

# Notes from the Nature Reserve

Green Gvm Conservation Volunteers at East Ham Nature Reserve August 2016

Dates for Saturday sessions are 24<sup>th</sup> September and 29<sup>th</sup> October 10am-1pm.  
Please come along if you can make it.

After all the rain we had early in the year, we are now desperate for a few drops to keep the meadow going. The colour is now predominantly yellow from the corn marigolds, as you can see in this photo of Judi and Christine at the July Saturday session. As flowers have gone over, we have collected seed to sow in other places.

Path clearance continues as always, in sun or shade depending on the temperature. The laid hedge has put on amazing growth so we have cut back the first section to encourage it to thicken up and fill in the gappy bits.



## Plant of the month

Blackberry or bramble - *Rubus fruticosus*



We have a love /hate relationship with this plant. It blocks the paths, arching over and catching you as you walk past. It scratches you when you try to cut it and it trips you up.

On the other hand, the berries are delicious. They have been eaten by people for thousands or even millions of years. Remains of blackberries were found in the stomach of a neolithic man dug up at Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex.

There are many species of blackberry. All are edible, but some taste better than others.

An ancient recipe for blackberry crowdie

combines them with toasted oats, cream and rum or whisky.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were still being picked commercially to make dyes.

Remember though, not to pick them after Michaelmas Night (29<sup>th</sup> September), because that is when the devil spits (or wees) on them.

We will be working on laying the next section of the hedge this winter. It is a lot of work to do, but makes it much easier to keep under control. It is also much better for wildlife because it grows thickly right down to the ground instead of having gaps.

Peter has written a really good article about the ancient art of hedge laying for the Wren group newsletter. If you would like to read it you can download it from the Latest News section of the website.



Penny

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## Animal of the month

### Comma butterfly - *Polygonia c-album*



This butterfly is called a comma because it has a small, white comma-shaped mark on the underside of the wings.

They normally hibernate between October and March, but can be seen at any time of the year if the weather is warm enough.

These butterflies were found all over England and Wales until the middle of the 1800s. They declined severely until they were only found in the

Welsh border counties. This may be because the caterpillars used to feed mainly on hops, which are no longer widely farmed. From the 1960s onwards the population increased again until it is now common throughout England and Wales and has even reached Scotland.

The larvae have changed their choice of food and now feed mainly on nettles, of which we have plenty at the nature reserve. They also still eat hops and we have some of those as well.



With the wings folded, the comma is well camouflaged



Caterpillar on nettle

We now have a scythe we can use. Tom Casey donated it to the Wren group. He is a former Tree Officer for Newham Council and is delighted that it will be used at EHNR as he knew the site well in previous years.



Peter and the Austrian scythe in action

It is an Austrian scythe which is lighter and easier to use than a traditional English one. It means that we can at last get the grassland under control.

The grass and the wildflower meadow should be scythed down to about 30cms (1ft) each year in the autumn. The cut grass will need to be raked off and put on a compost heap.

Regular cutting and removal of the hay will gradually reduce the fertility of the grassland and flower meadow. This will reduce competition from brambles and nettles, which like rich soil. The flowers and finer grasses, will be able to grow, increasing the biodiversity of these areas.

Please contact us if you have any suggestions of things to put in the newsletter or on the website. Email [newhamgg@gmail.com](mailto:newhamgg@gmail.com) Phone Judi 020 8470 7680 or Frances 078 4597 3156. Check out the website [www.newhamgreengym.org](http://www.newhamgreengym.org) for more information about us.

