



Conservation & Maintenance Wimbledon and Putney Commons

JULY 2014

Welcome to the July 2014 update from our Wildlife and Conservation Officer, Pete Haldane.

BioBlitz

During the weekend of Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th July 2014, Wimbledon and Putney Commons held its first ever BioBlitz. Designed, in part, to compliment the recent survey work that has been carried out on the Plain, the driving force behind the BioBlitz has been to simply encourage people to visit the Commons in order to explore the wide variety of wildlife habitats that lay before them.

Beginning on Saturday night, our weekend of events commenced with a very informative bat walk which was led by John Tovey of the London Bat Group. Attracting over 40 people, the bat walk moved off from the Ranger's Office at 8.45pm and over the course of the next two hours both Daubentons bat and Soprano pipistrelle bats were recorded. With a route that encompassed Queensmere, its surrounding woodland and the approach to the Nature Trail, there was rarely a moment when some form of bat activity could not be seen overhead.

Arriving just after dusk, Queensmere proved to be a hotspot for bat activity during the opening night of our first ever BioBlitz.



As the bat walk came to an end, and by way of a grand finale to the night's activities, the group were finally led towards the Nature Trail which from some distance away could be seen illuminated by the bright light of the moth trap which had been set up by Angela Evans, the Chief Executive's PA, and her partner, Les Hill.

Despite the apparent simplicity of the display (a suspended white sheet, similar ground sheet and a very bright light) the result was incredible and clearly demonstrated the vast array of moths that can be found flying around the Commons woodland at night.



Continuing into Sunday, our BioBlitz began in full swing with Dave Wills leading one of his ever popular morning bird walks, which despite being led during one of the quieter periods of the birding calendar, still managed to record 32 different species.

*A juvenile Kestrel: Just one of the many different species of bird recorded by Dave Wills during his early morning bird walk.
(photographed provided by Dave Wills)*



In addition to Dave Will's walk, two further guided walks were also led on the Commons and on both occasions we were extremely fortunate to have experts on hand who were able to find and identify creatures that may well have remained hidden if it had not been for their expertise in knowing just where to find them.



At the Ranger's Office, there was also a further chance to see more of the impressive moths that Angela and Les had managed to capture the previous night.

Queckett Microscopical Club were running an array of microscopes in the Information Centre, giving visitors a chance to see wildlife as never before. Their report of the day can be found [here](#).



Although we still have a number of records and sightings to collect, over the course of the two day event, at least 66 different types of bird, invertebrate and mammals were recorded which when added to the list of over 80 different types of plant and grass found on the Plain demonstrates just how rich and varied the wildlife on the Commons remains.

While the fantastic weather certainly helped to ensure that our BioBlitz was a success, the real triumph of our event was down to the active participation of everybody involved, both experts and visitors alike. Our sincere thanks to you all!

I would however like to offer my personal thanks to the following groups and individuals for giving up their time and expertise to make the day such a success: Queckett Microscopical Club, Wildlife Watch Club, Les Hill & Angela Evans, John Tovey, Duncan Sivell and Dave Wills.

Swallows

I could well be tempting fate but having already successfully raised young this year, it appears that our stable yard Swallows are currently preparing to nest for a second time. Having left the nest with their young on the 16th July, the pair of adult Swallows have once again been seen close to their original nest which is a very good indication that the pair could produce another clutch of eggs before they are due to return to southern Africa in September/October.



*Fingers crossed as Swallows prepare to nest for a second time in the Keeper's stable.
(photographed by Dave Wills)*

Further significant bird sightings that have been recorded by the Commons' team of ornithologists during July have included:

- Kingfisher (Beverley Brook)
- Common Buzzard (Seen near the Windmill and west of Scio Pond)
- Hobby (Putney Heath)
- Kestrel (The Plain)
- Tufted Duck (Bluegate)
- Sparrowhawk (Parkside woods & Scio Pond)
- Swift (35 seen feeding above the playing fields)

Return of the Honey bees – As visitors to the Commons Information Centre may well be aware, each summer we have an observation hive on display where visitors are able to observe the behaviour of an actual bee hive at work. Provided and managed by Peter Bowbrick of the Wimbledon Beekeepers Association, the bees on display afford the onlooker with a rare insight into the complex world of the Honey bee. Unfortunately on the 2nd July, a problem with the existing Queen bee meant that for a short time, the hive had to be removed. I am however pleased to say that the bees are now back in the Information Centre and appear very pleased to be back at work on the Commons again.

The observation hive will be in the Information Centre for the rest of the summer, so please come and visit whenever you are in the area.



Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

As mentioned in last month's Conservation and Maintenance update, the Forestry Commission has been working extremely hard over the last few months to contain the spread of OPM from the infestation areas recorded during 2014. Survey teams working on behalf of the Forestry Commission have already carried out work on Wimbledon and Putney Commons and while it is currently too early have a full assessment of the current situation, the recent spell of warm weather has clearly been favourable for the spread of this invasive pest.

To provide a clear reference to the recent work undertaken by the OPM survey teams, all trees affected by OPM during 2013 have been re-surveyed. In addition to this, a radius of 50 metres has also been surveyed around each and every one of last year's infected trees. In order to carry out their work, a water soluble orange coloured paint has been used to mark trees and the following reference system has been employed:

- 1 orange dot indicates the outer limit of a 50 metres survey zone.
- A large orange circle/ring indicates an infected tree. At the present time, all infected trees have also been marked with white tape.
- One orange bar indicates that a nest has been found on a particular tree but the moths have already flown.

1 orange coloured ring and white tape means that an OPM nest has been found.



As previously mentioned, if any OPM nests are found on the Commons please:

DO NOT:

- Touch or approach nests or caterpillars
- Let children touch nests or caterpillars
- Try removing nests or caterpillars yourself

For more information on OPM, please contact www.forestry.gov.uk/oakprocessionarymoth

The Maintenance Team

With the weather seemingly getting hotter and hotter throughout the month, our maintenance team, equipped with sun factor 50 and copious bottles of water, have continued working throughout July to keep the Commons both safe and inviting for visitors to use. Working from Monday to Friday, every week of the year, work carried out by the maintenance team during July has included:

- Litter collection
- Tree inspections
- Tree safety work
- Grass cutting & strimming work
- Repair work to rides and crossings



Peter Haldane

peter@wpcc.org.uk



**Wimbledon
and Putney
Commons**

020 8788 7655

www.wpcc.org.uk

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