

# News from East Ham Nature Reserve September 2023

Dates for Saturday work sessions are 26th August and 30th September 10am-1pm. Friends' walks on the same dates at 2pm, everyone welcome. Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm.

The theme for the walk on Saturday 26th will be "taking a close look at nature". Starting at 2pm we will focus on small things and details.



Marble gall on oak

## Please consider becoming a volunteer

Please come along if you can make it. We really need your help. We now have so few volunteers that we are struggling to even run all our sessions. Often we only have two people - definitely not enough to look after 9.5 acres.

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. We always stop for tea/coffee, biscuits and chat at 11.30. Some people leave after tea, others stay until 1pm.



Peter scything

Our Saturday walks are an opportunity to get out in our lovely green place and learn something about nature in a very relaxed way. You can get to know our plants and animals and see how things change throughout the year. Tea/coffee, cake and chat afterwards.

## Plant of the month

### Rosebay willowherb - *Epilobium angustifolium*



Several people have asked what this plant is, so it had to be the choice for this month, although it is coming to the end of its flowering season. It is common in the open areas of the nature reserve, especially The Wilderness. It is a striking plant 2-3ft tall in spreading clumps, with beautiful pink flowers in summer. It is very difficult to control because it can produce up to 80,000 seeds per plant. They are feathery and spread by the wind. Seeds remain viable for years in the soil, but only grow after the ground is cleared.

It is also called 'fireweed', because it often the first coloniser after a fire, providing shelter for other plants to establish. It was called 'bombweed' during the war because it grew on bombsites.

This was a rare plant until the late 19th century, when it suddenly started to spread. It is not known why it spread, but the seeds may have been carried in the slipstream of trains as the railway network spread across the country.

## Animal of the month

### Roesel's bush-cricket - *Metrioptera roeselii*



Frances spotted this little character on the wall of the visitor centre. You can find several species of bush-crickets and grasshoppers in our meadows. You can see them hopping away as you walk through the grass.

Different species can be identified by the sound they make. Roesel's bush-cricket's song is a long, monotonous, mechanical noise, unlike the chirruping of some other species.

Bush-crickets and grasshoppers "sing" by rubbing the hardened edges of their fore-wings together.

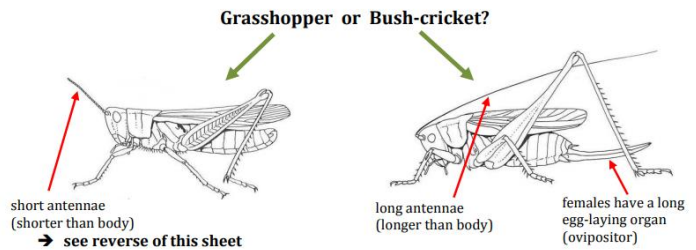
Roesel's bush-crickets usually have short wings and some of them are unable to fly.

Until the 20th century they were only found in south-east England, but are now spreading north.

**Horrible fact - horsehair worms live in water, but their larvae are parasites of grasshoppers and bush-crickets. When they become adults they alter the brains of their hosts, making them drown themselves so the worm can complete its lifecycle.**



<https://orthoptera.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/Common%20Bush-crickets%20and%20Grasshoppers.pdf>



<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/invertebrates/grasshoppers-and-crickets>

## Plant galls



The blackthorn flowered beautifully in the spring and sloes started to form. A few then became deformed, making long hollow shapes called pocket plums. This is caused by a fungus called *Taphrina pruni*, which affects stone fruits, so some of the plums which grow by the A13 were also affected. Fortunately we still had a good crop of plums and there are plenty of sloes for lovers of sloe gin!

Galls are formed by the plant in response to an alien invader. This might be a fungus, but is often a microscopic wasp, or other insect, which lays its eggs on the plant. This year nearly all the acorns became these knopper galls which are caused by a wasp, *Andricus quercuscalicis*, laying its egg as the acorn is forming. The gall protects the wasp larva until it bores its way out. The galled acorns will not germinate, so ultimately this is bad for the tree because it prevents it setting seed. Oaks and elms suffer from many types of gall. Look closely at them and see what you can spot.





You may also see this gall, called Ragged Robin or Robin's pincushion, on wild roses. It is also caused by a gall wasp, *Diplolepos rosae* which makes the plant produce this mass of fibres, which start off green and turn bright red. The larvae overwinter in the gall and emerge as adults in the spring. Female wasps can lay fertile eggs without mating, so males are rare in this species.

## What we have been doing



Pruning the *Philadelphus* (mock orange) on butterfly walk.

Hacking through the jungle



Adriana found an angel

## Tasks for September

- Removing ivy and goosegrass in the woods so bluebells can come through in spring.
- Tying bundles of cow parsley stalks to make nesting sites for bees.
- Clearing brambles and grass in the meadows to make spaces to plant flower seeds.
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.
- Making wood piles as habitats for minibeasts.



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

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Check out the website [www.newhamgreengym.org](http://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](mailto:friendsofehr@gmail.com)