

# The Esher Commons



## West End

includes a network of ponds and drainage ditches, providing a superb environment for species that depend on wetland habitats. Dragonflies and Damselflies can be seen

during the summer months hunting for prey over the open water and through the woodland glades. Water scorpions, diving beetles and freshwater shrimp all thrive.

## Ledges (West End)

There is an area of mature woodland, much of which is ancient, above the River Mole at the Ledges. Springtime provides an impressive display of wildflowers including bluebells, ransoms or 'wild garlic' and in the wetter areas, marsh marigolds.

During the summer months Himalayan Balsam flourishes adjacent to watercourses, as it does throughout Britain. Initially a garden escape in the mid 19th century, this highly invasive plant is controlled by various management techniques to limit its distribution.



## Fairmile Common

Across the Esher Commons, the scattered remnants of the open heath which survive are dominated by ling heather where the soil is dry. This is often mixed with bell heather, bracken and various grasses supporting a range of characteristic heathland insects. In the lower, wetter areas the heathland is dominated by purple moor grass, cross-leaved heath and several species of sphagnum moss. In amongst the heather, yellow flowers of gorse and the smaller dwarf gorse stand out. Fairmile Common typifies the pockets of remnant heathland and supports a range of characteristic insects including the scarce silver-studded blue butterfly.



## Starfruit

As a result of regular management, the ponds of West End are also home to a rare water plant, *Damasonium alisma*, commonly known as starfruit. Indeed in 2005, Chequers Pond was the only recorded flowering site in Britain.



## Arbrook Common

The woodland areas support a great variety of wildlife. Deciduous trees to be found include pedunculate oak, silver birch, sweet chestnut, grey willow, rowan and beech. Coniferous (evergreen) trees are mainly scots pine, corsican pine, western hemlock, larch and norway spruce. The birdlife is rich and varied particularly on Arbrook Common and many uncommon species nest here. Look out for green and greater spotted woodpeckers, goldcrests, jays, nuthatches, warblers and tits as well as birds of prey such as kestrels, sparrowhawks and tawny owls.

## The geology of the Esher Commons

is fairly typical of the area, the site lying partly on the acidic soils of the Bagshot Beds and Plateau Gravels locally overlain with peat, and partly on the damp clay soils of the Claygate Beds in the east. Lowland Heath, grassland, woodland and areas of marsh, bog and open water present a rich variety of habitats supporting many species of plant and animal life.

## Oxshott Heath

In autumn the Esher Commons provide an ideal environment in which fungi thrive. Some species to look out for are the bright red and poisonous fly agaric and the stinkhorn. In all, there are over 3,000 species of fungi recorded on Esher Common. During the summer months, south facing slopes, such as Oxshott Heath, warm up readily in the sun and provide suitable habitat for a range of insects and reptiles, namely lizards and grass snakes. These reptiles can be found basking in most sunny areas of the Esher Commons provided there is enough dense cover for them to hide in.



# Exploring the Esher Commons

The Commons provide a superb area for walking, horse riding, bird watching, jogging, dog walking and other outdoor recreational activities.

There are a number of car parks providing easy access to way marked signposted footpaths, bridleways and permissive horse rides. Statutory footpaths are marked with a yellow arrow; these are open to walkers only. The extensive network of permissive horse rides is ideal for horse riders of all abilities; these rides are open to both walkers and riders.

Please follow the Elmbridge Countryside Code so everyone can enjoy this valuable green space.

## Horse riders

Always keep to the way marked rides and be mindful of people walking on the Commons.

## Cycling

Please keep to the way marked trail at all times. Most of this trail is shared with permissive horse rides. Please give way to walkers and horse riders on these tracks.

Ride slowly and with caution, this is a cross-country trail with sharp corners and uneven ground.

## Dog owners

By law, you are required to keep your dog under close control at all times and prevent it from disturbing wildlife and sensitive habitats such as ponds and nesting areas.

Everyone knows how unpleasant dog mess is and it can cause infections, so always clean up after your dog and dispose of the mess responsibly.

## Litter

Litter and leftover food doesn't just spoil the beauty of the countryside, it can be dangerous to wildlife and can spread disease. So take your litter home with you, remember dropping litter, dumping rubbish and fly tipping are criminal offences.

## Fire

Fires can be as devastating to wildlife and habitats as they are to people and property – so be careful not to drop a match or a smouldering cigarette at any time of the year.

## Plants, animals and fungi

Discover the beauty of the natural environment and take special care not to damage, destroy or remove anything from the Elmbridge countryside.

Remember it is an offence to pick flowers or disturb wildlife. Please protect the environment and leave it for others to enjoy.