



UK REFUGE IN NATURE

London's concrete sprawl isn't often regarded as a refuge for plants and animals. And, thanks to the British government's draconian deportation policies, it's not much of a refuge for humans either. But at the Zoological Society of London (London Zoo), artists from New Art Studio – a therapeutic organization for asylum

seekers and refugees in London – have been meeting with researchers over the past year for the 'Refugia' project.

The name comes from a scientific term meaning the area in which a population of organisms can survive through periods of unfavourable conditions. New Art Studio members and the zoo's conservation scientists have shared knowledge, insights and experience on topics such as urban wildlife and animal migration.

Empathy for humans and other beings was at the core of many of the works displayed in a recent exhibition.

Mehmet, a 60-year-old political cartoonist and anti-government activist from Turkey who fled his country six years ago, points to the way animals and even plants suffer, and are forced to migrate against their will.

In one of Mehmet's paintings, a hedgehog cries and looks out to the sea as other hedgehogs float

towards the shore. On closer inspection, their spines unravel into humans seeking refuge in small boats. 'My job is to show the inequalities between peoples, and the inequalities between people and nature,' he says.

Traversing urban wildlife, forest and waterways, the artists reflect on the shared struggle for safety during a time of global crises. Artist SK, 33, a political asylum seeker, found peace of mind in London's parks and gardens

after she was forced to leave Pakistan. 'Nature always gives you a comfort zone,' she says. 'It's very important for asylum seekers. When you're going through that, nobody gives back better than nature.'

ALICE MCCOOL

The view over London Zoo and Regent's Park. As part of the 'Refugia' project artists have been meeting at the zoo and reflecting on relationships with nature and urban wildlife.

JOE DUNCKLEY/ALAMY