

A Breath of Fresh Air

SPRING

The newsletter for schools from the **Horsell Common Preservation Society**

Stag Beetles

The Stag Beetle is Britain's largest insect. It gets its name because the male's huge jaws look just like stag's antlers. The males can be up to 70mm long. Its head and thorax (chest) are shiny black and the wing cases are dark brown. The female is smaller and does not have the large jaws of the male.

You are most likely to see a male in flight on warm summer evenings in May when it will be looking for a mate.

The female lays her eggs in decaying wood. They turn into large white grubs with stubby legs and a brown head that are called larvae. The larvae feed on decaying wood at or below ground level for about four years before they become a pupa (a resting stage). The adults emerge in May or June of the following year. The Stag Beetle is harmless it does not attack living wood, or timber used in furniture, buildings or fences unless it is very rotten.

Stag Beetles used to occur in most of central and southern England. However today Surrey is one of the last counties where they can still be frequently seen. Their numbers are declining fast so we must do all we can to help them.

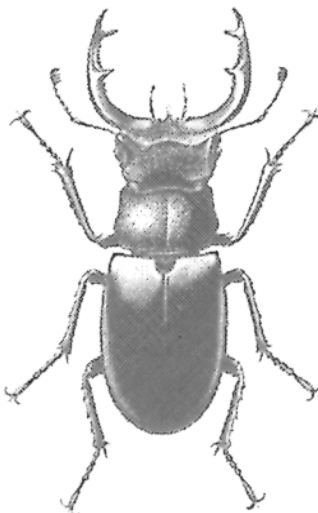
A survey carried out in 1998/99, by the People's Trust for Endangered Species, found that stag beetles have many predators. The most common were domestic cats and magpies, but it seems

many animals will make a meal of these beetles given the opportunity; foxes, jays, owls, bats, sparrows and squirrels have all been seen to attack or eat stag beetles. My own cats sit under the outside light and wait for beetles attracted by the light from the bulb to fall down. They then crunch them with great relish. It sounds horrible!

The main threat facing the stag beetle is the removal of fallen timber and tree stumps without which the larvae cannot survive. The old tree stumps and dead wood found on the Common are ideal for stage beetles. Fallen trees should be left in large pieces in contact with the soil so that the wood remains moist and is able to rot.

The adult beetles may look very scary with large pincers but left alone they will not harm you. Please do not be tempted to kill them. **Leave them alone and encourage others to do the same.**

We have a special responsibility for the Stag Beetle. Although they are scarce, Britain has more than most other European countries.



Male Stag Beetle
approx. life size



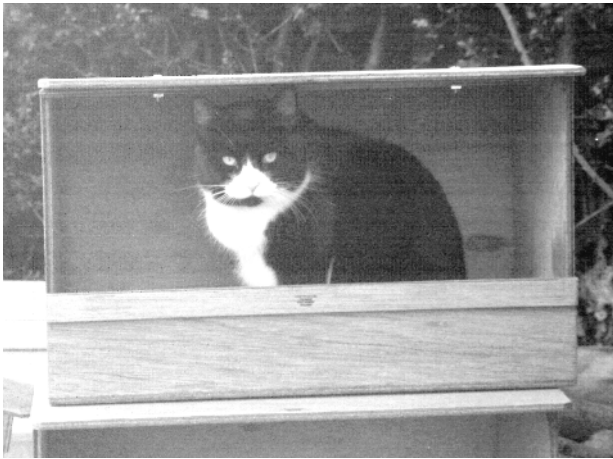
Stag Beetle
larvae

Spring Word Search

B	P	H	B	N	J	O	T	E	S	D	S
E	U	O	L	L	Z	M	G	T	I	T	F
E	P	R	O	A	U	I	S	G	A	F	X
O	R	L	S	K	J	E	H	G	W	K	E
R	I	C	S	G	N	M	B	N	H	O	G
A	M	R	O	B	O	E	T	E	D	O	C
J	R	S	M	Y	E	H	D	G	L	E	Y
T	O	E	L	T	C	E	E	L	O	L	S
H	S	F	L	O	Q	G	E	G	P	R	S
G	E	E	R	Y	A	D	V	T	D	U	F
I	S	C	A	T	K	I	N	S	A	E	B
N	W	A	P	S	G	O	R	F	Z	C	H

Find the 9 hidden kinds of wildlife that can be found on the Common in Spring.

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Catkins | Frogspawn | Nests |
| Bluebells | Nightjar | Stag Beetles |
| Blossom | Primrose | Hedgehogs |



Before the Kestrel nest boxes were put up last month one of my cats "Hattie" thought she would try one out.



Jarvis the Nightjar

The very special bird that comes to live on Horsell Common during the Spring and Summer

Jarvis the Nightjar will be flying back to Horsell Common sometime in April. He will build a nest on the ground among the heather and raise a family. Nightjars are only active at night so you will find it very hard to see one. If you go out on to the heathland areas of the Common just before dusk during April and May you may be lucky enough to hear their distinctive *churring* call.

Global Warming

In February I had a Red Admiral butterfly visit my garden on the edge of the Common. In early March there was a Peacock butterfly and a bright yellow male Brimstone. It is not unusual to see Brimstone at this time of year, but it is an indication of global warming that butterflies, which a few years ago could only be seen in May and June, are able to overwinter and appear so early.



Peacock butterfly

The large eye like spots on the upper side of the wings are thought to scare away birds when the butterfly suddenly opens its wings.

If you want to attract butterflies to your garden leave a patch of stinging nettles as the caterpillars of many species like to feed on the young leaves. The adults will be attracted to the flowers of shrubs like Buddleia (the butterfly bush), Viburnum and plants such as Teasels, Sedums and Michaelmas Daisies.



Fly tipping on Horsell Common

What to do with waste?

Households in the United Kingdom produce 2.3 million tonnes of waste a year. Approximately 50% of this is biodegradable (it can be made harmless by natural processes, such as bacteria, and can cause no permanent harm if it is dispersed or treated). Of this 50% just under half comprises food and garden refuse and the rest is paper and packaging. Only about 10% of this biodegradable waste is recycled; the remainder is buried in landfill sites or burned.

The government recently introduced a Landfill Tax which charges councils and firms for the amount they send to landfill. The hope was that it would encourage them to recycle more waste. This is a good thing but it also has a bad side because if a person hires a skip they are charged the landfill tax which can be around £70 a skip. Over the last few months this has led to an increase in the amount of waste dumped on the Common (fly tipping). Fly tipping is costing between £3,000 and £6,000 a year to clear up. This is money that could be spent improving the Common.

You can help, if you see someone fly tipping or dumping garden rubbish on the Common phone one of the numbers below. Make a note of the time and a description of the person involved. If you can also make a note of the car registration number it will be even more helpful. If the information you give leads to a successful prosecution you could get a reward of £200.

0860 712503
01483 773322