



Registered Charity No. 1013975

COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTER

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'.

Issue 45. Autumn 2008

Warden's Report

It has been a busy time on the Common over the past few months. Thanks to some generous funding from the Freehold Tenants group, we have been able to carry out repairs to a number of paths as mentioned in the last edition of Common Ground. The path running in front of the Forum has been repaired and the path across the Lower Cricket Pitch has been completely re-surfaced and is a lot more pleasant to use. We have just finished a new path at St Paul's Church to link up with an existing path and allow easier access in an area that has been very bad during our recent wet winters. Another area that has greatly improved access is the link between the Fairground car park and the Pantiles, where the new owners Targetfollow have paid for a new path to be

created. It is certainly a lot safer and less slippery than it was.

As well as the paths, the Freeholders have also agreed to fund a number of other large projects this year. One is the replacement of the cherry trees in the avenue at Mt Edgcumbe. The existing trees will be removed in the Autumn and 40 new Great White Cherries will be planted for the future. This will obviously take a number of years before the full effect is achieved but ultimately this will be a very dramatic sight in the spring. The second big project has just been carried out and I am sure that you will all have noticed it. The steep slope coming down from Mt Ephraim to London Rd, between St Helena and Gibraltar Cottage has been cleared of all the bramble and scrub that had invaded it over the years and the rock outcrops on the slope have

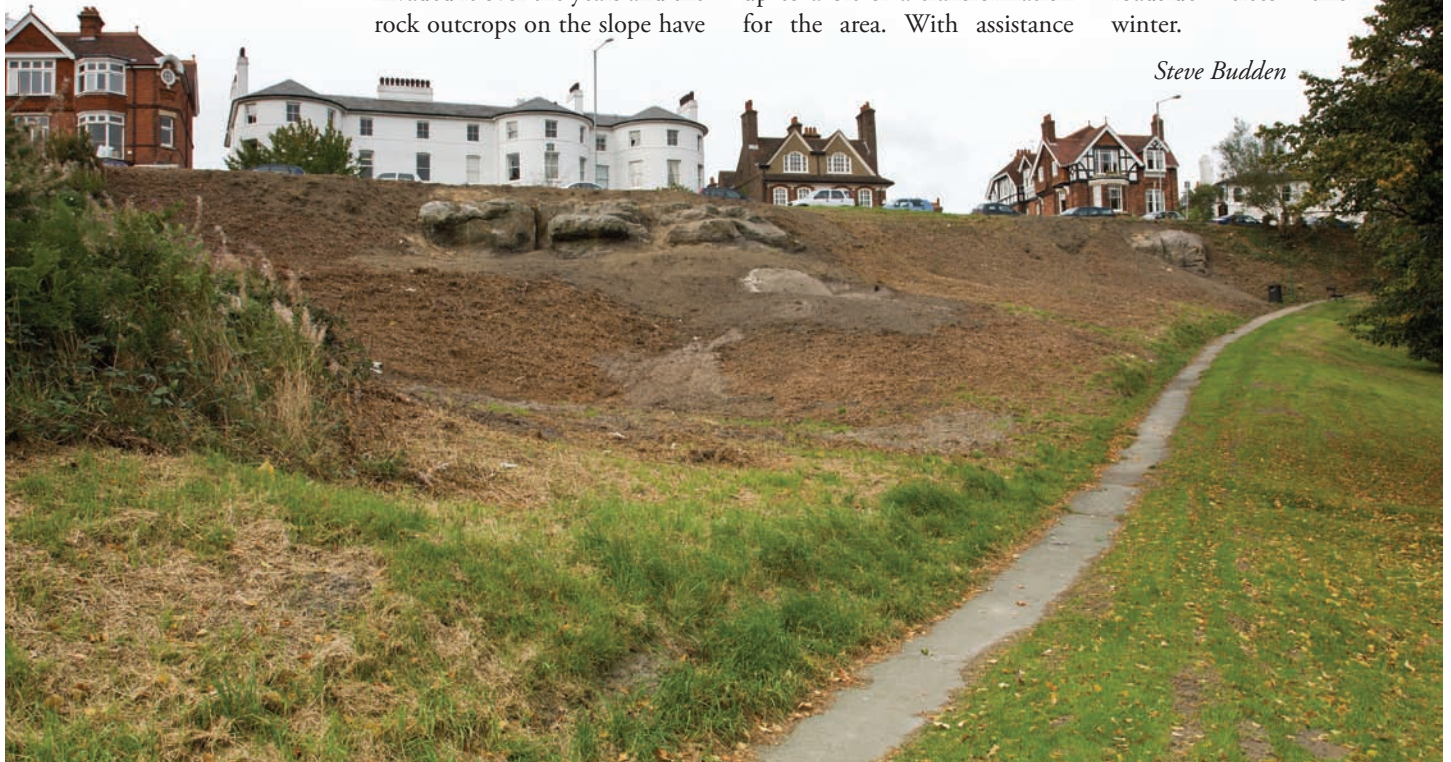
been partially re-exposed. This slope will be kept clear in future and as it greens up it should look very attractive. The Civic Society are hoping to install a panoramic view point there in the next year, so keep watching.

The final major Freeholders project is the repair of the path at the rear of Brighton Lake. This was started earlier in the year but the original results were not at all satisfactory. As a result of the various problems encountered on this project, more money has been made available and the wall at the front of the path is to be raised along its length by a new course of stone and then a top dressing of Breedon gravel will be added. It should look very smart when it is done. The area behind the pond has also been levelled and seeded so it all adds up to a bit of a transformation for the area. With assistance

from the Friends, we will also be carrying out some weed clearance from the pond in the next few weeks.

All our usual work has proceeded throughout the Summer and we will be carrying out our main clearance of the year at the beginning of October with the big collector flail coming back in for a couple of weeks. We carried out quite extensive bracken treatment in August and we are now able to clear areas that were sprayed then. We will also be collecting more heather seed from Cinder Hill reserve in a few weeks and spreading it on the new glade created by the volunteers last year just below the Victoria Grove. After that we will move into tree work and will again be concentrating on roadside trees this winter.

Steve Budden



Birding Journal

No.2: Greater-Spotted

Woodpecker

Latin Name: *Dendrocopos Major*

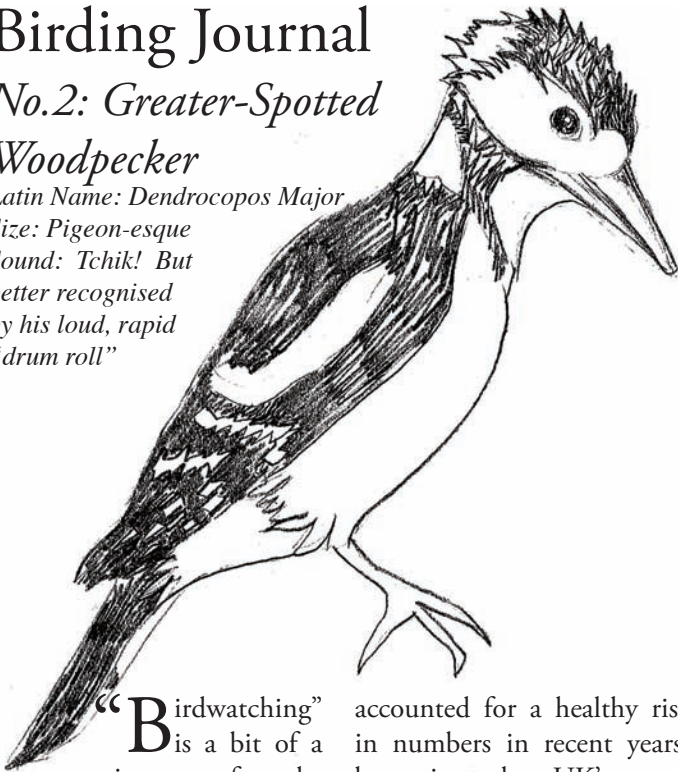
Size: Pigeon-esque

Sound: Tchik! But

better recognised

by his loud, rapid

“drum roll”



“Birdwatching” is a bit of a misnomer for the British birder, as you spend the majority of your time using your ears to identify species rather than your eyes. In the UK, where many birds are small, shy and indistinct (LBJs, or little brown jobs, to use a twitching term), a knowledge of what a bird sounds like becomes essential.

Some birds sounds are easier to identify than others, and few are more recognisable than the territorial hammering of the Great Spotted Woodpecker, who in from around January to June can be heard from Tunbridge Wells all the way to Speldhurst. If you follow your ears and manage to spot him, he (or she) is an unmistakable sight, perching high up on the side of a tree with his bold, vivid colouring of red, white and black. There are certain birds, who no matter how common they are, always give me a frisson of excitement when I see them and this exotically patterned bird is certainly one of them. Perhaps some of you are even lucky enough to get them perching on your bird feeder! His unfussy eating habits have

accounted for a healthy rise in numbers in recent years, becoming the UK’s most common type of woodpecker; but unfortunately they have developed a taste for other birds’ eggs. He will quite happily bore a hole into the side of a blue tit’s nest box to retrieve a tasty snack of eggs.

We’ve seen a few families of woodpecker, the mum and dad both making regular visits to their tree to feed their young. Both the parents will spend weeks boring into a tree to make their nest, and you can spot a woodpecker’s large, neat hole at least 10 feet from the ground. Woodpecker couples like to stay in the same tree year in year out, but will bore a different hole each year.

The woodpecker makes such a ferocious sound by hammering with his large, fierce beak, as hard and fast as possible. He has a large, flat head to accommodate plenty of shock-absorbent padding, otherwise he’d give himself brain damage! Although the birds I have spotted locally do favour hammering on the more orthodox tree, they have been known to have a go on telegraph poles or even

metal or ceramic objects or even in one reported case, a public address system, which certainly gave his drumming a magnification which no rival could possibly hope to match!

Mr Cassidy enjoys having the odd conversation with a

woodpecker, by pretending to be a rival. He takes a stick, and rat-tat-tats on a tree, and waits to be told off by the woodpecker to get off his patch!

Bettina Cassidy

Flora & Fauna

Interesting Discoveries

On the four Thursdays in August, Tunbridge Wells Museum held its annual series of mini-beast safaris in open spaces around the town. As usual, Tunbridge Wells Common was one of the venues and, despite the showers that seemed to punctuate most days this summer, some interesting discoveries were made. It is often the case that the children participating produce the best finds, and this occasion was no exception.

On the heather patch below Wellington Rocks, which attracts a wide variety of insects in late summer, an enormous dark bumblebee appeared. It had an orange tail and dark wings, and was shinier than a regular bumblebee. These features showed that it was a Hill Cuckoo Bumblebee, one of several species which – as their name suggests – sneak into the nests of regular bumblebees and lay their own eggs on the stores of nectar and pollen which the host has gathered for its young. There are six British species of cuckoo bumblebees, each associated with one of the commoner species of regular bumblebees. They have a strong resemblance to their chosen host, which perhaps helps them to get into the nest undetected. The Hill Cuckoo Bumblebee is associated with the similarly coloured from

which it is best distinguished by the strongly tinted wings. Red-tailed Bumblebees are common in the Tunbridge Wells area, but there are few records of its cuckoo species, and this was the first for the two Commons.

Also found among the heather was the splendidly camouflaged caterpillar of the Beautiful Yellow Underwing, bright green with white markings. These caterpillars match very closely the young heather shoots on which they feed. The adult is a day-flying moth which is reckoned to be one of the special inhabitants of heathland in the High Weald. The forewings have a complex and attractive pattern, red-brown speckled with white, which enables them to blend into the background when settled on heather stalks or the litter beneath. Camouflage is their first line of defence, but if they are disturbed while in hiding they can employ ‘flash coloration’, unexpectedly revealing their hindwings which are bright yellow with a contrasting black border. Many moths employ this strategy of displaying a sudden flash of bright colour to startle potential predators and give them a moment of opportunity to fly off and make their escape.

Ian Beavis

The Friends Tea Party

Mount Edgcumbe



Chairman Jenny Blackburn enjoys tea and cakes with the Mayor of Royal Tunbridge Wells, Mike Rusbridge, and his wife, Chris.

DIARY

ANNUAL DINNER

Make a note somewhere because our annual dinner will be on

Friday, February 6th 2009

Details will follow in the new year. To keep abreast of all news and even get an electronic copy of this newsletter delivered straight to your inbox, why not send us your e-mail address? Please send details to chairman@friendsofthecommons.org.uk

Words from a Reader

We love to hear from our readers and we recently received this lovely letter from Betty Jenkins who enjoyed the Summer issue so much she decided to put pen to paper:

My father played cricket for Linden Park and in my early youth I accompanied my mother there to watch. In those days harebells grew wild there - this was during the 1930s.

In 1941 a German bomb was dropped on the cricket ground and I was one of the volunteer working party who threw stones back into the water. How the cricket ground ever recovered is quite amazing! Before that I played there in a men's and women's cricket match once, but you'd better not mention that (*Sorry, Betty - Ed*)

I was sorry not to be able

to attend the opening of the new cricket pavillion (which I believe is the third on that site, after two cases of assent) but I contributed towards it, in memory of my father, Clarence Burnett (born 1892).

He remembered when Mount Edgcombe Road was known as "Donkey Drive" - it's a pity it isn't still called by that name. "Cabbage Stalk Lane"

near the Fairground is remembered as such.

Betty Jenkins (nee Burnett)

If you would like to share your stories about the Common and appear in a future issue of Common Ground please send your letters to: Common Ground, 64 Parsonage Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8TA

From the Chairman

I hope that you all managed to enjoy our few brief days of Indian Summer in late September! We held our first volunteers work party of the season on a dull and damp Saturday morning earlier in the month - much clearing of scrub from

Wellington Rocks. Next session will be on Saturday, 4th October at Denny Bottom, Rusthall. We will be clearing brambles, nettles etc. from the Toad Rock area in Upper Street.

The clearing of the greenery from below Mount

Ephraim has revealed rocks not seen for a very long time! I hope that you will all go and have a look! This work was funded by the Freehold Tenants. They have also funded the repair of the path at the rear of Brighton Lake and will soon be starting on the

major work of replacing the cherry trees that lead down to London Road opposite the Vale Hotel. We thank them all for this wonderful contribution.

Jennifer Blackburn

Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn issue of Common Ground. I hope you all enjoyed the Summer issue and passed it on to your family and friends to encourage them to join too.

The Summer is officially over and the trees are preparing themselves for Winter and at the same time giving us a wonderful time for a walk on the Common. The foliage is changing colour

and every journey across the Common is a different experience, so I encourage all of you to get out there and explore the beautiful green space of ours and perhaps share your great stories with us for the next issue. See you then.

Christopher Cassidy

Beautiful Things

From Clare Grant, author of Three Beautiful Things

On all benches, you're doing it and straight up.

Every bench up near Wellington Rocks and around the cricket pitch had someone sitting on it, waiting and watching as the end of September slipped by.

Skirting the Lower Cricket Ground, I hear shouts of 'Come on, come on, you're

doing it, you're doing it! Keep pedaling.' A man is teaching a little boy to ride a bicycle. The boy waggles the handlebars as he goes, trying to keep his balance.

The path that cuts straight through the Common. When I am halfway down, I like looking back up towards Mount Ephraim Road.

Clare Grant



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Vice-Chairman:	Simon d'Albertanson	Tel: 529256
Hon. Treasurer:	Mark Dennison	Tel: 528199

Committee:

Sally Balcon	Tel: 515741
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