

Notes from the Nature Reserve

Green Gym Conservation Volunteers at East Ham Nature Reserve October 2016

The next Saturday sessions is 26th November 10am-1pm. Please come along if you can make it.

Sorry, no newsletter last month. Penny was too busy. Autumn has arrived at the nature reserve, with the plants showing beautiful red, orange, purple and yellow autumn colours.



Judi and Stuart clearing Cricket Meadow

The wild flowers were such a success that we want to plant some more, so we are clearing the next section of Cricket Meadow, which was covered in brambles and ivy.

Peter did his lumberjack act and cleared several small sycamores.

Animal of the month

Red fox - *Vulpes vulpes*

There seem to be a lot of new holes around the nature reserve, dug by foxes, judging by the size of the holes.

There are several fox species, all belonging to the dog family, although only the red fox is native to the UK.

Foxes eat a varied diet, including earthworms and insects (adults and larvae), as well as birds and small mammals. They will also eat fruit in autumn. Urban foxes eat scavenged food, and food put out for them by people. They are often better fed than country foxes.



Foxes mate in the winter, when you may hear them screaming to attract a mate. Cubs live in a family group with the vixen, with the male bringing food until they are old enough to hunt for themselves.

Urban foxes became established in London in the 1940s.

During the 1990s a disease called sarcoptic mange killed a large proportion of the foxes - up to 95% in some areas. Populations are slowly recovering.

In captivity foxes can live for 14 years. Wild foxes rarely live longer than 2 years.

Plant galls

This has been a very disappointing year for lovers of sloe gin. The blackthorn flowered beautifully in the spring and sloes started to form. Halfway through the summer they became deformed, making long hollow shapes called pocket plums. This is caused by a fungus called *Taphrina pruni*, which affects stone fruits. Interestingly, it did not affect the plums which grow by the A13.



Normal and pocket sloes



Galls are formed by the plant in response to an alien invader. This might be a fungus, but is often a microscopic wasp, which lays its eggs on the plant. These spiky oak galls are caused by a wasp laying its egg as the acorn is forming. The gall protects the wasp larva until it bores its way out. The galled acorns will not germinate, so ultimately this is bad for the tree because it prevents it setting seed.

You may also see this gall, called Ragged Robin or Robin's pincushion, on wild roses. It is also caused by a gall wasp, which makes the plant produce this mass of fibres, which start off green and turn bright red in autumn. The larvae overwinter in the gall and emerge as adults in the spring.



And finally, apart from the natural beauty of the nature reserve, we have our amazing Green Gym volunteers. Here are Wendy and Anne.

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