

Notes from the Nature Reserve

Green Gym Conservation Volunteers at East Ham Nature Reserve May/June 2016

Dates for Saturday sessions are 25th June, 30th July and 27th August 10am-1pm.

Please come along if you can make it.

Our Open Day on 30th April was very successful, attracting several people who had never been to the Nature Reserve before. Stephen Timms MP popped in for tea and cake before heading out on the campaign trail. Two members of the Wren group took some lovely photos and offered help with a Facebook page and other publicity.

Our association with the Wren Group is proving very useful. This picture shows Wren Group President, Richard Oakman presenting us with a cheque for £300 for tools and equipment. He told us about the origins of the Wren Group, which actually started in East Ham, as a way of interesting boys in natural history and birdwatching, rather than collecting birds' eggs.



Plant of the month

Cow parsley - *Anthriscus sylvestris*



This plant took over and hid the paths through the woodland at the end of May.

It has several common names. A nicer one is Queen Anne's lace.

It is a member of the Umbellifer family. They have flowers in flat panicles. It is related to carrot, fennel and celery.

Beware! The family also includes some very poisonous plants like water dropwort and hemlock, the poison used to kill the philosopher, Socrates.

Hemlock can be distinguished from cow parsley because it has spotty stems and is usually a bigger plant. However, if in doubt, don't eat it. We have not found any at the nature reserve.

Animal of the month

Slow worm - *Anguis fragilis*



We have seen a few slow worms already this year as the weather has started to warm up. You can find them in the grass around the anthills.

- Slow worms are legless lizards, not snakes.
- They grow to 30-40cm long, and are easier to spot than common lizards, because they are quite slow moving.

- Slow worms have smooth greyish skin. Males are often paler, sometimes with blue spots. Females are larger with dark sides and a dark stripe down the back.
- Like most lizards, they can shed the end of their tails if they are caught. The tail carries on wriggling to distract the predator, whilst the slow worm escapes. Most of the ones at the nature reserve have lost the ends of their tails, probably to the resident cats.

What is the difference between a lizard and a snake?



- Lizards have eyelids and can blink. Snakes do not.
- Snakes have a series of flat plates on their underside, lizards have scales, the same as on their backs. We don't have snakes at the nature reserve so here is a water snake from Kentucky showing off its belly.
- Lizards have a mechanism for losing

their tails to escape and enemy. They can then regrow the tail, although only as a stump.

Growth has been phenomenal during May and June so work has included trying to keep paths open, as well as clearing ivy under the trees. Some mulch finally arrived and has been used on some of the worst bits. At present we are working on opening up Fireman's Walk, which has become overgrown. The bushes on both sides are encroaching, so have been trimmed so that there is access for fire engines and also for the lorries that bring the mulch in.

Wildflower meadow

We have our first flowers in the meadow. They are cornflowers, but will very soon be followed by daisies and poppies, which have already got their flower buds.



It is hard to believe that this area looked completely bare after we cleared it in the winter. Unfortunately, the brambles, nettles and other undesirables are growing as well as the flowers.



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.