



GCAA NEWS

Newsletter of the Golf Course Allotments Association

Spring 2012

Record break-in year?

The past 12 months have surely set a new record for break-ins and thefts at the Golf Course Allotments. And we were not alone: many allotment sites across London and further afield had similar experiences. This is the record of break-ins at sheds and other buildings on our site over the past 12 months.

In June last year, thieves came onto the site and broke into 28 sheds by forcing locks or removing them with bolt cutters. Several high value items (a cultivator and some strimmers) were taken. Then, just before our Annual Show, thieves visited once again, causing a lot of damage and stealing things. They

- ripped the very heavy metal door off the **storage shed** and stole all the machinery kept there
- broke the door of the **Trading Shed** and turned everything upside down;
- broke into the **Community Hut**, ransacked it and stole all the tombola prizes we had collected

It wasn't a happy new year either. On 7 January, 10 sheds were burgled and the machine shed door was taken off

completely. Then on 9 January, thieves cut a large hole in the Bluebell Wood fence. They broke into the Trading Shed and 83 members' sheds were also vandalised; paraffin was spread on a plot; water tanks had taps torn off and pieces of piping were forcibly removed (see photo). Many metal items were taken from plotholders' sheds. By then, the plight of the Golf Course Allotments had been mentioned in the Daily Mail, the Hornsey Journal, Ham and High, Garden News and ITV's London Tonight.



Look - no tap! Site Secretary Tullio Moglia shows Daily Mail photographer Stephanie Schaefer where thieves ripped off the tap and the attached pipe on plot 6A.

A new beginning

On 20 March, Golf Course Allotments ended a long battle to improve the fencing on the boundary with Bluebell Wood. Maintaining our fences is the responsibility of Haringey Council. But the quality of work they have done for us in the past has sometimes been

disappointing. That's why it was so easy for thieves to rip a large hole in the plastic-coated chain-link fence, walk onto our site, break into our buildings and take away our property. To make sure this does not happen again, GCAA offered to make a financial contribution towards the work to ensure that we got a fence of the quality we needed. The new fence is made of wire which is about a quarter of an inch thick (5mm and, in some places, 6mm). It reaches just over 2 metres above the ground (about 6'6"), has a "prickly" top and no toeholds. The metal posts are set in about 2 feet of concrete (over 600mm).

Local Councillor David Beacham wrote to us: "I'm delighted that these improvements to security have been made. Well done to you for driving this forward and achieving the (near) impossible!"



Job done! Tullio and Sean pose with the fencing crew after signing off for the new fence

Annual General Meeting

This will be held on our site on Sunday 29 April starting at 11am: all members are encouraged to attend. At this meeting, Committee members for the next 12 months will be elected as well as officers. Also, as the current Treasurer is retiring, a replacement will be required. The site and its activities are run by the Committee which is elected by the ploholders. The Committee will decide how we spend both the money we have raised and the annual maintenance grant which Haringey gives us. How do we get the balance right between maintaining our buildings and replacing taps? Our biggest fundraising event is the Annual Show. This brings in hundreds of people who live in our neighbourhood in addition to enthusiasts who have seen the event listed in the National Gardens Scheme handbook. The Committee also arranges events such as the Christmas Party. If we had not raised money over the years (and spent it wisely), our site would now look like a derelict chicken farm!

This year, our funds – as well as some help from Haringey - helped us to put up a new, secure fence alongside Bluebell Wood to deter thieves and vandals. Looking to the future, a big problem that will have to be tackled very soon is the dangerous state of the road surface. Other important responsibilities which are carried out by the Site Secretary include meeting, greeting and advising new ploholders and taking

responsibility for keeping the site safe, tidy and in working order. All this is done to ensure that working your plot is a pleasure.

At the AGM, you will hear what the current Committee has achieved and compare it with what was promised a year ago. You can also hear what plans there are for the coming year and respond to those. You can raise any issue at this meeting but please inform the Chairman beforehand. You can put yourself forward for election to the Committee. If you would like to work on the Committee, the AGM papers will tell you how to go about doing this. Remember: coming to this meeting gives you a chance to have your say and to influence how things are run. Finally, look out for the meeting documents which are available about two weeks before the meeting. If we have your e-mail address, you will receive them that way. The papers will also be posted on the site Notice Board.

Police visit

Following the numerous break-ins of the past few months, officers from the Metropolitan Police's local Safer Neighbourhoods Team came to the allotments to give advice on security. Their first stop was the new fence alongside Bluebell Wood. Intruders had cut the old fence with pliers but the new one is infinitely more challenging and would discourage thieves. We were advised to install metal arms on top with barbed wire strung between them.



Community Support Officers Jeff Darby and Avra Wyke with Tullio Moglia, Site Secretary

The police suggested that the GCAA becomes part of a Neighbourhood Watch which will cover our site and Bluebell Wood. This is in course of being set up. The police would give us specific advice on security, warning signs etc. They will be coming back for our Annual Show. You will have no difficulty recognising them!

3 potato competition - cancelled

This year, many of the Kestrels which are used for this competition went bad and the Trading Shed quickly ran out of good ones. As it would have been unfair to give competitors another type to plant, this year's competition has been cancelled. If your 3 potatoes are growing, you can now dig them up when you choose!

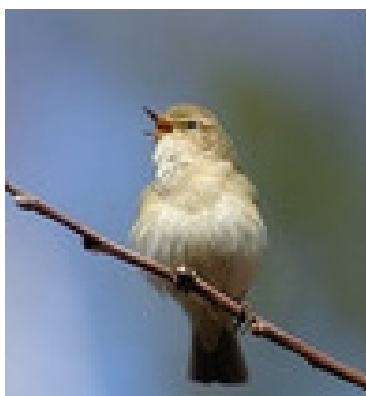
Seen on my plot

by George Dunnion
Last autumn, the jays were busy planting acorns on your plot! They never get round to eating them all, so weed your saplings as soon as they appear. Don't blame the squirrels for them all!

All winter, I've had to put up with noisy neighbours on the

next plot – a family of pheasants who made their home amongst the raspberry bushes. Week after week, they socialised noisily, looked after their younger members and then suddenly abandoned their home. Other visitors who arrived on a large scale were those Scandinavian thrushes – the redwings. They were 50 strong as they flew around the site.

By now, the blackbirds are clearing their throats gently as they limber up to sing their melodious hearts out. Great tits are repeating their "teacher, teacher" call *ad nauseam*. Chiffchaffs have been competing for the most boring songster with their relentless "chiff, chaff, chiff, chaff" having flown all the way from Africa to do so.



Chiffchaff (photo by Sergey Yeliseev)

Flocks of determined little long tailed tits are already very busy, as are the goldfinches. Other migrants - willow warblers and blackcaps - should have arrived by the end of March. And Merlin, bless him, has been keeping down the number of wood pigeons (as well as the rats)!

Butterflies on the allotment

by Peter Turner

Two rare butterflies were found in our allotment shed in the summer of 2010, fluttering against the window and trying to get out. I looked them up and found they were a male and female Purple Hairstreak. Although this species lives on oaks in southern England it is not often seen as it stays up in the canopy feeding on the sweet honeydew secreted by aphids. It does not fly about as much as other butterflies. I think this pair got into our shed as caterpillars that had walked down the trunk and were looking for somewhere to pupate. The shed is very close to a mature oak.



Female Purple Hairstreak (photo by greensnapper2011)

The butterfly itself is small with purple and black wings which are silver underneath. There is a small 'tail' under each wing with an orange spot near to it. This spot resembles an eye and is supposed to distract birds which peck it thinking it is the butterfly's head. The bird ends up with a beak full of wing scales, and the butterfly has an

extra second or two to make good its escape!

I didn't see any in 2011 but it's normal for numbers to fluctuate dramatically from year to year. 2012 should be a good year for them however as they thrive when there is a warm Spring. They are very pretty and sparkle in the sun - well worth looking out for. They adults may be seen in the summer months.

Good bye to the old Trading Shed

The wooden, dirty red building just uphill from our toilet was long a familiar landmark. Two decades ago, when some of us had just arrived to take over a plot, this was the Trading Shed – dingy, full of acrid cigarette smoke and grumpy, argumentative old men.

Many years later, a heavy metal door with two locks was installed. The old codgers must have thought it was impregnable! The resident rats played elsewhere while the shop was open; but they returned to their home once the humans had gone. On 14 March this year, the rats' parting gift to us was hosed down and brushed away. All the wood had to be burned as it was a danger to health. We now have a much stronger building to store our tables, tools and stock for the shop. Thanks to plotholder Shane who managed to secure this useful building for us at little cost. Plans are afoot to bring in a different colour scheme and to plant creepers and other

plants so that it blends more easily into the surrounding area.



New "building": a coat of appropriate paint and some creepers will help it blend in

No water, water everywhere

Following two exceptionally dry years, Thames Water has announced restrictions on the use of mains water. We are not allowed to use a hosepipe attached to a mains supply to water our garden or allotment. We are allowed to fill a watering can at a tap and use that for watering; but we must not fill the can from a hosepipe.

Anyone with an allotment or garden must obey these rules, otherwise they can be fined. Thames Water has powers to prosecute anyone who knowingly ignores these restrictions. As we've had two exceptionally dry years, no one should expect the ban to be lifted quickly: it will be months rather than days.

At the same time, Golf Course Allotments is sometimes in the embarrassing position of having water leaking from pipes. This happens from time to time because our pipes are so old or have been damaged. We have to find the leak and repair the pipe.

Bonfires

This is a reminder that we are under pressure to avoid having bonfires except when absolutely necessary. Many of the weeds we dig up can be composted – and Haringey Council expects us to do that. They would like fires to contain only diseased plants, perennial weeds, stalks and prunings: you should keep these until they are dry so they will burn more quickly and with less smoke. At present, there is a "fire day" once a month.

Notices around the site list the days on which day a bonfire is allowed: the next one will be on the first Saturday of next month.

Rhubarb season is here again

Rhubarb is a vegetable that feels like a fruit – maybe because of all that sugar we add to it! The picture below shows Alan Dines taking home some rhubarb in early March.



Alan "forces" some of his rhubarb – that is, he covers the plant with a bucket and some straw. Doing that keeps it warmer so it is ready earlier.

By now, rhubarb is plentiful. Here is a recipe for that old favourite – rhubarb fool.

Ingredients (for four):

450g rhubarb

4-5tbsps caster sugar

300ml double cream

100ml low fat Greek yoghurt

Slivers of preserved ginger (optional)

Method:

Chop the rhubarb and heat it gently in a covered saucepan with the caster sugar and a very little water until soft. Remove from the heat and continue cooking to reduce the liquid. Add more sugar if necessary, strain off the juice and reserve. Allow the rhubarb to cool. Meanwhile whip the cream until it holds peaks. Stir in the yoghurt and, finally, the rhubarb. Chill.

Serve in individual glasses.

Decorate with some of the reserved juice and, if liked, the slivers of preserved ginger.

Slow down!



Remember to limit your speed to 5mph while you are driving on the site.

Contributions and comments to: gcaachair@yahoo.co.uk