

A Breath of Fresh Air

SPRING

The newsletter for schools from the Horsell Common Preservation Society

Did the Martians leave man eating plants on Horsell Common?

When H G Wells wrote his famous story "War of the Worlds" he lived in Maybury. So it was natural for him to use local landmarks in his stories. In his book the Martians spaceship landed in the sandpit on Horsell Common. That story was science fiction so the Martians could not have left man eating plants on the Common - or could they? Of course not, but we do have a plant on the Common that eats insects.

The Sundew a relative of the Venus' Fly Trap of America can be found in the wet boggy areas of the Common. The soil on these parts of the Common is so poor that the roots of the plants find it very hard to draw up minerals. In order to survive the plant has developed sticky red hairs on the leaves. Insects stick to the hairs which slowly bend towards the leaf centre, trapping the insect. Eventually the prey is digested and the leaf opens again.

Plants that trap and digest insects in this way are called insectivorous.



Round-leaved Sundew

The red hairs on the leaves of these tiny plants often give a red tinge to the ground of the bogs and moors where it grows.

The Horsell Preservation Society is a Registered Charity. The Society's aim is to preserve the Common for the recreation and enjoyment of current and future generations. We hope that the public will treat the Common as a sanctuary, both for themselves and the plants and animals which live there.

Horsell Common Preservation Society
PO Box 53 Woking GU21 4YU



Jarvis the Nightjar

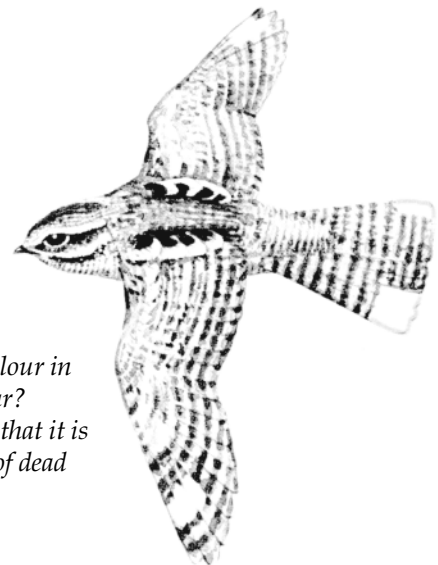
The very special bird that lives on Horsell Common he sleeps during the day and only comes out as it starts to get dark.

Jarvis the Nightjar comes to live on Horsell Common during the summer months. We are very lucky because Jarvis is not a very common bird and he is very particular where he decides to live.

Nightjars are very secretive birds and prefer to live on the open heathland areas of the Common. During the day they will sit tight on the ground, their dark brown mottled plumage looks like dead leaves so they are very hard to spot. The male has white feathers on its face that give the appearance of a moustache. At night they fly in search of insects such as moths and beetles. They have short beaks which they can open very wide to help catch flying insects.

You may find it very hard to spot a nightjar, but if you go out onto the Common about half an hour before it gets dark you might be lucky enough to hear one. The nightjar makes a very distinctive *churr churr* sound.

Jarvis says: "If you do go out walking on the heathland areas of the Common please keep to the footpaths. That way you won't disturb me or accidentally tread on my eggs. It would also help if you could stop your dogs from bouncing around in the heather as I would appreciate a good day's sleep!"



Can you colour in the Nightjar?
Remember that it is the colour of dead leaves

Ponds are important for wildlife

The name Horsell is thought to have come from the Saxon "horig scylf" meaning muddy shelf. At that time there would have been many small streams and ponds in and around the village. Common Close is built on land where there was once a lake called Norman Lake. There was also a pond in the middle of the High School playing fields.

As houses have been built the land has been drained and many of the ponds have been lost. The existence of some groups of animals, such as frogs, newts and dragonflies, have been threatened by this loss of habitat.

On the Common we have repaired and restored several ponds and created some new ones. The wet winter means that the ponds are as full as some people have seen them for a very long time.

Ponds can contain an enormous amount of wildlife. From bacteria and fungi, through algae and waterplants, flat worms, leeches, and water snails to dragonfly nymphs, frogs, newts and toads.

Frogs

We have one species of native frog the Common Frog it is sometimes called the Grass or Brown Frog. The colour varies greatly and even white (albinos) are known. Frogs breed as soon as they emerge from hibernation. They will lay their eggs (spawn) in large clumps in shallow areas of the pond where the water is warmest. The eggs develop into tadpoles, and in about 12 weeks have turned into baby frogs. They then leave the pond and live in damp places on land.

Toads

Toads have shorter legs than frogs, and they move by crawling rather than hopping, they also have warty skins. The Common Toad is frequently found far from water in summer and autumn and they only enter ponds to lay their eggs in the spring. The eggs are laid later than the Common Frog, and the eggs are in long ropes.

Newts

The ponds on the Common contain both Common, or Smooth Newts, and Palmate Newts at this time of

year. Like frogs they enter the ponds soon after coming out of hibernation. They lay their eggs singly attaching them to water plants. They leave the ponds soon after the breeding season is over. They live most of the year on land hiding under stones and logs during the day and hunting for prey at night.

Nymphs of damselflies and dragonflies

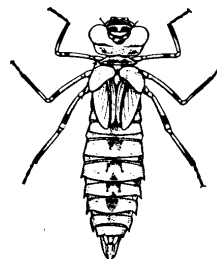
Dragonflies and Damselflies spend most of their life cycle in ponds. They can spend up to two years living underwater before emerging usually between June and August as the beautiful brightly coloured insect we see skimming across the water. During their period in the water they feed on tadpoles and aquatic insects. They undergo about twelve moults of skin. Finally the nymphs climb out of the water up the stem of a water plant. The skin splits open the wings expand and the body hardens. The insect then flies away in search of food or a mate. The adults may live for a month or so but do not survive the winter.

There are several ponds on the Sandpit Common and two ponds called the Warren Ponds on Horsell Birch. All are very full at the moment and some are quite deep, it is very easy to fall in, so always go with an adult if you want to explore.

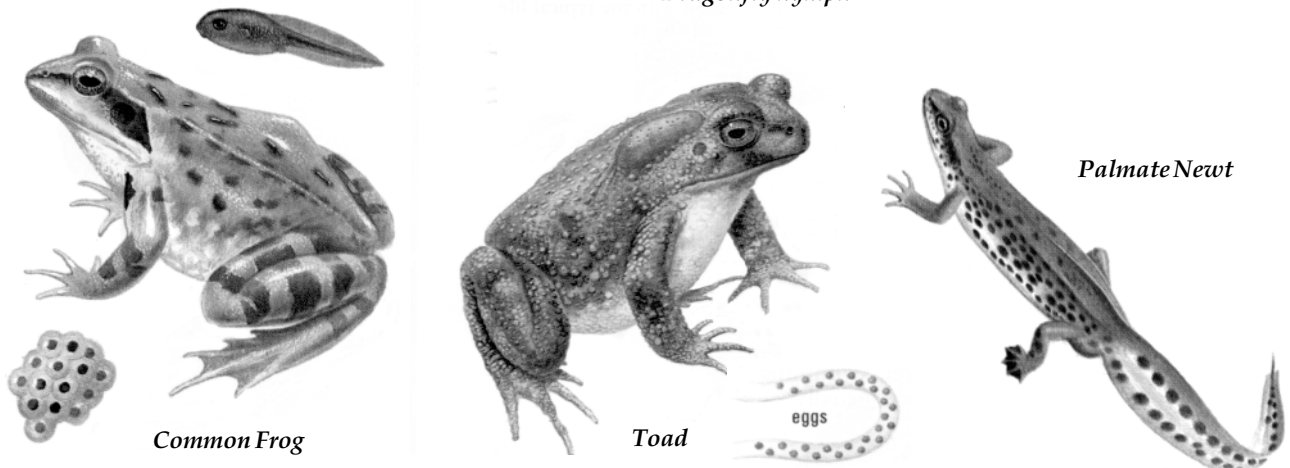
Please remember the conservation code. **Take only photographs - leave only footprints.** Please don't take anything out of the ponds, and don't put anything in including pond weed and supermarket trolleys!

If you want to see frog spawn develop into frogs many people in the village have fish ponds and will be only too willing to part with a clump of spawn. If you do decide to start a tadpole hatchery an old baby bath makes a good makeshift pond. Fill it with tap water and allow it to stand for a few days before putting in the frog spawn. When the tadpoles hatch feed them

very small amounts of cat food, too much will pollute the water. Put in a few large stones to provide some cover and don't place your bath where it will get too much sun. Cover the bath with netting to keep off the cats, magpies and other birds.



Dragonfly nymph



Common Frog

Toad

Palmate Newt