

Fungi - friend or foe?

Take a walk on the Common at this time of year and you will see a great many different kinds of mushrooms and toadstools. All together they come under the heading of Fungi. Fungi have no flowers or leaves. They feed on dead or living plants and animals, and they reproduce by means of spores.

Fungi are neither plants or animals and play a vital role in breaking down organic matter releasing and recycling nutrients, so they are of enormous benefit to the environment. They come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. They can be as tiny as the green mould that we see on stale bread, or large like the flat mushrooms that we eat for breakfast.

Fungi play an important role in terms of ecology. They include a number of species which can have a harmful effect on mankind as they are poisonous or can cause skin and other diseases. Other species can attack and cause the loss of crops. Many microscopic species, on the other hand, provide an invaluable service for man, for instance in the production of bread, wine and beer, helping bread to rise and beer to brew.

The revolutionary discovery that antibiotics made from fungi, in particular penicillin can cure infections is probably one of the greatest advances of mankind.

Some of the fungi you can find on the Common feed off living plants. Others obtain their nourishment from dead or decaying matter. The wet summer and large amounts of leaf litter and dead wood, have provided ideal conditions for the growth of large fungi. One of the most spectacular is the Fly Agaric with its bright red cap covered with white warty patches. Like many toadstools it is poisonous and if eaten could make you very ill.

Some of the mushrooms found on the Common are edible. However, unless you are an expert the best advice is to only eat mushrooms that come from the supermarket!

Facts about fungi

Only about a quarter of British fungi are large like the mushrooms and toadstools we find on the Common. The rest (microfungi) live in the soil and on plants and animals.

There are seven times more fungi species than there are flowering plants.

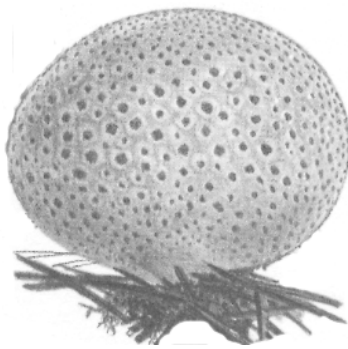
Only about 5% of the worlds fungi have been identified and described to date.

As fungi do not contain chlorophyll, the substance responsible for the green colour of most plants, they can survive with little or no sunlight.

Some of the fungi to be found on Horsell Common



Fly Agaric



Puffball



Leaf fungus

Chop chop busy busy

Autumn and winter are a busy time for the people that look after the Common. Conservation work stops during the spring and summer months so that the birds and animals are left undisturbed during their breeding season.

This year work will be carried out to clear a large section of the Danewell Gutter. This is the wet boggy area near to the sandpit. It is a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) as it contains rare plants like the Bog Asphodel and Sundew which require very special conditions to survive.

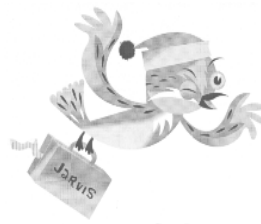
Birch and pine will be removed and burned. The ashes from the fires will be gathered up and taken away. They contain nutrients that lead to growth of undesirable species which like the birch and pine create shade that is detrimental to the plants that like wet open spaces.

The sundew can thrive in these very damp areas low in plant foods because it catches small insects on its sticky leaves and extracts the nutrients it needs from them. The damp boggy conditions are a haven for many kinds of insects, ranging from dragonflies to midges and mosquitoes.

Work will continue on Broomhall Common opposite the Brewery Road car park. The silver birch trees that have been thinned will be sold and used to make spindles and broom heads.

In other areas work will be carried out clearing and repairing ditches, footpaths and bridleways.

We are very lucky to have so many varied habitats on the Common. Heathland, pine plantations, woodland, wetlands, ponds and riverside meadows. Each needs to be looked after in a very different way.



Jarvis the Nightjar

The nightjars that have spent the Summer nesting and raising their young on the Common will soon be flying south to Africa for the Winter. We wish them a safe journey and look forward to their return in the Spring.

Surrey Wildlife Trust volunteer working parties on Horsell Common

During the winter months volunteer working parties are held on the Common. The dates are listed below. This year the work will take place on Grasslands Common - park in Horsell Common Road (northern end) off the Littlewick Road.

Sunday 8th October - 10am to 1.00pm

Sunday 12th November - 10am to 1.00pm

Sunday 10th December - 10am to 1.00pm

Sunday 14th January - 10am to 1.00pm

Sunday 11th February - 10am to 1.00pm

Sunday 11th March - 10am to 1.00pm

The group leader is Bill Pugh tel: 01483 715721. If the weather is bad please contact him before 9.30am on the day.

The activity - To remove scrub, mainly small birch and pine, from areas of heathland. This will improve the habitat for Dartford Warblers, Stonechats and Nightjars.

Tools - Bow saws and loppers will be supplied. Volunteers should wear sturdy waterproof footwear, protective of ankles and feet with a good grip, plus a pair of leather gardening gloves or similar.

If you are under 15 you will need to be accompanied by an adult.



Lots of fun at the Woking Carnival

Great fun was had in September when Horsell Common Preservation Society entered a float in the Woking Carnival. The theme was Horsell Common through the ages (2000BC - 2000AD). There was a Bronze age man representing the three bronze age barrows on Monument Common. Ellen and Christopher Heddle dressed as Martians depicting H G Wells' famous story "War of the Worlds". In his book the first spaceship landed in the sandpits on the Common.

The trailer, decorated with trees, leaves and heather was pulled by a Landrover with a large inflatable frog on the bonnet. Puffs of smoke from a smoke machine added to the atmosphere as the Martians tossed sweets to the crowd. At the end of the day everyone went home tired, happy and smelling of smoke.