

A Breath of Fresh Air

AUTUMN

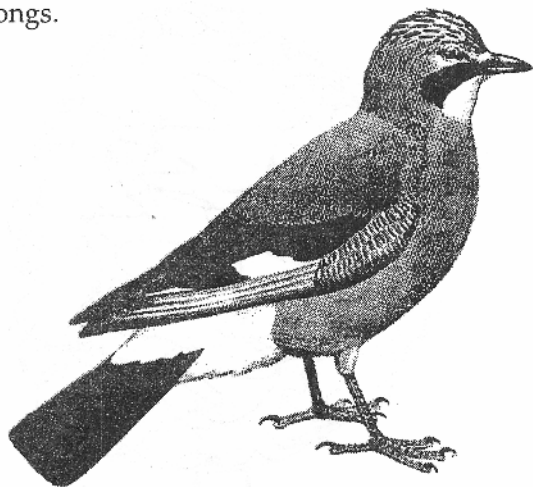
The newsletter for schools from the Horsell Common Preservation Society

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Autumn a busy time for Jays

The Jay is the most colourful member of the crow family. Acorns are an important source of food for the Jay. During the autumn one bird can collect and store as many as 5,000. You will often see them flying high over open areas at this time of year building up their larders. They will hide the acorns in holes and under leaves and can remember where they have been hidden and return months later to find them even under thick snow. Sometimes they miss a few and they are probably responsible for the stunted oak trees you can see on the heathland areas of the Common. Jays don't only eat acorns they also feed on other seeds and fruit, as well as insects (in particular, beetles and caterpillars).

The Jay is a very shy bird and is easily disturbed. It will quickly fly off with a rather jerky flight and a loud *skraak* sound. They are good mimics and will imitate other crows, tawny owls and even bird songs.



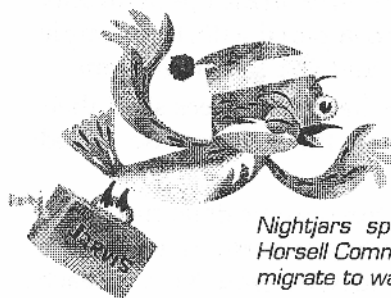
Like most crows it is quite large about 34cm (13.5 inches). It has a pinkish-fawn body, black moustache, white rump and a patch of vivid blue on its wing. They will sometimes come into gardens for food and will take vegetable scraps and peanuts from the bird table, mostly in the early morning before people are about.

Produced for schools adjacent to the Common by

Horsell Common Preservation Society

P. O. Box 53 Woking GU21 4YU

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*Jarvis the
Nightjar*

Nightjars spend the summer on Horsell Common in the autumn they migrate to warmer climates

Jarvis says: "Thank you for letting me stay on the Common for the summer. It's getting chilly now and I will be flying with the family I have raised all the way to Africa. I will be back in the spring. Please look after the heathland for me during the winter.

It will be a busy time for the people who work on the Common. They will be clearing some of the birch trees and scrub so that I will have more habitat in which to nest next year. Sometimes it is a good thing to cut down trees if it helps rare birds, like me, to survive."

Woking High School visit the Common

In July a group of Year 10 pupils and teachers for Woking High School carried out an environmental study on the Common. Many had used the Common for recreational purposes previously. Very few were aware of the size or the uniqueness of the habitat. Some were critical of the cutting down of trees. Their investigations centred on three areas (i) the Danewell Gutter (ii) the Sandpits and Pine trees and (iii) an area of deciduous woodland. It was a warm but overcast day. There were dragon and damsel flies around the Danewell Pond with Moorhen and Mallard on the water and fleeting visit by a Heron. There was evidence of deer in the mud around the pond. They heard Woodlarks and Green Woodpeckers and found all manner of creepy crawlies in the leaf litter beneath the trees. They were also surprised to see evidence of the 200 species of solitary wasps and bees in the banks of the sandpit.

At the end they went away with a better appreciation of why the Common is so special. They also learned that conservation can sometimes mean cutting down trees and leaving untidy piles of wood as homes for beetles. In a year or two some of these young people may even become members of the Horsell Common Preservation Society.

Looking at trees

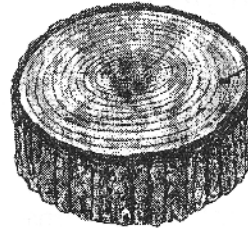
If you live in Surrey you cannot fail to notice trees. They are all around us. Yet did you know that despite Surrey having so many trees Britain is one of the least wooded countries in Europe, with only ten per cent tree cover compared with, for example 27 per cent in France, and 31 per cent in Spain.

Autumn is the time when many trees shed their leaves, trees that shed their leaves are called deciduous.

Keeping notes about trees can be great fun it also makes interesting reading at a later date. Choose four or five trees close to where you live. Visit each one during each season of the year and build up a record of how they change over a period of time. Now is a good time to start by collecting a sample leaf from each tree when the leaves fall.

Note down the trees height, measure round the trunk (the circumference), and the colour and texture of its bark. Record details of its shape, leaves, flowers and fruit (depending on the time of year), its location and the date.

You can make an impression of the bark of a tree by holding a piece of paper flat on the trunk and rubbing it with a soft pencil or wax crayon. Remember to write down the type of tree, the date and where you found it.



Count the Annual rings they will tell you how old the tree was when it was cut down.

The cambium layer the live part of the tree.

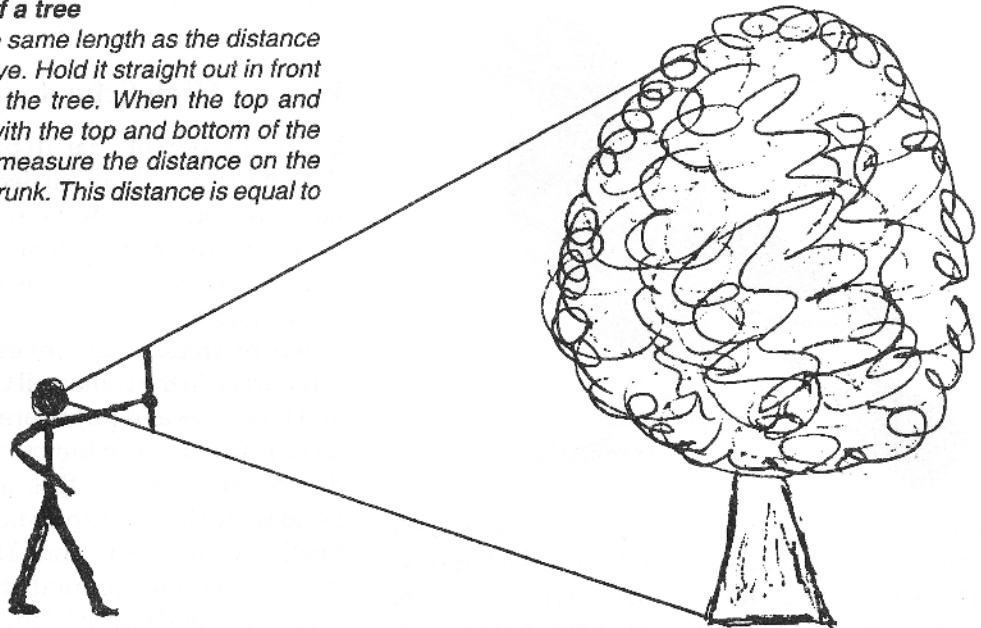
Only a small part of a tree is alive it is the section just beneath the bark called the cambium layer. At the beginning of each growing season the cambium produces new sapwood. At the end of the season the sapwood becomes part of the dead centre of the tree called the heartwood. This forms rings around the trunk that are called annual rings. Next time that you are on the Common count the annual rings on one of the tree stumps.

How to find the height of a tree

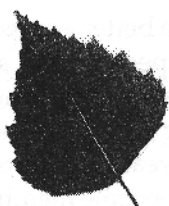
Cut a piece of wood to the same length as the distance between your hand and eye. Hold it straight out in front of you and walk towards the tree. When the top and bottom of the stick align with the top and bottom of the tree mark the spot. Now measure the distance on the ground to the base of the trunk. This distance is equal to the height of the tree.

Easy isn't it!

If you would like to learn more about trees a good book to start with is "Trees" ISBN 0-86318-812-5 one of the Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness Handbooks



Some of the leaves from trees that can be found on or around Horsell Common



Silver Birch



Holly



Oak



Sycamore