



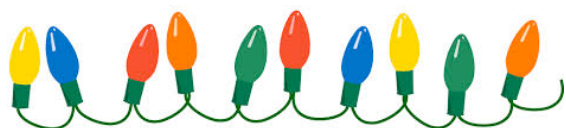
# Common Knowledge

December 2019, Issue 68

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## Seasonal Greetings

## And a Very Happy 2020

To all the members of  
the Friends of  
Streatham Common



## From the Chair

What a lovely summer we had and even after many events on the Common, and the large number of people that came out to enjoy it on the warm summer evenings, it is still looking fantastic. Lambeth Council has made some repairs to the grass towards the lower end, near the playground, and hopefully the ground will have time to recover over the winter.

SCCoop has been very busy in the Rookery, with new planting in the Old English Garden, plus a memorial planting project of acers and camelias at the main and side entrances to the Rookery. A lot of this work is carried out by volunteers that come out to help, come rain or shine. There is a group of around 15 people that regularly volunteer in the Rookery and between them they put in over 200 hours per month. Amazing effort, and a huge thanks to all of you for your dedication to and support of the Rookery.

The Stream Garden has now been completed, including some planting on mats in the pools. This is a great example of how our community groups like the FoSC, SCCoop and the Community Garden all work together. The project was largely funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund with additional contributions from SCCoop, the Friends and other organisations, and completed with many hours of volunteer help.

I'd like to wish all our members and their families a very merry Christmas and a prosperous and happy new year.

*Tracey Williamson*

## Wildlife Discoveries

It was a good late summer / early autumn for wildlife records on the Common, with sightings of two bird species that have seldom, if ever, been seen here before and of a type of bee that is new to the Common. The birds are not new residents but had just dropped in briefly en route to other destinations. The bees, however, are presumably here to stay. All three species were seen in the acid grassland area.

The new bee species is the ivy bee or ivy mining bee: 'ivy' because that's their main



food source, 'mining' because they nest in holes they make in the ground. They are relative newcomers to the UK, first spotted in 2001 but now found in much of southern England. The males appear in late August, coinciding with the first flowering of ivy. They are about the size of honeybees, with ginger thoraxes and distinct orange/yellow striped abdomens. The females hatch about a month later.

Although, unlike honey bees, ivy bees are solitary by nature, when nesting many do so in close proximity. After mating, the female digs a tunnel, which can be as long as two metres and has a number of side chambers. She fills each with a mixture of ivy nectar and pollen that she has gathered and then waterproofs each chamber with a cellophane-like substance

secreted from a gland on her head. Next she lays an egg in each chamber. After the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the pollen and then turn into pupae, which remain underground until new bees emerge during the following August / September.

That the ivy bees were found in the acid grassland section of the Common is no coincidence as they favour the type of loose sandy soil that characterises the area. So - a welcome to Streatham Common for ivy bees, a species that was first described as recently as 1993 in Germany and Croatia. Before that it had not been recognised as being separate from another two very similar solitary bee species.

Chance plays a large part in seeing migrant birds on the Common. There is always a chance they will drop in but even if they do there is a good chance they will not be spotted. So it was just good fortune that both a meadow pipit and a pied flycatcher were found this year. The former favours upland UK regions in the summer but moves south for the winter, with many staying in southern England while others migrate to mainland Europe. The one that briefly alighted on the Common in mid September must have needed a break and to re-fuel on its journey. It landed on a wooden post by the car park and then immediately relocated to the acid grassland where it walked around feeding for a few minutes before heading off on its journey again.

The pied flycatcher was similarly on a break from migration. These flycatchers breed in the west of the UK and then head for their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan West African countries, stopping along the way to rest and feed. The individual that chose to stop on the Common in late August presumably arrived during the night, when most migration takes place. It was seen next morning busily catching flying insects but then was off on the next stage of its long journey.

## Advertising Boards

For a couple of years Lambeth Council has been gearing up to allow local traders to place advertising boards on commons and parks. No sooner had this controversial proposal seemed to be getting close to starting up, a couple of months ago, than it retreated again, at least for now.

For advertising boards to be placed in public spaces, planning permission is necessary and the appearance at a small batch of sites (not including Streatham Common) of notices that such permission was being sought signalled that the project was under way. This triggered a number of objections. For example, when the Friends of Kennington Park discovered the application for up to 50 boards to be allowed in their park, they strongly objected. Meanwhile a petition was set up on change.org calling on Lambeth Council "to undertake a full open consultation with the community on whether the policy decision was right in the first place, and whether or not to proceed with these plans".

Crucially, perhaps, were the objections by the Norwood Forum and the Norwood Society to the advertising boards planned for the railings around St Luke's Gardens, which contain St Luke's Church. In October, this led Councillor Sonia Winifred, the cabinet member responsible for parks and open spaces, to suspend the whole operation while officers look into it again and ensure that any future plans involve public consultation as well as informing local councillors of the plans in advance.

## Silver Gilt

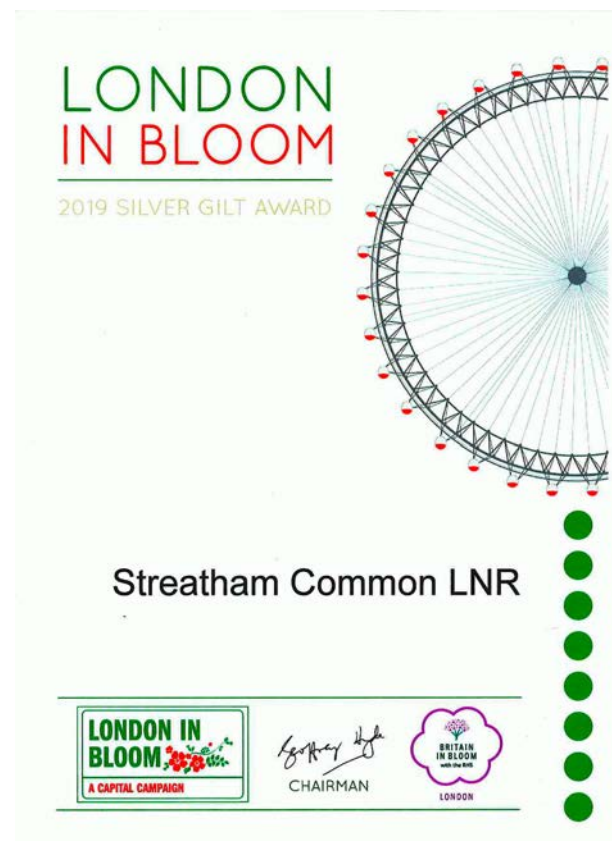
Streatham Common's Local Nature Reserve is now the proud recipient, on its first attempt, of an award from 'London in Bloom'. The awards recognise sites across the capital that demonstrate excellence in horticulture, biodiversity, sustainability and community involvement. An independent judge visited the site in June 2019 and based on her assessment, using a strict

set of criteria, in September it was awarded Silver Gilt (= very good) in the Large Conservation Area category. This complements the Silver Gilt Award that the Rookery has held in the Small Park category for over two years.

To secure a Silver Gilt, which is just one grade below Gold, on the first attempt and against stiff competition from many other sites from across London is pretty impressive. It recognises the hard work and commitment of the Friends, SCCoop and Lambeth Council in both protecting and maintaining the Local Nature Reserve, which comprises the woodlands, meadows and remnant area of acid grassland, so that both wildlife and people are able to share it.

A Silver Gilt bodes well for the future, so the judge's feedback report, which is now available, will be used to identify what needs to be done not just to maintain standards but also to improve the site so that we can aim to secure a coveted Gold in 2020!

*Iain Boulton, Environmental Compliance Officer, Lambeth Landscapes*





## Ground Repair

Surprisingly and pleasingly, Lambeth Landscapes – the fancy name for the council's parks and grounds maintenance team – have expended considerable effort in repairing the ground damage from major events this summer.

Work started a few days after the Kisstory music event was over with ruts being broken down and levelled off with soil. The same happened on the site later occupied by the funfair, which was also 'vertidraind' (pierced with equally spaced holes to decompact the soil and let water and air into the grass roots) and spread with grass seed.

More recently some small areas where the grass seemed to have been killed by some type of contamination were scraped off and reseeded. Other areas, where the earlier seeding had not been especially effective, were reseeded, covered with germination sheets and fenced off to increase the likelihood that they will become grassed over. One advantage of the mats is that they prevent much of the seed being eaten by pigeons and other birds. However, within a few days crows were observed shredding the mats, although quite why is a mystery as they are not seed eaters.

The dedicated reinstatement team that has carried out this work will soon be getting a machine that enables them to spread liquid fertiliser. It will also be able to be used to



spray an eco-friendly weed killer in areas where weeds are growing back more vigorously than grass.

So far, so good. There are clear signs of improvement. Come spring, we will be able better to judge how successful the work has been. That it has been carried out so well so far is in part because there is now an effectively equipped in-house team but also, one would like to think, is a response to the increasingly voluble complaints about the deterioration of the lower Common's surface not least by the Friends, who had been suggesting that a fallow year was needed to allow full recovery.

## SCCoop's Future

After a long period of uncertainty, we are pleased to announce Lambeth Council has now awarded SCCoop a new two-year contract to manage the Rookery. Excellent as this is, the contract is worth £46,000 per year less than before, and as you would expect, we want to keep the services and investment at the same level. We are also at the end of a two year Heritage Lottery Funded project, so are more reliant than ever on additional fundraising and support from the community. There are, however, some good developments to report.

First, we are delighted to announce that Alex Gerard has been appointed as our new Manager and will be starting with SCCoop at the beginning of December. Alex joins us from Groundwork London where he managed a successful programme working with vulnerable Londoners. He has a varied background in conservation, working both in the UK and internationally, as well as experience working in urban green spaces in London. Alex is also an experienced fundraiser and is excited to use these skills, working with the community, to help deliver our vision for the Rookery.

Also we are close to renewing our major sponsorship deal with Douglas and

Gordon, which has provided vital funds and will hopefully do so for the next three years. This deal covers sponsorship of major events like Kite Day and the Christmas Fair, as well as some subtle branding in the Rookery and initiatives such as putting an FoSC membership form into new home buyers' packs!

In other welcome news, SCCoop has been chosen to benefit from the next round of the Co-op Local Community Fund, so every time a member buys selected own-brand products and services, 1% of the money spent goes to their chosen local cause. You can become a Co-op member at [membership.coop.co.uk/new-registration](http://membership.coop.co.uk/new-registration). We have also been awarded funds from a local charitable trust with a long term association with the Rookery and the Common to enable us to continue to fund the conservation work in the Local Nature Reserve, although is subject to matched funding, so watch this space.

*Richard Payne, SCCoop Board Chair*

## Streatham Christmas

*Adapted with permission from John Brown's delightful book **A Streatham Christmas: a miscellany of items relating to Christmas past in Streatham**, which can be purchased for £6.40 at [streathamsociety.org.uk](http://streathamsociety.org.uk), where it is listed in the Pictorial History section of Publications.*

Since 1956, a Christmas crib has been set up at the bottom of Streatham Common, opposite Greyhound Lane, by the Knights of St. Columba. The tradition was started by J Albert Steiert together with John Taylor. They were concerned that Christmas was becoming secularised and the true meaning of the event was being overlooked. John Taylor built the first crib, with the interior background and the words "Come, let us adore him" being painted by Albert Steiert.

When the original crib was no longer serviceable Michael Moynihan built a new one which was in use until 2002 when,

sadly, the lighting circuit failed and the crib was unable to be illuminated as usual.

In 2003 the Knights held a sponsored walk, circumnavigating Streatham Common six times, in order to raise over £300 to replace the lighting and refurbish the crib so it could once again grace the Common and be appreciated in its full splendour.

Earlier, in 1985, the Knights were told they would not be permitted to erect the crib any more. Lambeth Council's Amenity Subcommittee claimed the Knights were a secret sect which did not allow women members and were Catholic Freemasons. The decision drew hostile headlines in the national press of *Away With The Manger* and *No Room On The Common*. The incident did much to foster Lambeth Council's then "looney left" image.

On close examination the criticisms were found to be totally unjustified. The Knights have no connection at all with the Masons and although they do have an all male membership, they operate in tandem with their sister organisation, The Dames of St Joan, whose members are all women.

Thankfully, when confronted with the wholehearted support for the Knights by other Christian groups, as well as local Hindus, Moslems and the Pentecostal Church, Lambeth Council relented and the crib was allowed to be erected on the Common as usual.

Today, the crib continues to be part of Streatham's yuletide festivities and each year the Friends of Streatham Common organise a carol service around the crib as part of the town's Christmas celebrations.

*Many thanks to Anthony Gold Solicitors for supporting the Friends Christmas Party and raffle and to Sainsbury's for providing the mice pies and milled wine before the carol singing.*



**Tree Spread on Acid Grassland.** For a while after World War 2, the Common's acid grassland, to the right of the footpath between Copley Park and Valley Road in the top photo below, was in part turned over to allotments and temporary housing. By the 1950s, the area had returned to grassland (bottom photo below). Fast forward to 1987 and more trees are present in the small part of the acid grassland that is visible in the photograph at the top of the page opposite. Now, as seen in the current Google Map photograph (obviously taken when a large music festival was present), trees have taken over a large portion of the area. Without conservation, the acid grassland will disappear altogether. *Thanks to John Brown / Streatham Society and Google*









The erection of large structures for events on Clapham Common will henceforth be subject to permission from the Secretary of State for the Environment and will require public consultation, according to the Open Spaces Society.

This follows a campaign by the Society along with the Friends of Clapham Common and Clapham Society to prevent the severe ground damage on the common caused by multiple large events. Lambeth Council claims that the legal position on erecting large temporary structures on common land is ambiguous but has agreed to seek permission in future with respect to Clapham Common. The Open Spaces Society says it will challenge Lambeth Council to apply the same protections to other open spaces that have the same legal status, including Streatham Common.

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