

Commons News



Wimbledon
and Putney
Commons

Wimbledon Common

Putney Lower Common

Putney Heath

JULY 2015

Welcome to our Commons News update for July



With summer now well and truly here, July and August sees the mosaic of habitats that make up the Commons at their best.

The vivid contrast between the dry, brown grasslands and the still luscious green of the woods and the bracken really show off the glorious colours of our wild summer flowers.

The swathes of Rosebay Willow Herb give a bright splash of purple amongst the greenery. A very successful pioneering plant, it has several common names: Fireweed, as it is often the first species to re-appear after a forest fire and in the south-

east it is often known as Bombweed, as it became especially prevalent across London in the immediate aftermath of the blitz.

The vivid yellow of the Ragwort is now abundant on the Commons. A food plant for some 77 species of invertebrate, the most common you will see is the caterpillar of the Cinnabar moth, with its distinctive black and yellow stripes.



OPM Caterpillar still an issue

With the ongoing issue of Oak Processionary Moth caterpillars on the Commons, our advice to parents remains that children should not climb in any of our Oak trees.

Our staff have removed many nests, particularly those on low branches, but contact with the caterpillars should be avoided.

If you do see any nests, please contact the Ranger's Office on 020 8788 7655

Skylarks make a triumphant return!

Our staff have worked hard over the last four years to get conditions on The Plain just right to encourage Skylarks to return to the area. Despite weather, dogs, and those who said it would never happen, they have returned this year and successfully bred two juveniles. It also looks like they may be trying for a second brood.

Our thanks to everyone who helped us to reach this goal, particularly dog-walkers for keeping their dogs on-lead in the area - we really could not have done this without your support.

Thank you!



“Globally scarce” Beetle found on Wimbledon Common!



The Commons hit the headlines earlier this month when the Natural History Museum (NHM) confirmed that a “globally scarce” False Click beetle had been found on the Commons. Dr Max Barclay, who manages the NHM's 10 million strong beetle collection, said: “To find such a species at Wimbledon Common shows that the Conservators are taking good care of the site, and managing it for wildlife, and that there are old important trees there that can support populations of rare insects.”

Keita Matsumoto, who found the insect, said: "It was a lucky shot. I'm pleased I was swinging my insect net that afternoon instead of my tennis racquet."

Such validation of our conservation work is encouraging, and shows the importance of regular monitoring.

One man went to mow....

The Plain, or Meadow as some know it, is one of our really important habitats, and indeed is part of why the Commons have a SSSI designation. It is an increasingly rare type of acid-grassland that typically occurs on nutrient poor, free draining soils with a low pH.

Historically, the area would have been naturally managed by grazing animals, but as that isn't possible here on the Commons, we have to mimic that process by mowing the grass. We then bale and remove it from site to prevent any nutrients leaching back into the soil.

The contractors will be here from 3rd August so please be aware that there will be large machinery on site.

Cutting and removing the grass is not a new thing here on the Commons, back in the 50s the grass was cut and dried and used to feed our own horses. Unfortunately, this had to stop as local youths kept setting fire to the drying hay.



Gathering hay the traditional way



Cutting and baling on the Plain

Stables Open Day

13th September 2015

Come and join us for our
20th Anniversary show!

Charity, wildlife and craft stalls, Birds of Prey, new arena events - dog-handling, army re-enactment, tractor rides, AFC Wimbledon Mascot Football match...and not forgetting the Wacky Dog Show!



What to look out for this month



July is the peak month for butterflies and dragonflies on the Commons so look out for Meadow Brown in grassland areas, and the Gatekeeper, one of the latest butterflies to emerge in the summer, can now be seen in abundance, particularly around bramble.

Purple Hairstreaks feed largely in the canopy of Oak trees but you will often see them come down to the ground to nectar or drink from puddles.



Also look out for the unmistakable Jersey Tiger moth. A day-flyer, it is another uncommon species in the UK that can be found here on the Commons. Look out for its "tiger" stripes and flashy orange or pale yellow underwing.



It's a quiet time for our birdlife but you may well see some young Swallows on the wing too, swooping and diving in the sky as they feed on insects.

They have successfully nested in our stable yard again this year - and are now preparing for a staggering 6,000 mile journey back to Africa!



Other plants to look out for include Yarrow - a pretty white flower that grows amongst the grasses - it is known to be one of the most versatile of medicinal herbs, good for colds, circulation and digestion!

The heathland is now also starting to blossom and the riot of colour produced by the heather is a sight not to be missed.



Volunteers and the Tuesday Night Scrub Bashers Club!



Our Tuesday night Volunteer Group, now affectionately known as the Tuesday Night Scrub Bashers, have been focusing their energies on the mammoth task of clearing scrub from large areas of Putney Heath.

Although the work is physical, you can set your own pace and is therefore open to anyone of any ability. It is hugely rewarding and leaves our volunteers with a real sense of accomplishment. If you are interested in joining us on a Tuesday evening, we meet at the Windmill at 7pm and work through until 9pm.

Peter, our Wildlife & Conservation Officer, leads the evening and, as well as providing all the tools and protective gloves, he even serves up a welcome cuppa and chocolate biscuit half way through the evening to restore any flagging energy!

A thank you also to local schools Rokeby, Rowans, Kings College and St Cecilia's and also the 2nd Wimbledon Guides for their volunteer help over the last month!

Bag it, Bin it!

We are struggling to get the message over to some dog-walkers about picking up after dogs. This is particularly a problem at the Playing Fields.

The pitches are used regularly for sports and, from this autumn, will be used extensively by school children.

We will be holding an information day at the Playing Fields over the next few weeks to explain to dog-walkers why this is such an issue, and we are going to stick a flag in every pile of mess we find and take an aerial photograph...in the next update we can show you the extent of the problem!



Deck the halls with....

....the Commons Christmas Card!

Each year we are delighted with the response when we ask you to submit your images for our Christmas Cards.

Although we didn't have too much snow this year, please do submit any image you think epitomise the Commons at Christmas. The most popular image will then be used for our 2015 Christmas Card.

There is no prize unfortunately, but you will be given full credit for the image on the card.

E-mail your entries to rangersoffice@wpcc.org.uk

