

# News from East Ham Nature Reserve May 2024

Dates for the next Saturday Green Gym Nature and Heritage Conservation Volunteers work sessions are April 27<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup> 10am-1pm Work sessions also every Wednesday 10am-1pm.

## Appeal



Bees and butterflies rely on pollen and nectar to survive. There are lots of flowers around the nature reserve and more will be appearing throughout the summer. **Please don't pick or damage flowers.** The bees and butterflies need them much more than you do. Picking a bunch of flowers can



mean the difference between life and death for them, especially early and late in the year when food is scarce.

## Animal of the month

Woodlice and pill beetles - *various species*



*Armadillidium vulgare* – Common Pill Beetle rolls into a ball to deter predators, such as toads, shrews, centipedes and spider

- Woodlice are crustaceans like lobsters and shrimps. They have an exoskeleton (external skeleton) of hard plates.
- They are found in dark, damp places, often under or in rotting logs at the Nature Reserve. They need dampness because they breathe through gills that have to be kept moist.
- Woodlice moult as they grow, losing the back half of the shell first, then the front half a day or two later.
- The females carry the eggs in a brood pouch under their body. The young hatch and stay in the pouch until they are large enough to survive by themselves.
- Woodlice do not wee. They get rid of waste products as ammonia gas, which passes out through their shell. This helps them to conserve water.

## Plant of the month

### Hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*

Hawthorn is blooming in our hedges, where it is laid in the traditional way. This makes it thicker to stop farm animals escaping from fields, or keep them out of arable crops. We don't have livestock, but the hedge makes a useful way for small animals like mice and voles, to move around without being seen. It is good shelter and a nesting site for birds.



In autumn the berries, called haws, provide food for animals.

There are lots of legends about hawthorn. People used to go out on the first of May, called May Day and collect the blossom. It had to stay outside the house though. I remember my grandmother would never allow it in the house because it is unlucky.

Apparently the smell, which seems pleasant until you start to notice the unpleasant undertones, is reminiscent of the smell of corpses. This is because it contains the chemical trimethylamine, given off by rotting flesh.

As children we ate the hawthorn buds that were just opening, calling them "bread and cheese". I don't know why, the flavour is nothing like bread and cheese

Dorothy Hartley in her book *Food in England* gives a recipe for a "spring dinner". It is a steamed suet roly-poly with a layer of hawthorn buds and finely chopped bacon instead of jam.

More information and legends at

<https://treesforlife.org.uk/into-the-forest/trees-plants-animals/trees/hawthorn/>

## What we have been doing



We have planted 150 plug plants of yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) in the mini-meadow by Norman Road. It is partly parasitic (hemiparasitic) on grasses, which weakens the grass. This is an experiment to see if it will control the coarse grasses and allow other flowers to grow.

We have sown seeds three years running, but had very poor germination, only one flower each time. The first flower was broken by someone putting a picnic rug on it. The second was in woodland and nothing grew there the next year. The third one was in the mini-meadow last year, but it was picked within a week.

This year the seed planted in Autumn has germinated well, so with the plug plants we should have lots of flowers in summer. Please don't pick them!

## Tasks for April

- Starting to clear a new glade by the A13.
- Cutting the base of ivy on trees.
- Removing ivy in the woodland.
- Clearing ivy off gravestones.
- Noting any interesting graves.
- Making wood piles and dead hedges as habitats for minibeasts.



## Please consider becoming a volunteer



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.

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.

Email [newhamgg@gmail.com](mailto:newhamgg@gmail.com) or phone Frances 078 4597 3156.

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 and receive a newsletter by email each month, please email [friendsofehr@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofehr@gmail.com)