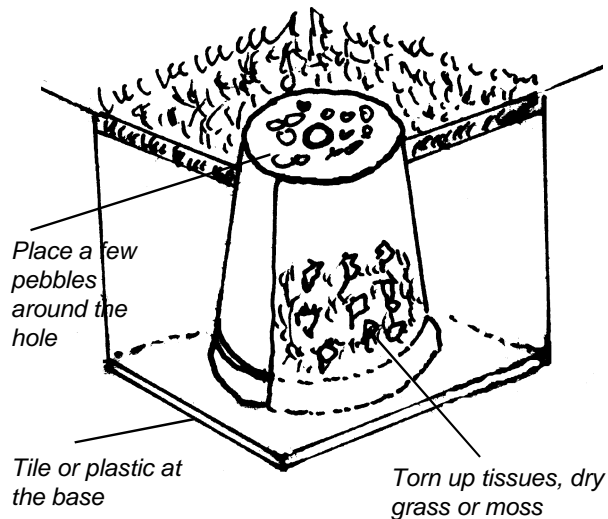


Bee aware on the Common!

Spring is a time when the Common comes alive. Birds that migrate from warmer climates will be arriving and animals that have been in hibernation for the winter will be emerging. Trees and plants will begin to sprout into new life. There will also be an increase in the numbers of visitors to the Common. The Common is essentially a wild place but too many visitors can cause problems for the wildlife. So there have to be some simple rules.

One important rule is that you cannot drive any kind of motor vehicle on the Common. Over the last year there has been an increase in the number of motor cycles and quad bikes that have been seen using the Common particularly the area around the sandpit. The reason for the ban is that noisy vehicles not only disturb the wildlife but also many users of the Common - walkers, dogs and horses, who come for the peace and solitude that it provides.

More importantly the sandpit is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because the steep banks are home to over **180 different species** of solitary bees and wasps. It is one of the best sites in the UK for these tiny creatures. So when you see barriers or logs placed at the top of the banks it is not because the Common Society are "spoil sports" and want to upset horse riders, mountain bikers and scramblers. It is because we are trying to protect a very vital habitat for wildlife. In Britain, 25% of our 254 bee species are now on the endangered list. This includes five species of bumblebee which, 20 years ago were widespread and common. If Horsell Common is one of the best places in Britain for bees and wasps maybe you could attract some of them into your garden?



Bumblebees for instance will often use an old mouse nest as a site to start a colony. If you don't have an old mouse nest don't worry! You can create a simple substitute by burying an upturned earthenware flower pot. Put it in a sunny open spot, the edge of a flowerbed is ideal, and sit back and wait.

Choose a pot with a drainage hole 1.5cm wide. Dig a hole in the ground slightly deeper than the pot. Place a piece of tile or plastic at the bottom to stop damp getting into the pot. Next half fill the pot with torn up tissues, moss or grass cuttings (*they must be dry*) and put the pot upside down in the hole. Fill in around the pot with soil and put a few small pebbles at the entrance hole.



On Sunday 16th February more than eighty Horsell Beavers, Cubs, Brownies, Guides, Scouts and various grown-ups took part in a sponsored pine pull on Horsell Common. It was a very cold dry sunny day, a lot of heathland was cleared and everyone appreciated the bonfire. Over £160 was contributed to the Scouts and Guides fund raising account.

Carry on feeding

As summer approaches most people will stop putting food out for the birds. Many will assume, quite rightly, that there will be more natural food available. We may think of the fat balls, kitchen scraps and peanuts as artificial foods. They are certainly not the normal food for birds. Our birds will never come across a wild peanut. So are we doing wrong? Well peanuts are eaten by birds in the areas where they grow. Bread is not a natural food but there are plenty of birds that will eat the wheat from which it is made, and do not mind when it is baked into bread. Many birds also scavenge fat from the bodies of animals when they die.

April is the time when many birds are really under pressure as winter food runs out. This is when they are trying to improve their body condition and start breeding. It is therefore very important



to carry on feeding through the breeding season. Very little of what you might want to feed to birds will be bad for them. Unlike us very fatty foods are good for them. Salty material is bad and dried food, such as desiccated coconut, can be harmful as they need to drink lots of water and it may swell inside them. We think of mouldy food as dodgy but many natural foods go mouldy and are still eaten by birds with great relish. It is likely that more birds are killed flying into windows near feeders than by "bad" food. If birds hit your window regularly, cut outs of hawks, stars or net curtains may all work. The birds will realise that there is something there and not just see the reflection from the bottom of the garden.

The best we can do for our birds is to provide a variety of foods presented in as many different ways as possible. Even the colour of hanging feeders is important. Experiments show that birds prefer silver, blue or brown feeders and are less like to be attracted to black or yellow ones. Food taken from the least used was only 65% of that taken from the most popular ones.

New addition to the Common

Horsell Common Preservation Society have purchased 16 acres of land on the opposite side of the road to Mimbridge Garden Centre. The new field will be called Mimbridge Meadow, it runs beside the River Bourne to a point opposite our existing Bourne Fields. It will not be open to the public until later in the year as a foot bridge across the Bourne and other construction work has to be carried out.

A new walk along the river bank will be created from Chobham Road at Mimbridge to the bridleway near Fair Oaks Aerodrome and the main Common. It will be an ideal opportunity to study the wildlife of the river bank including ducks, moorhen, sticklebacks, dragonflies and damselflies, you may even be lucky enough to spot a Kingfisher.

Watch this space for further news of when you can use the new walk.

Don't worry: leave them alone!

Most birds will nest and rear young between now and August. Wildlife organisations will be inundated with calls from concerned people who believe they have found baby birds abandoned by their parents.

Many birds leave the nest before they can fly, especially blackbirds and thrushes. They call to be fed while their parents search for food. They

may look as if they have been abandoned, but the parents will soon be back to feed them. The best thing is to leave them alone and move away so that you do not prevent the parents from feeding them. If a young bird is in danger - maybe on a road or near to a cat - it may do no harm to move it to a safer spot nearby, but its best chance of survival is offered by its parents care and attention.

Jarvis Returns



Nightjars will be returning to Horsell Common in the late spring, they are specialist heathland birds. We have adopted "Jarvis" the nightjar as the Horsell Common mascot. Heathland is now a more endangered habit than tropical rain forest. We have lost 50% of our heathland in the last 50 years. That is why it is so vital that we work hard to retain the remaining heath by preventing the birch and pine from taking over.