

# Notes from the Nature Reserve

Green Gym Conservation Volunteers at East Ham Nature Reserve Autumn 2017

Exciting times at the nature reserve. Lots of things have been happening. We now have a proper partnership working with Active Newham. Together we are making major improvements to the site, as well as attracting more visitors. They ran a pamper day for adults, with yoga, massage and meditation and there have been many sessions for children through the summer. School children are creating a mini nature reserve alongside Norman Road, for classes to use next year.

The really big story is the new paths. Corporate volunteers, mainly from the Financial Conduct Authority, have worked incredibly hard barrowing tons of crushed concrete fines (like sandy gravel) to create permanent paths. After a couple of weeks the paths are solid enough for wheelchairs and buggies to run over them. This means we have disabled access to large parts of the site. Even more importantly for us, the concrete suppresses weeds, so we don't have to spend so much time clearing paths. Green Gym members have been making the paths through the woodland. It is hard work, but fun, especially stomping the concrete down. The lizards think we have made the paths as basking areas for them.

We will be continuing laying paths through the winter. Other jobs include coppicing the hazels and laying the next section of hedge. Please come and join us if you can.



## Animal of the month

Garden cross spider, European garden spider - *Araneus diadematus*

Ant Corner stomped and sorted



There are lots of spiders about at the moment. Spider silk is incredibly strong, as you will find if you walk into a web.

These are big spiders. Females are up to 13mm body length and males are up to 9mm. They have a cross pattern of white spots on their back.

Garden cross spiders make the classic webs, called orb webs. They sit in the middle waiting for flying insects to be trapped.

After mating, the female builds a silk cocoon in which she lays her eggs. She protects this egg sac until she dies in late autumn. The little yellow

spiderlings hatch the following May.

The smaller male approaches the female carefully. He taps on the strands of silk web to distract her. If he is lucky he mates with her and gets away. If he is unlucky he ends up being eaten.



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## Plant of the month

### English Oak - *Quercus robur*



Acorns with galls caused by a minute wasp

Oak is the most common tree species in the UK.

The oaks at the nature reserve are quite young, only planted in 1990. They do not usually produce acorns until they are about 40 years old, with maximum production between 80 and 120 years.

English oak supports more species than any other tree. These are mainly insects, like those that cause galls and many different types of fungi. It provides nesting sites for birds and bats. Acorns are food for animals, including humans who have used them to make flour, or roasted as coffee.

England has more ancient oak trees (over 400 years old) than the rest of Europe put together. Some are 1000 years old. Ours have some way to go.

Oak was sacred to various gods including Zeus (Greek), Jupiter (Roman) and Dagda (Celtic).

Oak trees are now threatened by oak processionary moth and several diseases including acute oak decline.

Good news on the reptile front. We have had bits of roofing felt, called refugia, around the site since May for a reptile survey. We knew we had a lot of slow worms, but now we have numbers to prove that we have an exceptional population. Maximum so far was 35 adults and 25 babies spotted under 14 refugia in half an hour. Many of the females were pregnant so there will be more babies.



The common lizards are more elusive, but they were watching the corporate volunteers laying paths by Cricket Meadow. Maximum so far was 5 adults and 10 juveniles spotted in one session, which is a good population (Frog Life criteria). The sightings have been recorded in GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London).

This type of survey is useful because we can give actual figures instead of just saying we have a lot. We hope to continue counting the reptiles and also start surveying other animals and plants next year.

We are sorry that Anna Yusuf, who has done so much to improve the nature reserve is leaving Active Newham. She will be working with community groups in East Ham, so we hope she can still help with the good work.



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