



Epsom Common Association

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

www.epsomcommon.org.uk

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2016

Dear Member,

I'm pleased to report that a number of members have said how good the Common is looking this year. Cattle grazing started in April and once again we have a mixed group of the attractive Belted Galloway and Dexter rare breeds. After over ten years preparatory work clearing West Heath of head high bracken and creating a corridor into High Meadow, the grazing area has been extended to include West Heath. Six new squeezes and a horse gate have been installed to provide pedestrian and horse rider access to this area whilst the cattle are present. It is due to the clearance work and the cattle doing their job of keeping the scrub from building up again that High Meadow and the other grazing areas have developed into the attractive pasture woodland that we now have, and this approach has now been extended to include West Heath. I would be interested to hear your views on the extension of grazing to West Heath. As you may have noticed, garden waste continues to be dumped along the edge of the Common. Doubtless nearly all ECA members use some combination of composting and the Council's garden waste collection to dispose of cut vegetation and would never consider dumping, but clearly some people are. Why do we object to dumping? It is unsightly. It risks introducing invasive alien plants. We already have enough of these, including: Japanese Knotweed, Laurel, and Spanish Bluebell. If not controlled they can take over areas, or as in the case of the Bluebell, hybridise with native species. Dumping also increases the possibility of pests and diseases being introduced. They may come in anyway, but why help them? Perhaps less obviously, garden waste increases soil fertility, encouraging rank grasses, nettles, etc. to the detriment of wild flowers. This is opposite to the effect we are trying to achieve through grazing, where a fair amount of nutrient walks off the Common at the end of each summer in the shape of larger cattle. Mowing and collecting the cuttings (as practised on Goose Green and Osbournes Green) has a similar effect. In both areas the variety of flowers is increasing as the fertility drops. Finally, dumping any waste on the Common is prohibited both by local bye-laws and national legislation for Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Fines can be imposed if these laws are ignored. We anticipate that the Council will be writing to properties bordering the Common asking that dumping of garden waste and other rubbish ceases. Meanwhile if, for example, you are tempted to chuck some grass cuttings over the back fence, perhaps you could reconsider?

Thank you

Martin Gandy (Membership Secretary)

Cattle Grazing

With the arrival in May of 31 cattle of several breeds, the twentieth year of the cattle-grazing project on the Common is now under way. 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. This success led to the decision to extend the Great Pasture enclosure to include part of West Heath. After the heavy rains in Spring, the ground conditions continue to improve, and the animals are doing well.

When the animals are with us, their health and security is checked daily. Volunteers from the Association assist with this vital task, and we are always ready to welcome more so that we can share the load and replace those who have stood down. It is a pleasant task – more like a walk with a purpose. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Bruce Critchley to find out more. His email address is bruce_critchley@yahoo.co.uk and telephone 01372 742520.

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.

Saturday 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.

Saturday 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.

Saturday 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.

Managing Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve.

After a cold late Spring, Summer is finally here if a little cool and damp! Undeterred we have been out surveying the ponds for Great Crested Newts throughout May to June. Thanks go to our helpful volunteers, for assisting us in laying out the bottles in the evening and returning early in the morning to check what had been caught. We'd particularly like to thank Judith McNickle who joined us each time. The greatest success was at Blake's Pond where 28 Great Crested Newts were found proving that we have a good population on the site that has remained stable with 29 last year.

Our regular surveys for Butterflies, Reptiles and Dormice are continuing, again with the great support of our volunteers. Our thanks go to Alison Gilry and Bob Yeo who walk the butterfly transect route once a week from April to September.

The adder and grass snake population is doing well with first sightings of Adders in late February this year. Thank you to Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group for helping us check the refugia. Together we aim to check them once a month.

The Dormice boxes continue to be checked once a month, thank you to Gill Sanders for taking the lead with this survey. Our first check this season found no signs of Dormice but many of the boxes were providing nesting locations for Blue Tit and they also continue to be used by Wood Mice.

The volunteer help doesn't stop there. We are also running a bat survey once a month (First one rained off in May!) to help determine the bat activity on the site. We are going to use these preliminary surveys to find where the activity hotspots are and then focus on these areas in due course to see if we can pin down their roosting sites. So far we have recorded Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, Noctule and Brown Long-eared.

Sadly it seems that this we have no Yellow Hammers, a migrant bird that is becoming more scarce across the country. We can only hope it will make a return in future years. On a more positive note we have had many sightings of Buzzard, Sparrow hawk and Kestrel and the usual noisy nests of the Great Spotted Woodpecker have been heard. An exciting discovery was made 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!

If you would like to find out more about how we monitor the Common's wildlife or if you would like to assist please do contact the EEBC Countryside Team on 01372 732000.



Bracken pulling is already in well underway, but it's not too late to join us for a pleasant summer's evening. The summer bracken pulling programme is on various sites every Tuesday evening from 7.00pm till 9.00pm or dusk.

Horton Heath (meet at the vehicle access point off the old Christchurch Road): **5th July; 2nd, 16th and 30th August**

Blake's Pond (meet on railway bridge at the end of Castle Road): **12th July**

Railway Meadow (meet on railway bridge at the end of Castle Road): **19th July**

Hazel Coupe (meet at the Stew Pond car park notice board): **26th July; 9th and 23rd August**

We still have our charcoal making at the kiln site on the first Sunday of each month (apart from July which is on 10th). Lumpwood Charcoal, made from local hazel or oak, for barbecues and Charcoal Fines, used as a mulch or compost aerator, for gardeners are available for sale at The Lower Mole Trust, 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park or from The Old Moat Garden Centre, Horton Lane.

We aim to continue our programme of pond margin management in the autumn as we hope to have a vehicle by then. Please check the web site for details.

Epsom Common Association

Chairman – Vacant; **Vicechair** - David King, 1 Lewins Road, Epsom, KT18 7TL. t: 01372-722457 **EcoVols Leader** – John Turner, 10 Hookfield, Epsom KT19 8JG. t: 01372-721876; m: 07729-235559; email: ecovols@epsomcommon.org.uk **Treasurer** – Marilyn Day, 17 Blackthorn Road, Great Bookham, KT23 4BN. t: 01372-454477 **Secretary** - Cynthea Blunden, 6 Isabella Cottages, Epsom **Council Representative** – Steve Bridger - email: SBridger@Epsom-Ewell.gov.uk **Membership Secretary** - Martin Gandy, 2 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, KT17 3PU. email: chairperson@epsomcommon.org.uk: 01372-723149; m: 07796-362923; **Committee members** (in addition to the above named) – Bruce Critchley, Conor Morrow (LMCMP), Stewart Cocker (E&EBC), Roger Newman, Steve Nevard and Eileen Taylor