

News from East Ham Nature Reserve October 2023

Dates for Saturday work sessions are 30th September and 28th October 10am-1pm. Friends' walks on the same dates at 2pm, everyone welcome. Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm.

On Saturday 30th September we will be **looking for fungi**. Starting at 2pm we will see what we can find and try to identify them using iNaturalist app for adults and Seek app for children.



Clouded agaric
Do not eat!



A date for your diary - Saturday 4th November at 1.30pm we are going to have a Remembrance Walk, putting poppies and crosses on the war graves ready for Remembrance Day. We hope to have someone to talk about the work of the War Graves Commission.

Animal of the month

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

You have probably noticed that there are lots of spiders about at the moment. Spider silk is incredibly strong and sticky, 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. 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.



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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.

Maintaining habitats

East Ham Nature Reserve covers about 9.5 acres and includes many different habitats. There are areas of species rich grassland, woodland and scrub, with smaller habitats like woodpiles and anthills. It is important to maintain a balance between these, because different species of animals and plants need different conditions to survive. The aim is to create a mosaic of different habitats with green corridors linking them, so animals can move around safely.



Spotted wood butterflies are still around

Activities like cutting back ivy, removing brambles and cutting grass help to maintain the different areas and maximise the number of plants and animals that can be found at the Nature Reserve. These are labour intensive tasks, especially if done selectively, for instance removing brambles, but leaving knapweed and other wildflowers as we do throughout the year.



Peter scything Cricket Meadow

At the end of the flowering season, the grassland should be cut. Ideally it would be cut close to the ground in September, exposing bare soil, to make spaces for flower seeds to grow. Our problem is that the slow worms may be present in large numbers, producing babies in the autumn, so it cannot be cut very short without damaging them. We also have to be very careful raking off the cut grass to avoid damage to the slow worms.

It would be good to dig out all the coarse grasses, skimming off the topsoil, maybe using machines, as the council did on the Greenway. Because of the graves and slow worms, ours has to be done by hand. It needs a lot of manpower and we are very short of volunteers. It also has to be done carefully, because reptiles may be hibernating in the clumps of grass. We have made a start in Norman Road meadow. Now it has rained and the ground is softer, we should be able to make faster progress.

Plant of the month

Hazel - *Corylus avellana*



coppiced hazel

There are many hazels at East Ham Nature Reserve, but, although they produce a good crop of nuts most years, we have never tasted one. The grey squirrels get them as soon as they are ripe. Sometimes we find whole nuts, but they are just empty shells. How do the squirrels know they are not worth opening?

Most of the hazels had been coppiced in the past. This means that they were cut down to almost ground level and allowed to grow again. Unfortunately, they were then left to grow into tall trees, many of them decaying and falling over.

Over the last six or eight years we have been coppicing them again, so they form a thicket of long, straight poles. These can be cut again and again as a crop. The base or stool keeps on getting wider and producing more poles.

Traditionally, hazel poles had many uses. They were made into hurdles to use as fences. The thin poles traditionally make pegs to hold thatch in place. Bundles of sticks called faggots were taken into London to sell as firewood,

We use the hazel poles to make 1.5m stakes for when we lay the hedge (more on hedge laying in a future newsletter). We use thinner, longer hazel poles to weave along the top of the hedge, holding it all in place.

Look out for hazels in autumn, when the rounded leaves turn yellow. Pretty yellow catkins, the male flowers of the hazel, will appear in late winter and early spring.

What we have been doing



We have cleared a lot of ivy and brambles by the bench in the bluebell wood, near the bridge, where we found this little plaque, propped against a gravestone.

We had a larger than usual group (9 adults and some children) at our last Saturday session, so we cleared a lot of goosegrass and ivy from the woodland nearest High Street South. Some of the goosegrass is already 30cms tall. If we can remove it now, it will stop it taking over again as it did this summer.

The wildflower meadow at Rainbow Garden in Brampton Park had a lot of viper's bugloss plants, which were cut when they finished flowering. Some of the cut plants have been spread around the meadows at the nature reserve so they can shed their seeds. Using seed from local wild plants is an ideal way of increasing biodiversity.



viper's bugloss and
5-spot burnet moths

Tasks for October

- Removing ivy in the woods so bluebells can come through in spring.
- Clearing brambles and digging out grass in the meadows to make spaces to plant flower seeds.
- Planting cow parsley seeds beside the paths in the woodland.
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.
- Making wood piles as habitats for minibeasts.

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.



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