



Epsom Common Association

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

www.epsomcommon.org.uk

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2017

Dear Member,

As I write this newsletter spring has really arrived. Already we have spotted the first Adders in Great Pasture in early March, the bees are buzzing, the first Brimstones are fluttering and the dawn chorus can be heard. We are looking forward to the surveying season of 2017.

The number of people coming on our walks with our local experts has fallen in recent years. We have been holding our walks on Saturdays and the feeling was that this was a very busy day with family and shopping duties for many people. So as an experiment this year we are holding the walks on Sundays, and we will publish our walks programme more extensively. I hope this will suit most of you and I look forward to meeting some of you on the walks.

The website has some new features and I hope you find this useful. One feature is a photographic record of the Common. The intention is to build up an archive of images at about forty locations to show how the Common changes over time.

We are pleased to welcome some new members from Bramble Walk. A newly formed group, the Bramble Walk Conservation Action Group, has a number of objectives to improve the Common opposite their houses. A representative from the group contacted the ECA about their ideas. As a result the EcoVols team organised a task on Sunday 19th March and Monday 20th March to open up this area of the Common. Our regular volunteers were joined by a number of the local residents. With this larger group of volunteers we were able to clear a significant way back from the road. The challenge now is to keep the area open and perhaps to tackle the small pond which is overgrown by large Willows!

Some of our long standing members may remember Peter Lee who lived with his parents at 15 Willows Path during and after the war years. We heard recently of Peter's death in January. He had a fund of knowledge about the Common and the area around it and in 2015 he noted down his memories for the granddaughter of his old neighbours Arthur and Ethel Fisher. Some of his anecdotes included the aromatic delights of the pig farm off Lewins Road; the steam and smoke of the trains running through the Common; 'doodle bugs' flying over Epsom on the way to wreak havoc in London with air force pilots trying to tip them over; the chickens, rabbits, horses and even goats and geese that many people living around the Common kept.

Our cattle checking leader Bruce Critchley is looking forward to seeing the cattle back on the Common again this year. We are very pleased to have Steve Proud from Surrey Wildlife Trust to talk at our AGM about why cattle grazing is so valuable for nature conservation. We all enjoy seeing cattle on the Common, especially the Belted Galloways we have had recently, but do you know how they help with wildflowers, butterflies and other insects, and breeding birds?

Subscriptions are now due, (£3 for local and email members and £5 for postal members) and as some members have enquired about paying by standing order we have produced a standing order bank form and the road reps will have a supply of these when they deliver this newsletter. Our account details are sort code: 30-93-08, account number 00276113. If you do set up a standing order I would appreciate it if you could let me know via the email address membership@epsomcommon.org.uk so we can update the road reps lists.

I look forward to meeting you at the AGM. Thank you **Martin Gandy** (Membership Secretary)

42nd Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 26th April 2017 at 8:00pm

Christ Church Hall, Christ Church Road, Epsom

Surrey Wildlife Trust Conservation Grazing

Steve Proud manages the cattle grazing team for the Surrey Wildlife Trust. Steve's talk will cover how important grazing is for conservation and enhancing biodiversity on our nature reserves. The formal part of the evening will be held after the guest speaker's talk, with reports by the Deputy Chairperson and Treasurer, and the election of the Committee for 2017/2018. The other officers and committee are willing to stand again. Nominations for any of the officer posts, or for the committee, seconded by a current member, should be submitted in writing to the Deputy Chairperson fourteen days before the AGM.

We are expecting the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell to attend as our special guest. Refreshments available after the formalities – Doors open at 7:45pm

Cattle Grazing

This year is the twentieth of the cattle-grazing project on the Common. In addition to the interest the cattle provide, there have been clear benefits to the maintenance of a diversity of habitats which is so important to the Common's SSSI status. We are now looking forward to the arrival of this year's herd of Galloway cattle which is expected to be with us from late spring to early autumn. When the animals are with us, their health and security has to be checked daily, and volunteers from the Association assist with this vital task. We are always ready to welcome more volunteers so that we can share the load and replace those who have stood down. It is a pleasant task – just think of it as a walk with a purpose. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Bruce Critchley to find out more.

His email address is cattle@epsomcommon.org.uk and telephone 01372 742520.

Managing Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve.

Thanks to our stalwart volunteers, Alison Gilry and Bob Yeo, the butterfly surveying will start again on the 1st April. Alison and Bob follow the scientific method of surveying set by Butterfly Conservation and will walk the transect route once a week from April to September, noting down all the butterflies they see. These records are then sent to Butterfly Conservation and stored on the Countryside Team Database as well. Fingers crossed they see the impressive Purple Emperor again this year.

After having had two very successful years surveying for Great Crested Newts on Blake's Pond we are happy that the pond supports a good and stable population. We will survey Blake's Pond just once this season and focus efforts on continuing our search for GCN eggs across other waterbodies on the Common.

We will be continuing to monitor the reptile population with the help of Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group. Together we aim to check the refugia once a month and I'm sure will make use of our Countryside Team Volunteers once again to assist in keeping them free from over shading vegetation. We will also be liaising with volunteers from Ashted Common to assist them in starting up their reptile surveying once again.

The Dormice boxes will continue to be checked thanks to Gill Sanders who takes the lead with this survey. Unfortunately we had no signs of Dormice last year but many of the boxes are providing nesting locations for Blue Tits, Wood Mice and bees.

We will be carrying out bat surveys again, hopefully once a month to help determine the bat activity on the site. We continue to liaise with Surrey Bat Group over the monitoring of our bat population.

In conjunction with Ashted Common, we will be employing an ecological consultant to carry out a breeding bird survey across the whole of Epsom and Ashted Commons Site of Special Scientific Interest, which will begin in April. The Yellowhammer has been absent for the last couple of years and is a migrant bird that is becoming more scarce across the country. Fingers crossed it is spotted once again this year.

Further work to our veteran trees was carried out by a specialist contractor this winter and we will watch to see how they respond as they come in to leaf, which will then inform the work required next winter. We will also be keeping a watchful eye for the nests and caterpillars of the Oak Processionary Moth and we would ask you to be vigilant as well. Five further nests have been found by the Forestry Commission and we will be liaising with them along with Natural England as to how to manage the issue.

An exciting discovery was made last year at Great Pond in late May/early June when a pair of Downy Emerald Dragonflies was spotted making the first record for the species since 1986! Hopefully a sign that the work of the EcoVols around Great Pond is paying dividends and we will watch out for their return this year.



Our hardy volunteers have already been in action this year around the common, undertaking tasks at Wells Rise, Horton Heath and Bramble Walk. The late spring tasks on the common are at West Heath and the Hazel Coupe. We haven't worked at West Heath for about five years and we'll be returning to open up some glades and tracks that should provide shelter for the cattle in the summer months. This task won't be on our usual third Sunday date because of the clash with Easter, but a week earlier. At the Hazel Coupe, we'll be undertaking the seventh of our eight year cycle of works, tending to the existing plants, coppicing some of the older hazels and hopefully adding a few more to the hundred or so we've already planted there. The long term aim is provide a habitat for breeding butterflies, and maybe the odd dormouse. During the summer months of June, July and August, we'll be continuing with bracken pulling every Tuesday evening at 7.00pm on selected sites in order to prevent the bracken from overwhelming heathers, wild flowers and grasses.

April – Sunday 9th and Monday 10th - West Heath

Meet at the Wells Road entrance notice board at 9.30am daily. The work site is about a ten minute walk away.

May – Sunday 21st and Monday 22nd - Hazel Coupe

Meet at the notice board at the Stew Pond car park at 9.30am daily.

And, of course, we're still making charcoal on every first Sunday of the month, depending on the weather. We had to cancel the March burn because of early morning heavy rain, which later cleared into a fine day! Please support us by buying our lumpwood charcoal for BBQs or charcoal fines for the garden either from The Lower Mole Partnership at West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park or from The Old Moat Garden Centre, Horton Lane or contact John Turner direct.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY - DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Please note, all walks start from the Stew Pond Car Park unless otherwise stated and last for approximately two hours.

Wear suitable footwear and clothing, and if possible bring a pair of binoculars.

Sunday 14th May – 7:30am start – Early Morning Bird Walk

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

Sunday 9th July – 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.

Sunday 16th July – 2:00pm start – Wild Flower Wander

Peter Wakeham 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 23rd July – 2:00pm start – Bush Cricket Hop

Steve Nevard will be leading a walk to detect and hopefully see some of the varied species of Grasshoppers, Bush Crickets and other Insects that thrive on our Common. Duration of Walk approx. 2.5hrs.

Epsom Common Association

Chairman - Vacant **Vicechair** David King T:01372-722457 **ECoVols Leader** John Turner M:07729-235559 E:ECoVols@epsomcommon.org.uk

Treasurer Marilyn Day T:01372-454477 **Secretary** Cynthia Blunden **Council Representative** Steve Bridger E:SBridger@Epsom-Ewell.gov.uk

Membership Secretary Martin Gandy M:07796-362923 E:membership@epsomcommon.org.uk

Committee members (in addition to above) Bruce Critchley, Conor Morrow (LMCMP), Stewart Cocker (E&EBC), Roger Newman, Steve Nevard and Eileen Taylor