



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

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THE RANGER'S REPORT

February 2024



Ranger Dan, with his van.

You may have noticed that the Commons are an absolute hive of volunteer activity lately. The autumn and winter months are when we do our larger scale project work, since this is when the Commons are least active in terms of flora and fauna; for example, the trees are dormant, and birds are not nesting for breeding.

The majority of our current management activity is connected to projects to improve the Commons for both wildlife and amenity value. We want to encourage as much wildlife biodiversity as possible, whilst very much at the same time providing people with the most beautiful and safe place to walk, sit, meet friends, picnic, bird or butterfly watch, take photographs, perhaps hug a tree (go on, I dare you!) and to generally relax. Did you know that it's a scientifically proven fact that getting outside and experiencing wildlife is good for both your heart and soul? Of course, you did, although many of us forget perhaps...

Talking of safety: We are doing everything we can to make sure that we are always considering the safety of every single person that directly uses or simply passes through the Commons. Naturally, we also want to protect the fragile wildlife that has made its home on our Commons. However, the biggest risk to us, our children (and our many lovely dogs), as well as our badger, fox, deer, dormice and bird friends actually relates to the main roads. I have been worrying a lot about how dangerous some of the roads are. The road through the middle of Tunbridge Wells Common (Major Yorks Road) has an appropriate 30mph speed limit. However, the Langton Road still has a very frightening 40mph limit. Did you know that between 2000 and 2023 there were 53 'officially' recorded accidents on the Langton Road where it runs through the Common! We all know that this road is too fast and how dangerous it is to cross for us and our wildlife. I find it profoundly upsetting having to deal with so many dead or dying animals. It is so dangerous that I know for a fact that wheelchair users and many elderly residents simply don't even attempt to cross it! Surely it cannot be right that access through a Local Wildlife Site is denied to so many due to it being effectively cut in half by an unnecessarily fast and dangerous road. What do you think?

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The Society founded for '... the conservation, maintenance, preservation and peaceful enjoyment for the benefit of the public of the Commons by such means as the Society in consultation with the Conservators for the Commons thinks fit'.

Recently, we formally (and rather too optimistically) asked Kent County Council to review and reduce this speed limit from 40mph to 30mph. This would be easy and cheap to do, would be consistent with Major Yorks Road, and would only increase the journey time for vehicles by a paltry 16 seconds. However, I am sad to report that at the start of January, KCC refused this request, as they do not think that vulnerable groups trying to use the Commons and cross the Langton Road are of sufficient concern to delay car drivers by the KCC to reconsider their decision. If you would like to, then you can share your thoughts, worries and 16 seconds. We won't give up though and would very much appreciate the support of readers as we invite experiences of this road by emailing us at info@twcommons.org.

On a happier note, don't forget that there is so much to see and experience on Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons during this time of the year! We have spectacular rock formations which are over 100 million years old (yes, you did read that right!), many beautiful ponds, meadows and glades, wildlife, fabulous trees, ancient trees — and let me tell you something very important; we have some of the finest vistas in Kent! So, please do think about making time to explore more of the Commons. Perhaps visit the Amelia Scott, or take in a pint, cuppa, or a meal at one of the fabulous pubs or cafés in the area as you do so (and no, I wasn't paid to say that).

Finally, I would just like to say a huge thank you to the Friends of the Commons for their generous contribution towards the purchase of my lovely second hand van. This is a vital tool for me to be able to look after our beloved Commons. It also supports our community of volunteers by ensuring that we are able to move our wheelbarrows and spades etc around to do our work.

Please consider joining The Friends and help support the work we do, either by contacting me at: twcommons.org or <https://www.friendstothecommons.org/join-us.html>

Ranger Dan.



Volunteer Brian Ellis. Bench installer and re-furbisher extraordinaire

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

To all our members, and belated New Year wishes for 2024.

And thank you for help in raising £2000 towards the cost for a second -hand van for Ranger Dan, which was much needed. We also held a november dinner at The Spa Hotel which was attended by 50 members, and a Q and A session was given afterwards from Ranger Dan.

A number of projects will be funded by us in 2024.

1. The Walks (similar to Forest Schools) £750
2. Fungi walks and recordings (part of a 3 year project) £1250
3. An updated website, with easy access for filing out Joining forms online. £1500.

I must thank our growing band of wonderful volunteers who do clearance work and litter-picking on both Commons. And I am pleased to say that we will holding a thank you buffet at The Forum on sat 18th May, and Charlie's Angels will be providing the food, Details of this event can be found in this issue.

Clive Evans.



The Friends Winter Lunch at The Spa Hotel



Sign up to take part in The Big Plastic Count.

This is the UK's biggest ever investigation into household plastic waste. By taking part, you will help build vital evidence about what really happens to our plastic waste. This will help to convince UK ministers, supermarkets, and big brands to lead the way at global talks that could finally phase out plastic production for good. Schools can sign up too.

<https://thebigplasticcount.com/sign-up>

Volunteer opportunities!

Dan and Gemma organise monthly Saturday morning volunteer sessions on Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons. Tasks include litter picking and a wide variety of conservation projects. Why not join us – it's fun and very rewarding.

Preliminary diary dates are as follows, details of where and when to meet will be available on the website www.friendstothecommons.org

- Saturday 6th April, Saturday 4th May. Saturday 1st June
- Saturday 6th July, Saturday 3rd August, Saturday 7th September
- Saturday 5th October, Saturday 2nd November, Saturday 7th December

ON THE EDGE OF SPRING

I'm writing in mid-February, and there are already clear signs from the world of wildflowers and insects that we are emerging from winter. Since the turn of the millennium, winters in Tunbridge Wells have overall become more mild. Some summer and autumn flowers continue to bloom in a small way throughout the colder months, and winter-active pollinators have become a familiar sight whenever the sun shines. On the Commons, some Buff-tailed Bumblebee colonies carry on all through the winter, with queens and workers feeding and foraging at gorse flowers even in December and January. And Red Admiral butterflies – which didn't use to survive the English winter and never fully hibernate – will pop out of hiding on favourable days.

Over the last couple of weeks, the earliest true spring flowers have started to appear. One of the most characteristic native species is the Lesser Celandine, a relative of the buttercups but with more petals and heart-shaped leaves. It is generally a woodland plant and so commonly appears at the foot of old-established trees. There is an obvious clump beside a path near Wellington Rocks which often attracts some of the first mining bees and hoverflies of the new season. Close to it is a patch of Early Crocus, an escape from nearby gardens that survives well in the wild. Early Crocus is pale purple in colour with a long slender flower-tube. As its name suggests, it flowers earlier than the other two commonly naturalised species, Spring Crocus (variable but normally dark purple) and Yellow Crocus. Although a more recent arrival in the wild, Early Crocus is now more common than its relatives.

Some solitary bees typically emerge very early, the record for the Commons being 8 February. In the past, there was one particular species – Clark's Mining Bee – which used to appear ahead of all the rest at its communal nest site in the boundary ditch outside the Spa Hotel. But in recent years, other species like the Yellow-legged mining Bee and the Hairy-footed Flower Bee (which resembles a miniature brown or black bumblebee) have started to come out first.

Hibernating butterflies – Brimstone, Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell – are usually more cautious in emerging from their winter sleep. The regular mass emergence along the tree line on the southern edge of Tunbridge Wells Common around Brighton Lake takes place some time in March, sometimes a full month later than the first spring bees. But occasional individuals will come out ahead of the rest. On 23 February 2019, several Brimstone emerged on a sunny spring-like day. And this year that record was beaten by a Peacock which was flying behind the Lake along with a Red Admiral on 26 January.

Ian Beavis



Peacock



Yellow-legged Mining Bee Andrena flavipes male



Brimstone



Buff-tailed Bumblebee



Clark's Mining Bee



Early Crocus



Hairy-footed Flower-bee



Lesser Celandine

VOLUNTEERS THANK YOU BUFFET LUNCH AT THE FORUM, TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMON SATURDAY MAY 18TH 12-2PM.

As a token of our appreciation for volunteering, the FOC is pleased to invite our volunteers and a guest to an informal complimentary buffet lunch.

Whether you assist on the Commons with litter picking or the many conservation tasks, help deliver our newsletters, or you are a member of the committee, all our volunteers are invited.

For catering purposes, please RSVP Chris Gurr chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk, with your name and contact details, and if appropriate the name of your guest by no later than April 14th. We look forward to seeing you there.



Rusthall Common – Community Archaeology Update

The new dig season is fast approaching and we hope to be regularly back on-site sometime in March 2024. As ever our enthusiastic community group is always keen to recruit new volunteers at our site on Rusthall Common. Some of you would have already noticed significant clearance work in and around the rocky area. This work was organized by Ranger Dan and carried out by local volunteers. The primary function is that of woodland management and environmental considerations. However the upshot is that the exposed archaeology is for all to see as they drive or walk past the site. To see some of our finds from the site, please visit our display cabinet at The Rusthall Library.

For more information contact Nigel at wkdarchaeology@gmail.com



Volunteers clearance work at The Rusthall Spring Site

Lending a helping hand

Meet Harrison, one of our younger and newest volunteers. He is a pupil from Judd School, participating in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

During his first volunteer session on Rusthall common, he assisted some of our more experienced helpers and managed to completely fill several sacks with a collection of bottles, cans, sweet wrappers, crisp packets, takeaway containers and found several other discarded items. Thank you Harrison.

We welcome volunteers of all ages, just turn up, see details on our website.

<https://www.friendstothecommons.org/news>

All equipment supplied, safety briefings etc. are covered before each session.



Well done Harrison

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

A reminder to members who pay by Standing Orders to please amend their Membership Subscription amount as follows:

Single Members £10 Whole Families £20

Just too confirm The Friends Bank Details are as follows:

NAT WEST BANK
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
01028774 Account number.
50-70-13 Sort Code

Thank you , and please contact Chris Gurr (Mem Sec) with any questions regarding Membership.

chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk
07759703489

LEAVING A GIFT IN YOUR WILL HELP LOOK AFTER THE COMMONS WE ALL LOVE



Legacies need not be large, even a small amount can make a big difference and could have tax advantages too.

For more information
<https://www.friendstothecommon.org/legacy.htm>

Reg. Charity No. 1013975

The Friends Officers 2024

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www.friendstothecommons.org