



Epsom Common Association

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

www.epsomcommon.org.uk

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2011

Dear Member,

It is with great pleasure that I am writing my first report for the Newsletter as your new chairman. I would like to express many thanks to Vic Hayden for all his hard work over the last 6 years. He will be a hard act to follow. I was delighted to discover such a wonderful nature reserve on my doorstep after moving to Epsom from Oxfordshire in 2004, and joined the EcoVols shortly afterwards. I would like to especially thank John Turner for his enthusiasm and all the association members who have given their time to support the work on the common.

This is a challenging time for countryside management. The Lower Mole Project, which has been key to many of the improvements on Epsom Common and the adjoining part of our SSSI, Ashted Common, is facing threats of serious cuts in funding and loss of Surrey County Council as the hosting body. There would be a major impact on Epsom Common should this be allowed to go ahead. All the organisations affected are joining forces to challenge this threat. After a very hard winter we are now experiencing a severe drought with exceptionally low rainfall and high temperatures over the last few months. There is now a severe fire risk and there has already been a fire on Ashted Common, which fortunately was contained by the prompt response of the fire brigade. Despite this the common is full of birdsong and wildflowers. The bird walk with Tony Quinn on May 7th happened on one of the few days with slight rain but despite this we were able to see yellowhammers, willow warblers, mandarin ducks, herons and more common species.

We now have 35 Friesian/Jersey cross bullocks on three grazing areas. They arrived on May 4th and everything went smoothly although we did have one escapee for a short while on the Rye Meadow area. Association members are carrying out the checking on Thursdays and Fridays.

The AGM was held on April 12th and we were honoured to have both the Mayor of Epsom and our local MP Chris Grayling at the meeting. The existing officers were re-elected (with the exception of Vic), Bruce Critchley was elected as a committee member and I was elected as chairman and I thank you for this honour. We enjoyed a talk by Eileen Taylor on the wildflowers of Howell Hill nature reserve with some of Eileen's excellent photographs. Stewart Cocker gave an illustrated talk about the considerable progress made in encouraging biodiversity on the common through the work done following the 10 year plan. He concluded with a stunning video of three adders and a pair of adders filmed on the main grazing area in late March.

I would also like to welcome Gill Sanders, who sits on the board of the wildlife charity Buglife. The Committee has co-opted Gill onto the Committee as our invertebrates expert.

I am keen to improve communications with the membership by exploiting new technology and as a first step I am asking members to provide their email address details by sending an email to chairperson@epsomcommon.org.uk. This will be followed up by the road reps when they next call round. This will enable us to build up an email distribution list which will be used to send out urgent information and reminders about walks and other events. Although not everyone will be an email user this is growing and I expect most members will benefit. Spam and data protection concerns will be addressed. This will complement rather than replace the Newsletters, except postal members could receive the Newsletters electronically.

Thank you

Martin Gandy (Chairman)

Butterfly Survey

Alison Gilry is carrying out a butterfly survey on Epsom Common and would appreciate some help with this from Association members. The survey will be carried out every year over a circular walk starting from the Stew Ponds car park taking in the main grazing area, Horton Heath and woodland habitats. Each year the recording will be carried out weekly over a 26 week period from April 1st to the end of September, and each walk will take about an hour. If you are interested in seeing green and purple hairstreaks and would like to help please contact Alison for more information about how to survey and record the butterfly species you find. Her email address is butterflies@epsomcommon.org.uk and her mobile number 07736-962466.

Cattle Checking

The cattle grazing on the Common is now a regular feature in summer and helps to maintain diversity of habitat. The area being grazed is now the largest it has been during the life of the project and the Association seeks more volunteers to check the health of the animals on Thursdays and Fridays. Those already involved find the task thoroughly rewarding. To find out more or to arrange a taster experience with a checker please contact Bruce Critchley. His email address is cattle@epsomcommon.org.uk and telephone 01372 742520.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY - DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Please note, all walks start from the Stew Pond Car Park

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

Saturday 2nd July – 11:00am start – Butterfly Stroll

This annual search for the elusive purple emperor butterfly will be led by Howard Whiting. Help him also find, identify and record other butterflies, moths and invertebrates that live on our common. We suggest you may like to bring a snack on this walk.

Saturday 9th July – 2:00pm – Wild Flower Wander

Eileen Taylor will lead this popular walk to find and identify many of our wild flowers and other botanical delights which can be found on our common.

Saturday 6th August - 2.00pm - 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. Meet at the Stew Ponds car park Christ Church Road Epsom (B280) - Duration of Walk approx. 2.5hrs.



BRACKEN PULLING

Why not come and help us on Tuesday evenings during the summer months until the end of August? We meet at 7.00pm and finish at 9.00pm or dusk and usually stop for a short social break half way through. Gloves are provided and no experience is necessary.

Bracken is a very successful plant, found in every continent except Antarctica. It has a two-layer rhizome system; the lowest layer can be up to a metre deep. By pulling the main stem we aim to cut off the food supply back to the rhizome layers and so weaken the plant until it gives up. We're not expecting to eradicate the plant and, despite its toxicity, it can be a host for some caterpillars. Early flowering violets can grow under a bracken canopy and these small plants are host to some of the Fritillary butterflies, which then lay their eggs in the dead bracken litter.

Bracken can out-compete other later-flowering plants by shading them out. We pull bracken on four sites around the common in order to allow heathers to flourish, as they are an important late source of nectar for moths and butterflies. Many of the lowland heaths in north Surrey have been lost over the years due to changes in land use so the heather habitat is in decline. Our work at Horton Heath over the years has been well worthwhile as the heather is now spreading well in the middle section of this area and very little bracken to be seen - of course there's still more to be done! The Lower Moles undertook a few trial 'scrapes' on Horton Heath, simply removing a few inches of top thatch and soil in a small area about two metres square. This work allowed dormant heather seeds to germinate albeit along with plenty of birch but with some careful weeding, the heather has re-established itself successfully.

We will be at:

Horton Heath on 5/7, 2/8 and 23/8 - meet at vehicle access point off old Christchurch Road (near first roundabout);

Bramble Heath on 12/7, 9/8 and 30/8 - meet at the junction of Churchside and Bracken Path;

Blake's pond on 21/6, 19/7 and 16/8 - meet on the railway bridge at end of Castle Road;

the Grazing Area on 28/6 and 26/7 - meet at the Wells notice board off Wells Road.

Our Autumn tasks resume on Sunday 18th and Monday 19th September at Baron's Pond.

Don't forget our lumpwood charcoal, perfect for those summer BBQ's - only £5.00 a bag from us or the Lower Mole Trust at Horton Country Park; also available from the Old Moat Garden Centre, Horton Lane. We also sell charcoal fines at £3.00 a bag, just right for compost aeration or discouraging slugs and snails around tender seedlings or even deterring foxes from digging up your garden. Do contact John Turner for more details.

EPSOM COMMON ASSOCIATION

Chairman – Martin Gandy, 2 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, KT17 3PU. t: 01372-723149;

m: 07796-362923; e: chairperson@epsomcommon.org.uk

Vicechair and EcoVols Leader – John Turner, 10 Hookfield, Epsom KT19 8JG. T: 01372-722580;

m: 07729-235559; e: ecovols@epsomcommon.org.uk

Treasurer – Marilyn Day, 78 Manor Green Road, Epsom KT19 8LN. T: 01372-743606

Council Representative – TBA

Committee members (in addition to the above named)

Bruce Critchley, Conor Morrow (LMCMP), Cynthea Blunden (Secretary), Stewart Cocker (E&EBC),

David King, Roger Newman, Tony Quinn, Eileen Taylor, Gill Sanders
