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Newsletter for September 2020

Coronavirus update

Just when we thought we were getting back to some sort of normal, the goalposts have changed again. New restrictions came into effect on 14th September limiting all gatherings, both indoors and out, to six people. This will of course have a big impact on our work parties, but we are keen to keep them going if we can. Please see below for what we propose for now. Alternative suggestions would of course be welcome!

The next work party will be on Saturday 19th September. On this occasion we shall limit participation to six people, but we will keep this under review.

The six person limit will include the Coordinator and John Creasey, our Greensand Trust Ranger. If you would like to be one of the remaining four volunteers, please contact Bob Wilkin, this month's coordinator, at bob@afrosmosia.com or Mobile: 07796 446031. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. If we can't fit you in on this occasion, then we would be glad to offer you priority for a subsequent work party. We are seeking further guidance to see if it may be possible to safely and legally increase numbers for future work parties.

Our work plans will also need to be reviewed in the light of these new restrictions on numbers. Most probably we will be working on the top boundary of East and Middle Commons, clearing along the base of the hedgerow and mowing around the trees and benches, as well as completing work on West Common from last month's work party.

Please note that we are still adhering to strict health guidelines, as follows:

- Please bring your own gloves, water bottle and packed lunch, plus sun cream, a few paper towels and a bin bag. Regrettably, we will not be able to provide hot drinks until restrictions on numbers are lifted.
- Access to toilets has been agreed with Gary at the Red Lion from noon. Follow signs for entry and exit. Use hand sanitiser before entering and on exit.
- FOSC has face masks available for any jobs requiring closer distancing than 2 meters. We also have stock of alcohol based hand sanitisers.
- All volunteers should complete and sign a health declaration on the day.

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The August work party

Thank you to all who turned out for this work party - our first since January! They licked West Common into shape after months of unchecked growth and would have done more had heavy rain not stopped play mid-morning. I'm told that Robin Cox soldiered on in the rain to clear the overgrown edges around East Common car park. Gold stars all round, and an extra one for Robin!



Clearing along the bridleway

AGM postponed Due to Covid, we have regrettably had to halt our preparations for our AGM in October. It would have included a fascinating talk from Dominique Rhoades on her project surveying giraffe populations in Chad. That's a bit of a change from her conservation work back in UK, which includes helping to monitor our dormice on the Common! Instead, we are planning to deal with the more basic AGM business via Zoom videolink. This will be sometime in November, date and details to be confirmed.

Green Flag Award (2020 – 2021) Just a reminder that the announcement of all awards will be made in October 2020. Meanwhile, we are to be 'Mystery shopped' by one of the Green Flag Inspectors as full formal inspections are not made every year. His or her visit will happen sometime during the next two to three months, so please help keep the Common looking nice by picking up any litter and be kind to strangers who may appear 'lost'!

Haycut The grasslands on East and Middle Commons, plus the area in front of the School House on West Common, will be mowed any time soon.

What's on in our area

Chiltern Society - Heritage Festival, 19th September - 4th October 2020

They have a great and varied programme lined up. Click on this link to see what's on offer <https://chilternsociety.org.uk/heritage-festival/> You will need to contact them directly to see which events are still going ahead in the light of the latest restrictions.

Chilterns Champions Conference - 9.30 – 4pm on October 24th 2020

This is a free on-line event organised by the Chilterns AONB, promoting the cause of Citizen Science. Keynote speaker Chris Packham kicks off the day with 'Why Citizen Science Matters.' Later sessions will involve experts and volunteers from across the Chilterns talking about how anyone and everyone can get involved in a whole variety of areas, covering wildlife monitoring, chalk stream research, uncovering our ancient heritage and more. In the session titled '**Inspiring the next generation**' A panel of young volunteers will share why Citizen Science matters to them and how we inspire a new generation. Register for your free place [here!](#)

Nature Notes

Betony Following our report of a first sighting of this flower on Middle Common in July, Pat Baker, who is the Plant Recorder for this area, confirms that it is indeed Betony, which now bears the official name of *Betonica officinalis* (It was *Stachys officinalis* until recently.) She has very kindly given us this fascinating account:



“Betony belongs to the Dead-nettle family, nowadays called Lamiaceae - plants which are often aromatic and have square stems such as Mint, Thyme, Rosemary. Lamiaceae on the Common include Ground Ivy, Self-heal, White Dead-nettle and the only other one in the genus *Stachys* here, Hedge Woundwort. The strong smells of these plants are due to chemicals in them which make them unpalatable to grazing animals. Betony was certainly believed to have been of medicinal value in the past. The specific name "officinalis" means "sold in shops of the apothecaries, officinal medicines". Richard Mabey in "Flora Britannica" says it was one of the great all-heals of medieval herbalists. Mrs Levy's Herbal says it's a panacea which can be used for headaches.

In "Flora of Bedfordshire ", (C R Boon and A R Outen, Beds Natural History Society, 2011) it's described as an occasional perennial herb which occurs in grassland and woodland rides and on heaths, preferring acidic soils, and is declining in frequency, mainly due to habitat loss. The map shows it mostly on the Greensand Ridge across central Bedfordshire. There is a record of it in John Dony's 1976 "Bedfordshire Plant Atlas" in the 2 km square in which the Common is situated, but this new record will be the first one located to the Common itself, I believe. There seems to be a streak of slightly acidic soil across the Common where the Heath Bedstraw etc can grow. The plant is also in Studham Churchyard, where I first noted it on 11th July 2006, and in Whipsnade Churchyard, but no records north from there up to the Greensand Ridge. It is sold in wildflower mixes and some occurrences arise from that.”

And finally, thanks to Geoff Shute for this magnificent sunset picture taken earlier this month

