



# Epsom Common Association

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

## Common Rambles

After a winter during which many suffered greatly, we may at last be seeing a real way out of the Covid pandemic. The ECA is cautiously coming out of a hibernation that was interrupted only by an occasional online committee meeting. We did manage to hold three ECoVols tasks last autumn, but nothing this year until April, when we were able to work at our Hazel Coupe. Due to the hygiene procedures, we limited this task to established ECoVols, but hope to open future tasks to all; please check our website or Facebook page for information. We plan to start a programme of walks after step 3 of the Government "road map", scheduled no earlier than 17<sup>th</sup> May. By June we hope cattle grazing will have resumed, although on a limited scale.

We rejected the idea of holding our AGM online as too many members would be unable to take part; so that will have to wait until all restrictions are relaxed, currently expected 21<sup>st</sup> June at the earliest. We will also wait until then before asking our road reps to collect subscriptions in person, so would be very grateful if you could pay by bank transfer or cheque before then. Subscriptions are £3.00 per household or £5.00 for postal members; our bank account is:

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

The Common has continued to be a much valued place to exercise and relax. The increased number of visitors has resulted in much wear to the paths and grasslands, with some places reduced to a quagmire before the recent drier spell. Perhaps a price worth paying for the benefit and enjoyment gained by many seeking a temporary respite from lockdown. The vast majority left only their footprints, but unfortunately a few added extras such as litter or dog faeces. The worst incident was a New Year's Eve party; leavings included: a

gazebo, much litter, and hundreds of nitrous oxide cylinders. Disregarding the health implications of getting out of your mind at an illegal party during a pandemic, leaving rubbish on a nature reserve seems an odd way to celebrate the New Year. Thanks to the EEBC Rangers and various members of the public for clearing up. Thanks also to everyone else who has removed litter. Please also remember that dog poo should be bagged and disposed of properly, not hung in trees! However doubtless I am not addressing those responsible. A member recently brought to our attention a parliamentary petition (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/566467>) suggesting the government fund an information campaign against littering. Anything that might reduce this problem would seem worth considering.

Perhaps most concerning at present is a fashion for starting small fires. After the recent dry windy weather, the dead leaves, bracken and grass are like tinder. Please do not start fires on the Common. We acknowledge that the ECoVols do hold bonfires and charcoal burns, but these are strictly supervised and only take place when and where it is safe to do so.

Despite the recent snow, spring has started. Blackthorn is in flower and birdsong can be heard everywhere, including many Song Thrush, Chiffchaff and Blackcaps. Sadly Willow Warblers and Yellowhammers seem to have disappeared over the last decade, but a Marsh Tit (few if any recent records) was seen for a few days. Also, perhaps for the first time since the dam was restored in the late nineteen seventies, Herons are nesting at Great Pond. Roe bucks are shedding the velvet from their antlers and, despite the cold, Adders can be found attempting to sunbathe. Let's hope we can share their expectation of better times to come.

David King                      Chair

## ECoVols update

We shall be restarting our 2021 schedule of tasks in April and hope that it will run through the rest of the year without any further interruption. We are asking all our volunteers to go direct to the task sites as there will be no meeting points beforehand as we have to comply with social distancing rules. All the dates of our tasks and a map of the worksites can be downloaded from our website.

After many delays, we finally managed to install our new charcoal retort at the kiln site in April. Many thanks to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council for the Community Infrastructure Levy grant that made the purchase possible.

With our existing ring kiln, the timber is stacked inside the

kiln and ignited at the base, burning freely for about an hour to build up the heat. This produces a lot of steam and smoke and we usually expect only about half of the timber content to convert to charcoal. Using the retort system, the timber to be converted to charcoal is placed inside a sealed inner chamber. A fire is lit in an outer chamber so there's no direct fire on the timber. Any build up of pressure from the inner chamber is vented back into the fire and burnt off, so increasing the heat. This system should result in a more efficient output with less emissions.

At the moment we have no stocks of charcoal as we have been unable hold any burns for much of the past year either due to Covid or the weather.

## Eileen Taylor

We were saddened by the death in December of Eileen at the age of 86. After early retirement she had taken up a wide range of interests, including: botany, fungi and nature conservation; the last despite her initial surprise at finding she enjoyed spending a winter's day cutting thorny scrub. She became the volunteer warden of Surrey Wildlife Trust's Howell

Hill nature reserve, and through the SWT became involved with conservation work on the Common in the early 1990s. She joined our committee in 1997 and was an active ECoVol until 2019, also leading our flower walk for many years. Her knowledge, friendship and wicked sense of humour are much missed.

## Cattle Grazing

The cattle-grazing was suspended in 2020 as a result of covid-related difficulties; this was the first time since the Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001 that we have had to suspend grazing which commenced in 1997. This year the situation has improved and we are planning to go ahead with grazing in May, although the herd will be somewhat reduced compared with previous years. The effect on the flora of the absence of grazing in 2020 has been carefully monitored.

As in previous years, the areas where the cattle graze will be enclosed by electric fencing. In addition we are planning to adopt a Geo-Fencing system in which the animals wear special GPS-equipped collars. These enable their locations to be determined, and if one crosses a defined boundary the collar simulates an electric fence, i.e. gives the animal a shock (less

than an electric fence). The collars give out an audible sound that rises in pitch as the boundary is approached and the animals quickly learn to avoid the boundary. The system will be used in conjunction with the fixed electric fencing, so the security will be enhanced by having two means of defence against escape. The system also maps where the animals graze over time which will be very useful information.

We are anxious to recruit more volunteers to assist with the vital task of checking the health and security of the animals. Briefly, the task involves a 2-3 hour walk to locate the cattle and check the fencing, and each volunteer does this two or three times per month. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Bruce Critchley to find out more. His email address is [cattle@epsomcommon.org.uk](mailto:cattle@epsomcommon.org.uk) and telephone 01372 742520.

Dates for your diary

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**All events are subject to cancellation due to changing advice concerning the COVID -19 pandemic. Please check the ECA website, Facebook page or Common noticeboards for up to date information.**

All walks start from the Stew Pond Car Park unless otherwise shown, and last for approximately two hours. Wear suitable footwear and clothing, and if possible bring a pair of binoculars.

### Sunday 23rd May – 7:30am start – Early Morning Bird Walk

Join local bird expert Graham Cotten for a walk across the Common to see and hear a variety of bird species both resident and summer visitors.

### Sunday June 20th – 2:00pm start – Wild Flower Wander

Peter Howarth from the Countryside Team will lead this popular walk to find and identify many of the more interesting wild flowers and other botanical delights to be found on the Common.

### Sunday 27th June – 2:00pm start – Butterfly Stroll

The annual search for the elusive Purple Emperor butterfly will be led by Alison Gilry. Join her to find, identify and record other butterflies, moths and invertebrates that inhabit our Common.

### Saturday 17th July – 2:00pm start – Bush Cricket Hop

Steve Nevard will be leading a walk on our Epsom Common Day to detect and hopefully see some of the varied species of Grasshoppers, Bush Crickets and other Insects that thrive on our Common.

We can now be found on Facebook via the link below. This is still work in progress and more content will be added  
<https://www.facebook.com/EpsomCommonAssociation>

## Epsom Common Association

**Chair** - David King, 1 Lewins Road, Epsom, KT18 7TL. t: 01372-722457; email [chair@epsomcommon.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:membership@epsomcommon.org.uk)

**EcoVols Leader** – John Turner, 10 Hookfield, Epsom KT19 8JG. t: 01372-721876; m: 07729-235559; email: [ecovols@epsomcommon.org.uk](mailto:ecovols@epsomcommon.org.uk)

**Treasurer** – Philip Martin, 68 Longdown Lane North, Epsom. email: [treasurer@epsomcommon.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@epsomcommon.org.uk)

**Secretary** - Cynthea Blunden, 6 Isabella Cottages, Epsom **Council Representative** – Steve Bridger

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