



Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators

Annual Open Meeting 29 July 2020

Commons Wildlife Watch Initiative

Dr Ros Taylor

Good Evening.

The Commons Wildlife Watch is a new citizen science initiative that has been developed by WPCC's Wildlife & Conservation Forum over the last year.

Those of you who attended the Winter Talk earlier this year given by Peter Almond from the British Trust for Ornithology will have been introduced to their citizen science scheme but many of you will probably be more familiar with the RSPB's Garden Bird Watch scheme which takes place at the end of January each year. Running for some 40 years, it now has some 9 million participants so we are hopeful that many of you will come along and join our citizen science initiative here on the Commons.

Another citizen science scheme, The Big Butterfly Count, is currently underway so you could join in with that by visiting Butterfly Conservation's website and downloading their butterfly guide to get some practise!

The essence of citizen science is capitalising on the potentially valuable information that any member of the public visiting the Commons could give us. While we have a team of volunteers who carry out regular recording and who perhaps in your minds might be more expert people, understanding wildlife and engaging with wildlife and knowing what is there is really a role for everybody and since so many of you are visiting the Commons and enjoying the habitats and the plants and animals, we would ask you to contribute by sending us a record of your observations.

And in particular, since many of you will visit areas that we don't regularly record maybe we could get extra information on, for example, the impact of opening up the Beverley Brook corridor, or more information on Putney Lower Common. The latter, in particular, is an area which is under-recorded. Although we are now getting news about hedgehogs and our Conservation Officer visits Putney Lower Common monthly to make other snapshot records, it's not quite the same as hearing from people, day to day, telling us what they see when they are out taking a walk in the area.

How to join in. Take a look at the WPCC website, there is a link right there on the homepage and you can download a prompt sheet. This will encourage you to look at the most likely birds that you might find, or the most typical butterflies or dragonflies and so forth. It will give you the hint of what you might hope to see. These lists are based on what we have been recording over the last six years, and which you can read about in more detail in the annual Monitoring Reports which are also available on the website in the nature area.

The important thing to do is prepare before you go out; download your form, and take a pencil as this works much better in the rain. With the form comes a gridded map which will help you to identify and tell us exactly where you are. Perhaps also think about taking a pair of binoculars or some ID aids, whatever works for you. We have included some recommendations for books and apps on the Wildlife Watch page.

We had hoped to launch the scheme with a fanfare earlier in the year but then lockdown intervened and at the moment we can't provide the backup we had hoped to offer by being available in the Information Centre and sharing ID guides or peering together over a specimen to try to agree what it is, but you can find help through the books and weblinks we have provided. I would stress that you don't need to be an expert to join in you just need to be willing and observant.

When you have completed your sheet, please scan or upload it and send it to wildlife@wpcc.org.uk. Again, this information is on the web page.

Don't worry if you can't easily identify something you have seen. You can also take a photo and perhaps visit WPCC's Facebook Nature Notes group where there are several experts and enthusiastic beginners who can help you.

The other great way to practise is in your own back garden. Always remember the back gardens of Wimbledon, Putney, Kingston Vale are part of the hinterland of the Commons and what you see there is going to give you a hint as to what you might find when you are out and about exploring on the Commons.

You will be doing us a huge favour. Because this has been an unusual year, there are going to be gaps in our records quite simply because some of our regular volunteers are elderly; some have been shielding; some, like myself, have to travel a long distance which has not been allowed. I would suggest to you that this would be a wonderful way to respond to an unusual year and, at the same time, enhance the records for Wimbledon and Putney Commons and extend our baseline knowledge. If this were to run for 40 years like the RSPB scheme, we would know so much more about how things have changed on the Commons and whether things that here now are still present or whether new things have turned up. We live in a very variable times as has already been mentioned with potential variations in weather linked with changing climate. If this goes on we cannot be sure what will be the impact and this is why it's important to start by knowing what's here now.

Thank you very much for your time - I hope you can help us recording to the Commons.