

# THE COMMONS NEWS



Wimbledon  
and Putney  
Commons

Registered Charity: 303167

Wimbledon Common Putney Heath Putney Lower Common

Summer 2025



The Newsletter of Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Registered Charity: 303167



# Chairman's Welcome

Welcome to this year's annual newsletter. The last year has flown by since the election of the new Board of Conservators and my appointment by the Board as Chairman.

The last 12 months has, financially, been a challenging period for the Commons. The calling of the general election last May caused the possible approval of the Levy rebasing to be postponed and then further delayed as the new Government sought to deal with priority issues upon taking office. That has denied us much-needed funding to carry out some key capital works and the latest indications are that a decision will not be forthcoming until at least May. This means that, if approved, the levy rebasing will not now be implemented until the 2026/27 financial year. For 2025/26 the levy increase of 2.7% (equivalent to RPI for the year to September 2024) will largely be swallowed up by the Employers' National Insurance increase. These budgetary constraints will inevitably mean we will again need to postpone planned projects and anything other than essential and routine maintenance unless we can secure donations and grant funding.

However, as mentioned elsewhere in the Newsletter, thanks to grant funding from the Mayor of London and to the generosity of the public, the Queensmere restoration project is proceeding apace and I hope that you are as pleased with the result as we are.

On governance matters, our focus for the forthcoming year is to take forward a scheme under the Charities Act 2011 to clarify certain aspects of the administrative aspects of our governing legislation and to bring our constitution and regulations up to modern standards. To this end we have recently completed an exercise which will update the original 1871 Commons' map and, in particular, clarifies the boundaries of our buildings and their associated curtilages, an exercise which finances permitting, will in future allow us to upgrade and improve many of our public facilities which are now in a poor state of repair (such as the REMPF sports pavilion). We have also recently received approval from the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence to recommence the recruitment of their appointee Conservators - also delayed due to the election - and hope to complete that process by the summer, bringing the Board back up to its full complement of eight Conservators.

Despite the financial challenges which we face, the Board, and our dedicated staff team, are determined not only to maintain but also to enhance our wonderful open spaces to the best of our abilities. We know that those spaces are much loved and I'm always humbled by the generosity which you, the Commons users, show whenever we launch any campaign to raise funds for our works. More than ever, we rely on your support.

*Thank you*



## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators

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### Registered Charity: 303167

#### Current Trustees:

Mauro Mattiuzzo - Chairman, Elected  
David Brown - Elected  
Sue Bucknall - Elected  
Michael Johnston - Elected  
William Liu - Elected  
Peter Shortt - Appointed, MoD  
Oliver Bennett OBE - Appointed Defra  
Vacant - Appointed, Home Office

#### Officers:

Colin Cooper, Chief Executive  
Angela Evans-Hill, Deputy Chief Executive  
Philip Warner, Chief Finance Officer  
Peter Haldane, Conservation & Engagement  
Officer  
Maggie May, Fundraising Manager

Find all our social media and other ways  
to stay in touch at

Linktree:

<https://linktr.ee/wimbledonputneycommons>



## Major Events - 2025

### Conservators' Annual Open Meeting Wednesday 18 June 2025

The Conservators will present their Accounts and Annual Report for 24/25.  
Sacred Heart Church Upper Hall,  
Edge Hill, London SW19 4LU

Details can be found at on our website: [wpcc.org.uk/AOM25](http://wpcc.org.uk/AOM25)

### 14 September - Commons Open Day 13 December at 4.00pm - Carols at the Windmill

Full details of all the events can be found on our website:  
[wpcc.org.uk/events](http://wpcc.org.uk/events)

Sign up to our Nature Notes Newsletter -  
[wpcc.org.uk/NNN](http://wpcc.org.uk/NNN)  
or scan the QR code



# Chief Executive's Report



Chief Executive,  
Colin Cooper

As with many other charities, the current financial climate has brought its fair share of pressures on our running costs and is affecting some of the work we had hoped to carry out over the next couple of years.

Rising costs without a corresponding increase in income have meant some tough decisions, including pausing major path refurbishments and our signage interpretation project. Despite this, we

continue to move forward - adapting, reprioritising, and finding new ways to protect and enhance the Commons.

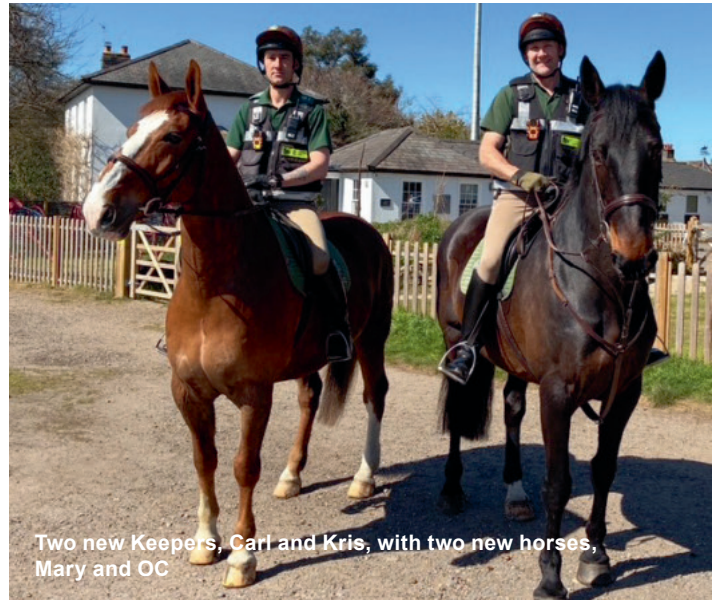
The last 12 months have also been challenging for nature. Whilst the Commons continue to provide rare and vital habitat for many species, there has been a noticeable decline in butterflies and birds across the whole of the UK, and that has sadly been mirrored on the Commons.

On the ground, although this winter was drier than the last, it still caused damage to paths, rides, roads, and car parks. Repairs will take place in the drier months, and a programme of works is already underway.

Our Queensmere Rewilding Project is largely complete, with a second phase planned to improve pond access. We're also actively seeking funding for a new large-scale habitat restoration initiative.

Community partnerships continue to flourish. We've joined the Kingston Biodiversity Partnership and Roehampton Partnership and regularly collaborate with local groups including the Roehampton Women's Network, Putney Society, Wimbledon Society, and the Wimbledon Union of Residents' Associations.

The past year has also brought significant organisational change and several valued colleagues have retired or moved on: Bill Rowland retired in August after 41 years, Paula Graystone in December after 23, and Jim Hutchings in January, having first joined in 1975. We also said goodbye to Jack Bye and Mark Scales as they pursued new chapters. Whilst this presented some challenges it has also given me an opportunity to restructure the staffing to better fit the requirements of modern times and also reduce costs overall by delaying some recruitments and pausing others.



Two new Keepers, Carl and Kris, with two new horses, Mary and OC

However, we have welcomed two new Keepers, Carl and Kris, both with experience in the Household Cavalry to bring our Keeping team to full strength. I am often asked whether mounted patrols are an expensive luxury. In truth, they are a vital part of how we manage the Commons. Horses provide an elevated vantage point, making them ideal for enforcement of byelaws - particularly regarding fires, BBQs ensuring public safety and, the growing issue of drones. They're also an excellent means of engaging with the public - few things bring a smile like the sight of a horse on patrol. Environmentally, they offer significant benefits too: lower ground impact in wet conditions, minimal emissions, and much less embodied carbon than traditional vehicles.

We've also had some positive internal moves. Angela Evans-Hill is now Deputy Chief Executive, with more focus on governance and strategy. Philip Warner has become our part-time Chief Finance Officer, supported by new part-time Finance Officer, Olivia McArthur. Meanwhile, Ranger Sarah Murton has moved into the Conservation team, enabling us to begin implementing our new Land Management Plan to help bring the Commons into favourable ecological condition.

I very much look forward to working with this restructured team and getting out and about to meet more of the many visitors to the Commons.

## New "chatty bench" on the Rushmere

Our Fundraising team have been working hard on our bench installation project and a highlight of this is the installation of a new "chatty bench" at Rushmere on Wimbledon Common. The aim of the bench is to encourage conversation and perhaps provide a brief respite for anyone who may be lonely for whatever reason. Situated on the main path overlooking the pond, the bench has a special plaque inviting people to sit there if they are happy for others to join them and chat for a while.

Like other benches on the Commons, the English oak bench is dedicated to the memory of a local resident, Mary Purcell Cosgrave, who lived in Wimbledon for 40 years and ran on the Common often. She was also an integral figure in the Wimbledon International Music Festival and the BBC Proms.



The new "Chatty Bench"



# Creating a Haven for Wildlife

In last year's newsletter, we shared the exciting news that Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators had secured funding from the Mayor of London's Rewild London Fund, in conjunction with the London Wildlife Trust, to restore Queensmere. This much-loved pond, originally constructed in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, had suffered from years of ecological decline. Although it remained a peaceful spot for visitors and a home to swans and other waterfowl, its concrete banks, silt buildup, and lack of aquatic vegetation made it far from ideal for biodiversity.

Thanks to the generous grant, WPCC embarked on an ambitious project to enhance Queensmere's ecological value, improve water quality, and create a thriving habitat for wildlife. Now, as we approach the final stages of this restoration, we look back at the progress made and the positive changes



Clearing the silt and building up the new banks



Queensmere in March 2025

## A Thriving Future for Wildlife

Queensmere is home to a variety of bird species, including mallards, coots, tufted ducks, mute swans, and grey herons. Surveys also recorded populations of Canadian and Greylag geese, Egyptian geese, and black-headed gulls. The restoration is expected to attract even more species, particularly amphibians and invertebrates that rely on aquatic vegetation for survival.

The reedbed will play a crucial role in filtering pollutants and improving water clarity, while the island will provide a safe nesting site for birds. By restoring natural bank vegetation, the pond's ecosystem will become more self-sustaining, with reduced erosion and healthier water quality. Although the physical work to the pond will soon be completed, the ecological benefits will continue to unfold in the months and years ahead. As plants establish and wildlife adapts to the new habitat, ongoing monitoring will ensure the long-term success of the restoration.

The next phase of work will be the restoration of the paths around the area and this work will take place once we have attained funding.



Creating the new island with some of the silt dredged from the pond

## Key Milestones

**November 2024:** Tree management work was carried out to remove invasive holly and cut back overhanging branches, improving light levels and reducing the volume of organic debris entering the pond.

**December 2024:** The first phase of excavation began. The pond was drained using electro pumps, allowing for an assessment of its condition. Fish - including pike, tench, and perch - were safely relocated before the silt removal commenced. During excavation, an old walled bathing area, once separate from the main pond, was uncovered.

**January 2025:** The newly exposed pond bed was reshaped. Hazel revetments were installed to create stable, plantable banks, and pre-seeded coir rolls were placed to encourage vegetation growth.

**February 2025:** A small island was built using excess silt, offering a new refuge for waterfowl. A dedicated dog ramp was also installed, ensuring that pets could enter the water without disturbing sensitive planting areas.

**March 2025:** The reedbed was planted, providing essential filtration and new habitat for insects, amphibians, and birds.

**April 2025:** The project nears completion, with final plantings taking place. Fixed-point photography posts will be installed and a viewing deck is due to be built, enabling visitors to track changes over time and contribute to citizen science efforts.





## The Restoration Plan

The project's primary aim was to restore Queensmere into a healthier, more diverse environment by:

- **Managing the woodland:** Thinning surrounding trees to increase sunlight, airflow, and reduce the accumulation of leaf litter in the water.
- **Addressing silt buildup:** Removing excess silt, which had significantly impacted water quality, and repurposing it to reshape the banks and create a new island habitat for birds.
- **Enhancing aquatic planting:** Installing a 120sq m reedbed to filter pollutants and provide habitat for invertebrates and amphibians.
- **Improving water flow:** Constructing a silt trap lagoon to prevent further sediment from entering the pond.
- **Enhancing visitor experience:** Installing a viewing deck and a designated dog entry ramp to protect vegetation while allowing access to the water.



The view from the inlet

## The Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Every path, heathland, bog, stream, pond and woodland on the Commons has an incalculable value that requires ongoing investment. As a charity we rely on the support of the community and visitors who cherish this special to keep the Commons open, safe, clean and bursting with nature.

The Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons bring together all these supporters to celebrate their significance not only as an important habitat for nature, but the vital opportunity they provide for exercise, recreation and relaxation.

The Levy alone is insufficient to cover the cost of maintaining the Commons and carrying out other projects and so the financial support of the Friends directly contributes to the larger restoration projects and, by becoming a member, you'll be directly contributing to the preservation of these rare and some of the fragile habitats. Membership starts at just £15 a year for a concessionary rate.

### What's in it for you?

- Exclusive Guided Walks – Six each year, exploring everything from birdsong to historic grand houses.

- Invites to Special Events – Including seasonal socials and behind-the-scenes experiences.
- Regular Updates – Stay informed with our Friends e-newsletter.

If you'd like to become part of this growing community, please visit our website [wpcc.org.uk/friends](http://wpcc.org.uk/friends) or scan the QR code.

The Friends are also now organising several of our community events like the Easter Egg and Pumpkin Hunts, Carols at the Windmill and the recent VE Day commemorations. Together with membership fees, recent member events – including a tea party and an 'Art of Illusion' evening - have raised over £40,000 for the charity. The Friends have also partnered with RunThrough, supplying volunteers for their running events on the Commons, including managing the bag drops at each of their runs. RunThrough have also allocated the Friends 20 places for each running event they hold here on the Commons in 2025, with the runners donating their entry fee directly to our charity. If you'd like to take up one of these places and support the Commons, do please contact [fundraising@wpcc.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@wpcc.org.uk)



## Nature Notes

### Botany Surveys Expand Across the Common's Grasslands

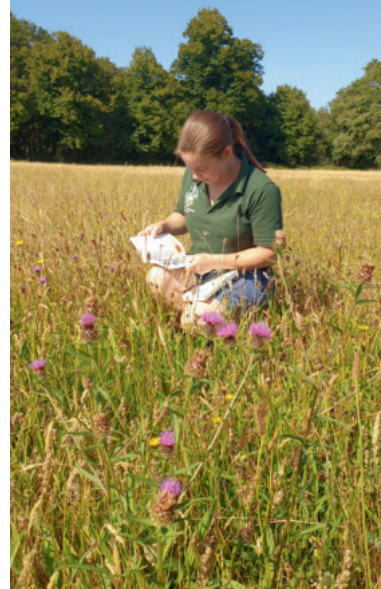
Our Conservation Department is broadening its plant monitoring efforts beyond The Plain, which has been the focus of recent years, and is now surveying a wider range of grassland, woodland, and heathland habitats across the Commons on a rotational basis. This expanded approach will enhance our evidence-based management of the Commons, particularly in response to the ongoing climate and ecological challenges.

In 2024, our focus has been on the grasslands, surveying a total of 15 sites across Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath, and Putney Lower Common. These areas undergo annual cutting and baling in late summer—managed either by contractors or our own Maintenance team—to remove excess material, prevent nutrient enrichment, and promote floral diversity. The data collected on plant species and abundance will help us track trends over time, refine land management strategies, and support potential grant applications.

During this initial survey year, we identified over 150 plant species across all sites. Among the notable finds were a diverse mix of grasses, flowering plants, and young trees, including the Bee Orchid, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Fairy Flax, Red Clover, Ribwort Plantain, Yellow Rattle, and Yorkshire Fog.

By expanding our monitoring efforts, we are better equipped to preserve the ecological richness of the Commons for future generations.

Conservation Ranger, Sarah, carrying out a botany survey.



### Birdlife on the Commons

Just 77 species of birds were recorded on the Commons last year, ten down on 2023. However, with the change over of volunteers leading the bird monitoring, we are not yet fully up to speed with the number of recorders. If you can help, why not get in touch? Contact us at [wildlife@wpcc.org.uk](mailto:wildlife@wpcc.org.uk)

All our birds of prey are doing well. We believe that a pair of Buzzards bred on Putney Heath, and a pair of Red Kite have been regularly seen flying over the Commons. Hobby have been seen again, hopefully also breeding, and we have at least 6 pairs of breeding Kestrel. Sparrowhawks are a regular sighting and Peregrine falcons are often seen hunting overhead.

Firecrests are also continuing to do well – they prefer dense, less managed woodlands, so our holly clearance efforts were strategically guided by their previous nesting sites, ensuring these areas were left undisturbed.

Migrant birds continue to grace us, including Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden and Willow Warblers, Siskin, and our regular Swallow pairs breeding in the Ranger's Office stables. Swift nesting boxes have also been installed at Manor Cottage, although this year they are being utilised by Great Tits.

However, we can't ignore the broader picture. The Commons are unfortunately reflecting the national trend: both species diversity and the number of individual birds recorded are in decline. It's a reminder of how vital our conservation work remains.



Firecrest

## Butterflies

A total of 27 butterfly species were recorded on the Commons in 2024, just one fewer than last year. While 2024 has been a challenging year for butterflies across the UK, the Commons continue to provide a valuable refuge, especially for generalist species, which appear to be faring relatively well with Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Common Blue all showing strong numbers compared to 2023. This may in part be thanks to the later hay cut on the Plain, which provided more time for these species to complete their life cycles.

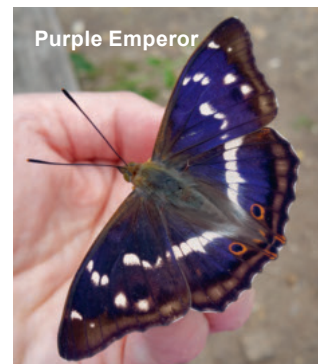
Two species recorded in 2023 were not seen this year - White-letter Hairstreak and Brown Argus. The former is difficult to detect, as it spends much of its time high in the tree canopy and relies on elm, which is only sporadically present on the Commons. Brown Argus is an occasional visitor and may simply have gone unnoticed, as it can be quite inconspicuous.

The continued absence of Small Tortoiseshell is disappointing and mirrors national concerns. Whether this species is now

approaching regional extinction remains to be seen.

A highlight for the year was the reappearance of the Purple Emperor - a large and striking species that's not easy to spot but has been recorded most years over the past decade. Its presence is an encouraging sign that the right conditions persist.

Butterflies are recorded on the Commons via two fixed transects walked weekly from April to September by a small team of volunteers. However, ad hoc sightings from visitors are vital so do please contribute via the iRecord Butterflies app or the iRecord website.



Purple Emperor



# Conservation Update

The usual habitat management work has continued over the last year with woodland clearance and tree safety a focus of the team's work. We were fortunate to have received a very generous legacy which allowed us to complete some additional holly clearance work alongside Stag Ride. Volunteers continue to provide the manpower for helping us to keep the scrub at bay on our rare and fragile heathland.

## Black Poplars planted at Putney Lower Common

The Black Poplar is one of the UK's rarest, native and deciduous hardwood trees and their numbers continue to decline. The primary drivers for this is habitat loss and a limited ability for natural regeneration - Black poplars require both male and female trees in proximity for seed production, but only about 600 of the estimated 7,000 remaining trees are female, making natural reproduction rare.

Efforts are being made to preserve genetic diversity through DNA fingerprinting and propagation of genetically unique trees. Local Conservation Arborist, Jamie Simpson, has been working on this project and has identified the Borough of Richmond as having some of the highest levels of genetic diversity of Black Poplars anywhere in the country. Of particular interest is the population along the Thames towpath at Barnes, which is believed to be a remnant wild population.

Our team have been working with Jamie, and we are delighted to have been able to plant seven Black Poplar saplings along the Beverley Brook at Putney Lower Common. We will closely monitor their health and condition so we can ensure they will become a true established population along with the trees already planted on the neighbouring sites of Barn Elms and Barnes Common, as well as the mature specimens found along the Thames towpath nearby.



Black Poplar leaves

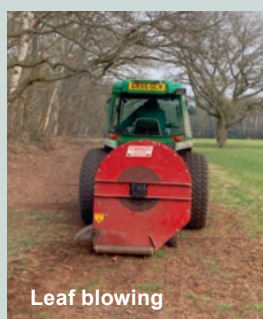
## Golf Course Conservation

A current project underway focuses on the edges of the golf course - an area that surprisingly forms part of a rich mosaic of habitats, including woodland, heathland and acid grassland.

The removal of several large silver birch trees has opened the woodland floor to more light, encouraging a greater diversity of ground flora and improving the woodland margin. Importantly, this has also enhanced visibility along the course, contributing to public safety. We have also created two heather restoration areas and we will be installing low-level wire fencing to protect the young heather shoots from rabbit browsing and help reduce trampling from foot traffic.

There has also been more Silver Birch thinning along Camp Road and the 13th Fairway (Hope Grant), as part of a wider initiative to help preserve the acid grassland and numerous ant hills in the area - a key feature of this nationally important habitat - which is currently a priority habitat in the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Leaf blowing to remove the accumulated layer of leaves and topsoil from the edge of the fairway has been remarkably successful and it has been gratifying to see that grasses have already started to recolonise the area.



Leaf blowing

## Trailcams on Putney Lower Common

Over summer and autumn 2024, two motion-activated trail cameras were set up on Putney Lower Common to monitor local wildlife activity around the WPCC complex on Lower Richmond Road. Strategically placed to ensure they did not capture images of human visitors we nevertheless managed to capture a really wide variety of species.

An impressive 2,566 sightings were recorded, covering 18 different species.

Among the recorded species were blackbirds, blue tits, brown rats, domestic cats and dogs, dunnocks, great tits, grey squirrels, hedgehogs, jays, magpies, red admiral butterflies, foxes, robins, mice, song thrushes, woodpigeons, and wrens.

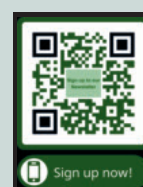
The presence of species such as hedgehogs in particular highlights the importance of Putney Lower Common as a thriving habitat for urban wildlife. The results also provide valuable insight into the interactions between domestic and wild animals in the area.



A cheeky young fox cub

## Sign up for our E-Newsletter

We can't include everything about our work on the Commons in this one Newsletter so if you'd like to keep up to date our latest news, or be the first to hear about events taking place on the Commons, do please sign up to our e-newsletter. Sent out every two or three months, it is a great way to keep in touch and has lots of information on what to look out for on the Commons and also our latest conservation works. Sign up on our website - go to [wpcc.org.uk](http://wpcc.org.uk) or scan the QR code



## Putting Nature on the Map

The conservation team have been working on some behind-the-scenes projects that will play a vital role in how we manage and protect the Commons.

One such effort is a new mapping project led by our Conservation Ranger, Sarah Murton, using QGIS software to digitally map the Commons and its key ecological features. These have so far included:

- Deadwood habitats, vital for over 1,000 species, including standing wood, buried timber, and Stag Beetle pyramids - helping identify where more could be added to boost biodiversity.
- Bird boxes across the whole Commons - with 86 installed - for use by Blue Tits to Kestrels and even Tawny Owls - keeping track of their locations helps us monitor nesting success.
- Trees such as Conifers, London Plane and Black Poplars. Many of the conifers for example were planted to commemorate specific events and therefore have historical significance that we do not wish to get lost over time - such as "Jubilee Clump" located near Paradise fairway which was planted in 1977 to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. Other trees, like the London Plane Trees, are vulnerable to disease and by accurately mapping their locations we can properly monitor them for health risks.

- A 2016 National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey that will allow us to track habitat changes over time and guide future ecological management.

**This mapping work helps us see the bigger picture and, in conjunction with species monitoring, supports more informed, effective conservation**



## Fundraising Update

With our Fundraising Manager, Maggie May, off on maternity leave, Lynnie Farrant has stepped in to provide cover and, with her PR background, has made great strides with our fundraising campaigns over the last year. We are delighted that Lynnie is staying with us following Maggie's return in April this year.

WPCC took part in two of the Big Give Match Funding opportunities. First in early summer of 2024 we joined in the Big Give Green Match Fund. During the week of the campaign, all donations were doubled and our target of £10,000 was reached within just two days! All the monies raised were put towards the restoring the Commons. In December 2024, we joined the Big Give's Christmas Challenge. Supporters donated an amazing £3,600 which was matched by pledges from generous Friends' Benefactors and our Big Give Champion, The Reed Foundation. We met our target on the very first day, and ultimately raised an incredible £11,800!

WPCC's first World Ranger Day appeal raised more than £3,000 in donations last July, marking the global celebration of

those protecting the world's natural treasures and cultural heritage. The monies raised enabled us to purchase specialist woodland tools to help our Maintenance team in their work conserving and maintaining the Commons' 300 hectares of woodland, such as woodland thinning, clearing invasive vegetation, tree safety work tasks and lifting heavy timbers for dead hedging.

We're incredibly grateful for the continued support from our local community. A heartfelt thank you to Wimbledon Village Stables, who raised some £6,000 for the Commons through their annual ball and silent auction in March - an amazing gesture that makes a real difference. We're also delighted to recognise the brilliant Year 6 pupils at Wimbledon High School, who raised over £1,000 during their enterprise day and have chosen to fund a new weather station for the Commons' Wildlife Garden. Their enthusiasm and generosity are truly inspiring. In addition, WPCC has been supported by a number of local businesses who have donated prizes for the Open Day raffle and other fundraising events, including Wimbledon Brewery, Jeroboams, The Ivy, and most notably Robert Holmes and Company, who were the headline partner of the Open Day as part of their 2024 sponsorship.

## A Kind Reminder: Dogs, Flea Treatments & the Commons

We're pleased to offer a small dog-friendly access point to Queensmere - situated at the outlet end to minimise wildlife disturbance. However, spot-on flea and tick treatments pose a serious risk to our waterways. Just one treatment contains enough pesticide to kill 60 million bees, and these chemicals are now turning up in rivers at alarming levels. When dogs treated with spot-ons enter ponds, the toxins wash off, harming aquatic life.

Evidence also shows that traces are showing up in birds' nests, likely from fur used as nesting material, seriously threatening chicks' development.

To help protect nature, please keep treated dogs out of water and avoid leaving fur on the Commons. We strongly encourage switching to tablet-based treatments - equally effective and far safer for wildlife.

**We know how much you care for your pets – and we know you care for nature too. With your help, we can keep the Commons a safe haven for everyone.**

