



## Welcome to our November Commons

**News.** It's hard to believe that summer has been and gone in the blink of an eye and autumn is here already. Although it's a hot topic of discussion here at the Ranger's Office, we do think the Commons looks amazing in their autumn coat!



## Windmill Update - The sails are coming back!

We are delighted that the major works to restore our Grade II\* Listed Windmill, funded with the benefit of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant, are now nearing completion. The perished membrane beneath the wooden cladding of the tower has been replaced; the fantail has been restored and the tower and cap have been repainted. Unfortunately, during the course of the works, it was also found to be necessary to completely replace the wooden balustrading around the roof of the windmill at an additional cost of £15,000.

But with the scaffolding now removed, we can look to the major task of getting the sails back! And the good news is that this is scheduled to take place on the morning of Wednesday 9th November - weather permitting - and the public are welcome to come along and watch. As part of the HLF project, we are also planning on filming the re-installation of the sails and this will be available as a resource for future education programmes.



## 2016 Commons Christmas Card now available!



This year's Commons Christmas Card is a stunning painting by local artist, Mr C W Austin. Although painted some 34 years ago, it shows how timeless the Commons are and you'd be hard-pressed to tell this wasn't painted much more recently. We are grateful to Mr Austin for allowing us to use this beautiful image.

The cards are on sale at the Ranger's Office, priced at £6 for a pack of 10 cards.

## Wildlife on the Commons

We often make mention of the hard work carried out by our conservation volunteers, the “Scrub Bashers”, but another hugely important but often unseen group of volunteers are those who make up our wildlife recording team.

Many of you will know Dave Wills, our local bird expert who, aided by his small army of fellow bird-watchers, produces the excellent annual Commons Bird Report for us. But did you know we also have regulars who walk two butterfly transects, monitor our dragonflies and damselflies, keep regular records of the moths to be found on the Commons, and also keep check on our plants and grasses? Their recording has mostly been informal, but over the last few years we have started to collate this valuable information to help us increase our knowledge of the Commons’ flora and fauna. This information gives us a good indication of what we are doing right, or perhaps wrong, in the management of this vitally important habitat, and will help guide the future management.

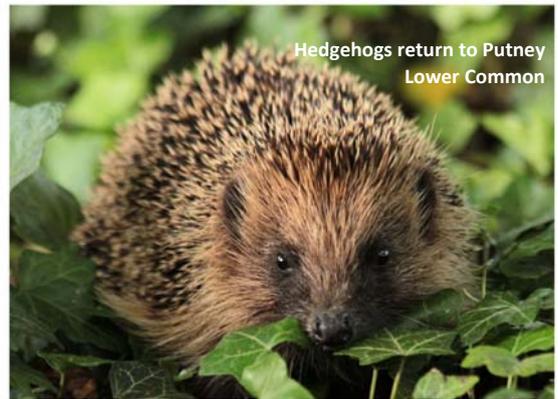
Equally important are the general public who visit the Commons and provide valuable ad-hoc information on wildlife sightings. A fantastic example of this has been the sightings of breeding hedgehogs at Putney Lower Common. Figures suggest that hedgehog numbers have dropped by some 30% over the last ten years and they have virtually disappeared from some parts of London. We had thought them long gone from the Commons so these reports have been incredibly valuable and we have added details to a survey being carried out by the British Hedgehog Society. We would also welcome news of any further sightings.

A notable bird sighting this year has been that of a Bee-Eater seen flying around the Windmill in May - another sighting reported by a member of the public. A resident of Southern Europe, their visits to the UK have been more and more frequent and a pair has been breeding in Cumbria, causing speculation about colonisation in the UK.

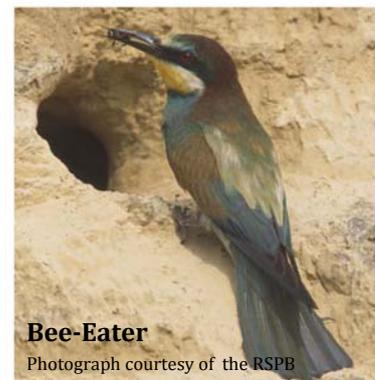
Butterflies have also provided some notable sightings this year including Purple Emperors, White Admiral and a stunning Marbled White spotted, near Bluegate Pond by regular walker David Element.

Another new species recorded this year, although likely to have been here some time but unnoticed or mis-identified, is the stunning Bee Wolf (*right*). Part of the Wasp family, they nest in the ground around sand dunes and lowland heaths. Here on the Commons they are found nesting in one of our more sandy soil footpaths at the edge of the golf course. Their prey is the worker honey bee but they also feed on the nectar of a variety of flowers, including bramble and creeping thistle.

Photograph courtesy of  
volunteer, Les Hill



Photograph courtesy of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society

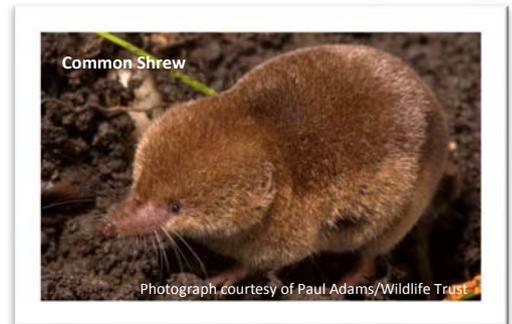
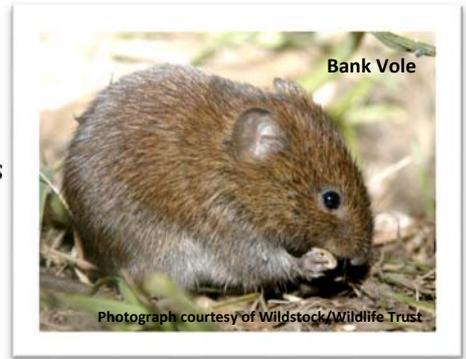


## Surveying for Small Mammals

For the first time this year we have carried out a small mammal survey - the increase in the number of raptors flying around the Commons would indicate that there is a sufficient small mammal population to sustain them. Although we have confirmed sightings of Shrews and Bank Voles, small mammals are generally quite elusive creatures and difficult to record.

Led by Alex Learmont from the Surrey Mammal Group, members of the public joined us on the evening of Saturday 22nd October 2016 to see the humane Longworth traps being set and a brief talk by Alex, and then again at the crack of dawn on the Sunday morning in order to see what had been trapped.

Alex commented "Despite a slow start our group trapped and recorded six Wood mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) at various locations along the bramble scrub bordering The Plain. This shows that the area is a valuable refuge for small mammals, which in turn support other predators such as Kestrels, Owls and Foxes. It also gave an excellent opportunity for volunteers to see and handle such charismatic creatures otherwise rarely seen up close".



For more information on small mammals, visit the Wildlife Trust's website at [wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org)

## DIARY DATES

### Carols at the Windmill!

To celebrate the restoration of the Windmill sails, and because it's Christmas, on **Saturday 17th December** the Wandle Concert Band will be at the Windmill playing carols to get us into the festive spirit! Come and join us for mince pies and hot drinks. **3pm to 4.30pm**. The Windmill Car Park will be open for parking.

**Although most dates are still to be finalised, these are some of the events we will be organising during 2017:**

- February - Winter Talk
- April 15th-17th Easter Weekend Treasure Hunt
- April - Spring Walk Putney Lower Common
- May 7th 8.00am - Bird Walk with Dave Wills
- May - Bat Walk
- June - BioBlitz - our annual weekend of nature
- July - Butterfly and Dragonfly Walk
- September 10th - Wimbledon and Putney Commons Open Day
- September 17th - Fungi Walk
- October - Autumn Walk
- October 28th - Halloween Event
- December - Christmas Gift Craft Fayre

For further information on any of our events or to book a place on any of our walks and talks. Please e-mail [rangersoffice@wpcc.org.uk](mailto:rangersoffice@wpcc.org.uk) or call Angela on 020 8788 7655

## Fungi on the Commons

At this time of year, it is the turn of fungi to populate the woodland and heathland. Fungi are another important part of the ecology of the Commons as they "recycle" plant debris and leaf litter into nutrients, breaking them down into the soil.

Given the sensitive nature of this SSSI site, we only allow picking under permit from the Ranger's Office and limit the amount that can be picked to 250g per person. Please contact the Ranger's Office for more information.



## New Development and clearance work at Putney Lower Common

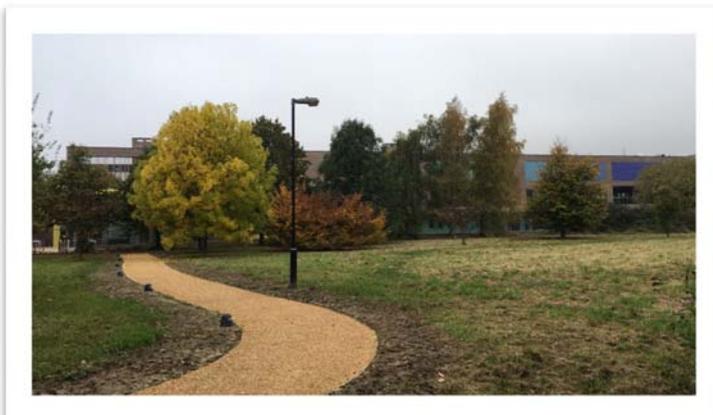
The construction of the school building at Putney Green has now been completed and was officially handed over to the Oasis Academy on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016.

The school's Executive Principal, Di Morgan, commented "We are looking forward to the children learning about their natural environment including the adjacent Common and will be encouraging the next generation of botanists and those who help look after these wonderful natural assets. The new intake of children started their studies in the new school after the recent half term break".

The external footpath and access road are also complete, with a tar and gravel finish. The planting of many native trees and shrubs is due to start in late November/early December with material having been selected from Hilliers Nursery by the retained Landscape Architect for the project. The former access road to the old Nurses Home and car park for the hospital have been excavated, and the areas top-soiled. They will be re-seeded and returned to open grassland for use by the local community

### Woodland Clearance work

Our own staff have been continuing clearance work to open up the more dense areas of woodland north of the cemetery and west of the fairground site. The aim of the work is to improve the amount of light that gets to the woodland floor and so aid an increase in the biodiversity of the site.



## Charity Commission launches Statutory Inquiry

The Conservators have been formally notified by the Charity Commission that it has opened a Statutory Inquiry to look into the possible financial loss to the Charity arising from the easement that WPCC entered into with Wandsworth Borough Council for access rights over Putney Lower Common, and the way in which the Conservators have sought to resolve the matter.

The Commission required the Conservators, by 13th October, to have appointed a firm of valuers to carry out a retrospective valuation and, following a procurement and tendering exercise conducted by their retained charity lawyers, Charles Russell Speechlys, the Board approved the appointment of a Senior Partner from Daniel Watney to undertake a retrospective valuation of the easement at the date it was agreed in 2012. It is expected that the retrospective valuation will be received by mid-November.

In accordance with the Charity Commission's Formal Action Plan, if a loss is identified, the Board will then need to consider, with advice from their lawyers, if it is appropriate and feasible to recover any loss and, if so, from whom.