

News from East Ham Nature Reserve August 2023

Dates for Saturday work sessions are 29th July, 26th August and 30th September 10am-1pm. Friends' walks on the same dates at 2pm, everyone welcome. Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm. Please come along if you can make it.

The theme for the walk on Saturday 29th will be “**butterflies and bumblebees**”

We will try to identify them using ID cards and also the iNaturalist app for adults and Seek app for children.

Good news this month.

We have a new vicar, Father Paul. He wears shorts and rides a bike and is very interested in forming links between the church and the nature reserve. He has joined us for tea and biscuits on Wednesdays at 11.30.



White-tailed bumblebee

The church is celebrating its patronal day on Saturday 22nd June. Short notice, but come if you can because the church will be open to visit and there will be tea and cakes in the church hall.

Sarah is having a mammoth clear out of the visitor centre. She will be running activities for children at the nature reserve on Mondays all though the summer holidays.

Animal of the month

Comma butterfly - *Polygonia c-album*



This butterfly is called a comma because it has a small, white comma-shaped mark on the underside of the wings.

They normally hibernate between October and March, but can be seen at any time of the year if the weather is warm enough. They are easy to recognise because they have ragged edges to the wings.

These butterflies were found all over England and Wales until the middle of

the 1800s. They declined severely until they were only found in the Welsh border counties. This may be because the caterpillars used to feed mainly on hops, which are no longer widely farmed. From the 1960s onwards the population increased again until it is now common throughout England and Wales and has even reached Scotland.

The caterpillars have changed their choice of food and now feed mainly on nettles, of which we have plenty at the nature reserve. They also still eat hops and we have some of those as well, possibly left over from when the area round the church was market gardens.



With the wings folded, the comma is well camouflaged



Plant of the month

Blackberry or bramble - *Rubus fruticosus*



We have a love /hate relationship with this plant. It blocks the paths, arching over and catches you as you walk past. It scratches you when you try to cut it and it trips you up.

On the other hand, the berries are delicious. They have been eaten by people for thousands or even millions of years. Remains of blackberries were found in the stomach of a neolithic man dug up at Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex.

There are many species of blackberry. All are edible, but some taste better than others.

An ancient and delicious recipe for blackberry

crowdie combines them with toasted oats, honey, cream and rum or whisky.

Early in the 20th century they were still being picked commercially to make dyes.

There are lots of blackberries ripening now. Pick a few, but leave some for the animals. Remember though, not to pick them after Michaelmas Night (29th September), because that is when the devil spits (or wees) on them.

Tree problems

All our trees are starting to show signs of being stressed by climate change. The very hot dry summer last year, followed by the early cold weather has taken its toll. There is likely to be much more damage this year, which is already very dry, although not yet very hot. Two large birches on Butterfly Walk and several of the Scots pines on Pine Walk have already died. Many of the Austrian and Corsican pines are partly dead.

Stressed trees are more likely to suffer from diseases. Many of the sycamores are suffering from sooty bark. This is caused by a fungus *Cryptostoma corticale*. The fungus may be dormant for years, only appearing when other factors stress the tree. Look at the sycamores and you will see some with sections of bark falling off and sooty, black spores underneath. There is no treatment and several trees will have to be removed.



Sooty bark on sycamore

The only good thing about removing trees is that it will open-up glades for other plants, especially flowers, to grow.

Tasks for August

- Removing ivy in the woods so bluebells can come through in spring.
- Collecting seed of cow parsley to plant in the woodlands.
- Tying bundles of cow parsley stalks to make nesting sites for bees.
- Clearing brambles and dead grass in the meadows.
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.



Brown argus

Our work sessions are very relaxed. You can work on something that interests you, at your own pace. You can leave whenever you like and there is no obligation to be there every week.

Tea and biscuits at 11.30 and there is always time for a chat.



Please contact Penny at newhamgg@gmail.com if you have any suggestions of things to put in the newsletter or on the website.

Email newhamgg@gmail.com or phone Frances 078 4597 3156.

Check out the website www.newhamgreengym.org for more information about Green Gym, East Ham Nature Reserve Heritage and Conservation Volunteers.

If you would like to join the Friends of East Ham Nature Reserve please email friendsofehr@gmail.com