

A Breath of Fresh Air

WINTER

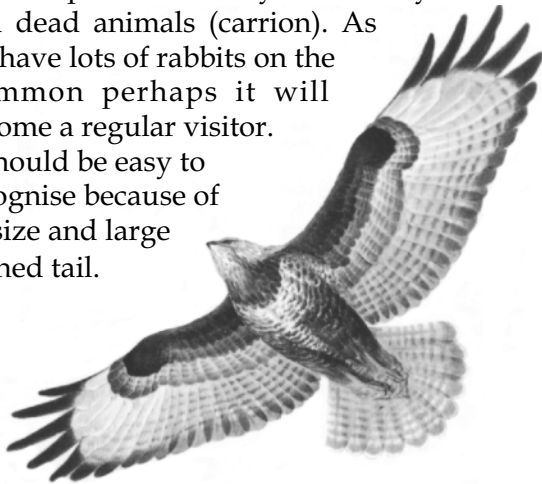
The newsletter for schools from the Horsell Common Preservation Society

Buzzard seen on Horsell Common

There have been several sightings of a buzzard on Horsell Common. A group of Surrey Wildlife Volunteers working clearing birch and pine seedlings watched it for five minutes soaring high in the air over Anthonys. During the whole period it never once flapped its wings it just circled effortlessly like a glider using the wind to gain height.

It is very unusual to see buzzards in Surrey they are normally found in the West Country. Buzzards are large birds of prey with a wing span of up to 130cm. They feed mainly on rabbits and dead animals (carrion). As we have lots of rabbits on the Common perhaps it will become a regular visitor.

It should be easy to recognise because of its size and large fanned tail.



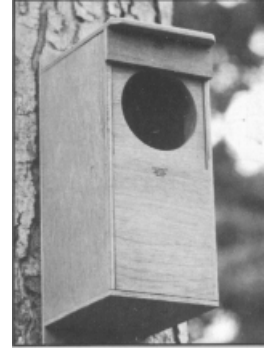
Gardening for life

Woking Borough Council have recently launched their Gardening for Life project. The idea is to get people to garden in a more environmental friendly way by cutting down on the use of pesticides and peat, encouraging them to reduce their use of water, and to compost kitchen and garden waste. The aim is also to encourage wildlife into gardens by creating suitable habitats. People taking part in the scheme have been asked to keep a record of 12 species that they may see in their garden, including birds, bats, beetles, snakes, butterflies and newts.

Horsell Common covers 830 acres. It is the largest land owner in the Borough and accounts for 80% of Woking open space. So with the largest garden in Woking we will be doing our bit to encourage wildlife by putting up bird and bat boxes at various locations during the winter months.



Bat box



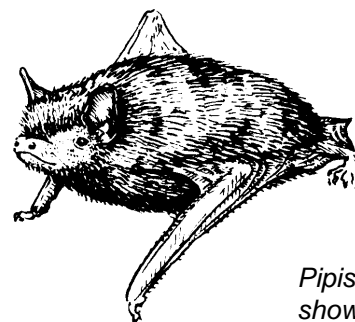
Little Owl box

Bats in the garden

Bats are mammals, the group of animals that are warm blooded have fur or hair on their bodies and give birth to live young. Like all mammals they suckle their young on milk and care for them until they become independent. There are nearly a thousand species of bats (almost a quarter of all mammals). They are found all over the world except for the Arctic and Antarctic. In Britain because we are an island and quite far north we have only fourteen species of bats.

Bats have received a bad press, in the past, and many people still think of them as blood sucking vampires. All our British bats are insect eaters, consuming such large numbers that in some countries they would be encouraged in order to keep down insect numbers.

Bats can best be described as flying mice. Their name *Chiroptera* means "hand wing" they have extra long fingers covered in skin which extends along their bodies and is attached to their back legs. They are creatures of the night and find their food and avoid objects by using echolocation. They emit high frequency sounds, which cannot be heard by the human ear, these



Pipistrelle bat
shown life size

sounds are reflected back off of objects to very specialised enlarged ears. This way bats are able to find prey in the dark. They literally see with their ears.

The Pipistrelle is our smallest and commonest bat. It is so small that it can easily fit inside a matchbox when its wings are folded.

When ever bats rest they allow their body temperature to fall. They hibernate in winter when food is scarce. Since 1981 it has been an offence to intentionally damage or destroy any place that a bat uses for shelter, including houses or outbuildings. It is also illegal to kill, disturb or handle a wild bat without a licence.

When I first moved into my house we had bats that spent the summer roosting in the space between the roofing felt and the tiles. They would start to wake up about half an hour before dusk and would return at about four in the morning

making a terrible noise. I put up a bat box hoping that they would move in so that we could get a peaceful nights rest but they still preferred the roof tiles. There has been a serious decline in bat numbers over the last few years. Sadly we have not had bats in our roof for over six years. Bats need two basic necessities to survive, plenty of food and choice of places to roost. I have since found out that only about one in ten bat boxes actually have bats in residence. We still regularly see bats just before dusk. They fly around the street lamp in the lane outside feeding on the insects that are attracted to the light, turn around the corner of the house and take in a couple of circuits of the pond and garden and are gone. A lady just down the road tells me that they are now resident in her loft. Perhaps they just thought that they would like a change. It would be very sad if we lost them altogether.



A Postcard from *Jarvis the Nightjar*

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

I am enjoying the winter here in Africa the weather is a lot warmer than it is in Horsell. My friend Darty the Dartford Warbler stays in England for the winter. If it is very cold some of the Dartford Warblers will not survive, so I hope that you don't have a long cold spell. I will see you again when I fly back in the spring.

Lots of work to be done

Winter is the time when most of the conservation work is carried out on the Common. During this period many of the animals will be hibernating so it will cause little disturbance to wildlife. Heathland is now a more endangered habit than tropical rain forest. In Surrey we still have some of the best lowland heath in Europe but unless regular work is undertaken it will soon be lost to the invading birch and pine.

Grasslands Common

Wildlife Enhancement Scheme

Commencing January 2000 contractors will be working to remove trees and scrub from approx. 6 hectares of Grasslands Common. The work, part of the heathland regeneration project, has the agreement and financial support of English Nature.

This site is recognised nationally as a SSSI (site of special scientific interest). It is also of European importance as it forms part of the Thames Basin Heaths potential Special Protection Area. It is ideal nesting habitat for three rare species of birds, Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark. Work will be completed by early March so that its does not interfere with the nesting season.

Broomhall Common (opposite Brewery Road Car Park). Work is planned to remove and thin much of the undergrowth to open up the area and allow the oaks and other broad leaved trees light and air to grow. It will also make the footpaths safer and less threatening. A band of scrub will be retained to act as a screen to the houses that back onto the area. We are receiving advice and help from the Forestry Commission with the project. Initially it will appear a little sparse but in few years we should have a mature woodland that will benefit both wildlife and the people of the town.

Volunteers from the Surrey Wildlife Trust have been working on the Sandpit Common improving the heathland by removing pine and birch seedlings that have encroached upon the heather. Young helpers are always welcome. You will need to wear old clothes and a stout pair of shoes or boots and some gardening gloves. If you are under 15 you will need to be accompanied by an adult. We meet in the sixcross roads car park at 10am and work until 1pm the dates are Sundays **13th February and 12th March**. The group leader is Bill Pugh tel. **715721**. *If the weather is bad please contact him before 9.30am on the day.*