



creos
Crouch End Open Space

AUTUMN 2020



CREOS is a voluntary group set up to preserve Crouch End Open Space for the enjoyment of all. This area is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and a vital green corridor for North London's wildlife.

CREOS in the time of Covid-19

There have been both pros and cons for CREOS during lockdown.

On the upside, we are glad to see that many more people have discovered and enjoyed the area – dog walkers, parents with children and joggers – which also means potential new members! To show their appreciation for our work, one couple even donated £400, representing two months of gym membership!

For many of the people currently out of work or forced to work from home during the current pandemic, CREOS has provided a vital lifeline to the natural world – especially for those without gardens or balconies of their own. Several people have commented that their walks in the CREOS woodland have been central to preserving their sanity and mental health in a time of such enormous stress, particularly when finding a place to exercise safely outdoors is much harder than usual, and indeed impossible for some.

On the downside, the start of lockdown in March meant that our monthly work mornings had to cease, causing this year's main project to create a weather-resistant path along Boundary Oak Walk (leading from North London Cricket Club towards Wood Vale) to be halted. When lockdown eased in July, work mornings recommenced, albeit without our usual picnic lunches, and the hoggin path was finally completed after much hard work (see separate article)!

Although CREOS welcomes newcomers, one of the disadvantages of the extra footfall was that, due to social distancing, vegetation became trampled alongside paths, leading to the emergence of new paths by the side of the old ones. To add to this problem, some of the logs used to define our paths were removed by vandals and used to light fires in the Highgate Wood School playing field, blackening and charring the grass, and causing damage that will take months to repair.

Another emergent issue was that, as gyms were closed during lockdown, there were, understandably, many more joggers taking advantage of CREOS for their daily run, which made it harder to practice good social distancing when using the narrow, winding paths across CREOS land. Although many of them were careful to keep their distance,



some did not, shooting past walkers on narrow paths at an uncomfortably close distance, risking the health of others using the paths. Ros Abrams (pictured) spoke with some of the more polite joggers, who commented that they were appalled by the behaviour of their less polite fellows. Ros felt so strongly about this that she took to wearing a 'sandwich board' on her walks, stating 'JOGGERS – BE THOUGHTFUL, KEEP YOUR DISTANCE', which met with a mixture of bemusement yet also general approval from the public.

Finally, I'm sure we all agree that nobody wants another Lockdown, and the CREOS committee hopes that we will be able to continue with our regular projects during the winter, including planting foxgloves and over 100 wild daffodil bulbs and re-seeding the wild flower meadow, providing not only a beautiful, bright splash of colour in the woodland, but also supporting many of the rare and fragile ecosystems that CREOS helps to sustain.

Jacky Wedgwood

Completing the Boundary Oak Walk

In the last newsletter we described how the Boundary Oak Walk had become impassable last winter because of incessant rain. It's pleasing to report that it has now been successfully renovated and weather-proofed, thanks to the efforts of many CREOS members, volunteers and Good Gym. For some, the shovelling and spadework was a welcome exercise while the gyms were still closed.

Boundary Oak Walk was previously just a woodchip-covered footpath and had turned into a boggy quagmire. Restoration work was urgently needed so that walkers did not need to make detours through the adjoining undergrowth, which of course affects wildlife habitats. Work was started in early Spring and had to be halted during the first lockdown period, but when restrictions eased in July we were able to complete the job.

The climax occurred in mid-August, when 20 tonnes of hoggin (the top surface) was delivered to an awaiting team of volunteers with barrows and shovels. A whacking plate was hired to flatten and compress the finished surface. Warm thanks and praise from passers-by helped cheer on the team. The cost of the materials was considerable, and we are most grateful to the many people who responded to our crowd-funding appeal to raise funds for the project. The appeal raised £1,340, supplemented by £1,000 from CREOS's own reserves. We are confident that the new path will withstand the rigours of the coming winter's weather!
Rob Jackson



Spotted! – Cardinal Beetle

This Red-headed Cardinal Beetle *Pyrochroa serraticornis* was found on the border of the meadow at CREOS in May this year and is usually expected to be seen in small numbers across our site. They are often found in woodland rides and hedgerows across the midlands and southern counties of England from May to July. They grow to between 10-18mm and their larvae feed on other insects beneath the bark of freshly dead broadleaved trees. The adults are found on flowering shrubs or felled tree trunks.

Photo John Larkin



Saving the Queen's Wood Oaks

Visitors to CREOS can be forgiven for thinking that CREOS is part of Queen's Wood. Our Woodland Walk does indeed lead into the wood and the extensive area between the allotments and the gardens of Wood Vale is populated not just with silver birch, but with young oaks and hornbeams whose seeds have strayed in from the adjacent woodland.

Many CREOS members have therefore taken an interest in the fate of four mature oaks that Haringey wanted to fell earlier this year, situated on the edge of the wood, not a stone's throw from CREOS, as they were causing subsidence to a nearby property. The public heard about this just in time and the day the tree surgeons arrived they were met by a protest of more than 30 people (see photo). A petition to Haringey Council to save the trees was subsequently signed by over 9,000 people and was soon followed by a petition to AXA, the insurers, to stop threatening Haringey with thousands of £'s worth of costs and damages.

AXA have made a big play of their commitment to the environment via funding for tree planting. However, what few people realise is that to replace the carbon capture of the four mature oaks in Queen's Wood would require the planting of over 2000 saplings.

Local people feel so passionately about the benefits of this local nature reserve, one of England's last few patches of ancient woodland, that an organisation called SHIFT (Stop Home Insurers Felling Trees) was formed to protect not only these trees but others facing a similar fate. The organisation's aim is to alert homeowners to the fact that, at the first signs of subsidence, insurance companies' first knee-jerk reaction is always to reach for the chain-saw. But trees are not always to blame when homes face subsidence and it is important to question these demands and save as



many of our mature trees as we can if we are serious about improving London's air quality.

As a result of the protest, which lasted many weeks, the four oaks have been saved for now. At the home-owners' request, AXA paid for an independent structural survey which concluded that in this case, far from helping, felling the trees could have been a disaster for the property! Heave, it seems, is worse than subsidence. However further monitoring is taking place, and the protesters are ready to return if the need arises.

For information on SHIFT see: savequeenswoodoaks.carrd.co or to contact email stophomeinsurersfellingtrees@gmail.com
Glenys Law

The CREOS Cyclamen

Can this be one of the happier outcomes of climate change? Cyclamen enthusiasts once had to travel to Mediterranean shores to find this hardy plant growing in the wild, but now this beautiful little flower is thriving in its location off the CREOS Lower Path and getting more abundant every year.

Our cyclamen has been identified as *cyclamen hederifolium*, which occurs throughout the Mediterranean area and here it is one of the most familiar species in gardens. It closely resembles both *C. africanum*, and *C. confusum*, with which it is found together in the wild in the limited area of Crete where *C. confusum* occurs. The flowers appeared in September and are now at their best in October.

The leaves appear later than the flowers and are not easy to see as they look similar to the ivy amongst which the plant is growing. *Glenys Law*



COVID Consequences

The CREOS committee is able to report that workdays are continuing as normal during the pandemic, albeit with social distancing and no sharing of tools. Paths will be repaired and new trees and hedgerows are to be planted soon, along with some spring bulbs. Sadly though, these are less sociable times and we cannot end our workdays with the usual picnic on the meadow that has come to be much appreciated by so many of our volunteers.

We are also sorry that we are unable to offer our usual Christmas Party this year, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Instead there will be a decorated tree to lift your spirits on your Christmas walks through the woodland. The location is still a secret, so start looking out for it as Christmas approaches.

Let us hope that 2021 will see a return to normality and that CREOS will be able to provide an AGM in May, a summer event on the meadow and the best Christmas party ever. Meanwhile stay safe and give people space.
Glenys Law



'Where the bee sucks ...' the CREOS wild-flower meadow

The wild-flower meadow in a corner of the Highgate Wood School playing field, created by CREOS in the spring of 2019, returned again to flowering glory in 2020 after a late start, due to the dry spring. In June, a little later than expected, the wildflower patch was again in full bloom.

Now that the summer is over the area has been mowed and scarified ready for the planting of a fresh supply of seeds, to add extra colour and floral diversity. This will include annuals such as cornflowers and poppies, as well as yellow rattle to suppress the grasses. Once the seeds have been sown the area will be fenced off again to protect them, so that next year should bring us another glorious display to attract butterflies and bees (and passers-by). *Jane Bywaters*

The second summer's growth was patchier, with wild grasses predominating at one end, but CREOS volunteers have been working hard to rectify this for next year.



The countryside charity
London

Working for a greener city

The CREOS committee is pleased to announce exciting new plans for that muddy corner of the Highgate Wood School playing field which has always been so notoriously difficult to navigate throughout the winter.

We have been awarded a grant from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, in order to create a hedgerow alongside the CREOS path into the field, and behind this hedge there will be a small coppice of low-growing trees and shrubs to attract more wildlife.

First we will be repairing the path, then planting will take place in November and the area alongside the path will be fenced off initially to protect the hedgerow until it is well established.

We apologise in advance for any inconvenience while the work is taking place. *Glenys Law*



Charcoal drawing by Ros Abrams

Help our membership grow

CREOS always needs a larger core of active members. So when you've read this edition, do pass it on to anyone you think may be interested in helping preserve our open space as a nature haven for wildlife and walkers. To join, make a donation, or volunteer please contact our Membership Secretary: Alys Elphick on info@crouchendopenspace.org. For more information about CREOS visit crouchendopenspace.org