

Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Annual Conservation Report 2018/19

Introduction

The Annual Conservation Report for 2018/19 provides a summary of the conservation activities that have been carried out on Wimbledon and Putney Commons from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

Written by the Conservation and Engagement Officer for Wimbledon and Putney Commons, this report also provides details of the wide range of volunteering activities and public engagement events that have taken place on the Commons during the year.



Throughout the year, the Commons' Saturday morning volunteer 'Scrub Bashers' are involved with cutting back invasive saplings around the Commons' remaining areas of heathland and open ground.

Heathland Management:

Working under the guidance of our current involvement with the Higher Tier element of Natural England's (NE) Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement, between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, heathland management has remained an ongoing part of the Commons' overall programme of habitat management.

Found on free draining, nutrient poor, acidic soils, lowland heathland is classed as a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan because it is a rare and threatened habitat.

According to Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Negotiation Schedule, the aim of the management of lowland heathland is '*to provide a mosaic of vegetation which allows all heathland features to flourish, including pioneer heath and bare ground which benefits rarer invertebrates, birds, reptiles and plants*'.



Heathland located to the south of Hookhamslade Pond (September 2018)

In accordance with the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Countryside Stewardship agreement, at an operational level, the management of lowland heathland on the Commons will include:

The control and management of birch, oak and other scrub species by cutting and stump treatment.

Rotational cutting (or grazing) to maintain a varied heathland vegetation structure.

The creation of bare ground sites through the scraping back of turves.

The maintenance of a full range of age classes of gorse by cutting and removing arisings.

The management of dense bracken stands and deep bracken litter layers by rotational cutting, bruising or spraying.

Since the establishment of the Commons' Saturday morning volunteer group (commonly known as the Scrub Bashers) in 2015, it has been this group that has been at the forefront of carrying out the general management of the Commons' heathland. Equipped with hand tools including loppers and bow saws, this group of volunteers meet up on two Saturday mornings each month and between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, invasive saplings, mature gorse and bracken were cut back around Bluegate Gravel Pit and on areas of heathland located to the south and east of Hookhamslade Pond.

Following all volunteer scrub bashing sessions that take place on the Commons, the Commons' Maintenance Team are then responsible for chipping and removing all cut materials away from the heathland. This work is not only carried out to maintain the natural beauty of the site but perhaps more importantly, the removal of all cut materials helps to prevent an increase in soil fertility, the suppression of existing ground flora and the risk of unwanted fires.



Cut saplings stacked and ready for the arrival of the Common's Maintenance Team

In addition to the support which they provide to the Commons' various groups of volunteers, the Common's team of six maintenance operatives are also responsible for all of the mechanized and the larger operations that are required on the Commons' heathland.

As part of the Commons' commitment to the current phase of the NE, CS agreement, during November and December 2018, tree thinning was carried out along the edge of heathland located to the south of Kingsmere and on heathland located to the south of Hookhamslade Pond.

This work was carried out to help increase the area of open heathland on the Commons and also to provide a more natural edge to the nearby woodland. As there was no herbicide treatment used on any of the cut tree stumps, when new shoots appear, this will also result in the creation of a much more natural and gradual transition from tall trees through to low scrub and the surrounding heathland habitat.

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, other heathland work carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team has included Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) bruising, the re-establishment of a small wetland site near the junction of Ladies Mile and Inner Park Ride and ensuring that firebreaks are cut across all areas of heathland and long grass.



One of the Commons' Maintenance Team Bracken bruising on an area of heathland near Ladies Mile. This work is carried out as Bracken produces a dense canopy which can result in blocking out the light required by other plants to survive. Using a bracken bruiser that has been mounted on a ride on mower, small cuts are produced on the stem of the Bracken which allows sap to pass up from the rhizome (underground root system) and in effect allows the plant to bleed.

Towards the end of 2017, a joint project involving The Royal Wimbledon Golf Club (RWGC), Wimbledon and Putney Commons and Natural England, was initiated to help improve the heathland habitats which are found on the Commons and the nearby land administered by the RWGC.

As both sites contain land which forms part of the Wimbledon Common Site of Special Scientific Interest, the project involved the removal of turf on four areas of ground located around the edge of the Wimbledon Common Golf Course. These turves were then transported by staff from the RWGC and subsequently used to enhance various bunkers around the RWGC course.

The areas where turf was removed on the Commons included two sites near the Kings Royal Rifles (KRR) Memorial Stone, one site close to Sunset Road and one area near the western end of Camp Road.

In total, 1500m² of turf was removed from Wimbledon Common and re-laid around bunkers belonging the RWGC. Where bare ground was left behind on Wimbledon Common, this was harrowed by experienced staff from RWGC and subsequently covered with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) cuttings that had been taken from other selected areas of the Commons.

By July 2018, emergent Heather was found growing on two of the areas of scraped ground (Sunset Road and one area near the KRR stone) but the other two areas remained largely bare of vegetation. As the overall coverage of Heather remained fairly limited across all of the four sites, by the end of 2018, the decision was made to delay any further work of this kind until further evidence could be found to demonstrate the effectiveness of this particular form of management.



Heather being cut near Sunset Road by staff from RWGC towards the end of 2017



Although Heather only appeared on two of the areas of scraped ground during 2018, bare ground, as illustrated above in the area near Camp Road, has proved to be of enormous value to invertebrates with large numbers of Mining bee nesting holes found throughout the summer months.

Acid Grassland:

In addition to the Commons' heathland, another valuable habitat that is managed under the guidance of Commons' NE, CS agreement is acid grassland. Occurring on nutrient poor, free draining soils with a pH from 4 to 5.5, there are currently three areas on the Commons which undergo a programme of management specifically designed to protect this increasingly rare habitat. These areas include The Plain, the area of grassland immediately south of Tibbet's Corner and a small area of grassland located close to the southern end of Centre Path.

While all three areas of acid grassland undergo an annual programme of work where contractors cut and remove vegetation from the site, it is the largest of the three areas, The Plain, which is subject to the most intensive programme of management. With an overall area of 11.7 hectares, between 1st March and 31st July, 9.7 hectares of this site are designated as a Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) Protection Area where visitors to the Commons are asked to keep dogs on lead, keep to mown paths and to not fly kites near the restricted area.

As part of this work, 30 public notices are positioned around the perimeter of the Skylark Protection Area and during late spring, three paths are mown by the Commons' Maintenance Team across the area to allow visitors to cross the site.



Each year, public notices are positioned around the Skylark Protection Area on the 1st March. Unfortunately, while Skylarks were reported on The Plain during the summer period, no nesting birds were recorded on this site during 2018.



Contractors photographed cutting and baling vegetation on The Plain during August 2018



As part of the management of The Plain, an area measuring one hectare is left uncut during the annual summer mowing which is carried out during August. This area of ground is left uncut to provide an important wildlife refuge and a suitable habitat for ground nesting birds should they appear the following year.

Additional grassland restoration work:

As part of the Commons' 2016, NE, CS application process, soil samples were collected from 13 of the Commons' grassland sites to determine whether they were suitable for inclusion in the final CS agreement. In total, 325 soil samples were collected and sent off to Natural England's soil laboratory for analysis.

While the outcome of this work resulted in a small number of areas being included in the current CS agreement, unfortunately, the vast majority of the areas that were tested were found to be too high in nutrients for inclusion.

Without the option of grazing cattle, an alternative way to reverse this problem would be to carry out an annual programme of work where the vegetation from a small number of grassland sites could be cut and removed in order to reduce excess nutrients.

Following NE's advice, two small grassland sites on the Commons were selected and using a hired scarifier, a programme of cut and collect was carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team during August 2018. In time, this work will help to improve the status of these areas as acid grassland sites. The two areas that were selected are close to the Southern Pound on Wimbledon Common and close to Telegraph Road on Putney Heath.



Meadow restoration work was carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team during August 2018. The two areas selected were close to the Southern Pound (photographed above) and close to Telegraph Road on Putney Heath (photographed below).



Woodland Management

Covering an area of 263 hectares, 2019 marked the Commons' first year of involvement with the Forestry Commission's (FC) Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement.

Lasting for a period of five years, the FC's, CS agreement involves the following objectives:

- To create a more varied range of tree age to ensure good succession
- To maintain and enhance hazel coppice
- To reduce the dominance of holly in the understorey
- To increase open areas within woodlands
- To remove invasive non-native species
- To retain non-intervention areas
- To improve wetland areas and ponds
- To encourage a wider range of native species
- To maintain an appropriate and effective health and safety regime
- To maintain and improve amenity
- To obtain grants where available to further objectives.
- To continue to encourage the use of the Commons for recreational and educational purposes.

During the first year of the Commons' involvement with the FC's CS agreement, woodland operations were concentrated along the area of ground that runs parallel with the Wimbledon Common section of the Beverley Brook.

Working in conjunction with the Wimbledon Common Beverley Brook restoration project (1st January 2019 to 28th February 2019) the Commons' Maintenance Team carried out a programme of tree thinning that was designed to both improve the structure of the woodland along this area and to help increase the amount of light which is able to reach the nearby watercourse of the Beverley Brook.



Photographed during January 2019, two members of the Commons' Maintenance Team can be seen carrying out tree thinning work along the edge of Beverley Brook. By removing carefully selected trees, the additional light which is able to reach the watercourse below will help to promote the growth of instream vegetation and provide additional habitats for fish.

Prior to the start of the Beverley Brook restoration project, Natural England and an independent ecologist had been consulted to determine which trees could be felled along the edge of the watercourse without causing undue disruption to wildlife and the advice from both of these sources was strictly adhered to throughout the entirety of our 2019 woodland operations.

Recycling of the cut materials was also a high consideration in our 2019 woodland work programme with a substantial amount of large wooded material being used to serve a multitude of purposes along the brook. The results of this work included habitat creation and cover for wildlife, the creation of in-channel features such as islands and berms, the narrowing of the channel and the increase of flow velocities which would help to reduce the deposition of silt which has been a major problem along the Beverley Brook for a considerable length of time.



Large wooded material was used to create various features along the Beverley Brook such as berms which can be seen in the photograph above.

In other areas, cut materials were also piled up along the woodland edge to provide additional deadwood habitats and in some cases, large sections of timber were sunk vertically into the ground to provide specific habitats for the increasingly rare Stag Beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) for which, in part, Wimbledon Common has been designated as a Special Area of Conservation.

In accordance with the Commons' FC, CS agreement, as much dead wood is kept on site as possible. It is then allowed to undergo the natural process of decay which is of such vital importance to the Commons' wide variety of flora and fauna.



Stag beetle log piles were created as part of the Commons recent woodland work along the Beverley Brook. Stag beetles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended and listed as a Priority Species for the UK and London Biodiversity Action Plans.

Although the largest section of the Commons' 2019 woodland management programme was carried out close to the Beverley Brook on Wimbledon Common, during the same period of time, the Commons' mid-week volunteer group were also involved in another important piece of woodland work. On a number of occasions throughout January and February 2019, this group of volunteers visited an area of woodland which is located between the two Gravelly horse rides in order to cut back neglected Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) which had sadly fallen outside of any active programme of management.

By cutting hazel growth close to ground level, new coppice shoots re-grow from dormant buds on the remaining stump and within a very short period of time new shoots appear and help to regenerate the shrub layer which is an important and often missing part of the Commons woodland structure.

What's more, by including the neglected hazel trees into a regular cycle of coppicing, this work will actually prolong the life-span of the trees which are cut.



Hazel coppicing being carried out by volunteers during January 2019



Coppiced Hazel stool

Pond Management

There are currently nine ponds on Wimbledon and Putney Commons all of which have been created either from wet areas on the clay that have been dammed or as a result of old gravel pits that have become flooded.

While all of the Commons' ponds are varied in size, depth and settings, all of them are nonetheless extremely important for the diversity of wildlife they attract.

Unfortunately, as a result of the continued presence of the non-native and highly invasive aquatic plant known as New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), two of the Commons ponds, 7 Post Pond and Curling Pond, required special attention during the autumn of 2018. Introduced from its native range of Australia and New Zealand into the United Kingdom in 1911 and sold as an oxygenating plant for ponds, by the 1950's, New Zealand Pigmyweed had dispersed into the wider environment via the movement of vegetative fragments on boats, machinery, clothing and possibly wildfowl. Successfully growing in and around water that is up to 3 metres deep, a dense mat of vegetation can soon spread across a pond causing the shading of existing plants and the depletion of oxygen in the water which leads to a reduction of native flora and fauna. To increase the problem, there is no dormant period for this plant which results in continued growth throughout the year and apart from Grass carp which are known to graze New Zealand Pigmyweed, there are no known species that predate on it.



New Zealand Pigmyweed photographed in 7 Post Pond in 2015



Opting for the use of the mechanical removal of New Zealand Pigmyweed during 2018, weed was left on the edge of 7 Post Pond for one week to allow any wildlife to return back to the pond. Following this, the weed was removed from site and allowed to compost nearby. Following all visits to the pond a strict programme of cleaning machinery and clothing was adhered to in order to prevent the spread of New Zealand Pigmyweed to other parts of the Common.

In addition to the problem of invasive aquatic plants, another issue that has affected 7 Post Pond and especially Curling Pond is the problem of dense shading. Apart from their aesthetic appeal, waterside trees can be a useful addition to a pond providing a wide range of useful habitats and resting places for wildlife. In the case of 7 Post Pond and Curling Pond, it was considered however that the dense shade and high amount of leaf fall was promoting conditions that are detrimental to both the aquatic flora and fauna of these sites. With help provided from volunteers and the Commons' Maintenance Team, vegetation was removed or coppiced from 7 Post Pond and Curling Pond and further removal of large shade bearing Turkey Oaks (*Quercus cerris*) will be carried out around Curling pond in the future.



Members of the Commons' mid-week volunteer group cutting back bramble and small saplings around 7 Post Pond during November 2018

With regards to other more general tasks that have been carried out around the Commons' ponds during 2018 and 2019, as with previous years, public notices were positioned around five of the Commons' ponds which ask visitors to keep their dogs out of the water from 1st April to 31st August. This is done to help protect the Commons' breeding waterfowl and the ponds that are included are Bluegate Gravel Pit, Hookhamslade Pond, 7 Post Pond, Kingsmere and Queensmere. As a result of multiple reports of dogs running into the water at Rushmere and disturbing the waterfowl, public notices were also added to this area on 1st May 2019.

During the beginning of March 2019, the annual task of restoring and providing the floating platforms on Queensmere with fresh nesting material was also carried out and it was good to see that one of these platforms was soon used as a nesting site by a pair of Mute swans (*Cygnus olor*).

Beverley Brook

Carried out in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) Wimbledon and Putney Commons (WPCC) and Merton Council and funded by the Environment Agency and Viridor Credits (landfill tax), after two years of careful planning and preparation, work commenced on the Beverley Brook restoration project during the first week of January 2019.

With the Commons' Maintenance Team involved with tree thinning and woodland work along the edge of the Beverley Brook, by the second week of January, contractors (Aquamaintain) working on behalf of SERT had arrived on site and the scale of the work being carried out along this section of the Commons soon intensified.



SERT contractors working along the Beverley Brook during January 2019

With approximately 2km of the Beverley Brook (14% of its total length) passing through Wimbledon Common, an extensive programme of works lasting approximately 2 months was carried out to help restore this section of the river back to a fully functioning riverine eco-system. Facing a watercourse that had been heavily modified in the past and was therefore very limited in habitat diversity for fish and aquatic invertebrates, this project involved a number of key elements. These have included the removal of creosote covered toe boarding from either side of the channel, tree thinning to allow more light to reach the watercourse below and help promote the growth of in-stream plants, narrowing of the channel which would increase the flows and create additional habitats for fish and adding large woody materials which would also provide a greater complexity of habitats for aquatic wildlife.

While a great deal of work was carried out along the Beverley Brook during the first two months of 2019, looking into the future, both SERT and the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators will be involved in a number of projects that have been designed to help further improve this section of river.

For our part, we will be organising both staff and volunteer litter picking events along the Beverley Brook and SERT have organised two volunteer pollution monitoring schemes. These schemes involve their 'Pollution Patrols' which help to monitor pollution incidents such as contaminated water being discharged into rivers and Riverfly monitoring which is a national scheme co-ordinated by the Riverfly Partnership and also designed to detect changes in local water quality.



According to SERT, by the end of February 2019, 'a total of 1.3km of the Beverley Brook had been enhanced with 60 new pieces of large woody material and 63 berms installed. By the end of the project, 2km of creosote covered toe-boarding (bottom right corner of the photograph above) had also been removed which filled eight 20m³ skips.'

Management of Invasive Species

As well as our involvement with the management of non-native invasive aquatic plant species, the other main invasive species that are actively managed on Wimbledon and Putney Commons include Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*), Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*).

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

OPM is a non-native species of moth that was first identified in the United Kingdom (Kew, West London) in 2006. Despite the active management of this pest by the Forestry Commission and various landowners, by 2018, OPM had become established in most of Greater London and some surrounding counties.

Having been involved with the management of OPM on Wimbledon and Putney Commons since 2011, our annual approach to dealing with this problem focuses on the two key aspects of communications and risk management. In effect, this involves specialist contractors applying a recognised biological control agent (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) to Oak trees in a small number of high footfall areas during May, the positioning of public notices around strategic points of the Commons and the survey and removal of all OPM nests found under a height of two metres from the ground.

OPM life Cycle: (Information sourced from the Forestry Commission)

Egg Stage – Eggs are laid from July to early September where each female lays between 100 and 200 eggs on twigs and small branches in the canopy. The first larvae hatch from the eggs in April.

Larval stage – OPM larvae can be found from April to June. There are six stages during the caterpillar feeding cycle with caterpillars getting progressively bigger during each stage. As they mature, thousands of short hairs cover the larvae and it is these short hairs that contain the irritant toxin.

Stages 1-3: Caterpillars are very small when they hatch, around 2mm long, and are still less than 1cm by the time they reach the third stage.

Stages 4-6 – Caterpillars spin silken nests and the larvae eventually moult to the pupal stage within those nests. During this phase, larvae may also be seen massing on the trunks and branches of trees and moving in the characteristic processions that give the moth its Common name.

Adult moths – Adult moths fly at night from July until early September and they have a wingspan of around 30-32mm.



*Apart from the application of *Bacillus thuringiensis* which is carried out by specialist contractors, all other OPM work on the Commons is carried out by full time members of the Commons staff. As skin contact or inhalation of OPM hairs can lead to skin rashes, sore throats, irritation to the eyes or breathing difficulties, all staff who are involved with the removal of OPM materials are equipped with all of the necessary personal protective equipment required to keep them safe during this work.*

Japanese knotweed

Japanese knotweed is a fast growing non-native perennial which produces bamboo like stems up to a height of 2 metres (approximately 7ft).

Under the provisions made within Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is an offence to allow Japanese knotweed to grow in the wild and therefore, whenever this plant is identified on the Commons, its location is entered into a specific data base and herbicide treatment is carried out as soon as possible.

The most effective method of controlling Japanese knotweed is through the use of glyphosate which is a herbicide that is able to travel through the plant and kill the extensive system of rhizomes and this work is generally carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team during late summer.

During 2018, there were 26 Japanese knotweed sites located on the Commons, all of which were treated with glyphosate.



Photographed during May 2018, this small patch of Japanese knotweed on Putney Lower Common was identified and treated with glyphosate before it was allowed to spread

Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan balsam is another non-native invasive plant species which is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and therefore it is an offence to plant or allow this species to grow in the wild.

Growing rapidly, Himalayan balsam can grow to a height of between two and three metres in one season, spreading quickly and smothering other vegetation beneath it. Affecting wetland area such as river banks, each plant can produce up to 800 seeds which are dropped or fired into the watercourse resulting in the contamination of land downstream.

The two areas on the Commons which are affected by Himalayan balsam are the sections of the Beverley Brook which run through Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common. Traditionally, Putney Lower Common has been much worse affected by Himalayan balsam than Wimbledon Common but wherever this invasive plant is identified, it is removed by non-chemical means which entails pulling by hand and then composting away from the watercourse.



Himalayan balsam photographed in flower along the Beverley Brook on Putney Lower Common.

Putney Lower Common:

Separated from the main body of the Commons by a distance of just over a mile, preserving and caring for the natural aspect of Putney Lower Common remains a high priority in the overall management of the Commons.

From the 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019, work on Putney Lower Common has included litter picking and the removal of graffiti, enforcement of the Commons' By-laws, grass cutting, tree safety operations, tree planting, spraying and removal of OPM, further improvements to the Rangers compound including the creation of new brick flower beds, a new bug hotel and a large notice board, the creation of a narrow footpath to the north west of the site to improve access across boggy ground and the completion of a hedgehog survey which was carried out in conjunction with Barnes Common and the Zoological Society of London.

On top of this, Putney Lower Common has also played host to the annual visit of Rose's fairground, school visits and sporting fixtures.

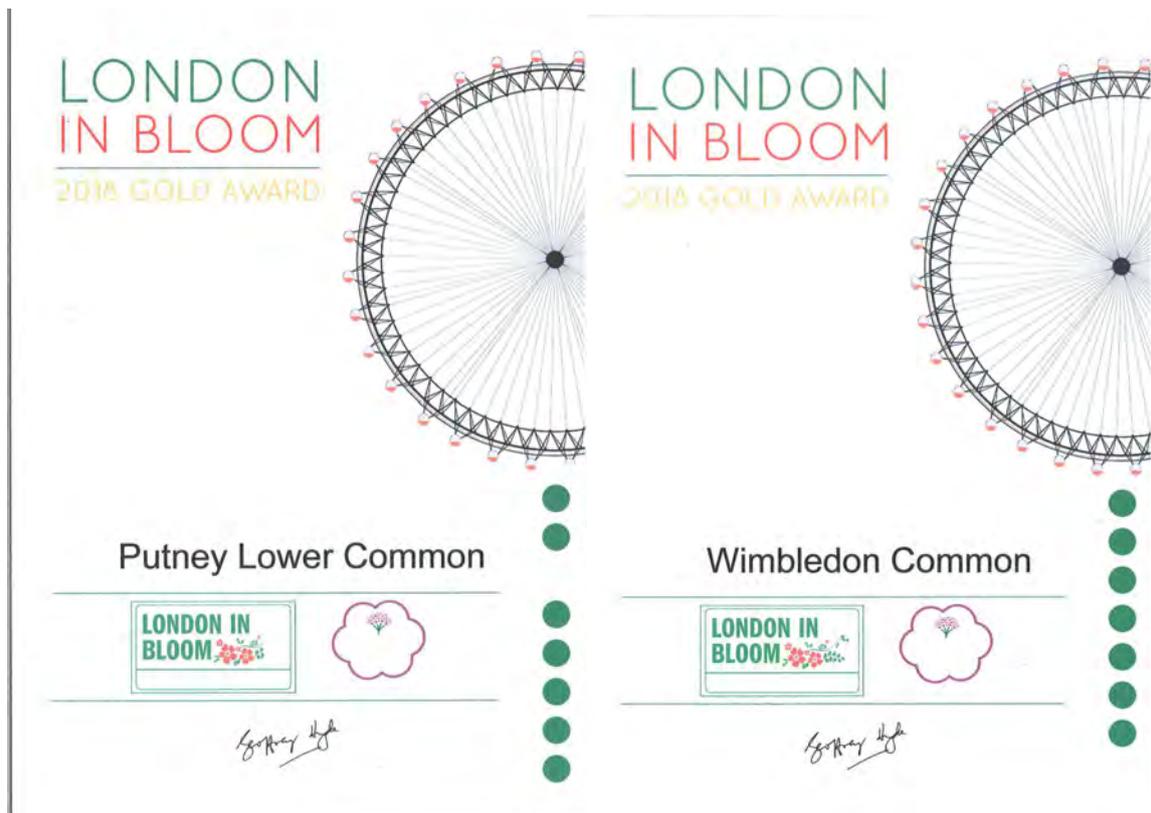


Members of the Commons' Maintenance Team involved with the annual summer cut of the meadow surrounding the Oasis Academy.

As with the all areas of the Commons, looking after Putney Lower Common is a real team effort which involves volunteers and staff from most of the Commons various departments.

In recognition of all of the hard work that is put into this area of the Commons throughout the year, in September 2018, for the second year in a row, Putney Lower Common was presented with a Gold Award in the 2018 London In Bloom competition.

Marked under a number of categories which include the welfare of park users, access, facilities, maintenance (including control of litter, graffiti and vandalism), maintenance of hard landscape features, environmental sustainability, conservation and community involvement, the Gold Award is presented by the London In Bloom judges to all sites considered by them to have reached a level which is classed as 'outstanding'. Given the comparatively small size of Putney Lower Common we were very pleased to discover that out of a total of 200 points, Putney Lower Common was awarded 177 points which was only three points less than the 2018 winner of the London Common of the Year: Wimbledon Common.



Gold awards for both Putney Lower Common and Wimbledon Common

Volunteers and Engagement

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, volunteers have continued to play a huge role in helping with the day to day management of the Commons.

As well as the activities that have been carried out by the Commons' Saturday morning Scrub Bashers and the Commons' mid-week Volunteer Estate Team, volunteers on the Commons have also helped with litter picking, conservation activities, wildlife surveys, the Commons' visitor survey, walks and talks, and events such as the Commons' annual Bioblitz and Open Day.

Whether it's been wading along the Beverley Brook or trampling through bramble to remove litter, cutting back invasive saplings or spending countless hours collecting valuable wildlife data which will be used to help with the future management of the Commons, Wimbledon and Putney Commons simply wouldn't be the same without so much invaluable help from our volunteers.



Volunteers painting the Commons' stable yard in July 2018

Established during October 2018, one of the Commons' newest volunteer groups has been our 'Adopt an Area volunteer litter picking team. To help keep the Commons' clear of litter, the Commons have been divided into 22 distinct compartments which volunteers can 'adopt' and either litter pick on their own or as part of a team.

All volunteers are provided with gloves, a litter stick, rubbish bags and a hi-visibility vest which helps to identify them as part of our team. During the short period in which this group has been active, the difference that has been made to the Commons' has been amazing and we would like to thank every single person who has been involved with this project so far.



One of our regular volunteers litter picking near 7 Post Pond

Adopt an Area litter picking map



By March 2019, 15 areas had been adopted by 17 volunteer litter pickers making a huge difference to the overall appearance to all of these areas of the Commons.

Duke of Edinburgh Award

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, the Commons attracted volunteers from a wide range of groups and backgrounds but one group of volunteers that has steadily increased in number has been through the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

With Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards on offer, between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, we have been helped on the Commons by 27 young people involved with the Bronze Award, two people involved in the Silver Award and 2 people involved with the Gold Award.



While many of the young people involved with the Duke of Edinburgh Award complete their hours by litter picking on the Commons, those involved with the higher levels such as the Silver and Gold awards have also helped carry out surveys, supervise walks and even help to paint the Commons' stable yard.

To ensure that volunteers and staff are kept up to date with events on the Commons, we produce a number of newsletters during the year including our e-newsletters and Common Ground which hopefully provide an informative way of further integrating our volunteers into the wider life of the Commons.

In addition to the Commons' written material, another method of keeping people informed about the various activities that take place on site is through the numerous walks and talks that are provided by volunteers and staff throughout the year.

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, a total of 30 walks and talks were provided to local residents groups and societies, visiting school groups and interested members of public.

With subjects covering wildlife, history, stable management and the overall management of the Commons, we have estimated that during this period approximately 887 people attended our walks and talks.



Mounted Keeper talking to visitors at the start of the Commons Management Team led Walk in October 2018

As well as the many walks and talks that have previously been mentioned, another one of the Commons' regular events that has remained very popular over the past few years has been our fortnightly walking for health events. Supported by the Ramblers Association, Walking for Health is England's largest network of health walks with over 360 active walking schemes, helping people across the country to socialise and lead a more active lifestyle.

Although the Walking for Health organisation has now been in existence since 2005, our particular involvement with this important initiative started during the summer of 2016 and with two walks per month, our programme of healthy walks has now become a firm part of the Commons annual list of events. Looking back over the past few years, it's been great to witness how popular these events have become and extremely rewarding to see that many of the walkers who started with us in 2016 still regularly attend our events three years on. It was also great to see that during the beginning of March 2019, we managed to attract 34 walkers to a single event which has been the highest number so far.



Peter Haldane 2019

