



# Westcombe Woodlands

Newsletter – Issue 12

## Summer / Autumn 2019

### Chairman's Message

We have had our first crop of apples from the Glade Orchard this Summer, and very good they are too. You may recall that we planted a variety of different types of traditional apple trees, both eaters and cookers. They all seem to be fruiting well, unlike the pear trees which have provided a couple of rock-hard pears which seem of more interest to insects than for human consumption! Some of the apples will be available to eat on our October Open Day.

The bees are now well established on the far side of the glade where the hives receive more direct sunlight than in their old position. Andrew Slade is confident of a reasonable supply of honey which we hope to have on sale at our October Open Day.

The regular monthly maintenance sessions continue to work well, but as you will all know, weeds are a constant battle; and in the woodlands we have our fill of them. Nettles, brambles, ivy and self-sown sycamores to name just a few. The Mound is in need of attention before the end of Summer if it is not to revert to a pretty impenetrable jungle.

One issue which has arisen is the extent to which local families, and particularly those with young children, can access the woodlands at times other than the Volunteer or Open Days. It is difficult to say no when the woodlands are such an exciting and interesting space. But the problem with this kind of access is how to regulate it and what would probably happen is that the essential wildness of the place would be compromised by dens and other

signs of children having played there. Then there is the problem of insurance. If we allowed children to use the woods when there were no members of the Friends in attendance, I would be concerned that our insurance would not cover any injuries sustained and the trustees might face personal claims. We have reluctantly decided that we cannot allow access except of Volunteer and Open Days, as a regular practice.

**Tim Barnes – Chairman – October 2019**

**The Friends of Westcombe Woodlands invite you to our Annual General Meeting, to take place at The Old Royal Naval College on the Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at 7:30pm. There will be a speaker from The Small Woods Association.**

### News from the Woodlands

#### Apiary Update

This has been the best year for the bees in Westcombe Woodlands. We moved some of the bees to a new and sunnier location in the glade and the bees have shown their appreciation producing a good honey harvest.

No two years are the same in the apiary and this year we successfully used a technique called an 'artificial

swarm'. Bees swarm naturally. This is the way they reproduce new colonies. The art of the beekeeper is to control their natural instincts as much as possible. The artificial swarm technique makes the bees think they have swarmed but in fact they have just moved a few feet away. Each year the hives prepare to swarm but before they do, you can divide the hive leaving the old queen in her original position with a few bees and move the rest of the bees to one side.



This hive has no queen, so they set about producing a new one. When the new queen emerges and starts laying eggs, they settle down in a new colony thinking they have swarmed. We are now in the process of preparing for winter making sure the bees have enough food to get through the winter and the colonies are strong. The mouse guards are in place and the ventilation in the hive is sufficient.

The LBKA (London Beekeepers Association) have been very supportive since the untimely death of our guide and mentor John Large who ran the Shooter Hill Apiary. Jeremy Rosie and Andrew Slade did their initial training at the Shooters Hill Apiary. They have both gone on to take and pass the first BBKA (British Beekeepers Association) qualification this year.

## Flora and Fauna In Focus

The Woodlands, for such a small area, is species rich. In what is hoped to be the start of a series of articles, we aim to elaborate a little of some of the wildlife we have in the Woodlands. In this article, we describe a plant and a butterfly.

### Enchanter's-nightshade - *Circaea lutetiana*



Photograph taken in July

This rather non-descriptive, perennial and often overlooked plant covers large areas of Westcombe Woodland, especially in the areas between the 2 Glades. It's typically found in woodland and various other shaded habitats, with white flowers from June until September. It is a native British plant, common in woods or the borders of

woodland, in shade or semi-shade and grows best in moist, rich soils. While it can be a nuisance in gardens, it spreads by means of stolons to form large colonies under suitable conditions.

This perennial, herbaceous plant has dull mid-green leaves on opposite sides of its slender and delicately hairy stem. Normally it grows more than 50 cm. The leaf sizes can typically be between 4 and 7 cm long, being broad at the base and narrowing towards the tip.

The small flowers are normally white, although sometimes they can have a tinge of pink. In early Autumn, the fruits appear, and they are covered in hairs which help them to cling to animals (and humans!) in order to aid dispersal. Despite its rather exotic name, there are no known medical uses for this plant.

## The Comma Butterfly - *Polygonia c-album*



This butterfly, shown resting on a nettle in the woodland is one of the more familiar butterflies in England, showing an increase in its range over the last 4 decades. Previously widespread, by the middle of the 19th century its habitat stronghold was mostly confined to the southern

Welsh & English border areas, especially Herefordshire and Monmouthshire. Reasons for its decline are thought to be the reduction in the growing of hops. Nowadays, it has a preference for common nettles as the larval plantfood, although adults will also lay eggs on willow, currants, elms and hops.

Adults feed on the nectar of thistle and knapweed, as well as ripe blackberries.

The underside is much duller than its bright upperside. When the wings are closed, it has the appearance of a leaf, giving it some protection against predators.

One of the most remarkable features of the comma is that it can be seen all through the year, although they emerge in greater numbers in March. It's mostly found on the edge of woodlands, but is also found in gardens, especially those with rich nectar sources.

### Financial Summary

Our income for the year ending 30th June 2019 was substantially augmented by the grant awarded by the Greenwich Growth Fund of £8000 towards the Seed to Trees Project. There were also grants from the Peter Harris Trust, EGRA and the Greenwich

Society. Our additional income came from annual subscriptions (£540), Life subscriptions (£150), donations (£870) and the proceeds of Christmas cards (£700).

The seed to trees expenditure was our principal outlay followed by Christmas card expenditure equipment and insurance. The accounts will be submitted to the Friends at our AGM in October. But we have sufficient reserves to cover any projected items of expenditure for the foreseeable future.

### Bats in the Woodlands

Our regular annual Bat Walk took place this year on Sunday 7 July. As on previous occasions Les Clark of the London Bat Group led us and this evening Rich Sylvester was able to borrow extra bat detectors. This enabled us to accept a higher number of people who had enquired, so that we had our largest turn-out ever. 29 people participated, many of whom were new to the Woodlands. We were delighted, in particular, to welcome neighbours from Seren Park and hope that they will join us in future events. We hope everyone enjoyed the offer of a glass of Pimms.

The bats were particularly co-operative this year, with more of them hunting in the Glade, rather than passing over on their way to another hunting ground. Les Clark speculates that 'our' bats are roosting locally, probably in the Seren Park blocks, and are hunting closer to home as they are suckling their pups at this time of year. We will take this into account in our plans for next year's Bat Walk.

Another departure this year was that we asked for donations. We were delighted to receive £105 towards our work in maintaining and improving the Woodlands as a wildlife preserve. Also, in recognition of Les's support over the years, we made a contribution to the Bat Conservation Trust.

## Seeds to Trees Project

This project has been substantially funded by the Greenwich Growth Fund and has been implemented since our last Newsletter. The initiative is being delivered by 2 of the Trustees of the Friends, Richard Sylvester and Ruth Cracknell.



Three local Primary Schools are involved, Halstow School, Christchurch CofE School and St Josephs RC School. About 180 children from these schools have been involved supported by staff and parents. The project involves an annual cycle of work in the woodlands beginning with sowing tree seeds and moving on through weeding and mulching young trees. We attach a typical school programme indicating the timing and content of one of the



Oak saplings from the seed bed, taken in July 2019

sessions.

To equip the groups properly the Friends have invested in childrens' gardening tools and spades as well as numerous bird boxes which have been installed. The project has also been supported financially by the Greenwich Society and EGRA , (East Greenwich Residents Association) and by gifts in kind from Mace Construction (tree nursery– labour and materials), Woodland Trust ( donation of 280 trees/canes and planting tubes, Royal Parks (Greenwich) (donation of mulch for trees) and Good Gym Lewisham (work party to complete Tree Nursery). The Growth Fund Officer for the Royal Borough of Greenwich attended one of the sessions and was enthusiastic about the project and the obvious enjoyment of the children.

It was clear to anybody attending that Ruth and Rich had combined a really interesting programme to enhance young children's appreciation of nature, together with a fun event. Feedback from the schools was very positive and enthusiastic. Examples are as follows;

### Halstow

Parents and children, *"Really enjoyable for adults and kids, the kids loved being responsible for getting their own mulch"*

Teachers, *"Well organised and thought through. A wonderful wilderness, such a gift for the children to come here."*

### Christchurch

Parents and children *"Inspiring growing trees and connecting to nature. Really good to learn about the bees"*

Teachers

*"All the children were busy and engaged. I learned something too!"*

Summary by Year 3/4 Team Leader *"We have been absolutely overjoyed with the project this year. There has been amazing feedback from parents and*

*children We would love to get the dates in for next year.”*

### **Website Update and Future Volunteer Dates**

Our website continues to be updated, although we do keep an active Facebook page (search for Westcombe Woodlands) and also our Twitter page (search for @WestcombeWood). However, the greatest change to our website is it actually has a new address; it's now [www.westcombewoodlands.uk](http://www.westcombewoodlands.uk)

We do keep notice boards around the entrances of Maze Hill station, and at the entrance of the woodland too, just in case you aren't sure of the next open day.

#### **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October**

10:00 – 1:00 Regular monthly volunteer session.  
2:00 – 5:00 Early Autumn open day.

#### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October**

7:30 - Annual General Meeting

#### **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November**

10:00 – 1:00 Regular monthly volunteer session.

#### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December**

10:00 – 1:00 Regular monthly volunteer session.

### **Hospice Open Garden – Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

The Woodlands were open on Sunday June 9<sup>th</sup> as part of the Open Garden event in aid of the Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice. Fourteen Greenwich gardens participated in the event, and there was a steady flow of visitors to the Woodlands. The advantage of participating in events like this is that it brings in new visitors who have received the leaflet and want to see as many gardens as possible. Blackheath and Eltham gardens also contributed to the event which in all raised just under £14,000 for

the Hospice which, of course, they were absolutely delighted with.

### **Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme**

We are delighted that the daughters on committee member Donald Albrecht used the Woodland as part of their skills' requirement in participating in The Duke of Edinburgh scheme. The task involved was the upkeep of a more sturdier footpath, linking the



entrance to the mound.