



HCCPS Newsletter August 2023

Hilltop Villages Calendar: Once again, with your help, we hope to produce the 2024 local Calendar. Please send me any good photos of local interest, taken throughout the year. lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk. Photos taken on your devices are very welcome but they are not high enough quality for a full page. These need to be taken on a camera. Subject matter can be any local events; wildlife; scenes etc. Images should be sent to me by mid-September. Thank you very much in advance. It is always a real treat to see the quality and variety of your photographs and the proceeds from the calendar sales make a substantial contribution to the maintenance costs of the grassland, ponds, paths and rides – as well as keeping the subscription price very low!!

Coronation Trees: The five trees planted for King Charles' coronation are doing well thanks to constant watering when needed by Mark Hobbs and others. We have been very grateful to receive contributions for the purchase of the trees and the work associated with planting them from Hilltop Villages Good Neighbours Group who not only paid for commemorative books for the younger children who participated in the planting ceremony but have also paid for two of the trees. Our thanks too to the Cricket Club, Local History Group and Cholesbury Village Hall Committee who each made contributions. Please note there are still a few commemorative mugs left. If you would like to purchase one or more they are available from Chris Brown rayshill@gmail.com at £7 each.

Moths: After a disappointing time nothing earlier this year, due to the strange weather patterns, David had a bonanza of moths at the end of June. Over the last few years, he and Peter Bygate have recorded a total of 442 different moth species on the Commons (332 macros and 110 micros) and counting! David is currently busily trying to identify, from his photos, the latest micros to have arrived - not an easy task since some are no more than 0.5cm long! We may soon have to supply the promised bottle of Champagne when the grand total reaches 500!!

Pheromone Lures: David has recently purchased some pheromone lures to attract clearwing moths. These are small day flying macro moths without scales on their wings - they mimic wasps and other insects. None of these had previously been found in our area, and Peter, who has been nothing for over 60 years, had never ever seen one! However, within a short time, the lures attracted eleven clearwings of three different species: red-belted, orange-tailed, and red-tipped clearwings. Some arrived within minutes of hanging out the lures in the sunshine. Since then, David has found a fourth species – a yellow-legged clearwing. Unfortunately, an attempt to find some on the Commons recently didn't produce any. David plans further use of the lures on the Commons and would be happy to show how it works to anyone who is interested. The weather conditions need to be just right, but if it's going to happen, we will let you know via Grapevine.



Orange-tailed clearwing



Red-belted clearwing



Red-tipped clearwing



Yellow-legged clearwing

Date for your diary: David and Peter will be giving a presentation on Moths and Butterflies at 7.30pm at Cholesbury Village Hall in the evening of 28th September. David's talk will encompass butterfly and moth highlights on the Commons over the last few years and will cover the life cycle of butterflies and their amazing transformation from caterpillar to adult. Peter will concentrate on butterflies and the environments in which they are found overseas. Those of us who have attended any of their talks or moth release mornings know that these will be fascinating talks enhanced by their brilliant photos. Drinks and nibbles will be served.

Pheromone Traps: Recently, I have been inundated with clothes moths and am happy to tell you that pheromone traps have been very successful (Sorry David and Peter!) Like David's clearwings, the male clothes moths were attracted to the traps within minutes and I have now trapped well over 100. Hopefully, this will mean that the females can't breed and my jumpers will have fewer holes in future! You can also get pheromone traps for the box tree moth which is creating such devastation at the moment. I don't know how successful these traps are.

Glow-worms: It's now flight season and David was hoping to see if there are still males around and whether he could find any females this year. David wrote 'I spent well over an hour on the Commons between 10.30pm and midnight last night looking for female glow-worms. Sadly, again, nothing. It's peak season, and I tried all the most likely places that John Tyler suggested last year. So, I think we have to conclude either that there just isn't a breeding colony (yet!) or that they are very thin on the ground. I will try again before the end of the month, if this unhelpful unsettled weather gives me another decent night during the flight season.'

Polecats: According to Paul Brown in the Guardian recently, in the 17th and 18th centuries it was one of the duties of churchwardens to pay bounties to residents for exterminating vermin. He cites the list of animals and birds for which bounties had been paid from the annual accounts in Wing. These included buzzards, hedgehogs, kites, polecats, starlings, stoats and weasels. Most of these species survived over the years but polecats were nearly extinct in England by the early 20th century. However, Brown says that they have since spread widely from Wales where they had survived.

You may remember that Andrew Jordon found one, accidentally trapped in the foundations for a pond which he was creating in 2021 and which was released unharmed. At the time, several others reported that they had also sighted one. Has anyone seen one since? We have been unable to capture sightings on our trail camera. Polecats are now heavily protected and the churchwardens here will definitely not be paying out any bounties!



Polecat accidentally trapped



Polecat being released unharmed

Grass Cutting: Our thanks to James Jolliffe for his cutting of the paths and rides and for topping the bracken on the heather beds. The Commons are looking fantastic and are accessible for walkers and riders. In September James will be asked to cut the Manorial Waste – the land outside people’s houses on the south side of the main road. If for some reason you don’t want him to cut outside your property, please let us know.

Work for volunteers: Although the bulk of the work on the Commons is now done by machine there is still work which needs to be done by hand. Recently the DofE volunteers worked on removing the bracken from the heather and Janet and others have had a go on the Hawridge side of Horseblock. We very much appreciate their help and we would value **your** help on the heather beds too in pulling up bracken plants or cutting off the bracken with secateurs if it is too hard to pull it out. The waste can be thrown into the treed area nearby. **Please be aware that you need to wear heavy duty gardening gloves because the bracken stems can splinter and cause wounds.** Other jobs that **you** could undertake are clearing the ride of debris on Rays Hill. Just throw logs/branches off to the sides. This would make it easier for riders. Also, clearing the areas around the various benches from brambles and bracken would make it easier to sit comfortably.



Stick and Flick: We have deliberately not required dog walkers to pick up their dog poo on the Commons and really hate to see bushes ‘decorated’ with poo bags which the walker probably intends to remove on their return journey but forgets to do so. Please, as a courtesy to others use a stick to remove your dog mess from the paths and flick it off out of the way of other walkers.



Bee Orchid: Lizzie Every found a bee orchid on the Common just outside my hedge. Although there have been bee orchids recorded on the Commons in the past, I know of none recently though they are around locally elsewhere.

Have you spotted any?

Enjoy the diversity on the Commons!

Lindsay Griffin