



## Dog Walking on the Commons

The growing number of dogs on the Commons is a major problem, threatening this vulnerable natural habitat. To help counter this the Conservators introduced three new Byelaws at the end of 2008, in line with other authorities.

The most fundamental of these requires all dog-walkers to pick up after their dogs - everywhere on the Commons. There has been something of a mixed reaction to this with many people still refusing to pick up their dog's faeces. It might, therefore, be helpful to explain the reasons behind the introduction of this particular Byelaw.

The first, and perhaps the most obvious reason, is that no-one likes to tread in dog poo; it is a health risk, it smells, it gets everywhere and is generally unpleasant. The Conservators have, in recent years, come under increasing pressure from both local residents and families who use the Commons for picnics or games with their children to do something about the problem, particularly so on the mown amenity areas of the Commons, such as Rushmere or The Plain.

The other important aspect is nature conservation. Although the Conservators have successfully preserved and protected the Commons since 1871, it is only in the past two decades since the major part of the Commons has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that the Conservators have had an obligation to manage and protect two nationally declining priority habitats: lowland heath and acid grassland. Both of these habitats require a nutrient-poor soil to survive. Input of nitrogen phosphate and potassium from dog faeces has the potential to exert a significant fertilising effect, which could, if left unchecked, eventually lead to the destruction of these vital habitats.

An unexpected problem we are experiencing is that some dog-walkers are picking up after their dogs but then leaving the dog-waste bags lying in the undergrowth. Apart from looking unsightly, this creates an even bigger environmental problem than not picking up the faeces. The Conservators have spent in the region of £6,000 installing dog-waste bins

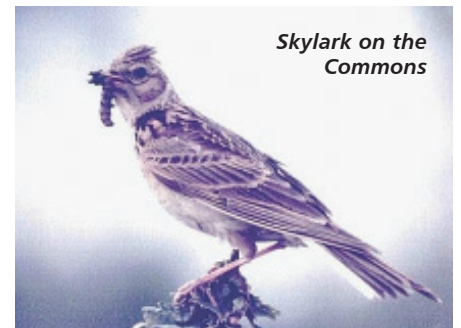
across Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common, and have placed them in accessible locations without impinging on the beauty of the Commons.

*So please, if you bag it...bin it!*

Disturbance by

dogs and dog walkers alike is also a major problem for the flora and fauna in environmentally sensitive areas. This has led to the introduction of the second of the new Byelaws, which gives the Conservators the power to create areas from which dogs must be excluded. The most immediate danger relates to the survival of ground-nesting birds. Trampling and excessive disturbance by dogs is thought to be one of the reasons for the critical decline of ground-nesting birds such as the Skylark and Meadow Pipit. Skylarks are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and it is a criminal offence to disturb birds while nesting. There will be areas of The Plain which will become temporary dog-free zones during the nesting season. Queensmere and its surrounds will also have a "dogs on lead" restriction in order to protect the water-nesting birds, particularly the swans, which are nesting again this year.

The third and final new Byelaw gives our Keepers the power to insist that a dog which is being a nuisance be kept on a lead on the Commons. The Ranger's Office is receiving an increasing number of calls about spats between dogs. Whilst this is in the nature of dogs, particularly between males that are uncastrated, the main problem seems to be that some owners simply ignore the situation and walk away. Additionally, some dog-walkers do not understand that their over-enthusiastic dog can seem threatening to other users of the Commons. The owner may know the dog's intentions are friendly, but others may not. Many of these potentially difficult situations could easily be avoided if a boisterous dog were kept under control and, should an incident occur, it could often be defused with a simple apology.



Skylark on the Commons

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators

## ANNUAL OPEN MEETING

Wednesday 10 June at 8pm  
St John the Baptist Church Hall,  
Kingston Vale, SW15 3PY

### Presentation of annual accounts and report

There will be a general discussion on any points you wish to raise.

Refreshments will be served after the meeting.

**Please help the Conservators to protect the Commons and keep them a pleasant place for everyone.**

## Heathland and Grassland Issues

Over the past year, the Conservators' staff have been very busy with a number of conservation projects:

**Heathland** - We are currently in the third year of a 10-year Heathland Management Plan, and heathland restoration work has recently taken place on Putney Heath adjacent to Inner Park Ride. A smaller patch of heathland has been reclaimed at the base of the Roehampton Hills.

Although only a small number of mature trees have been removed from the area, it is the follow-up operations, which include the clearance of timber, chemical treatment of tree stumps and the removal of all materials from the site, that keep our workforce busy. While the operational stage of our work may appear quite dramatic, the Commons' Site of Special Scientific Interest status means that we have a duty to bring this land into a favourable condition to ensure that no further loss of this valuable habitat occurs across the Commons.

**Grassland** - Another habitat that has come under increasing pressure is the area of grassland known as The Plain, which lies adjacent to Windmill Road, and is divided into two distinct sections. Approximately one third of this area is cut throughout the summer and used as a mown recreation area while the other two thirds are managed for their special ecological value. As a result of the low nutrient content of the soil in this area (pH4 to 5.5) this habitat is known as 'Lowland Acid Grassland'. Rich in wildlife, acid grassland has become a



Grass cutting on The Plain

priority for wildlife conservation across the country but requires constant monitoring and special management techniques for its continued survival. Without the traditional management resource of low intensity grazing by ponies or cattle, the

Plain receives two mechanised cuts per year. The first cut of the year takes place during early March and includes the mowing of approximately 60% of the area while the second cut covers the entire area and takes place in September. All grass cuttings are collected and removed to ensure that nutrient levels in the soil remain appropriate to the correct habitat requirements. While we do all that we can to protect vulnerable habitats across the Commons, complete success can only be achieved through the active participation of Commons users.

To support us in our work, we ask that during very sensitive times of the year, such as the bird-nesting season (March to the end of July), visitors to the Commons appreciate that areas of open grassland and heathland need to be treated with special care.

**To help protect the ground-nesting birds, please observe the signs put up by our staff.**

## Commons' Stables Open Day

The Wimbledon Common Stables Open Day is now a huge event in the Commons' calendar, taking months of planning and organisation to pull together what has become the highlight of our year. But its origins were much humbler.

The Open Day was the brainchild of our Senior Keeper, Bill Rowland. Back in 1996 the Keepers, with assistance from the Probation Service, built a new stable block to replace the original stables that were old and damp and becoming unsuitable for the horses. Bill suggested that the Levy-payers should see what some of their Levy money had been spent on, and suggested



Grooming demonstration

opening up the normally private stables to the public for a day. The idea was not only to show the public the stables but also to explain what actually goes on behind the scenes and what is involved in the day-to-day running of the Commons.

### Wimbledon Common Stables Open Day

Come along to the Annual Stables Open Day  
on Sunday 12 July 2009 from 10.30am  
at The Ranger's Office, Windmill Road, SW19 5NR

**A GREAT DAY OUT FOR ALL THE FAMILY!**

- \* Farm Animals
- \* Birds of Prey
- \* Tractor Rides
- \* Horse displays
- \* The Wacky Dog Show!

That first year was a very modest event. The Keepers put on grooming displays and put up display boards explaining who they were, and what they did. Staff were also on hand to explain the work of the Conservators and the importance of the wildlife habitats that can be found on the Commons. But over the last 13 years the event has grown enormously and now provides a great fun day out for all the family, with stalls for the adults and donkey and tractor rides for the children. As the Open Day has grown, we have tried to maintain the principle that the stalls and displays are run by local people, for local people, and have some relevance to the Commons or the countryside in general. It is not a commercial event and it is not held for financial gain. Most of the exhibitors are local charities, such as Putney RSPCA, London Wildcare and Battersea Dogs and Cats Home.

In addition to the stalls, there is an arena with events going on all day such as riding displays by the Wimbledon Village Stables, police dog handling by the local Parks Police, the majestic Shire horses from Richmond Park and a superb interactive display of birds of prey that enthralled both children and adults alike last year.

And how can we not mention the highlight of the Open Day - the one part of the event that the crowds flock to? It is The Wacky Dog Show of course! For mutts and pedigrees alike, there are classes for "Dog Most Like Its Owner", "Dog with the Waggiest Tail" and the infamous, free for all, completely manic open dog race!



Birds of Prey



And they're off!

**Come and join us!**

## Meet the Conservators

The triennial election for the five elected Conservators took place in February this year. Seven candidates stood for the five available places, including the five currently elected Conservators. The Levy-payers overwhelmingly re-elected the five current Conservators: Mr David Devons, Mrs Diana de Coverly Veale, Mr John Horrocks, Mr Norman Plastow MBE and Mr Andrew Simon.

2009 has also seen the retirement of the three Conservators appointed by the Secretaries of State. Three new Conservators have now been appointed by the Secretary of State for Defence, Secretary of State for the Environment (Defra) and the Home Secretary.

**Ministry of Defence** - Sir Ian Andrews has worked for the Ministry of Defence for many years and has considerable experience of dealing with estates owned by the Ministry. He replaces Sir Robert Andrew, one of our longest serving Conservators, who was appointed by the Secretary of State for Defence in 1973 and has been reappointed every three years since then. His extensive administrative skills have been invaluable to the Board as well as his knowledge of the workings of the civil service, particularly when it has been necessary to negotiate with government departments.

**Defra** - The new Defra appointee is Dr Stephen Frank, whom many of you may know through his work with the Merton branch of the London Wildlife Trust. Stephen has extensive ecological and conservation qualifications and experience, and has also carried out conservation work on Wimbledon Common. He replaces Una Sutcliffe, who was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1998 and her environmental skills will be sorely missed. Not only was she an expert on Farm Bog (her MSc thesis was based on this) and other aspects of the Commons, but she

was joint editor with Tony Drakeford of the book "Wimbledon Common & Putney Heath - A Natural History" published by the Conservators in 2000. She also established and chaired the Natural History Sub-Committee, which reports monthly to the full Board on conservation issues.

**Home Office** - Mr Derek Frampton has been appointed as the new Home Secretary appointee. Derek has considerable knowledge and experience of local legal and policing issues and this will prove invaluable to the Conservators. He replaces Pauline Brueseke who was appointed by the Home Secretary in 1999 and who brought a welcome pragmatism and directness to the Board and spoke out frequently on behalf of the residents of Roehampton. Pauline also brought a knowledge of local government, having previously served as an elected Councillor.

We would like to thank all three retiring Conservators for their contribution to the work of the Board and welcome the three newly appointed Conservators.



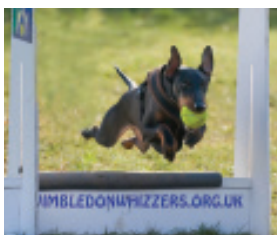
*Standing from left to right: Mr Andrew Simon, Mr Norman Plastow MBE, Mr David Devons, Mrs Diana de Coverly Veale, Mr John Horrocks. Sitting from left to right: Dr Stephen Frank, Sir Ian Andrews, Mr Derek Frampton.*

## Flyball comes to the Commons

The Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields have continued to flourish this year. One sport that has really taken off in a big way is flyball. The Wimbledon Whizzers Flyball Team is a new club that started meeting at the Playing Fields in February 2008. Since its inaugural meeting, the club has gone from strength to strength and is now entering competitions around the UK, and has even hosted its own flyball event at the Playing Fields.

To the outsider, flyball appears to be a sport for dog-mad people with ball-mad dogs; to the insider, this is confirmed! Flyball involves a relay team of four dogs leaping over hurdles to retrieve a tennis ball. Sounds a bit dull? Not in the slightest. The sheer enthusiasm of the dogs and their owners really does have to be seen to be believed! There's always lots of whooping, cheering and barking.....and that's just from the handlers!

If you've seen flyball on TV you might be forgiven for thinking that this is purely the domain of Collies - not so - the Whizzers have a mix of dogs taking part, ranging from Labradors, Jack Russells, Shelties and Spaniels to all mutts in between. If you would like to see what it's all about, or even have a go with your dog, pop along to the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields on a Saturday morning, or have a look at the Whizzer's website [www.wimbledonwhizzers.org.uk](http://www.wimbledonwhizzers.org.uk).



## New Cottages at Stag Lane

The 2008 Newsletter reported that a project underway was the construction of two new houses for Commons Keepers on an enclosed plot of land owned by the Conservators on Stag Lane. As with the new Ranger's Office, the building work has been funded by the enforced sale of Mill House in 2007, and at no expense to the Commons' levypayers.

The Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 made provision for the Conservators to build six cottages on the Commons, in addition to the cottages that were already built when the Conservators took over the land from the then Earl Spencer. The cottages have, after major delays caused by additional drainage work required by Thames Water, now been finished and the two Keepers have moved in with their families.

*New Cottages at Stag Lane*



## Chairman's Report

The Putney Hospital site at Putney Lower Common is still an eyesore. Last year, agreement was reached to erect a hoarding on Common land around the site whilst the Putney Hospital buildings are demolished and the new development is built. The agreement, which includes a nominal licence fee and special provisions for the protection of the trees, is for 3 1/2 years; thereafter, the licence fee increases substantially. By now, the Section 106 Agreement, to which the Conservators are a party, should have been signed and this will allow demolition of all the buildings on the site to begin. The transfer document should also have been registered; this transfers land at the rear of the site to the Conservators in compensation for the new access road to be built on the Common. Putney Hospital was closed in 1999 and it is amazing that it is taking so long for the development to begin; direct discussions between the Wandsworth Primary Care Trust and the Conservators have continued since 2002.

All the Conservators, and many users of Wimbledon Common, breathed a sigh of relief when Robert Napper was convicted last December of the brutal murder of Rachel Nickel 16 years earlier, and Colin Stagg's innocence was put beyond any doubt. Safety on the Commons is a top priority, and the mounted Keepers are well trained to deal with most eventualities.

In 2008 the Court of Appeal held that the Conservators do have the power to grant easements, particularly rights of way. What is a fair and reasonable price to charge owners of

properties that have access across the Common for a right of way is still under discussion, given our obligations under the Charities Act to obtain "the best that can reasonably be obtained for the charity". When a scheme acceptable to the Charity Commission has been prepared, owners of properties around the Wimbledon Village end of Wimbledon Common will be offered the opportunity to purchase a right of way, although there will be no obligation on them to do so.

The triennial election for the five elected Conservators took place in February and it was good to see a small increase in the number of levy-payers voting - 22.4% compared with 21.1% in 2006 - although it was still disappointingly low, bearing in mind that the average turnout for local government elections is about 35%.

Our part-time archivist, financed by a generous donation, has completed the first stage of sorting and cataloguing the Conservators' records. He is now in the process of fully sorting and listing documents. The work is expected to last until the end of the year.

Finally, on a conservation note, agreement has at last been reached with the Environmental Agency for the construction of a "scallop" on Beverley Brook by the Scout Field near the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields to provide a sanctuary for river life.

David Devons  
Chairman

## Commons Finances 2008 - 2009

The Commons' finances are soundly based on income from the Levy, which covers staff costs. Care of the environment, and other planned expenses, are covered by grants, income from the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, fairs, sale of logs, etc. The Levy is linked to the Retail Price Index (RPI) for the September preceding the financial year. This has enabled the Conservators to keep up with inflation while controlling expenditure through forward-planning. Income from other sources has grown in recent years, ensuring adequate maintenance and renewal of equipment. Funds from the enforced sale of Mill House enabled us recently to build two cottages in Stag Lane, which are now occupied by Commons Keepers. This helps with security since the Keepers can be summoned immediately a problem arises.

The Conservators are confident of sustaining current levels of care of the Commons through the coming year or two, despite the possibility that RPI might then be close to zero. For 2009-10, the Levy for a Band D property will be £24.32 per annum, compared with £23.32 in the previous year.

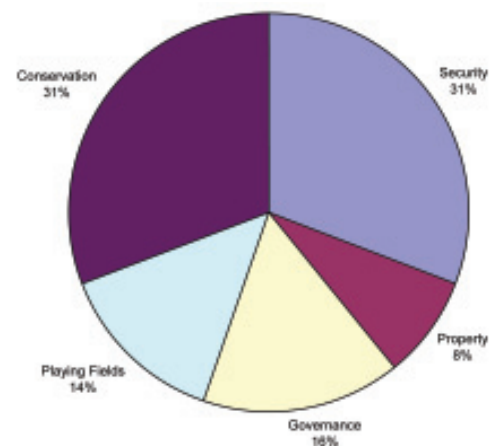
## Gifts and Legacies

Under Section 8 of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators is a body corporate with perpetual succession. This means that the body corporate exists separately from the individual Conservators. The Conservators as a body corporate is also a registered charity. Therefore, there is no inheritance tax on legacies bequeathed to them, and any gifts can be offset against the donor's income tax. The annual levy barely produces enough to cover the salaries and related costs of the staff running the Commons, so that the Conservators

depend on income generated by other means, eg from the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, from allowing filming on the Commons and from selling items such as logs, postcards and Christmas cards.

If you would like to support the Commons by means of a donation or legacy, please contact Gordon Vincent, the Clerk & Ranger, Chief Executive, at the Ranger's Office (see contact details below). Not only would the Conservators be most grateful but your gift would be used to benefit the Commons for present and future users.

### Expenditure Breakdown



For more information on issues highlighted in this newsletter log on to [www.wpcc.org.uk](http://www.wpcc.org.uk)

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