



Common Knowledge

August 2019, Issue 67

Inside this issue

2. OMG it's OPM
3. Playground
- 4 & 5 Bring Back the Heather!
6. Fitness Equipment
7. Anti-social Behaviour

Common Knowledge, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email: peternewmark@gmail.com

For Your Dog's Diary

8th September

Win a prize at the
Scruff's Fun Dog Show

On the Common opposite the
Rookery Café from 1.00pm.

13th October

Cool off and get wet at
Doggy Splash Day

In - and in support of - the paddling
pool.

From the Chair

My name is Tracey Williamson and I am the new Chair of the Friends of Streatham Common. Before I go on to tell you a bit about myself, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing Chair, Mike Robinson, for his four years of service to our charity. I'd also like to thank David Malley who has stepped down as our Treasurer, also after completing a four year term. At the same time, we welcome two new members to our Executive Committee. Nick Cattermole returns to take up the Treasurer role, and Claire Hopkins joins as Vice-chair.

So, about me. I have lived in Streatham for around 25 years and have been a member of the FoSC for as long as I can remember. I first got really involved with the Executive Committee in 2011 when we formed a fundraising group to help with the Rookery Centenary celebrations. Since then I have been on the committee and have organised a few fun events such as quiz nights and comedy evenings. I am also involved with the Streatham Common Co-operative (SCCoop), and represent the FoSC on its board. We work very closely together to help keep the Rookery and our Common well maintained.

We have some exciting new projects that we want to get underway for the Common, but at the same time Lambeth Council is making huge cuts to its parks budget and we will feel the effects of this on Streatham Common. Consequently, it's more important than ever to have a solid Friends group with a strong presence and voice. We are always looking for new people to come and join our committee. If you are interested, and want to make a difference to our Common, please email me at chair@streathamcommon.org or come and speak to me anytime if you see me out and about walking my two miniature schnauzers Jack and Joey, the crazy puppy.

OMG it's OPM

They were bound to arrive on the Common one of these years and late this June they did. The Forestry Commission let Lambeth Council know that they had spotted Oak Processionary Moths (OPM) in a tree by Streatham Common North. Subsequently they have also been spotted by the leader of a Forest School and by council employees on a few oaks in the woodlands. This was an unwelcome discovery as the caterpillars can cause harm to both oak trees and people and so have to be removed.

OPM was accidentally introduced into England on imported oak in 2005. It is now established in most of Greater London and in some of the surrounding counties. The Forestry Commission map of where it was found in 2018 shows several hotspots, including one on Tooting Common. Also, one or two affected trees were found in north Croydon and in Brockwell Park. So it was pretty much inevitable that OPM would reach Streatham Common's oaks sooner or later.



An OPM caterpillar in webbing in our woods. The long white hairs are not the ones that cause trouble: those are almost invisible.



OPM caterpillars processing.

The OPM is so-called because the moths, which emerge from eggs that have overwintered, have a habit of moving head to tail in long lines up trees or sometimes across ground. The processions of caterpillars often have one leader followed by several rows abreast of one another. When ready to do so, the caterpillars form a nest by surrounding themselves with white silken webbing. In the nest, they turn into pupae from which moths subsequently emerge.

The caterpillars feed on the leaves of oak trees and, if there are large numbers, can strip a tree of its leaves, leaving it particularly vulnerable to other threats as well as unsightly. For humans, the problem is the thousands of tiny, almost invisible hairs on the caterpillars, which are shed in large numbers if the caterpillars are disturbed and can be carried a fair distance by wind. If they then come into contact with people they can cause itchy skin rashes as well as eye and throat irritations. Occasionally they can cause breathing difficulties. Nests at ground level are a particular problem for children and pets.

Because of these harmful effects and to try and prevent the further spread of OPM, when a nest is reported it is quickly dealt with first by spraying with a selective

insecticide and then by removing the nest and bagging it up for disposal.

If you chance upon rows of OPM caterpillars or a nest, keep well clear and report them to the Forestry Commission's online Tree Alert service
forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/tree-alert/

Playground

A victim of its own success, the playground has increasingly suffered extensive damage to its grassy surfaces by the many children using them. Instead of being grassy, the ground had become bare and, after rain, muddy. In July, most of these areas were therefore covered in a rubber mulch. This is made of shreds of old forklift tyres, which are bonded together with polyurethane. Various colours are available and one might argue that too dark a look has been chosen. In any case, this surfacing is far more durable than grass, even if it is not so nice looking.



Work in progress, with some bare areas not yet covered in rubber mulch.



For those requiring refreshments while in the playground, the Little Rook kiosk overlooking the playground is fully operational. It's an offshoot of the Rookery Café but with limited offerings.

At the June AGM, the following were elected to the FoSC Executive Committee:

Chair - Tracey Williamson
Vice-chair - Claire Hopkins
Treasurer - Nick Cattermole
Secretary - Harriet Blacklay
Promotion - Lizzie O'Grady
Membership Secretary - Louise Gu
Council Communications - David Malley
Newsletter Editor - Peter Newmark
Park Watch Coordinator - Lizzie O'Grady
Volunteer Coordinator - Richard Payne
Committee Members - Diccon Reynolds, John Rhodes, Shea Richardson, Mike Robinson, Andrew Simpson



Kite Day 2019 was a roaring success. Even if the wind was intermittent making it hard for some of

Bring back the Heather!

As an estate agent might put it, Streatham Common boasts Lambeth's largest piece of acid grassland, moments from the Rookery Café and with potential to update throughout. For Natural England, the area of acid grassland is one of the reasons that parts of the Common were granted the status of Local Nature Reserve: for the Friends, Streatham Common's acid grassland is valued for its biodiversity but has become too degraded for comfort.

Acid grassland develops on low nutrient soil overlying gravelly and sandy acidic soils. As it is not suitable for crop growing, it was often the habitat used as grazing land for livestock which, in turn, prevented it turning into scrub and woodland. Now it survives only if the grass is cut and removed to prevent the cuttings from fertilising the soil.

The Common's acid grassland largely lies between the paddling pool and the footpath that runs from opposite Valley Road to opposite Copley Park. Some of the lower part of this area has become woodland in recent times and some of the upper part is maintained as amenity grassland by regular mowing. But in

between there is an area that still has some of the characteristics of acid grassland.

It abounds with grasshoppers and crickets, is rich in butterflies, still has a small population of yellow ants and contains some plants that characterise acid grassland, such as sheep's sorrel and red fescue grass. However, the acid grassland is not in good shape. Parts, as already mentioned, have turned into woodland, which is spreading. Some areas have



The acid grassland viewed from the top of the Common (with the new woodland in the middle). Note the lack of view over the tree tops.



the display kites to fly, hundreds of people flew their own kites and thousands enjoyed the day.

become invaded by brambles. The surviving part is fragile and suffers from too much footfall and the addition of nutrients from dog fouling and emissions from vehicles on nearby roads. And some plants have gone missing: alas, the single remaining heather plant noted in the 1994 *Nature Conservation in Lambeth* (of which Andrew Simpson, a member of our Executive Committee, is an author) has long since gone.

It is time, we think, to restore the area the best we can. Ideally that would mean removing the trees, getting rid of invasive species, reducing the nutrient level of the soil and reintroducing grazing animals.....and bringing back the heather. Grazing animals are a step too far but what can be done realistically? At present we have more questions than answers.

One issue is should we remove some of the trees, replacing them by planting new trees lower down the Common. (A side benefit of this could be the restoration of the views over the Wandle Valley from the top of the Common). The trees are mostly oaks, some the native species and some non-native turkey oaks, which could be preferentially removed. Even if we

removed some, would acid grassland re-emerge or has the soil changed irreversibly in character over the few decades in which the trees have grown up?

Another question is how to remove the invading and spreading bramble, which is still low lying. Probably the only effective method is to strip off the whole of the topsoil (a JCB job) and then fence off the area, re-seed it with seeds from acid grassland species, plant some heather and let the area slowly recover. Would this be acceptable?

How could the footfall on the acid grassland be reduced in general? Would barriers to entry from some directions be tolerated? Would well defined footpaths reduce trampling of other areas?

Mered Jones, SCCoop's Head Ranger, Iain Boulton, Lambeth's ecology expert, and myself will be trying to find answers and then developing proposals. These will be presented for consultation at a public meeting on 19th September, after which we will be able to work how much funding to seek.

Peter Newmark

Fitness Equipment

Look at almost any park around here and you will find some sort of fitness equipment. But not on Streatham Common. The Friends are wondering whether to change that. We have been asked a few times why there is no equipment and it seems likely that its presence would generate considerable use. And most of us need to be fitter - don't we? - even if some people prefer not to exercise in public.

At present, it is quite usual to see people using benches or playground equipment for exercise purposes. This would be avoided were there to be purpose built equipment. And we suspect that it would not too hard to attract funding in addition to any use of our own accumulated funds.

The questions then are what sort of equipment would be best and where it should go, subject to planning permission.

All manner of equipment is available with different designs and for different purposes. Some suits people who are already rather fit and need to keep that way. Other types of equipment are better suited to the less fit and the elderly.

One popular form of exercise is calisthenics and the Friends have been approached on more than one occasion about installing suitable equipment on the Common. Calisthenics exercises large groups of muscles such as those used in pulling and bending. It requires rather simple equipment such as parallel bars or bars for chin-ups. These can also be used for stretching exercises, which runners often carry out. Individual units can be clustered in one place (top photo) or distributed one by one over an area (middle).

Serving a rather different purpose are the outdoor gyms (bottom) found in some local parks and even housing estates. Most of the equipment in these gyms is

constructed of metal and so wears well but has moving parts, which can be troublesome. The overall look is rather industrial and arguably not so suited to the Common as wood/metal equipment.

Where the equipment would go depends in part on whether to cluster or distribute it. The advantage of a cluster is that users



can readily move from one piece to another. The disadvantage is that it can act as a gathering point for a rather large and sometimes noisy – especially if music is played – group of people. A cluster would require a flat piece of land, of which there are not too many on the Common other than by the A23. Distributed pieces of equipment could be placed almost anywhere, each one occupying a small space and perhaps laid out in a trail. Whatever the equipment, there would need to be a hard surface under it.

Over the next few weeks, the Friends plan to come up with some proposals, which will be put to a public meeting for consultation on 19th September. We would very much like to hear before then from anyone who has a view and especially from those of you who can tell us about the type of equipment you personally would use were it on the Common.

Anti-social Behaviour

Long warm evenings are just the ticket for spending time on the Common, especially if you don't have your own garden. And why not meet up with a group of friends for a picnic and fun? So far, so good.

What is becoming an increasing problem (and not just here, it seems) are the groups who are either unaware of, or simply ignore, the bylaws that operate on the Common and who sometimes behave in clearly anti-social ways.

In recent weeks there have been a number of such instances. In one a loud sound system was rigged up at the edge of the Common and powered from a council property by a cable that ran across the pavement and the road. In another, a loud sound system was operated from a car that had been driven into the middle of the Common. It is not unusual for there to be an



Two smart display boards about the Local Nature Reserve on Streatham Common have recently been installed. The LNR dates back to 2013. It has recently been judged for a London in Bloom award and we should know the result in September.

associated illegal barbecue and sometimes a large volume of litter is left behind.

On occasion, word gets out, presumably via social media, that a party is going on and more and more people arrive causing traffic problems. Invariably if it is a gathering of young people, drugs are in evidence, mostly laughing gas (nitrous oxide) which comes in small metal canisters that, when emptied, are left on the Common along with other litter.

Attempts by local residents to have these gatherings nipped in the bud or controlled are seldom successful. In part this is because there are no council officers available to deal with the problem and in part because even if one can get through to 101 - the non-emergency police number - and even if a couple of police do turn up, their powers of persuasion are limited and they are reluctant to take any real action. Only if reinforcements are forthcoming is the number of police sufficient to persuade the party goers to pack up and go.

Advertisements



Vale Veterinary Clinic
~ Your other family doctor ~
020 8679 6969 | info@valevets.com
130 Streatham Vale, London, SW16 5TB
Visit us today @ www.valevets.com
Vale Veterinary Clinic - Streatham



Black Cat Chimneys

Chimney Sweeping & Testing, Fireplaces and Stoves -Supply & Install, Cowls and Birdguards fitted , Chimney/Flue Lining

Tel: 020 8764 7689 / 07948 146066
Email: info@blackcatchimneys.co.uk