Chairman’s Statement

Firstly I would like to apologise for the time it has taken to get this edition of the newsletter to you all. It has been a busy year and due to various circumstances we have been delayed in completing it.

However, we have still been working hard looking after Horton Country Park. We have continued with our volunteer days, roughly one Sunday a month, and a few of our members have been joining the regular mid-week volunteers of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Countryside Team. Over 2007/08 we have clocked up 38 volunteer hours which is something to be very proud of.

We are also starting to plan the Autumn Fair which we will be holding in conjunction with the Countryside Team on Sunday September 27th 2009. Letters are going out to stall holders and hopefully it will be a great success as it was back in 2005.

Please put the date in your diaries and if you would like to join in and help us with the preparation and running of the day, please get in touch with Sarah Clift, Senior Countryside Officer, on sclift@epsom-ewell.gov.uk or call 01372 741191.

We have really enjoyed working alongside the Countryside Team and would like to encourage more of you to come out and see how the park is managed. We are also trying to help the Countryside Team in its wish to focus on the surveying and monitoring of the site.

Volunteering doesn’t have to be physical work all the time! If there are any of you who take note of the birds you see or the plants around the park and if you have any species records we would love to hear from you.

The Countryside Team are collating all their records on to a database and work closely with the Surrey Biological Records Centre. If we can all work together to build up a picture or what is around us then we can make sure the park is managed in the most positive way.

Hope you are all well and have enjoyed the park over the last year. Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Countryside Team Update

The Countryside Team has been busy over the last year or so. We have moved in to the Planning Department of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and have had a slight review of our role and priorities.

Our main focus is now on implementing the management plans for Horton Country Park, Epsom Common and the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserves.

This has meant that the Countryside Team as of October 2007 has been working with volunteers mid-week as well as our monthly weekend working with the Friends.

So far our mid-week and Friends volunteers have been involved in tasks such as woodland management, coppicing, management of the vegetation along the water vole stream, putting up deer fencing to protect the coppicing, hedge laying, litter picking, workshop tasks to make signs and maintain tools, track side management and working in the information centre. The information centre is now fully open as of June 2008.

With all this extra time spent on practical work, unfortunately we have had to reduce the amount environmental education work. However, we still have had our local youth groups visiting us with very successful pond dips. Even a Great Crested Newt was found!

We are also continuing with our guided walks and advising local schools on their school grounds and wildlife areas.

With a view to implementing the management plans and enhancing the wildlife value of the site, we are in the process of setting up a monitoring system for the main habitats, which will inform the management of the site.

We are always looking for extra sources of funding to help with the management of the Country Park and have submitted our application for Countryside Stewardship Higher Level Scheme. This should help us greatly with the long-term management of the site.

If you have any questions about the management of Horton Country Park or would like to get involved with the volunteers please get in touch. If you would like to join us, either mid-week or on our monthly Sundays, please contact the Countryside Team on 01372 732000 or sclift@epsom-ewell.gov.uk.

Sarah Clift
EEBC Countryside Team

www.hortoncountrypark.co.uk
We have several members who are keen bird watchers but no one who shares their interest in plants with us. So at meetings members of the Friends had expressed an interest in learning about the Flora in the Park.

Sarah said she would organise a walk to look at the wild flowers, but it would have to be a sharing of knowledge as she did not profess to be an expert.

A date was set and we met at the Rangers Office at 6.30pm, carrying our wild flower books. Fortunately it was a fine, warm evening.

We were lucky to have Stewart Cocker to share his knowledge with us and to use the walk to monitor the Flora for their records.

We set off for Little Westcotts meadow which is at the southern end of the Park. It soon became obvious that we needed our books in order to identify the plants accurately, as so many of the wild flowers are very similar on first sight.

We had some friendly argument about the common names of plants, which are not accurate and have regional variations, so I bowed to Stewart’s superior knowledge and grasp of the Latin names. He had also had the forethought to bring along a means of recording what we saw.

In Little Westcotts we found the following plants in flower:

- **Birdsfoot trefoil** *(Lotus corniculatus)*
- **Common Vetch** *(Vicia sativa)*
- **Red / White Clover** *(Trifolium repens / pratense)*
- **Lesser Stitchwort** *(Stellaria graminea)*
- **Creeping Cinquefoil** *(Potentilla reptans)*
- **Meadow Buttercup** *(Ranunculus acris)*
- **Hogweed** *(Heracleum sphondylium)*
- **Smooth Tare** *(Vicia tetrasperma)*
- **Fleabane and Grass Vetling** *(Pulicaria dysenterica)* *(Lathyrus nissolia)*

Some of them were so delicate it was easy to miss them among the tall grasses. We then went into Emmet’s Mead which is lower lying, and saw:

- **Knapweed** *(Centaurea nigra)*
- **Ragwort** *(Senecio jacobaea)*
- **Meadow vetchling** *(Lathyrus pratensis)*

Here the grasses were waist height and above, with saplings and quite rough ground and I found it quite hard at times to keep up with the fitter, more sensibly dressed members of the group.

Next time I’ll remember to wear long trousers and stout shoes, I had mistakenly thought that spotting wild flowers would be a gentle stroll!

By now it was getting on for 8.30 so we decided to call it a day, having covered only a tiny part of the Country Park, just 2 of the 51 Management Compartments.

I can see what an enormous task it is for the Rangers to monitor the wild life in the park and how much they need our help and support.

It was a great evening in very pleasant company and I do hope we can repeat it, with more members next time!

Pat Lowe
Friends of Horton

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**Flora Walk**

Meadow Buttercup *(Ranunculus acris)*

Hogweed *(Heracleum sphondylium)*

Smooth Tare *(Vicia tetrasperma)*

Fleabane and Grass Vetling *(Pulicaria dysenterica)* *(Lathyrus nissolia)*

Knapweed *(Centaurea nigra)*

Ragwort *(Senecio jacobaea)*

Meadow vetchling *(Lathyrus pratensis)*
I am very fortunate to live right on the edge of Horton Country Park and enjoy seeing the wildlife it provides unfortunately our cats enjoy it to and often bring home "presents". June this year one of the cats brought home a grass snake, it hung limply from its jaws with its tongue hanging out and giving off a foul odour. the dead snake, 0.5 m long, was placed in a plastic container and kept in the fridge for me to see when I returned from work that evening.

When I got home and looked at the deceased snake it started to retract its tongue and move! as it started to warm it showed more signs of life but was still very sluggish. we left it still in the container on the kitchen table with the lid loosely on top and went to have our dinner. on returning the lid was off and there was no sign of the snake! the following day we spotted it sneaking along the wainscoat of the hall and managed to ensnare it. by now it was very much alive so we released it back into the park straight away.

Laurence Coley
Friends of Horton

Grass Snake (Natrix natrix). One of three UK species.

Oak Trees, Acorns and Wasps

While walking earlier in the year you may have noticed, as I did, that a lot of the acorns destined to become our oak trees of the future in the park have been looking rather unusual. I had seen some acorns like this before but this year seeing so many stirred me to search for an explanation to my now new question: why are these mutated acorns appearing?

I have since discovered that such a deformed acorn would be known as ‘Gall’. This is the common term for any abnormal growth on a plant caused by another organism. These growths in particular are known as ‘Knopper Galls’.

The pedunculate or English Oak (Quercus robur) on which I have seen these appear is probably our best know tree, used to build ships in the past and although more likely to feed squirrels and jays today an important part of our country’s landscape none the less. These Knopper Galls were first documented in the 1960s and rapidly spread across Britain. The cause a non-native species of wasp, known as ‘gall wasps’ or in the case of our English Oak and Knopper Gall the particular species of gall wasp Andricus quercuscalicis.

The wasps are parasitic and use the tree as a host to their life cycle. They secrete their larva on a part of the tree, such as the cup of the acorn in this case, and with some likely genetic hijacking the insect genes of the wasp direct the growth of the tree’s plant tissue to provide nutrition and safety for development of the new wasp from the larvae in the form of a gall growth. This is very a similar to the formation of an ‘Oak Apple’ which is also a gall caused by another species of gall wasp in a similar manner.

Such galls do not appear to cause any significant harm to our trees and as with many things this is a change caused by the various species present and the environment in their own natural balance.

Peter Tomlin
Friends of Horton
The Friends of Horton Country Park

The Next Newsletter

Would you like to write an article for the next newsletter?

Perhaps you would like to write about your experiences as a volunteer with the Friends; or pass on some of your expert knowledge of the park’s wildlife or its history.

Any photographs that you think would be interesting for other readers are also welcomed.

If you would like to write an article for us all to read or show us some of your photographs then we would be pleased if you could let us have your articles and photos by e-mail to peter@hortoncountrypark.co.uk or by hand to Brendan.

Thank you for reading

The Friends of Horton Country Park

Information Centre

The information centre now fully open since the end of June is looking absolutely fantastic and is a real resource to all park visitors.

Our thanks to all the people involved in creating the information centre: All the Friends with particular reference to Alan Cheshire, Ray Eyres, Pat Lowe and Terry Summerfield. Also volunteer Hannah Gilbert.

An of course we can’t forget the staff involvement of Richard Daponte who started it off, Sarah Clift, Lindsay Coomber, Debbie Samwell, Annette Murray and also Keith Aplin and Dave Amer for their advice and use of tools and material.

What’s Going On? / Diary Dates

Friends meetings:

Meetings are on the first Tuesday of every second month.

Tuesday 3rd February 2009

Tuesday 7th April 2009

Tuesday 2nd June 2009

At 7:30 p.m. in the hall behind the Rangers’ Hut.

Friends volunteer tasks:

Coppicing Butchers Grove and barbecue

Sunday the 21st December 2008

[Lower Mole Coppicing 9/10/11/16/17/18 December 2008]

Usually meeting by the Rangers’ Hut for 10 a.m.

Please do come along and support us, it’s great fun.

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