



Epsom Common Association

Est. 1974 Patron:- The Worshipful The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell
www.epsomcommon.org.uk

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2017

Dear Member,

This edition features a report from our new Chairman, Dave King. I wish him every success in his new role. I am also pleased to be able to run a fungus foray again this year with thanks to Mike Waterman from the West Weald Fungus Reporting Group. Our fungus foray walk leader for many years, Andrew Smith with his mother Mary, is moving away from Epsom in September. I would like to thank Andrew for leading his very successful forays over many years.

It is very disappointing to report a number of serious vandalism incidents this year. Some details are covered later in the cattle report. On Sunday April 9th a number of fires were set deliberately in the Horton Heath area. This was a particularly serious case of arson because the Common was very dry at this time. Fortunately some visitors raised the alarm and the fire brigade were able to deal with the situation. Our members can play an important role in reporting any vandalism incidents to the emergency services if appropriate or to the Countryside Team via the council number 01372 732000.

Martin Gandy (Membership Secretary)

Chairman's Report

Having been elected chairman of the ECA at the recent AGM, for which I thank you, a few thoughts on the current state of the Common seem appropriate. In many respects the situation is rather good. Epsom & Ewell Borough Council continue to lead a long running programme of conservation work - for example we have now been grazing cattle for twenty years. The Council's commitment appears confirmed by their adoption last year of a one hundred year management plan, the sort of time scale needed when dealing with the natural world but rare in political life. Of course the Council is not working alone, in particular the ECA and the Lower Mole Partnership both contribute a great deal.

The results of all this activity are obvious. In place of large areas of nearly impenetrable secondary woodland, crossed by a few muddy tracks, we now have a range of flourishing habitats. These include: remnants of heath, rough grassland, wood pasture, and groups of veteran oaks managed to prolong their lives and the presence of the hundreds of species of insect, fungi, birds, etc. that depend on them. The improvement is recognised by Natural England, who now classify the status of most of the Site of Special Scientific Interest covering much of the Common as "favourable". The application for National Nature Reserve status is still under consideration; we remain hopeful. On a more personal level I suggest the Common is now a more beautiful and fascinating place.

Situated on the edge of Epsom, the Common is a recreational area as well as a nature reserve. The "All Weather Track" provides excellent access, the entire length has now been resurfaced and a branch added to Stamford Green.

Of course there are problems. The biggest challenge is probably climate change, but this is an issue of such scale and complexity that we can only be a tiny part of the solution. So instead I will focus on a couple of slightly more tractable concerns.

The first is money; local authorities are under intense financial pressure, and may see cutting spending on countryside management as a relatively painless economy. Politicians at local and national level must be persuaded that we need a healthy countryside as well as social care, education, the NHS, etc. Enjoyment of a walk on the Common is real and valuable! Work on the Common actually costs the borough's residents much less than might be expected. All the organisations have volunteer groups; their labour is free, and although the ECA is paid a few pounds per person per day towards tools, etc., it is excellent value. When contractors are needed the cost is usually paid from government grants for countryside improvement. However these grants are funded by the European Union. We were repeatedly told money would be available after leaving the EU; some needs to be allocated to nature conservation.

Another problem is new pests and diseases. Two of current concern are Ash dieback and Oak Processionary Moth. Ash dieback appears to be affecting many saplings on the Common, but as there are thousands this may not be too serious. However if it kills mature trees and prevents any seedlings from growing to maturity, then we will lose a beautiful and important tree. In contrast the caterpillars of the Oak Processionary Moth are a threat both to trees, by defoliation, and to human and animal health due to irritation by the fine hairs. The Forestry Commission is attempting to control the outbreak, but it is not clear it can succeed. We may have to hope that natural predators will keep the numbers in check.

Despite these worries, I suggest we can take pride in the state of the Common and believe we can make further improvements. I would like to thank all those involved in managing the Common and all members of the ECA for their efforts and support.

Dave King (Chairman)

Vic Hayden

I am sorry to have to let you know that Vic Hayden, our former Chairman, passed away on Thursday 29th June. Vic was one of the founder members of the Epsom Common Association in 1975 and has made a huge contribution over the years as one of the EcoVols volunteers, leader of the cattle checkers and more recently Chairman of the Association. As we heard this news just before the newsletter was printed a full obituary will be included in the Autumn Newsletter

Cattle Grazing

With the arrival in May of 23 cattle comprised of Belted Galloways, Dexter crosses and Sussex crosses, the grazing on the Common is now under way. Several of the animals were with us last year and all have settled in and are doing well. 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 year is the second with the extension of the Great Pasture enclosure to include part of West Heath.

Early in the season, a large part of the electric fencing in the Rye Meadow grazing area was vandalized repeatedly, which led us to move cattle from there to join those in Great Pasture. These episodes of criminal damage now appear to have ceased, but we remain concerned; if you find damaged fences, gates, troughs or cattle in distress, or have information please contact the Council on 01372 732000 (24hrs). If you witness damage taking place call the Police, on 999 and also inform the Council via 01372 732000.

When the animals are with us, their health and security is checked daily. This is a pleasant task – more like a walk with a purpose. Volunteers from the Association assist with the checking; 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**



Bracken pulling is well underway, but it's never too late to join us! We meet very Tuesday evening during the summer months at 7.00pm and finish at 9.00pm or dusk, and we usually stop for a short break after the first hour. We provide gloves or you may bring your own. Please see the web site for details of meeting places or contact John Turner.

Horton Heath: 4th July; 1st, 15th and 29th August

Blake's Pond: 11th July

Railway Meadow: 18th July

Hazel Coupe: 26th July; 8th and 22nd August

During the Autumn we turn our attention to the ponds on the Common.

We'll be clearing scrub and small trees from the margins.

Baron's Pond: September 10th and 11th September

Blake's Pond: 15th and 16th October

Great Pond: 19th and 20th November

It's perfect BBQ weather, hopefully anyway. So why not buy some of our lumpwood charcoal?.

It costs £5 a bag available from The Lower Mole Trust, 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane (phone first in case they're out and about - 743873).

The Old Moat Garden Centre also sell our charcoal, but prices may vary. Alternatively, contact John Turner directly.

Did you know you can make great moisture retaining compost, perfect for your containers and hanging baskets, just by adding a handful of our Charcoal Fines to your usual compost. **Only £3 a bag - bargain price!**

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 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.

Sunday 17th September - 2:00pm start - Fungus Foray

Mike Waterman, who is Group Recorder for the West Weald Fungus Recording Group and a life member of the British Mycological Society, will be leading a walk looking for interesting and unusual fungi. Mike has been leading forays since about 1980. Mike will be pleased to explain about fungi to people new to these fascinating organisms and will record details of species found.

Epsom Common Association

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Treasurer Marilyn Day **T:**01372-454477 **Secretary** Cynthia Blunden **Council Representative** Steve Bridger **E:**SBridger@Epsom-Ewell.gov.uk
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Committee members (in addition to above) Bruce Critchley, Conor Morrow (LMCMP), Stewart Cocker (E&EBC), Roger Newman, Steve Nevard and Eileen Taylor