



Epsom Common Association

Est. 1974 Patron :- The Worshipful the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell

A Message from the Chair

Given the scale of the Covid-19 calamity, it seems inevitable that the health or welfare of some members, or those close to them, will have been badly affected. We extend our sympathy to all.

In comparison, the tribulations of the Association are minor. Our last conservation task was in March; further tasks, collection of subscriptions, walks, the AGM, etc., all rapidly moved from inadvisable to illegal. At the least, we had hoped to distribute a newsletter, but this also proved impossible. Finally, in August we received approval to resume conservation work, having agreed a range of infection precautions with EEBC. We held four bracken pulling evenings, and hope to run the autumn tasks and charcoal burns as planned, details below. However we will not hold an autumn meeting and this will be the only newsletter. The committee will continue without an election until next year; not ideal but we could see no alternative. Given that the ECA has done rather little for its members this year, and that most subscriptions are collected by our road reps knocking on doors, we have decided to make this year's subscription voluntary. We still have a number of fixed costs to cover. If you do wish to pay (£3.00 per household), please do so directly to our bank account:

Sort code: 30-93-08 A/C no: 00276113.

Please give your name in the reference box so we know who sent the money. Alternatively please send a cheque, payable to Epsom Common Association, to Martin Gandy, at 2 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, KT17 3PU. Many thanks to all who have donated.

The pandemic has had some effect on the Common, as described by Stewart Cocker below. Unfortunately, as well as Covid, there are other concerns which will affect many aspects of life, and could damage the Common; an outline of some follows.

Firstly, remember Brexit? It attracted some comment in the years before Covid. We have now left the EU, but wait to see how both environmental policy and funding will be affected. The current ten year Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme ends this year and the follow on Countryside Stewardship scheme unfortunately does not provide the same level of funding. A proposed Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) is currently going through a consultation process. Once implemented, the ELMS may yet again change how EEBC can obtain funding for countryside management. Any cut will reduce both the work the Council can perform and may affect the sums (e.g. £5 per volunteer

day) it kindly pays the ECoVols for conservation work. Although quite small, these payments are vital in keeping the ECoVols insured, supplied with tools, fuel, etc. Of course there is continuing concern about government commitment to the environment. The last ten years have seen large cuts to Natural England, the body that supervises the management of SSSIs such as the Common. These cuts have likely delayed, we hope not forever, the hoped for designation of the Common as a National Nature Reserve.

Then there is housing policy. As you may know, the government imposed a target of at least 579 (possibly now even more) houses per annum on the Borough. Given that over 40% of Epsom & Ewell is Green Belt or other open space, and that much of the rest is already developed, it is not obvious where this housing will go. The proposed thirteen storey tower in place of the Furniss building on West Street is presumably someone's idea of a good location - or perhaps just an opportunity to make a lot of money. The Association is not the right body to pursue matters of planning policy, not least because it is well outside our constitutional objects. However, as explained previously, we would be seriously concerned if nearby green spaces, such as the former hospital sites, were threatened with excessive development. You may wish to take part in the consultations and meetings on this subject that are anticipated over the next year or so.

Lastly, we have the biggest threat of all, the climate crisis. Think I had better leave that for another day. The reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants during lockdown are already disappearing.

On a positive note, last year we were awarded a significant grant by EEBC from their Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund. The main items are a charcoal retort and a solar / battery light by Stamford Pond. Progress has been delayed by the pandemic, but fabrication of the retort has started. This will be a more efficient and less smoky replacement for a worn out kiln. Meanwhile Master Butchers in Manor Green Road have sold our entire stock of charcoal, so we certainly need to resume production.

Best wishes and good health to all, and we hope to be able to resume more of our usual activities next year.

David King Chair

The impact of Lockdown on the Common

National emergencies have a habit of affecting access to our Common, with the ploughing of large areas during WW2, the recent Foot & Mouth Disease outbreaks and this year the global emergency caused by Covid-19. While TV news showed goats walking the streets of a deserted town centre in Wales, it could not have been more different on the common! Visitor numbers were unprecedented in the early weeks of the lock down, so much so that in the end the car park was locked and drivers parking on nearby roads were leafleted about only making essential journeys. As the lockdown evolved visitor numbers remained very high, especially at weekends and even now in September they are significantly above what would have been the norm in recent times. The high visitor numbers and the knowledge that many visitors were new and not used to the strange ways of the "Fuzzchat," (a person born on the Common) led to our decision not to graze this summer. We and our farmer Luke Smith felt there were likely be too many issue with the fence lines, especially as elsewhere in the County, Luke had to remove his cattle due to vandalism to fences. It was a tough decision but the subsequent vandalism to two of the three cut-out cows fabricated by the Lower Mole Partnership and placed to let regulars and newcomers alike know that the cattle would return in 2021, confirmed our concerns along with vandalised squeezes, gates and the Great Pond Dam fence. Sadly all volunteer work apart from monitoring of butterflies was suspended in late March, however, August saw the return of the ECoVols, the Countryside Team volunteers and the Lower Mole Partnership volunteers, all carrying out essential habitat management.

June was a month of highs and lows with the low being the inevitable return of Oak Processionary Moth nests. In a repeat of 2019, a survey was carried out in the three grazed areas which showed that compared to 2019 there were fewer nests below head height to be removed but there was a small increase in nests overall in 2020. The parasitic fly was identified on many nests and again our local bird population has been munching the caterpillars. The survey result was unexpected and future years will hopefully paint a more detailed picture of trends but thankfully the predicted exponential increase in nests failed to happen. The high was the discovery that Epsom Common is part of a very special club and we think unique in the South East, with our volunteers confirming that all five of the UK's Hairstreak butterfly species are now present, with Black Hairstreak found in Great Pasture, an indication that our habitat management is working! We have also been able to pay a contractor, a bit later than usual, to cut bracken at Woodcote Heath and West Heath. In addition the grazing areas will be flailed as usual in September which will help keep encroaching scrub under control, which is vital with no cattle this summer. Thankfully lockdown has not been meltdown for our Common and it continues to provide a nationally and internationally important home for nature and provides us all with the access to nature and tranquillity that we need to get through this difficult time.

Stewart Cocker Countryside Team

EcoVols update.

At the beginning of August we were finally given the go ahead to resume our volunteering tasks on the Common. Due to the delay, we were only able to undertake four of the summer bracken pulling sessions and so we concentrated our activities solely on Horton Heath.

Our autumn schedule will go ahead as published:

- Blake's Pond - 20th and 21st September
- Great Pond - 18th and 19th October
- Christ Church Glade - 15th and 16th November.

Charcoal burning has also restarted and our first burn was on Sunday 6th September.

We do have a set of COVID guidance rules that apply to all of our tasks so if anyone wishes to participate please do contact me first so I can pass on all the necessary information.

John Turner ECoVols Leader

Dates for Your Diary Update

As you will understand we have been unable to hold any of our normal events this year. It is still not possible to know what the situation will be for both indoor and outdoor group meetings when we would normally begin our 2021 programme next spring. We will arrange provisional dates for our spring meeting and our walks programme and will keep you informed via newsletters if possible, and via our website and noticeboards.

Epsom Common Association

Chair - David King, 1 Lewins Road, Epsom, KT18 7TL. t: 01372-722457; email: chair@epsomcommon.org.uk **Vicechair** - Vacant

Membership Secretary – Martin Gandy, 2 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, KT17 3PU. t: 01372-723149; m: 07796-362923; email: membership@epsomcommon.org.uk

ECoVols Leader – John Turner, 10 Hookfield, Epsom KT19 8JG. t: 01372-721876; m: 07729-235559; email: ecovols@epsomcommon.org.uk

Treasurer – Philip Martin, 68 Longdown Lane North, Epsom. email: treasurer@epsomcommon.org.uk

Secretary - Cynthia Blunden, 6 Isabella Cottages, Epsom **Council Representative** – Cllr. Steve Bridger

Committee members (in addition to the above named) – Bruce Critchley, Conor Morrow (LMCMP), Stewart Cocker (E&EBC), Roger Newman, Steve Nevard .