

Friends of Croham Hurst Woods

We aim to support and promote the preservation of Croham Hurst Woods and its flora and fauna for the enjoyment of the community

Newsletter No 25 October 2013

Chair's Report (Councillor Maria Gatland)

This year I became even more aware of the variety of wildlife in Croham Hurst Woods. I regularly saw ducks and some species of geese on the top during the long cold winter and spring. An encounter with a large deer with antlers speeding towards me on the slopes newly cleared of holly was extraordinary. Deer are now a common sight and beautiful to see. I just wish they would develop a taste for holly rather than snacking on regenerated oak. Deer guards have been put in around newly generated trees and plants to protect the regeneration. We are so lucky to have all of this wildlife within sight of Croydon's skyline.

The removal of nearly two hectares of holly funded by the Friends and the Council has been spectacular in bringing light, warmth and regeneration to the Hurst. However regrowth and a profusion of holly seedlings in the hot summer is a problem. We need a coherent plan in place to deal with this before we fund another tranche of holly removal but I do accept removing the seed source will be an ongoing and important project.

Following complaints to me about how slippery the entrance was at Bankside I approached the Council to put in some steps. They were put in by The Conservation Volunteers and what a good job they have done. The Downland Trust too did a great job repairing the steps to the top of the Hurst originally built by them in 1995. Their volunteers also cut back the holly by the steps making it much more open. So if you are feeling fit using the steps feels safer although not easier!

Mitcham Common had a serious grass fire from a cigarette thrown from a car so we were lucky, even though some people carelessly lit fires, we did not have a serious fire on the Hurst this summer. Lighting fires is illegal and so is dumping rubbish. I requested the Council to remove a lot of dumped rubbish over the summer, a few showing no respect for our beautiful ancient woodland.

I was so pleased to hear that the Friends of Croham Hurst Woods have been nominated for the Queens Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest award for voluntary groups in the UK so just to be nominated is brilliant. Founded 11 years ago we have taken on many projects from helping the rare pale endangered St Johns Wort, to recreating the meadow shown on old maps and to removing invasive holly. None of this would have been possible without the hard work and support of so many of our members in many different ways.

The highlight of our year is the AGM, this year on November 20th. We are so lucky to have Dr Dan Allen as our speaker. He is a writer, editor, pet magazine columnist, otter expert, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and more! An entertaining speaker he will tell us about his latest book 'The Nature Magpie'.

Litter Pick (David Coups)

The 'Keep It Clean' campaign, launched by Croydon Council in December 2012, encourages local communities to look after their environment and dispose of waste responsibly. We devoted our March 2013 work day to collect litter from the Hurst. We had a good supply of volunteers including some younger members. The results were rewarding and amongst the items we collected were an old wooden bench, metal wheelbarrow, metal bucket, traffic cone, duvet! and around 15 sacks of miscellaneous litter. Our thanks to all who participated in this activity. It is likely to be repeated in the future!

Croham Hurst Holly Removal (Simon Levy, Forestry Adviser)

What is often not appreciated is the fact that all English Woodlands structure reflect some degree of human intervention. Consequently even ancient woodlands such as Croham Hurst are classified as *Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands*. Until the late 19th century, woodlands were vital for the resources they could offer from hazel to make fencing, wood fuel and timber for building. As a result woodlands were a mosaic of light and shade caused by trees being regularly felled and re-growing.

With management continuing for millennia, species associated with English Woodlands occupied the various habitats that resulted. Nightingales need the shrub stage of growth, violets the newly cut sunny forest floor. However, with new materials and fuels the need for active management ceased and woodlands became even aged and dark as the canopy closed. Whilst this brought some ecological benefits (for example for some invertebrates) many of our beloved woodland species are in decline and new trees find it hard to regenerate.

The dark blanket of holly on the Hurst is symptomatic of this decline as only very shade tolerant species can grow under a dense closed canopy. Whilst an important component of native woodlands, holly as a dark blanket over significant areas prevents the growth of new trees by stifling their light, reduces ground flora and like any monoculture limits the variety of habitats available.

Current work is removing areas of holly and gently opening the canopy and we have already seen regeneration and coppice growth of oak in the cleared area and whilst initially drastic, the work is aimed at stimulating life in this wonderful wood.

Message from the Treasurer (Ted Budden)

A big thank you to all who have subscribed to the Friends during the past year. The new financial year starts in November and so annual subscriptions are now due.

Newsletter Delivery

Many thanks to all the volunteers who deliver the newsletter. Inevitably we are always looking for more volunteers to help with this activity and in addition we need someone to take responsibility for organising the delivery of the newsletters twice a year and the AGM calling notice. If you are interested in helping with any of these activities please contact Councillor Maria Gatland on 020 8405 6718 or email Maria.Gatland@croydon.gov.uk

Annual General Meeting 2013

The AGM this year will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 20th November 2013 in Emmanuel Church Hall, Rockhampton Road. Please come along to what promises to be a very interesting evening.

Subscriptions If you wish to subscribe to the Friends of Croham Hurst Woods, please supply the following:

Name
Address
Tel. No.

Subscription enclosed (£10 min), cheques payable to **Friends of Croham Hurst Woods**
Send to Councillor Maria Gatland, Floral House, 238 Selsdon Road, South Croydon CR2 7AA
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Committee

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