



Mistletoe

Aims of the Mistletoe Action Plan

- To ensure the conservation, enhancement and greater awareness of mistletoe in Lambeth and London for current and future generations.
- To ensure that mistletoe is more widely recognised as a London and Lambeth species of cultural and ecological importance.

A) What is mistletoe?

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) is a semi-parasitic plant found on a variety of deciduous trees. It has fleshy green leaves and produces sticky milk-white berries, which are spread to other host trees by many birds, especially the mistle thrush.

It is a plant of enormous cultural and social value, as well as being increasingly rare, yet also surrounded by mystery about its ecology and medicinal use. Mistletoe's London sites are mostly in open landscape habitats, such as trees in parks, gardens and streets. Although London is outside its stronghold in southwest Midlands, the species has many cultural links to the capital. Probably never common in London, it still has a long history in medicine and seasonal traditions.

B) Where can I find mistletoe in Lambeth?

Mistletoe is scarce in the Greater London area. A number of Boroughs have good or reasonably reliable records but in most there are only a handful of records, sometimes one plant per Borough. The full list includes Barnet, Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Harrow, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Haringey, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kingston, Lambeth, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond, Sutton, Wandsworth and Westminster.

The location of all known individual mistletoe plants in Lambeth is a closely guarded secret, because of the risks of plants being removed from trees for commercial or personal gain. As individual sightings or finds are made known, Lambeth Parks records the location, tree host species, condition of mistletoe and whether male or female. A database is kept of locations and this is referred to in any correspondence relating to the management of the host trees or the mistletoe itself.

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for mistletoe?

Inappropriate forestry and tree management practices may be unsympathetic to mistletoe. For example, being a tree parasite, mistletoe is sometimes pruned out because it is wrongly thought to be a source of distress to a host tree and needs to be removed as part of the normal process of tree management or 'surgery'.

There is also the neglect of existing mistletoe colonies on trees, and also a loss of suitable management techniques. For example, traditional 'sustainable' harvesting of mistletoe, which controlled infestations by taking some mistletoe off host trees to be sold or used elsewhere whilst allowing the survival of a remnant colony, may be no longer practised in many areas.

Mistletoe 'rustling' or theft –taking of mistletoe from host trees in an unsustainable manner, may be on the increase because of rising popularity for 'kissing' under mistletoe at Christmas. Such removal of mistletoe probably does a host tree no good either due to damage and infection by disease

Mistletoe is often omitted from habitat creation schemes which it could be benefit from. Examples include some Community Orchard schemes, which fail to include mistletoe planting or care of existing colonies on older trees within the orchard.

D) What is the legal status of mistletoe?

Mistletoe receives the same protection as all other wild plants in the UK through the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). Therefore, it may not be uprooted (which would include pulling down whole plants) without the permission of the landowner.

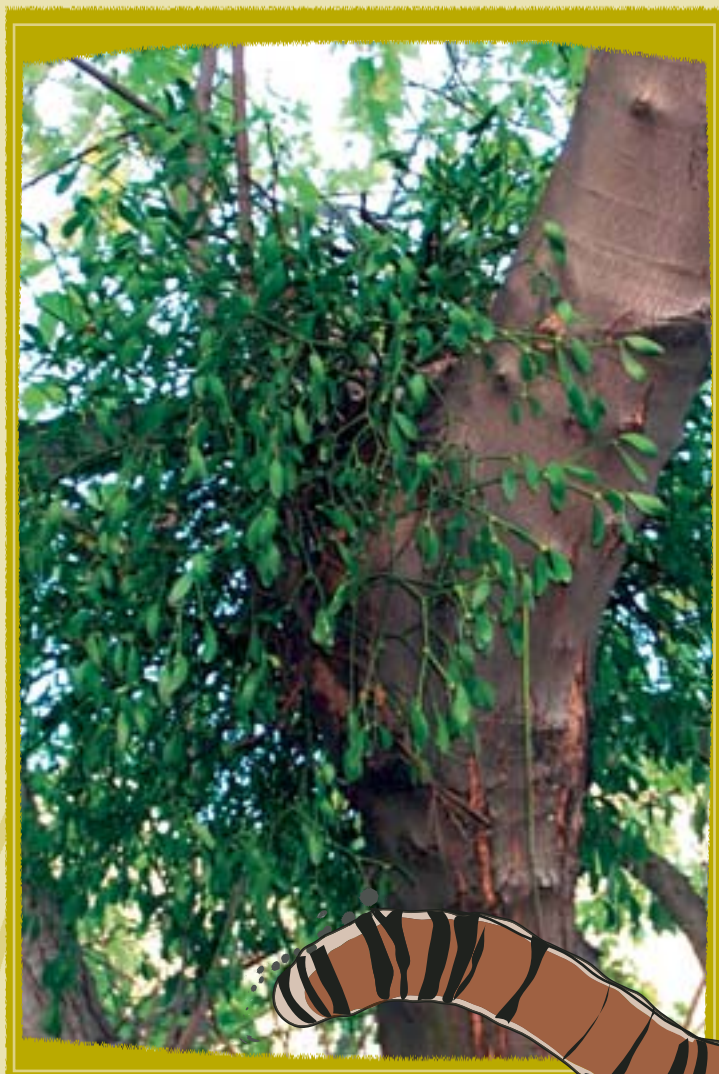
The felling of host trees containing mistletoe may also be prevented by Tree Preservation Orders which have been imposed on the tree, or Conservation Areas which offer protection to a series of trees in a designated area.

E) What will the Mistletoe Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will collate and maintain data on the distribution and abundance of mistletoe in Lambeth. A database covering all existing data on mistletoe, plus a mechanism for recording new findings of the plant, will be in place by the end of 2007.

Objective 2. We will work to prevent any loss of mistletoe plants and any reduction in the current population of mistletoe in Lambeth. This will be an ongoing programme.

Objective 3. We will work to increase mistletoe populations in Lambeth through encouraging natural colonisations through the actions of birds, and deliberate inoculations of suitable host trees using novel techniques. It is hoped that 20 new or restored mistletoe populations will have been established in Lambeth by 2008.



*Close up of mistletoe plant attached to mature tree.
Lambeth Council 2005*

F) Who is involved in the Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Mistletoe Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks).

The Lead Community Partner is the Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI), and all local enthusiasts acting through them or on their behalf. Other Partners would include the London Wildlife Trust, London Natural History Society, London Tree Officers Association, Trees for London and English Nature.

2. Contact for information

For more information on the Lambeth Mistletoe Action Plan, including copies of this plan in paper or electronic format, please contact:

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3. Further information and advice

Further advice on mistletoe, its ecology and conservation, and the management of trees to protect and support mistletoe, can be found on the following websites.

- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/>)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/>)
- English Nature (<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/default.asp>)
- London Natural History Society (<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~lnhsweb/>)
- Botanical Society of the British Isles (<http://www.bsbi.org.uk/>)
- Plantlife (<http://www.plantlife.org.uk/>)
- Forestry Commission (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/>)

