

News from East Ham Nature Reserve November 2023

Dates for Saturday work sessions are 28th October and 25th November 10am-1pm. Friends' walks on the same dates at 2pm, everyone welcome. Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm.

On Saturday 28th October we will be looking for fungi, since we didn't find many last month. 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.



Sulphur tuft fungus



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.

News

Three of us had a meeting with Paul, the vicar, and two other members of the church, as well as Nicola and Sarah from Newham Parks with a view to working more closely together. The church is interested in adding to its ecological credentials, which already include an award for energy efficiency in the church building.

We discussed various topics including how to publicise the nature reserve. We agreed that there should be a notice that would be visible from the High Street and an indication that the entrance is in Norman Road.

Early days, but we will be meeting every three months, so things should start to move forwards.

Animal of the month

Red fox - *Vulpes vulpes*

There seem to be a lot of new holes around the nature reserve, dug by foxes, judging by the size of the holes.

There are several fox species, all belonging to the dog family, although only the red fox is native to the UK.

Foxes eat a varied diet, including earthworms and insects (adults and larvae), as well as birds and small mammals. They will also eat fruit like our cherry plums. The stones turn up in fox poo! Urban foxes eat scavenged food, and food put out for them by people, so they are often better fed than country foxes.





cute fox cubs

Foxes mate in the winter, when you may hear the vixens screaming to attract a mate. Cubs live in a family group with the vixen, with the male bringing food until they are old enough to hunt for themselves.

Urban foxes became established in London as far back as the 1940s.

During the 1990s a disease called sarcoptic mange killed a large proportion of the foxes - up to 95% in some areas. Populations are slowly recovering.

In captivity foxes can live for 14 years. Wild foxes rarely live longer than 2 years.

Plant of the month

Ivy - *Hedera helix*

The ivy we spend so much time clearing is the juvenile form of the plant. It roots into the ground as it spreads. It also uses small roots to climb up trees or gravestones. It does not damage the trees and is not parasitic. We remove it to prevent trees becoming top heavy with ivy and blowing over in the wind. The small roots can damage gravestones.



juvenile ivy

Once it reaches a certain height, such as the top of a grave or branches of a tree, it becomes adult. The leaf shape changes, the plant stops producing roots and the stems grow upwards like a bush. If a cutting from an adult plant is rooted, it will grow as a bush.



mature leaves and flowers

The adult plant produces round clusters of flowers in autumn. A child told me they looked like Covid viruses! They smell bad to attract flies as pollinators. They are also a very good source of nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies and other insects. This is becoming more important as autumns are warmer now and many bees and butterflies are still active. There are very few wildflowers after September, so ivy flowers are one of their main sources of food, together with

garden flowers like Michaelmas daisies. You can help by growing autumn and winter flowering plants in your garden.

The flowers are followed by berries which turn through purple to black. These berries are an important food source for birds, when other food is scarce in winter, although they are poisonous to humans.



What we have been doing

Some new people have joined us!! The Saturday group has grown to 9 adults and two children and we often have five in the Wednesday group. Some people have other commitments, so can't manage every session, but we are happy if they come whenever they can.

We have been concentrating on two areas. Frances works in the woodland nearest to High Street South. She is making good progress clearing the remains of goosegrass and making areas of bare earth to sow flower seeds. It would be good to plant more bluebell bulbs, but we need more people to do it. That may be a task for the Saturday group.

Maureen is our expert at clearing graves. She has a folding chair so she can work sitting down if she needs to. She always manages to remove enormous piles of ivy.



yellow rattle

The other group has been working on Norman Road meadow. This is an experiment to see if we can establish wild flowers by clearing some of the coarse grass. It's impossible to clear it all. We will keep hoeing it out over winter then sow seeds in the spring.

We will also put in yellow rattle as plug plants in spring, since we have had little success growing it from seed. Yellow rattle is semi-parasitic on grass, so should help to weaken the vigorous grasses and give other plants a chance.

Tasks for October

- Removing ivy and planting bluebell bulbs in the woodland.
- Clearing goosegrass before it gets chance to set seed.
- Clearing brambles and digging out grass in the meadows to make spaces to plant flower seeds in spring.
- Planting cow parsley seeds beside the paths in the woodland.
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.
- Making wood piles as habitats for minibeasts.



Autumn colours

As the weather gets colder and the days are shorter, autumn colours start to appear. Look out for the field maples turning a lovely buttery yellow and bright red leaves on the blackberry bushes. Leaves of dogwood turn through red to purple and they have berries which feed the birds.

Chlorophyll, which is the green pigment in leaves, can only work to produce sugars to feed the tree when it is warm and sunny. In autumn it is broken down for the tree to recycle as other compounds.

As it disappears from the leaves other colours

start to show. Leaves turn yellow, orange, red, or purple depending on which compounds they contain. The colour varies for different sorts of tree. For a scientific explanation go to:

https://www.compoundchem.com/2014/09/11/autumnleaves/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email



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. sometimes 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.

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 friendsofehnr@gmail.com