

Notes from the Nature Reserve

Green Gym Conservation Volunteers at East Ham Nature Reserve July 2016

Dates for Saturday sessions are 30th July, 27th August and 24th September 10am-1pm. Please come along if you can make it.

We are feeling a bit overwhelmed by the amazing growth this year and the amount of work needed to maintain the site. We really need to attract more volunteers. Any ideas on how to do it would be welcome.

We have spent part of the Wren group's money on two azadas, which are a digging tool like a light mattock. We are looking into buying a proper scythe and more good sickles to deal with the grassland and the wildflower meadow.

We need to replace worn out tools and buy new ones, especially if we want to expand the group, so we are applying for a grant from the Skipton Building Society. If we are shortlisted, there will be a public vote, so we will need your help - watch this space for details.



Poppy, corn marigold, corn chamomile and cornflower in the meadow

Plant of the month

Rosebay willowherb - *Epilobium angustifolium*



This plant is common in the open areas of the nature reserve. It is a striking plant 2-3ft tall in spreading clumps, with beautiful pink flowers in summer.

It is very difficult to control because it can produce up to 80,000 seeds per plant. They are feathery and spread by the wind. Seeds remain viable for years in the soil, but only grow after the ground is cleared.

It is also called 'fireweed', because it often the first coloniser after a fire, providing shelter for other plants to establish. It was called 'bombweed' during the war because it grew on bombsites.

This was a rare plant until the late 19th century, when it suddenly started to spread. It is not known why it spread, but the seeds may have been carried in the slipstream of

trains as the railway network spread across the country.

We have been working on the path to the south of Cricket Meadow, which had nearly disappeared because it was so overgrown. Wendy in particular has been doing good work in widening it. When it was really hot, we gave up and moved under the shade of the trees to work on the path there. The wildflower meadow needs attention every week, as the brambles we thought we had dug out keep growing again from bits of root. If we keep pulling them out, they should weaken and give up eventually.



First blackber

Animal of the month

Common and pygmy shrew - *Sorex araneus* and *Sorex minutes*



Both these species are probably found at the nature reserve, but you are only likely to see dead ones.

Both species are both chocolate brown on the back, lighter on the sides and whitish underneath. They are distinguished by their size. Common shrew is 5-8cm body length with 3.5-5cm tail. Pygmy shrew is 4-6cm with 3-4.5cm tail.

They eat invertebrates, such as slugs, snails, beetles and spiders. They need to eat at least their own weight in food every 24 hours.

The pygmy shrew is more common in grassland, whilst the common shrew prefers woodland, where they hide in leaf litter or under logs. Our laid hedge makes a good corridor for shrews and other mammals to move about.

They build nests under stones or logs. Pygmy shrews are good climbers and are sometimes found in bird nest boxes.

Mammals like our resident cats may kill shrews, but are put off eating them by the smell from scent glands on the body. Their main predators are birds like owls and kestrels, which have no sense of smell.

Wildflower meadow

This is a great success and has really brightened the place up. This is how it looked mid-July, with a pretty mixture of colours. The yellow corn marigolds have now grown taller than the other plants and become dominant. The poppies have faded, but have produced seed heads. It will be interesting to see what happens next. Some species will flower later and others will not flower until next year. We will be saving seed to plant in other areas and also applying to Kew for more seed if they run the scheme again.



Please contact us if you have any suggestions of things to put in the newsletter or on the website. Email newhamgg@gmail.com Phone Judi 020 8470 7680 or Frances 078 4597 3156. Check out the website www.newhamgreengym.org for more information about Green Gym, East Ham Nature Reserve Conservation Volunteers.