



streathamcommon.org
Registered Charity 1166961

December 2018, Issue 65

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Seasonal Greetings

And a Very Happy 2019

To all the members of
the Friends of
Streatham Common



Common Knowledge

From the Chair

There are several big changes on the Common that everyone will have noticed. The new playground at the bottom of the Common was opened by the Mayor a year ago. The new tree line of English Oaks on the north side of the Common has suffered a few casualties in the exceptionally hot summer but the failing trees will be replaced shortly. The renovation work on the Rookery's cascade has been completed as has much of the new landscaping and planting in the surrounding areas, with the final planting to be completed next spring.

Some little things on the Common have also been quite interesting. We surveyed a rare butterfly, the purple hairstreak, living in the canopy of the many oak trees and a study was made of all the butterflies on the Common and their habitats. The honey bees have been doing well in their hives and next year we hope to have our first harvest of honey. We have spotted a rare albino squirrel living close to the Common and our resident tawny owl is still calling at night.

The events we held over the past year have all been very successful. These events aren't just great fun, they also generate money that we can spend on the Common. We do have problems though trying to find enough volunteers to run our events so please join our volunteer list and come along and help out. If your abilities are more organisational or IT related then please consider joining the executive committee: we could really do with the help. With that I'll wish you a happy Christmas and a wonderful new year.

Mike Robinson

Holly and Ivy

Should you, around about now, be belting out the lyrics of the British folk carol, *The Holly and the The Ivy*, take the time also to have a good look at these two plants, which are prolific in the Common's woods.

Strangely, given the carol's title, the text barely mentions ivy. Holly bears "a blossom as white as the lily flower, a berry as red as any blood a prickles as sharp as any thorn a bark as bitter as any gall". As for ivy, its only mention is that when the holly and the ivy "are both full grown, of all the trees that are in the wood, the holly bears the crown". Botanically, ivy didn't stand a chance as it's not a tree!

The carol is more or less right about holly. The blossoms are indeed white, if rather inconspicuous, and the berries red. Holly is dioecious, which means there are separate male and female plants. Both are needed if berries are to be formed, both have blossoms, but only the female produces berries. The great majority of the holly bushes on our Common do not have berries either because they are male or because they are females without a male in the vicinity. The prickles on the leaves are indeed as sharp as any thorn, except on new growth. Nevertheless, holly has been used as cattle and sheep feed in the past. The berries are devoured by birds. It may be that the bark is bitter but it is not clear where that information comes from. For humans, the leaves are certainly bitter and the berries toxic.

There are plenty of old superstitions about holly. Most would have it that cutting down

holly brings bad luck, even though cutting branches for seasonal decoration is fine! Pre-Christianity, holly branches were seen as a powerful fertility symbol and a charm against witches and house goblins. Christians kept the custom of bringing branches into homes but with the holly now standing for the crown of thorns and the berries for Christ's blood.

Ivy, which like holly is evergreen, is rampant in our Common's wooded area. It both climbs trees and creeps along the ground, putting out feeding roots in soil and deep crevices. For climbing purposes, it has adhesive suckers that adhere to a tree's bark. Ivy is not a parasite: it makes its own nourishment just like any other plant. So it does no harm to any tree it climbs, other than by shading out the tree's

own leaves or if the extra weight of its foliage causes the tree to topple.



Ivy provides excellent ground cover but, when invasive, can overgrow other species. It has clusters of small greenish-white flowers from September to November, which

provide a plentiful source of nectar for bees, wasps and other insects long after most other sources have dried up. In due course, the flowers are replaced by blackish berries, which are eaten by birds. Wherever it grows, ivy provides excellent cover for wildlife. Small birds and bats take cover in ivy growing up trees, while both small birds and mammals can hide out in ivy on the ground.

Ecologically, I would say that ivy wears the crown but that holly is the clear winner for decorative purposes. Carol singers will just carry on belting out the 200 plus years old words, regardless.

Bins

With picnic days long past, perhaps it is time to reflect on the topic that comes up repeatedly during warmer weather: what can be done about litter on our Common? How can people be persuaded to use the bins? Do there need to be more? Would it help to have persuasive signs up? Why is there such a mess in the vicinity of some bins? And so on.

First – have a guess at how many rubbish bins are on the Common, excluding the Rookery, the cafe and the paddling pool. The answer is below. In fact there were several more than that until very recently. Three of these were removed because they were in a poor state of repair and so close to others that Lambeth Council did not think they needed replacing. The other four were removed at the request of the Friends in order to reduce footfall and the driving of rubbish collection vehicles on sensitive areas of the Common.

This reduced the number of bins to around 50. In addition two very large wheelie bins have been by the car park since the summer. And during the summer months, Lambeth's Patrick Griffiths – who does such a good job of clearing up litter – was putting extra black bags next to the most used bins. Yet still the Common would be full of litter some evenings and early mornings, before Patrick did his round.

Why? For a start, there is the problem created by foxes, crows and squirrels. If a bin is of the type that is easily accessible to such scavengers, they can create a horrible mess while searching for titbits. The solution is simple – replace the old open bins with the type that are inaccessible to scavengers. This would be costly, although little by little it is happening when an accessible-type bin needs to be replaced for some reason.

Then there is the problem of people who seem not to care. If there isn't a bin right next to where they have generated the

litter, they leave it there when they go. Worse still are the people who sit on benches that have litter bins right by them and still can't be bothered to use them. A partial solution would be large signs that encourage people to take their litter to a bin or, better still, to take it home with them. Another solution, especially for the worst offenders, would be on the spot fines, were there anybody to hand them out.

We hope that at least some of these solutions can be implemented. We also hope that people will think to take their recyclable litter home with them and/or that recycling bins are provided on the Common. Let us know if you have any other thoughts on how to reduce the littering problem.

Mystery Solved

For many years we have puzzled over this metal structure, which stands behind the large patch of gorse that is not far from the car park. Was it an old notice board or, more fancifully, something to which horses were hitched? All was revealed when a fire this summer destroyed a patch of ferns and brambles along with a couple of trees. Emerging from the ashes was a wire cage – a rubbish bin that hung off the structure. It is now back in place although too damaged to be of much use.



Twenty Years of Kite Day

The Kite Day motto, “Come make a kite, come buy a kite, come fly a kite”, has underpinned every kite day. Not just a day to watch other people flying kites, but to do it yourself. Enjoy the wind, when there is some, and be out in the open air. An ancient antidote to the couch potato existence.

I have always loved kites. I can remember as a child flying a traditional diamond kite with my grandfather: the kite was taller than I was. This was back in the day of cotton kite sails and twine, which always tangled up. Now we have ripstop nylon and carbon fibre sparred kites, specialist Kevlar kite lines and kite display teams to entertain and astound us with their technical skill and artistry.

We moved to Streatham Common in the mid 1980s and I flew kites on the Common from then on. I remember I wrote a long lost article for this newsletter in which I was evangelical about the joys of kite flying. With the encouragement of John Cresswell, the then secretary of the Friends, and the hard work of Gerry O'Brien, who for many years dealt with the paperwork and liaison with the council, a day in March 1998 was settled for what was called ‘Wind Day’, with kite flying a part of it. It was windy but not the brightest of days as I remember. Kite Day, itself, developed out of that, overcoming the fact that 1999 was a complete washout, the only one we have had.

Kite flying was pretty informal then. There was no arena or sound system. We had a few local volunteers; Roy Reed, a graphic designer and expert kite flyer, made contact with experienced kite flyers; and Karen Murray, who organised kite surfing holidays in Portugal from her travel agency and holiday firm in Clapham, also helped out a lot with the admin and had good connections with established kite fliers. Becky and Richard Locke also helped out for many of those early years. They had a Landrover-based, ex-military ambulance



This year's Kite Day was held in fine weather but the wind was intermittent. Nevertheless it was at times sufficient for some of the large kites and displays to go ahead. At other times, the large crowd took over the arena.

which was useful on the day as a focal point and for first aid. The local scout troop lent us a heavy ridge tent and on occasions we borrowed a domestic, family frame tent for our headquarters.

Gus Campbell, a neighbour and gifted artist/designer, created posters between 2004 and 2011. His artwork is on the Kite Day website (streathamkiteday.org.uk) and well worth a look. Roy Reed's website (reeddesign.co.uk/kites/) has instructions on how to make a good, cheap, easy-to-fly kite.

In later years we set up an arena for the professional kite teams who started coming and used the Friends of Streatham Common public address system so the teams could fly kites to music. In between the kite flying displays I chose and played background music. The PA did us proud for many years and I learnt the skills required to operate the mixing desk. All went well until some years ago when I accidentally blew up the loudspeakers.

We started inviting food and drink stalls as well as kite shops to come to Kite Day, and community groups came along as well. We would liaise with the events department at Lambeth Council as things got more formal, and like Topsy the event just grew and grew.

Bob Colover



This fine albino squirrel has been visiting gardens close to the Common in recent months. (Photo: Tom Frankfort).

Park Watch Relaunch

Have you ever been annoyed by people lighting barbecues on the Common in summer, or upset by anti-social behaviour near the playground, or concerned about vehicles driving on the Common when they are not supposed to? If so then you might be interested to know that Streatham Common Park Watch is going to start up again – if we can get enough volunteers.

Park Watch operates like a Neighbourhood Watch but in a green space instead of streets. The aim is to improve communication between police, council and users of the Common so that the police and council can target their resources more efficiently and community members can voice concerns to the people who need to hear them. Regular users of the Common – dog walkers, commuters, joggers, anyone – can be the “eyes and ears” on the ground for our local Safer Neighbourhood Team.

The Council's Community Safety team and the local police are supportive of this initiative – which was first started up a couple of years ago – as are the local councillors and the Friends of Streatham Common. It represents a good opportunity for us all to work in closer partnership.

We are looking for a couple of people to run a group of around 20 Park Watch members able to access and post information. Of course, Park Watch is not a substitute for calling 101, or even 999, if there is a problem that requires more immediate police attention. However, the aim is to tackle anti-social behaviour together and make our Common just that little bit more pleasant for everyone! If you are interested in becoming an administrator or a member of the Park Watch team then please email CWilcox@lambeth.gov.uk and we will invite you to a meeting to re-launch Park Watch early next year.

Councillor Clair Wilcox

Fungi Found

Although the prolonged dry weather had not been good news for the first fungi walk on the Common for some years, Sylvia Myers of the London Wildlife Trust managed to identify around 15 species for the good crowd that turned up on October 20th. Among the more showy of these



were Panther Cap (left) and Jelly Ear. Other species included Golden Scaly Cap, Stinking

Dapperling and Candle Snuff. This was not a foraging walk but the relative edibility of most of the species was made clear.



Whats Up?

Ground damage - work has been continuing on the restoration of the areas of the lower common used for large events. Attempts – not wholly successful – have been made to level the ground, aerate it, reduce compaction and reseed it with grass. However, the area remains the worse for wear and becomes worse each year.

Playground - work is underway to create the planned kiosk that will serve the playground. It should open shortly. The large number of visitors attracted by the new playground and the long dry summer have both taken their toll but restorative work is underway.

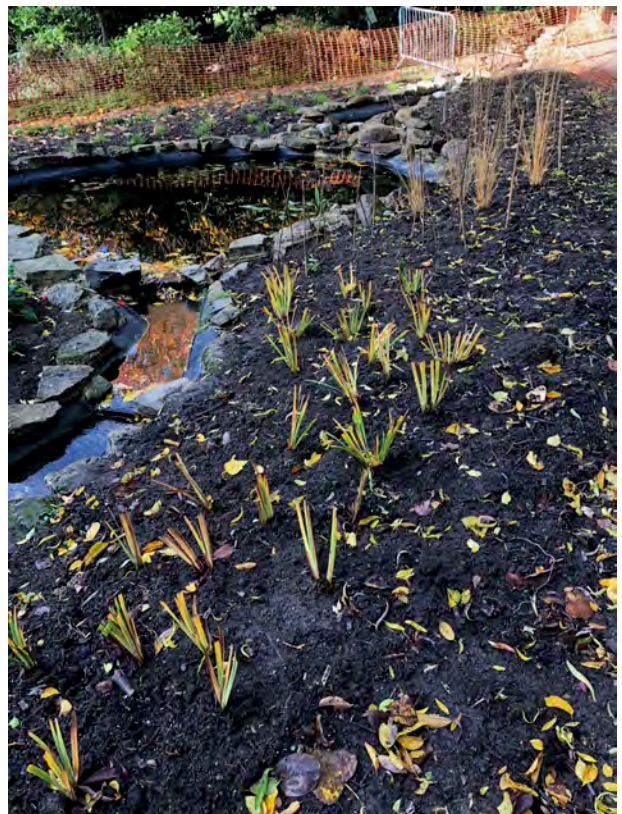
Cricket strip - the damaged artificial mat on the Common has been replaced thanks to funding by the English Cricket Board.

Oak Trees - about half of the new oak trees that were planted in a line parallel to Streatham Common North in the spring did not survive the exceptionally dry summer, despite being watered. Replacements are on order.

Inkspot Brewery - following some test runs in October, there is now a real brew most weeks. Finally!

The Rookery - in the summer we bade a sad farewell to Dominic Leary who had so impressively managed the gardens for the Streatham Common Cooperative from the start. Our thanks to him and good luck to those who have taken over.

The Heritage Lottery funded restoration of the Rookery's cascade and the surrounding Stream Garden (as it is now called) has progressed well with new crazy paving laid and the first stage of planting of the redesigned garden areas completed. The area – some of it shown in the photograph – will remain fenced off until the plants are better established. The second stage of planting will take place in the spring.



Butterfly Survey

Imagine walking a fixed path on the Common for an hour or so while in the middle of a square box that is 5 metres wide. Fortunately the box is made of clear plastic. Even more fortunately, for those of us who were taking turns to carry out a weekly survey of butterflies from April to September, the box was imaginary. What we had to do was record the butterflies we came across within the imaginary box.

The path we followed every week took in all the different habitats on the Common and was designed to go close to anywhere that there were plants that attracted butterflies. Naturally, therefore, the path went through the Rookery gardens as well as skirting several bramble and thistle patches.

Some species of butterfly have only one short period when they are seen each year whereas others have more than one brood so are seen in two or three distinct periods. A weekly survey reveals which species are seen when and their abundance. If the survey is carried out every year, it can show changes in abundance as well as changes in timing.



The infrequently seen Small Copper butterfly photographed during a survey.

Over the period of the survey we recorded about 20 species of butterfly, some only once. It was probably a relatively good year for most species as the weather was often warm and dry.

The results of our survey (or 'transect') have been fed into the data for Surrey and South-west London. Around 100 transects are monitored each year in this area and the overall results are analysed in an annual report published by the Surrey and SW London branch of Butterfly Conservation.

The fact that in this century butterflies are emerging 2-3 weeks earlier than before 2000, probably due to climate warming, has been revealed by long-running surveys of the type now started on the Common. Long may our survey continue. Let us know if you would like to take part next year.

Peter Newmark

Splashings of Fun



Many of Streatham's dogs were on their best behaviour for the annual Scruffs Dog Show on September 9th but let their hair down for the Doggy Splash Day a month later, when they were allowed to frolic in the paddling pool before it was shut down until next year. About 130 dogs took part in the dog show, raising £200 for the Friends and £150 for Pets As Therapy. About 150 dogs had fun in the paddling pool, raising nearly £1300 towards keeping the pool open next year. John Rhodes and his team worked their socks off to ensure both events were a success.

Renewal Information

If there is a letter enclosed with this newsletter asking you to renew your membership, please complete the form and return it with your payment.

Better still, please switch to paying by Standing Order, which saves both you and us some time and effort. You can set up a Standing Order via the enclosed form, or go to our website – streathamcommon.org – and follow the instructions for how to set up the Standing Order either with your bank or via PayPal.

If you already pay by Standing Order, you need do nothing.

If you have any queries about your membership, please email membership@streathamcommon.org

If you are not already receiving emails from the Friends of Streatham Common providing information about forthcoming events etc, all you have to do is go to the bottom of the our website's homepage – streathamcommon.org – put your email address in the box near the foot of the page and press SIGN UP.

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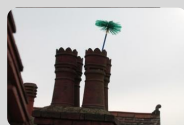
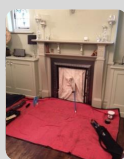


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