



Registered Charity No. 1013975

# COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTER

The Society founded for '... the conservation, maintenance, preservation and peaceful enjoyment for the benefit of the public of the Commons by such means as the Society in consultation with the Conservators for the Commons thinks fit'.

Issue 44. Summer 2008

## DIARY

### TEA PARTY... TEA PARTY... TEA PARTY... TEA...

We have a fantastic new venue for our annual tea party – Mount Edgcombe Hotel and Restaurant! Right in the heart of Tunbridge Wells Common – what could be nicer.

**Wednesday, July 16th,  
3:00-5:00pm**

Please order your tickets - £6.00 per person with cheques made out to "Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons" from:

Mrs. Sylvia Luckhurst  
76A Grove Hill Road  
Tunbridge Wells  
TN1 1SP  
Telephone: 01892 529225

Please feel free to bring guests – the more the merrier!



## Warden's Report

It has been a bizarre spring weather-wise; again! It seemed in mid-February that we were to have another very early start with birds nesting and one of the largest masses of frogspawn that I have ever seen in Fir Tree Pond. However, the subsequent cold wet period seemed to kill most of it and we now have very few tadpoles in either Fir Tree or Cabbage Stalk Lane Ponds. Brighton Lake, which saw later spawning seems to be doing well however and all the ponds now contain good numbers of newts. Incidentally, I had a report of people removing newts from the Marlpit Pond on Rusthall Common in the last few weeks. This pond contains a breeding population of Great Crested Newts, these are quite rare now and are heavily protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, in fact you need a special licence even to handle them. Please leave them undisturbed in their pond, as well as reducing our breeding stock, you are leaving yourself open to a substantial fine and a criminal record.

The cold, wet weather has also given us a few problems with the grass-cutting. We have been forced into quite long gaps between cuts, which always leaves it looking very scruffy. However, we are getting it under control now and the standard should improve over the rest of the season.

Now that the weather is improving, we can get on with some of the tasks scheduled for this period. In the next few weeks we will commence work

at Brighton Lake to restore the path that runs around the pond. Once that is finished we can prepare the recently cleared area behind the pond and seed it as we have just done to the area adjacent to Fir Tree car park. Once that is completed, we will move on to repairing and re-surfacing the footpaths in front of the Forum and along the edge of the Lower Cricket Pitch and building a new path from the driveway to St. Paul's Church towards Happy Valley to link with the existing path. This area was in an awful state this winter, almost unusable at times. Thanks are due to the Freehold Tenants for financing all this path work and to Targetfollow for financing the stump grinding at Brighton Lake. The keener eyed among you will also have noticed the restoration of a number of

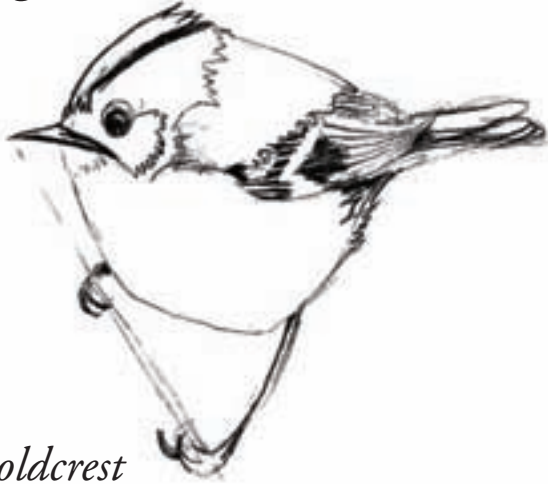
benches across the Commons and the removal of several old concrete benches. This has been partly financed by the Friends, so a thank you for that as well.

Finally, the new pavilion is complete at Linden Park Club and it looks great; or it will do when the builder clears the last of his rubbish, the grass grows around it and he repairs the path at the back. It is quite a substantial building now and is very nice inside. They have already suffered their first graffiti attack though and so we are all watching with trepidation. So far, the problems of last year in the area have not occurred in any significant degree but the summer is not really underway yet. Keep your fingers crossed!

*Steve Budden*



# Birding Journal



## No. 1: Goldcrest

Latin Name: *Regulus Regulus*

Size: Tiny - Four to the Ounce

Song: High-Pitched See See See

Even smaller than the diminutive wren, the cute-as-a-button Goldcrest has been top of my “to see” wishlist ever since I developed an interest in birds. I don’t know whether or not it’s because my birding eyes are becoming more practised, but all of a sudden this year I’ve gone from not seeing any at all to seeing them everywhere, and I just can’t get enough of them. Perhaps he’s just decided to settle here full time, and who can blame him. Crossing the North Sea from Northern Europe every winter must take it out of the little chap, after all.

The first time I saw one, I wondered to myself, is it an insect? Is it a fledgling? That was, until I spied that unmistakable yellow crest. If you’re walking past a conifer, keep an eye out for them as they love flitting tirelessly around the pine cones like little hummingbirds. Unlike its fellow members of the Warbler family, you will most likely see him before you hear him; the goldcrest never sings when he’s active, which seems to be all the time! Also, he’s also got quite a thin, reedy voice, so more likely than not he’ll be drowned out by

a nearby piercing robin, or a brash blackbird.

The Goldcrest holds not only the honour of being our cutest bird, but also is in contention of constructing the most beautiful nest, made of moss and spider webs, and finished off with a layer of feathers. Of course, it’s a compact and bijou home, as the eggs it has to hold are only the size of a pea.

If, like me, you lack the patience and skill to be a decent twitcher, but you just quite like looking at birds, then the Goldcrest is a godsend. They don’t seem to be too fazed by human presence, so you can stand pretty close to them, “awwwing” to your heart’s content, and they’ll quite boldly put on a show for you without flying away. Just don’t expect them to sit still for you! How on earth anyone has managed to get one to sit still for long enough to take a decent picture, I do not know. Now we all have to sit and pray that his cousin the Firecrest decides to come and set up home here, too! Watch this space.

*Bettina Cassidy*

# Flora & Fauna

## Heathland Flower

“In April and May the golden bloom of the furze, which is unusually profuse in this spot, delights the eye, and its rich perfume scents the breeze”. Victorian and Edwardian guidebooks frequently praise the beauties of the Commons’ heathland vegetation, dominated by the gold of the gorse and the purple of the heather. Subsequently, these characteristic heathland flowers became much less widespread, shaded out by encroaching woodland, but enough has survived to benefit from the improved management of the last twenty years.

By the 1980s the only significant patch of heather to remain on Tunbridge Wells Common was the one between Wellington Rocks and Victoria Grove, but several others can now be seen including a large area beside the Race Course. Three species of heather grow in the High Weald, and all of them can be found on the Commons. The dominant species is the Common Heather or Ling, with relatively small flowers, of which a white variety also occurs. Much less common are the deep purple Bell Heather, with larger flowers, and the Cross-leaved Heath, whose flowers are similarly bell-shaped but paler. Heathers have their own special associated insects, including two mining bees – *Andrena fuscipes* and *Colletes succinctus* – which gather pollen for their young exclusively from these flowers and thus fly only in late summer when they are in bloom. An attractive day-flying moth, the Beautiful Yellow Underwing, has well-camouflaged caterpillars

which feed on heather foliage.

Gorse occurs on the Commons in two varieties. The vast majority is the larger Common Gorse, which flowers chiefly in the spring, when it is very attractive to early-flying insects such as bumblebees. In every month of the year there is always some Common Gorse in flower, providing pollen even in December and January for those bumblebees that nowadays maintain their colonies all through the winter. In the heathland area by the Race Course there are some plants of the less common Dwarf Gorse. These flower in late summer, and at that time of year stand out conspicuously among the surrounding Common Gorse bushes whose flowers have mostly turned to seed. A related plant also found on the Commons is Broom. The flowers are very similar to those of gorse, but on closer inspection a Broom bush will be seen to lack spines.

*Ian Beavis*



# Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

*Mount Edgumbe (Venue for our Midsummer Tea Party)*

Mount Edgumbe takes its name from Emma, Countess of Mount Edgumbe, who spent the summers of 1795-7 in Tunbridge Wells. The only daughter of Dr Gilbert, Archbishop of York, Emma married George Edgumbe in 1761, the year in which he succeeded to the title of Lord Edgumbe. Subsequently, he advanced to the rank of Admiral and was created Earl of Mount Edgumbe. The Mount Edgumbe in Cornwall, the ancestral seat of the Edgumbe family, overlooks Plymouth Sound,

and George had Command-in-Chief at Plymouth during the late 1760s.

A more direct sea-faring connection with Tunbridge Wells' Mount Edgumbe, however, is with Rear Admiral Sir William Edward Parry, the Arctic explorer, who stayed at Mount Edgumbe House in 1839. Parry commanded three expeditions in search of the North-West Passage between 1819 and 1825. Also, in 1827, he made a brave attempt to reach the North Pole, travelling with sledge-boats over the ice. All a

far cry from Tunbridge Wells Common. By the time he was staying at Mount Edgumbe, Parry was Controller of the Steam Department of the Navy.

The origins of the little group of buildings at Mount Edgumbe, comprising Mount Edgumbe House, Mount Edgumbe Cottage and Ephraim Lodge, seem to predate Lady Edgumbe's visits to Tunbridge Wells by some time. Bowra's map of 1738 shows three buildings in that position, but without a name marked. Today,

they present a picturesque ensemble, with tile-hanging and a pretty gothic facade, surmounted by a crow-stepped gable.

Mount Edgumbe Cottage has associations with the poet and author Horace Smith, best known for "Rejected Addresses", written jointly with his brother James in 1812, and for novels, including "Brambletye House", produced in 1826.

*Philip Whitbourn*



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## From the Chairman

Well, here I am still as your chairman since no-one was willing to take up the post at the AGM.

The good news, however, is that we do have a new editor of the newsletter! Christopher

Cassidy has accepted the challenge ably assisted by Bettina Cassidy, his wife.

This will probably be the last edition in this format as we would like to introduce colour, more illustrations and

make it more attractive to a wider audience. We welcome them both and look forward to future editions.

We also have a new venue for the annual tea party! I hope that you will support it

as you have done in the past. With good luck and sunshine on the day, it should be a memorable occasion. I look forward to seeing you there.

*Jennifer Blackburn*

# Editorial

Welcome to the Summer issue of Common Ground. Firstly let me introduce myself. My name is Christopher, my wife and I have been Friends for only about a year but we have been huge fans of the Common since we first moved to Royal Tunbridge Wells in 2004. I was therefore delighted when I was approached by our Chairman, Jenny Blackburn, to edit the Common Ground

Newsletter after George Lawson retired last issue. I'm sure, like me, you'll want to thank George for all his great work - we have certainly really enjoyed reading past issues.

We love to spend quiet afternoons walking the myriad of paths with our binoculars looking for wildlife and admiring the flora and fauna. It's also a great place for me to find a quiet hour walking, just me

and my camera, for some nice hobby time.

I hope you will find the introduction of a couple of new writers and columns exciting and will enjoy reading them. I hope this in turn will encourage you to put pen to paper or finger to keyboard to let me know what you think of the latest issue and if there is anything you'd perhaps like to see in the next issue? I'd really love to hear from you

and would like to request that you send in any of your experiences, stories or even pictures about the Commons that you may have and we'll look to include them in the next issue. Send your e-mails to [common@ankehuber.com](mailto:common@ankehuber.com).

Oh, and don't forget to share your issue with friends and family and encourage them to become Friends too.

*Christopher Cassidy*

## Beautiful Things

*From Clare Grant, author of Three Beautiful Things (threebeautifulthings.blogspot.com)*

“Short cuts make long delays” warned Pippin in Lord of the Rings when offered the cross country option. But surely a cut across the Common shortens my travels around Tunbridge Wells.

Dropping down off Mount Ephraim and walking through the woods to the Pantiles is quicker than going down Church Road and along London Road...

isn't it? So why are my friends looking at their watches and wondering where I am?

Could it be that I didn't have time to watch swifts over the lime trees and then to linger at the top of road with the cherry blossom? Was slowing right down to sneak up on a rabbit a mistake? Perhaps, when I heard a jay screeching, I shouldn't have stopped to

look for blue feathers.

In any case, I'm late, and an explanation involving the smell of stinging nettles; sun light catching on gnats in the woods; a path lined with buttercups and people practising fly fishing on the Lower Cricket Ground will probably not do.

Instead, I make vague claims about waiting for the washing machine to

finish – but perhaps next time, I'll be brave enough to look my friends in the eye and tell the truth.

*Clare Grant*

### Officer & Committee Membership 2007-2008

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