in New York, the ultimate concrete jungle? Well, yes, there are jungles within jungles even here. I used to work in NY once and my local birdwatching patch there was Central Park, which is alive with wildlife of all kinds. This was a sentimental return visit. Central Park is over two miles long by half a mile across, so about the same size as my local patch in Shingle Street – and the two have more in common than you might think.



Contributed

American robin

for the birds to find it as well and for two reasons.

First, NYC is right on the flyway for the thousands of birds migrating between their summer homes in New England and Canada and their winter quarters further south. Every spring, tired migrants gratefully pause to rest and refuel in Central Park, which from the air must seem like an oasis in a concrete desert. Secondly, the Park offers a great range of habitats: lakes and streams for wildfowl and water-birds; woodland for all manner of American thrushes, warblers, tanagers and vireos; thickets for owls and catbirds; mature trees for woodpeckers, flickers and sapsuckers; vantage points for raptors; and even a few paved areas for urban refugees like starlings and house sparrows. Starlings were introduced to America when 40 pairs were released in Central Park in 1890, on the initiative of one Eugene Schieffelin, who had the absurd ambition of introducing to America all the 60 or so birds mentioned in Shakespeare. The starlings and the sparrows flourished, but the nightingale and most others failed (and what he did about the ostrich and the phoenix isn't recorded...).

You can see 100 different species here in a day in the spring, well over 200 in the course of a year, which compares very well with Shingle St. The other thing I like is the familiarity. I knew just where I would find American robins on the Great Lawn, palm warblers by Willow Rock and buffleheads in the corner of the Reservoir. There was even a rare bird in the Ramble, a yellow-breasted chat, in which the drug-pushers were taking a proprietorial interest ('It's over there, second bush on the left, and would you be wanting anything else, Sir?').

Jeremy Mynott, Shingle St