



April 2021



April has inspired poets through the ages. It was in April that Chaucer's Pilgrims set out on their journey to Canterbury, and he describes the sweet breath of the West Wind breathing life into the tender new leaves.

"Oh, to be in England Now that April's there," wrote Robert Browning, and we could echo, "Oh, to be on Chislehurst Commons at this time of year."

New green shoots glowed in last week's welcome sunshine, which bathed the grasslands, ponds and heathland, and brought dappled light and shade to the woodland.

There is so much to see and hear on a walk on the Commons at any time of year, but spring has its own attractions - green shoots, birdsong, brightly coloured wildflowers, and the scent of blossom.



There is an abundance of blossom on the Commons at the moment, like this blackthorn near Rush Pond. It is a member of the prunus family, which includes plums, cherries and almonds. Later the flowers will develop into the inky- black fruits known as sloes.



More good news from Prickend Pond. There are signs that the planting last autumn on the island has been successful, and new leaves are beginning to grow. Two Hawthorn saplings and some shrubs - dog rose, rose and guelder rose – were chosen to enhance biodiversity and to improve the appearance of the island following the loss of the original four willows. We decided not to plant more willows because they need a lot of water, and climate change may mean more hot, dry weather.



The new path and seating area have been well-used in the past month. Parts of the bank are still fenced off, to allow the area to re-generate. More plants are being added, to increase biodiversity and add interest – foxgloves, violets, red campion, red dead nettle, speedwell and corncockle, for example. Most have been sourced from elsewhere on the Commons.

All of this - and much more - has been made possible by the expertise and dedication of our wonderful volunteers, and the time they give so generously.

WILL YOU BE A TRUE FRIEND OF THE COMMONS?

The 180 acres of local common land are protected by an Act of Parliament.

Chislehurst Commons has responsibility under the Act for the management and maintenance of the area. The Act, however, made no provision for funding, and we rely on the generosity of local people to enable us to continue our work. We have two Keepers whose knowledge, skills and dedication are invaluable. Everyone else who works to maintain and develop our beautiful Commons does so on a voluntary basis.

You can donate via our website at

www.chislehurstcommons.uk or go to [PayPal Giving](#).

There are now two additional ways for you to show your support for Chislehurst's common land.



Members of the Co-op can nominate our charity to receive 1p in every £ they spend.

<https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/47108>



We are also registered with Amazon Smile.

Visit www.smile.amazon.co.uk instead of the normal Amazon website and select Chislehurst Commons, and for everything you buy, Amazon will donate 0.5% to help maintain the Commons. This is another excellent opportunity to support the greenspace on your doorstep.

THANK YOU!



All across the Commons the cheerful signs of spring in the air are evident, as birds begin to nest, and the warmer days bring bees and butterflies. It is always uplifting to see new chicks at the ponds, with their anxious parents nearby.

These Egyptian Geese were first this year, with one gosling. They are protective parents and drive away other birds that may come near.





But the other water birds have not been idle. The Moorhen, above, is taking nesting material to a site on the island. Generally, the female builds the basket-like nest in dense vegetation, while the male gathers and delivers the nesting material, although both parents incubate and feed the young. Moorhens (and coots) do not have webbed feet, but lobed toes (see photo above). Their long, lobed toes enable them to walk on soft mud and floating vegetation, seemingly walking on water.

Coots have also been seen nesting, and the duck house is occupied by a Mallard, so we can expect to see more families taking to the water in the next month.



Across the Commons other birds are finding places to nest. Last month we reported that Ring-necked parakeets were inspecting possible nesting sites. These two photos show one now in residence in a hole in the Black Poplar at Prickend Pond.



A Stock Dove, another bird that nests in holes in trees, was seen emerging from a hole in a big lime beside Rush Pond. It is similar to a Wood Pigeon, but without the white neck and wing patches. There were two of them, so hopefully

they will breed successfully.



Bee-fly bonanza

Signs of spring abound, but there's one that's easily missed, once seen never forgotten... the emergence of bee-flies! Widespread across the Commons in April, the UK's commonest species, the dark-edged bee-fly *Bombylius major* (resembling a cross between a bee and a giant mosquito) is a true fly with a single pair of wings, compared to the two pairs of bees. It doesn't sting or bite, instead it uses its long-pointed proboscis to suck nectar from flowers, and its hairy body makes it an effective pollinator as it moves around flowers. Like many flies it has evolved a specialised life cycle... in this case parasitizing solitary mining bees. Bee-fly eggs are laid near or dropped into a bee's burrow, where the larva hatches, finds a bee brood cell, eats the stored pollen and finally the bee larva. The bee-fly larva pupates and remains underground until the following spring, when it emerges as an adult. See [Bee-fly Watch 2021](#) for more information about UK bee-flies.



The first sunny days of spring have seen the emergence of butterflies from hibernation. The Comma butterfly, once in steep decline in Britain, is now widespread. Its scalloped wings and colouring enable it to hibernate undetected amongst dead leaves. Its main habitat is woodland.

Stoat!

There have been several reliable sightings of a stoat on St. Paul's Cray Common. It has been seen running across St. Paul's Cray Road, and from the National Trust land onto the Common. This highlights the importance of the connectivity of greenspaces to animals that need to roam in search of food and shelter. Scadbury, the Common and Petts Wood give the stoat a wide area to hunt over.

Stoats move very fast so, as yet, we have not managed to take a photo.

And finally the Commons in close up.



This Mouse-ear Chickweed is now in flower all over the Common, often almost hidden amongst the grass, providing a good food source for insects. It has tiny white star-like flowers with 5 petals, each one deeply notched.

Our Commons have so much to offer us, whichever way you look. To the tops of the trees or down at your feet, there is something amazing to see. We will continue to work to preserve and maintain them while also developing their biodiversity.

Looking for things to do on the Commons this spring?

Check out the Activities Tab on our Website.

(Click [here](#) for a direct link, or go to www.chislehurstcommons.uk)

- **There is a Family I-Spy, a Family Scavenger Hunt and some fun ideas for things to do with leaves and twigs.**
- **All the Tales displayed through the woodland in December and January are there for you to enjoy at your leisure.**
- **Our “Out and About” guides have things to look out for on the Commons.**
- **You can catch up on past Newsletters.**

[Click here to access a map of the Commons](#)

Thanks for the photos in this Newsletter to Don Drage, Peter Edwards, Jonathan Harvie, Kevin Jennings, Ross Wearn and Mary Wheeler.

Thanks also to the Editorial Team – Kevin Jennings, Christine Wearn, Ross Wearn and Mary Wheeler.



Chislehurst Commons are proud to display the Green Flag Award logo.

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