

A closer look at the Heath's Hedgerows Tuesday 10 May, 1.30pm at West Lodge

In preparation for the OPAL Biodiversity survey focusing on Britain's Hedgerows, Heath Ecologist Dr Meg Game has kindly agreed to meet with volunteers to help them get to grips with the survey methods.

Hampstead Heath is a great place to survey hedges. From the Heath Extension to Parliament Hill, from Kenwood to the Vale of Health, the Heath is criss-crossed by ancient boundary lines, scrubby fence lines, and neatly coppiced hedges.

This ongoing survey is a great opportunity to build up a picture of hedgerow habitats on the Heath, as well as contributing valuable data to a national survey.

For more information about the OPAL Biodiversity Survey and the other OPAL surveys that Heath Hands has been involved with visit www.opalexplornature.org

Tick the box on the yellow form to book your place.

A call for Trustees

Heath Hands, as a **registered charity**, has a constitution and is run by a Board of Trustees. The charitable aims of Heath Hands are set out in the constitution. Essentially they are the conservation, protection, and improvement of the Heath including environmental education. The Board of Trustees consists of six people **elected** at the annual general meeting by the members (the volunteers) and there are five **non-elected** trustees who represent our key founders and sponsors.

The elected members are two volunteer representatives (Charlotte Harkin and David Lowe) and four office bearers: the secretary (Anne Collins), treasurer (Sheila Macleod), vice chair (David Mackenzie) and chairman (Jamie Jenkins). We hold our posts for one year. We may be re-elected but can hold office for no more than three years in succession. Charlotte and Anne will have served three consecutive terms come October.

The non-elected Trustees are the Chairman of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee (Michael Welbank), the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath (Simon Lee), and representatives of Kenwood (Paul Griffiths), the Vale of Heath Society (Ian Harrison) and the Heath and Hampstead Society (Peter Tausig).

The main task of the Board of Trustees is to see that Heath Hands is run efficiently and well and that it achieves its charitable aims. The Trustees discuss the management of the volunteer work programme, and explore partnerships and opportunities with other organisations.

We would very much welcome interest from Heath Hands members willing to spend some time helping with this essential aspect of Heath Hands volunteer work. Please come and help us look after Heath Hands' future!

by chairman Jamie Jenkins

C A P T I O N C O M P E T I T I O N



Can you think of a suitable caption for this evocative photo taken by volunteer Michael Shaw?

Entries to Loretta at West Lodge. The best will be printed in the next edition of Hands Update.

Do you have an interest in butterflies or natural history, and are you confident interacting with the general public?

We are looking for **volunteers** for the Butterfly House at Golders Hill Park on Hampstead Heath.

Tasks include monitoring the welfare of the butterflies, maintaining the Butterfly House environment, welcoming visitors and helping them to understand conservation issues surrounding butterflies and their habitats in the wild.

The Butterfly House is open everyday between April and October from 2pm to 4pm

Contact 020 8458 9102 for more information or download an application form online at www.heath-hands.org.uk/volunteer



Hands update

Newsletter of the volunteers on Hampstead Heath

Summer's in the air...

Do you enjoy fetes, fairs, local heritage and community gatherings? Can you think of ways to promote and explain our activities to a wider audience? Do you have ideas that would draw in a crowd?

Join the Heath Hands Summer Events team

This year Heath Hands will be investing in a more eye-catching display stand to take around to summer outdoor events. We want to improve the way we let the public know about Heath Hands' work and volunteering on the Heath. Events tend to take place at weekends and evenings like the Green Fair, Kenwood concerts and Heath Heritage days. If you'd like to get involved in spreading the Heath Hands word, let us know!

Dates for your volunteer diary

- **Tuesday 10 May:** Join Heath ecologist Dr Meg Game taking a look at the **Heath's Hedgerows** (see page 4).
- **Wednesday 1 June:** Special volunteer visit to **Middle Temple Gardens** near Fleet Street (see right).
- **Monday 6 June:** Litter pickers at the ready! We're looking for 50 volunteers to help at the **Hampstead Heath Litter Blitz**.
- **Saturday 18 June:** Help is needed to staff our Heath Hands stall at the Highgate **Fair in the Square**.
- **Throughout the summer** volunteers are needed for the **Butterfly House** in Golders Hill Park (see page 4).

There are more details of these and other events for volunteers on your yellow booking form.

Praise indeed



Appreciation of our efforts: Volunteers Anne Collins, Charlotte Harkin and Amanda Bain met Diane David and the power walking girls at Kenwood in March.

If you've ever wondered whether the work you do as a volunteer gets noticed by the public, then we can tell you ... Yes, it does! In fact, a group who meet regularly to walk around the Heath and Kenwood, wanted to show their appreciation of the volunteers' hard work by generously donating £150 to Heath Hands. Walk leader Diane David tells us about their group, and why they felt Heath Hands' contribution to the upkeep of the Heath was so important.

"We are a group of 'girls' who like to meet once a week for a spot of power walking over

Hampstead Heath and Kenwood for exercise and good health. Everyone loves the two hours we spend in the fresh air and we always say how fortunate we are to have our health and strength to walk for 5-6 miles, in such stunning surroundings. On that basis, whilst there is no charge for the activity, we decided that we should each put some money into the pot every week, and at the end of the year we would agree which charity would benefit from our savings.

This year we managed to collect £150 and the decision to give the money to Heath Hands

once again was unanimous. We all get so much out of the Heath because of all your efforts to maintain the area so beautifully. We know you will be able to put the money to good use."

Chairman Jamie Jenkins and volunteers met with the group for a spring photo at the Farm Cottages lawn. The group meets every Monday at 9:30 by the Kenwood car park.

Thank you to the girls for their generous donation, and thank you to the volunteers whose work makes such a difference.

BOOK NOW

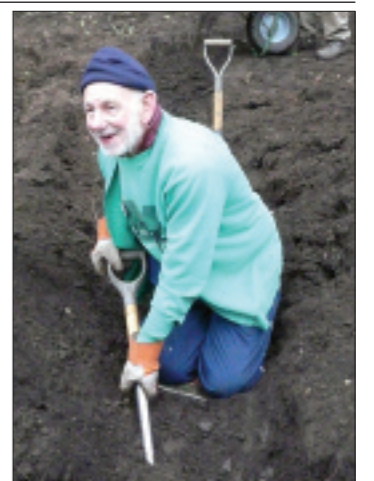
Volunteer tour of Middle Temple Gardens

Led by Head Gardener Kate Jenrick
Wednesday 1 June 10:30am

Kate has kindly offered to take up to 30 Heath Hands volunteers on a guided tour of the historic and beautiful gardens at Middle Temple. Places are limited so please return your yellow booking forms promptly.

Information at your fingertips

Check out Heath Hands' updated website which includes a new section featuring reports by City of London ecologists. Get the latest information on Heath biodiversity and wildlife including amphibians, reptiles, water quality and historic hedgerows.
www.heath-hands.org.uk



What on 'earth' is Michael Shaw up to? Find out on page 3.



A walk through grass snake country?

Well that's what a group of five volunteers were hoping for when they met up with Heath Ecologist Adrian Brooker on a less than sunny afternoon in March.

Our intrepid group met to find out how they can help contribute to an ongoing survey of reptiles on Hampstead Heath.

The initial survey was carried out by the London, Essex and Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Trust between summer 2008 and spring 2009, and combined direct observation by their



Grass snakes are 'amphibian specialists' and therefore rely on access to ponds, such as the Bird Sanctuary Pond shown above, to feed.

experienced field herpetologists with the placement of artificial refugia at several reptile "hot spots" on the Heath. The grass snake, *Natrix natrix helvetica*, was the only native species of reptile found, although the presence of the slowworm *Anguis fragilis* was not ruled out.

Grass snakes were sighted all over the Heath, particularly around the Cohen's Field and Viaduct areas, but the main focus seemed to be in the fenced-off areas which are subject to less disturbance. To continue the survey, the volunteer's task will be to walk pre-set routes (or transects) through these areas checking underneath strategically placed refugia for reptiles and other wildlife. Artificial refugia are bitumen sheets placed in transitional areas of scrub to open grassland that heat up more quickly than the surrounding area. Reptiles cannot regulate their own body temperature and so need to bask

in the sun to warm up, and must retreat to dense shade to cool down. They take advantage of the refugia as a good safe place to warm up.

Of the native British reptiles volunteers are only likely to find grass snakes, although they will almost certainly find families of voles and other wildlife under the refugia too. The wildlife is not disturbed by lifting the refugia, and snakes are known to return to a spot regularly despite having been discovered there on previous occasions. Everything of interest will be logged.

Our volunteer surveyors will set out again in early May learning the routes and getting to grips with the recording forms. Watch this space!

Volunteers have already accompanied Adrian on his frog and toad spawn monitoring walks, and we hope to look at newt and crayfish monitoring in the next few weeks.



Volunteer Robert Spigel investigates one of the refugia.

The weather throughout was distinctly drizzly, and at one point, downright rainy, so unfortunately we didn't encounter any grass snakes this time round... but volunteers will be back to see what they can find over the summer months.

Grass snake facts *Natrix natrix helvetica*

- Adults range in size from 20cm to one metre. Females tend to be larger than males, and can reach 120cm.
- Snakes are oviparous (egg laying). Batches of up to 40 eggs are laid in June or July amongst heaps of rotting vegetation.
- Hatchlings emerge in Autumn and are only 18cm in length.

Double digging

Yes that's what Michael Shaw's up to. It's jolly hard work – but that doesn't put off our hearty volunteers. Kenwood Gardener **Dave Gibbons** explains what all the huffing and puffing was about.



With labour intensive tasks such as double digging, the benefit of having a group of volunteers is immediately evident. Volunteers were able to start digging several trenches at once, meaning the large border could be thoroughly worked in record time.

Over the years to come millions of visitors to Kenwood will wander through the Flower Garden and gaze upon the display of Rhododendrons and other flowering shrubs in the area. While many may appreciate the beauty, few will be aware of the back breaking work carried out recently by dedicated Heath Hands volunteers as they improved the soil for replanting

as part of the long term Landscape Restoration Project.

Over several sessions in February, volunteers helped clear away old and tired shrubs, painstakingly grubbing out the roots to help prepare the ground for the new planting. With an overgrown Cherry Laurel which had dominated the planting gone, and the area now cleared, this was a real



Volunteers Mazal Cohen, Michael Shaw and Janet Ford break up and aerate the subsoil to improve its condition.

opportunity to get in and improve the soil which had not been worked for nearly half a century. This is where the hard work really began as volunteers gamely engaged in the age old practice of double digging. Some were new to it; for others it brought back memories of the work involved in developing the Kitchen Garden border a few years back. Either way,

the process was simple enough and with a dozen or more enthusiastic volunteers, keen to work out in the green gym, it made a huge task manageable.

With such a large group they divided across the area at 3 or 4 starting points instead of the normal one. Successive trenches were dug, a 'spit' (depth of a spade's blade) first, removing this layer of topsoil before breaking up the subsoil beneath to a further spit and then forking in several barrow loads of compost in to the bottom layer. Volunteers worked systematically across their area using the topsoil from one trench to backfill the previous one. All the time they were careful not to mix topsoil with subsoil.

The double digging was important to open up the ground, aerating the soil to a good depth, improving both drainage and water holding capacity, increasing the bacterial activity in the ground and ultimately leading to increased fertility and healthy plant growth.

With the soil improved, the Kenwood gardeners were able to plant a selection of flowering shrubs including Rhododendron, Hydrangea and Eucryphia. The plants chosen are ones that may have been available to the gardeners at Kenwood in the late 18th and early 19th century; the period that English Heritage is committed to restoring parts of the landscape to.

Volunteers returned at another session to apply a deep mulch around the newly planted shrubs to give them the best start; holding in the soil moisture and limiting the growth of weeds and resultant competition for water and nutrients.

This was a project that truly tested the resolve of the volunteers. It is true that anyone who has not double dug cannot fully understand how hard this work is. English Heritage and visitors to Kenwood all owe a huge debt of gratitude to the dedicated volunteers who turned up and got stuck in to this back-breaking work. Some even seemed to enjoy it!

Heath Hands presents... A Volunteers' perspective

Story by Jamie Jenkins and David Mackenzie

The London Gardens Network is an informal network of gardeners and horticulturalists. Their seminar this year was on the theme of working with volunteers. At Kenwood Head Gardener Paul Jackson's suggestion, Heath Hands had been invited to present the volunteers' perspective. Other speakers addressed some of the delights, and possible pitfalls, of working with volunteers.

David Mackenzie worked with Loretta to develop a presentation outlining the history of Heath Hands, as well as some of our current projects and conservation work such as maintaining delicate habitats, undertaking biodiversity surveys, and preserving the Saxon ditch. The presentation opened with some wonderful views of the Heath and Kenwood followed by some pictures of us hard at work!

The event took place at Roots and Shoots in South London, an inspiring community garden and wildlife education centre, as well as a project running a very successful youth skills-training programme. It is well worth visiting, a peaceful breathing space just off the Kennington Road in Lambeth. David and I met many people there from gardens in London and Sussex. We hope to be able to arrange some guided visits for Heath Hands members to other gardens and volunteer projects. We may also host visits from other volunteers to the Heath and Kenwood. Willing ambassadors may be needed please.

The event was attended by sixty people in total including a keynote address by Wesley Kerr, London director of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Jamie and I came to an agreement about this: I would give the presentation while Jamie answered the tricky questions and modelled the Heath Hands sweatshirt (more on this later).

I suppose it went quite well really, though taking off my shirt halfway through was probably a mistake. The clatter of chairs and the screams as people made for the exits was a clue here. But they calmed down when I explained that the shirt removal was NOT designed to expose my magnificent torso, muscles honed to perfection by years of double-digging and mulch-spreading. No, it was merely to reveal my Heath Hands t-shirt. Then Jamie stood up to display the sweatshirt. He spread his arms and gave us a twirl. Knocked out two people in the row behind him but, hey, that's showbiz.

Was I nervous? No, no, no. Yes, of course I was nervous. But I rehearsed what I was going to say and then I probably said it. For I have little recollection of the presentation itself. But someone did come up to me afterwards to say they really enjoyed it, especially the story about the blue fox. 'Ah, the blue fox,' I said. 'Of course, yes.'

I have no idea what she was talking about.



Could you be a Heath Hands Ambassador?

