Greenwich Peninsula
Wellbeing Quest Trail

Answers



1. Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park has the largest breeding colony of common terns in London. Common terns are migratory birds. They arrive in this area to breed in April after spending the winter in Africa. In August, when the chicks are grown and strong enough to fly, they return to Africa.
Common terns prefer shingle beaches to breed. They don't build a nest like other birds but lay their eggs between the pebbles, perfectly camouflaged in this natural habitat.

The ecology park does not have a suitable shingle beach for the terns, so the team have created an artificial habitat mimicking one, and the terns seem to love it, returning year after year in bigger and bigger numbers. The fence built around the raft perimeter prevents other birds and foxes from interfering, keeping the nesting terns and their chicks safe.





2. Black poplar is a rare wetland tree that used to grow in large numbers on the Greenwich Peninsula when the area was still a marshland. The species you can see growing here is a hybrid black poplar. Its shape has been controlled by a process called pollarding to maintain a smaller crown. On the left is how they grow if left untouched.



3. In the early 19th century, industries included ropemaking, ordnance works, submarine cables, iron and steel works and shipbuilding industries.

At the end of the 19th century the East Greenwich Gas Works was built, and this dominated the peninsula for 100 years. It grew to be the largest gas works in Europe, originally manufacturing gas from coal before changing to oil in the 1960s. The by-products of this industry led to the development of soap, linoleum and tar factories on the Peninsula.



In the late 20th century, the gas works shut down and the peninsula was left as a contaminated wasteland until it was regenerated in the 1990's.

For more information about the history of the area, check out books by Mary Mills – a local historian and a big supporter of the Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park.

4. Far to the left you can see the edge of Canary Wharf (the impressive buildings of London's financial district can be better spotted as you walk on the Thames Path, behind the O2). Just to the right of Canary Wharf, you can spot Trinity Buoy Wharf, a vibrant arts and cultural hub in East London featuring London's only lighthouse.



Between those two landmarks, at the back you can spot another iconic sculpture: the red ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture, designed by Sir Anish Kapoor and Cecil Balmond, which is in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. At 114.5metres high, it is the tallest sculpture in the UK.

Up on your left, there is the Emirates London Cable Car.
Behind the building in front of you is the London City Airport. You can spot the planes flying in and out.
Another transport landmark is the DLR (Docklands Light Railway) spotted in several places across the river, just in front of you.





To your right, you can see the Thames Barrier – the big flood defence mechanism built between 1974 and 1982.
The hill you can see on the far right is covered by Oxleas Wood, a designated ancient woodland – you can see the water tower on top of the hill.

5. Records tell us that the Peninsula used to be a marshland with dense forested floodplains during the Bronze Age. Between the 5th and the 11th centuries the first river walls were built and the ground started to be used for agricultural purposes.



Up to the 17th century, the land was drained, trees were cut and more agricultural fields were created. From the 18th century, the land underwent another drastic change of landscape as industries arrived in the area, polluting the soil in the process.

You can find more info here:
https://greenwichpeninsulawildlifeheritage.co.uk/history/

6. 'The Line' is a public art trail that connects Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, the O2 waterways and the line of Greenwich Meridian. From a total of 25 pieces of art, 5 of them can be found on the peninsula: Antony Gormley, Quantum Cloud, 2000; Gary Hume, Liberty Grip, 2008; Serge Attukwei Clottey, Tribe and Tribulation, 2022; Richard Wilson, A Slice of Reality, 2000; Thomson & Craighead, Here, 2013.

You can learn more about 'The Line' and download a map of all the art that forms it here:
https://the-line.org/

More about Greenwich Peninsula Art Trail can be found here:
https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/whats-here/art-trail

7. Over 3000 seals live in the River Thames and there are often sightings around Greenwich and the peninsula. These include grey and harbour seals.

Peregrine falcons like to nest or perch on high-rise buildings. As the peninsula has plenty of tall buildings, it is not a surprise that this species is often seen here. Other birds of prey include sparrowhawks and kestrels, which can be spotted hunting in the Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park.





Kingfishers are regular visitors to Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park. The park provides shallow open water, quiet perches and reed beds, all habitats that the kingfisher loves.

There are no rabbits on the peninsula – rabbits like large open spaces, with loose soil that they can dig and dense bushes and shrubs where they can hide, none of which can be found on the peninsula. Other mammals that freely roam the area are foxes and grey squirrels.



8. The Pilot Inn is over 200 years old. It was built in the early 1800s to serve the local coal workers. The row of eight cottages alongside it was constructed for workers of the chemical works and the mill. They are an example of late Georgian artisan housing and are Grade II listed for their protection.

Fun fact: This historic pub has featured in Blur's Parklife music video in 1994.

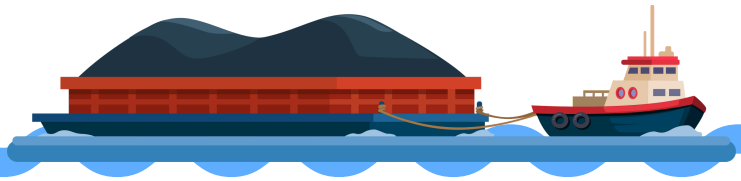
9. The River Thames played a significant role in the development of the Greenwich Peninsula. When the peninsula used to be a marshland, the river was at least three times as wide at high tide as it is today and was shallower.



The significant changes in the river started around the 16th century when the first river walls were built to support the work that changed the marshlands into pastureland.

The development of engineering and the industrial era led to stronger river walls built between the 19th to the 20th century. This forced the river to get narrower and deeper and created a faster flow – ideal for naval commerce and industry.
In the 1980s, the Thames barrier was opened, helping to control the river's water levels and protecting the heavily developed peninsula from tidal surges.





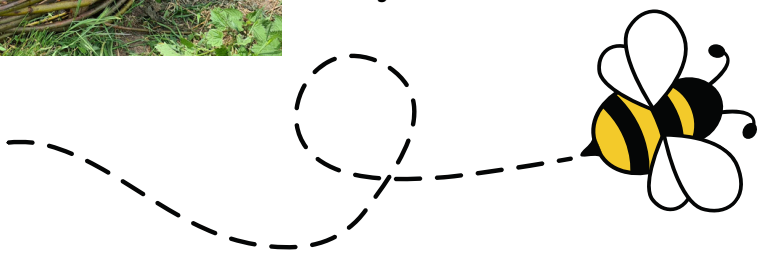
10. John Harrison (1693-1776) was an English joiner and clockmaker. He came to London in the 1720's to seek rewards promised by the 1714 Longitude Act. At that time there was no easy solution to finding a ship's longitude at sea. John Harrison worked on several versions of timekeepers that would work on ships and solved the problem. His solutions revolutionised navigation and increased the safety of long sea voyages.



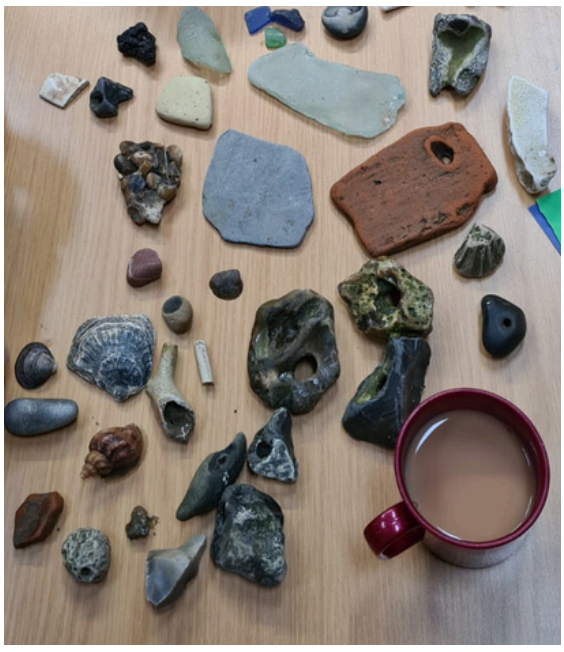
11. Before 2023, Mudlarks Boulevard was another patch of grass lacking in biodiversity despite the rare trees that were planted here. Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park has stepped in to take over the care of this land and turned it into a stepping stone ecosystem for the wildlife that has lost their habitat due to the urban development in the area.



As a result of their work, you will now see several plant beds that nurture and protect plants like wild roses, lavender, rosemary, fennel, thyme, catnip, sage, stinging nettles and many more, all extremely important for pollinators and rare species of insects. The impact is not only visible to our eyes but also to the eyes of birds and mammals that have started to visit this place more and more in the last year.



12. Animal bones found on the foreshore of the river at Greenwich Peninsula are thought to be from historic butchery and domestic waste washed out from the slaughterhouses, rubbish dumps and tanneries that were situated along the shore of the Thames from Tudor to Victorian times. With a twice-daily tide, the Thames uncovers, moves and deposits bones and teeth all along the foreshore.



Along the river at Southwark, Wapping and Plumstead were several clay pipe factories, which explains the significant amount of clay pipe pieces found on the river. Clay pipes were used from the late 16th century to the late 19th century.

Plenty of pottery pieces and sea glass can also be spotted at low tide. The tidal movement of the water churns these pieces over time, smoothing their edges whilst keeping the patterns and painting intact.

Although the River Thames has struggled with pollution over its history, today it has a diversity of creatures living in it: from different crustaceans (which explains the variety of seashells found on its shores) to seals.

Thank you for taking part in our Nature Wellbeing Quest!