



September 2022



Why hasn't Prickend Pond dried up, when there is a drought and the rest of the Commons here in Chislehurst are scorched by the sun?

It's a good question!

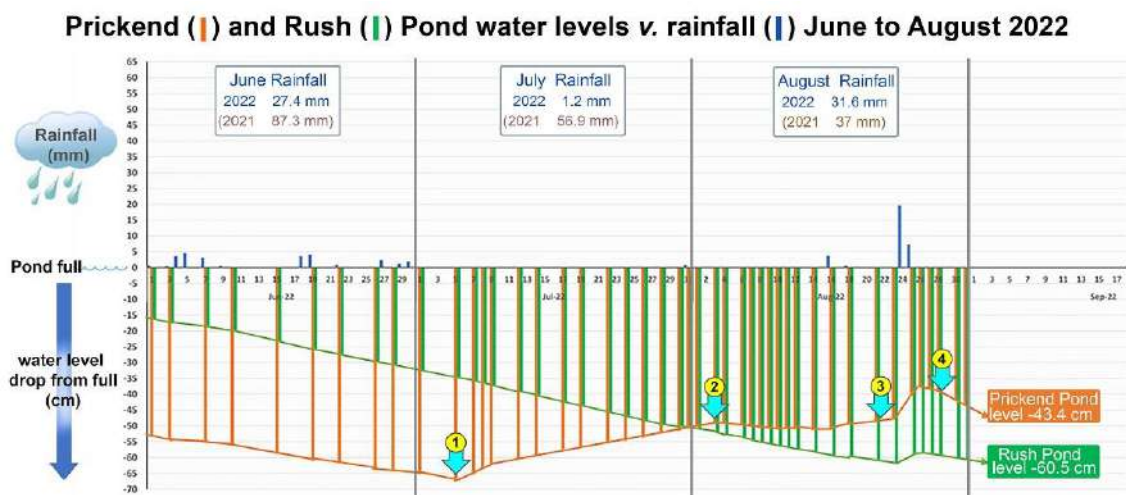


Kevin Jennings explains.

After record summer temperatures of over 40C, with no significant rainfall for

months, the parched Commons and receding ponds leave little doubt about the potential consequences of climate change, the need to conserve and protect diminishing water resources and to better appreciate the unfolding impact on habitat, flora and fauna.

With a rather ironic twist, Prickend Pond looked to be heading towards its lowest level in recent years (see levels below), when, at - 62cm from full on the 5th July, water was heard and seen gushing from a surface water runoff pipe into the ditch leading to the pond.



The mystery water was traced to Prince Imperial Road, where mains water was bubbling through the road surface straight into kerbside surface water drains. These drains and others around Prickend and Centre Common are part of local flood management, feeding into the pond which adds extra storage capacity, before overflowing into drains leading to local rivers.

To ensure Prickend captures as much surface water as possible, Chislehurst Commons recently ensured the council had flushed the system... a result for the pond, but the leak saga flowed on for some 50 days! The incident also enabled us to obtain information on the volumes of water needed to maintain levels in the pond.

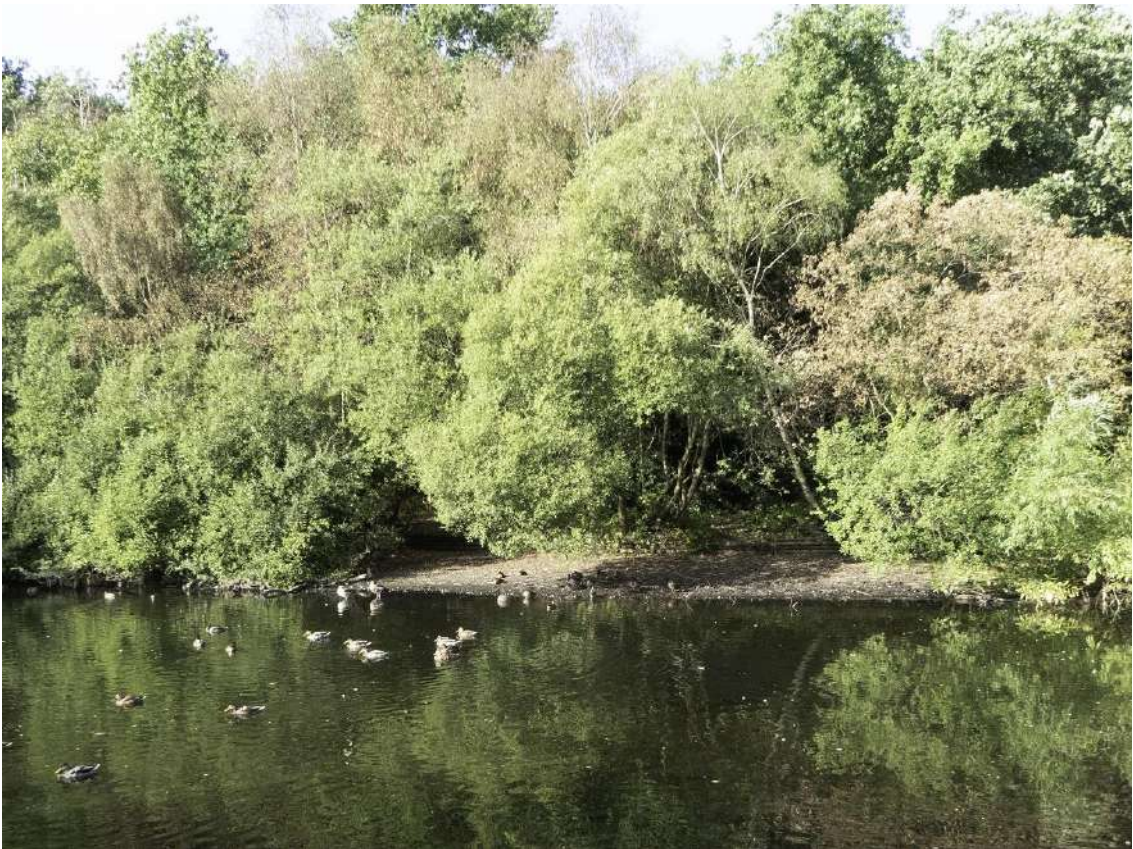
From 6th July (near point 1 on the level chart) and through to point 2, approximately 79,000 litres per day flowed as the pond level rose. At point 2, flow slowed to 30,000 litres per day (possibly due to work on leaks around Old Hill) and the level started to drop, before a final rise at point 3. Rain on the 25th coincided with the 'final leak fix' on the 27/28th when flow stopped (point 4). Without further rain the pond level started going down again.



While Prickend Pond levels rose, Rush Pond levels continued downward, despite its 20,000 litres per day borehole support. With concerns about the remaining depth of water, volunteers checked bed depths around the pond, confirming depths to 60cm even with a further 20cm level drop (to -75cm from full on the level gauge).



Based on data and observations, work continues to improve the ponds' resilience to extremes of weather, and to measure its impact. More road surface drains feeding into Rush Pond were cleared and flushed on 1st September, and volunteers have started the selective removal of willow from parts of Rush Pond. Trees encroaching into the pond (see recent before and after photos below) increase water loss by taking up water, and potentially intercepting rainfall.



And a final “it never rains but it pours” note.... as well as droughts, we are also looking at the impact of extreme wet weather events on the ponds.



You are invited to a Party!

**This month Peter Edwards, our Assistant Keeper, retires
after 14 years' service to the Commons.**

**Come along and celebrate his birthday with coffee (or tea)
and a cake,
and wish him a long and happy retirement.**

Where? Our Marquee at the Cockpit, on the area between the Tiger's Head and St. Nicholas Church.

When? Sunday 25th September 2022, between 2pm and 4pm.

We hope to see you during the afternoon!

Essential Tree Work



Alan Porter gives an update on recent tree work.

If you have been walking round the Commons recently you may have noticed a significant amount of tree work going on. Some of this has been carried out in-

house by our keepers, ably assisted by our volunteers, but some has been much more substantial work requiring the services of a tree surgeon.

The work carried out by our keepers has been to clear trees blocking street lights and to remove dead and dying trees along the side of the busy roads that cross the Commons. So far, this work has been carried out along Centre Common Road and Old Hill. The latter would have been particularly difficult to do had it not been greatly helped by Thames Water having the road closed off over recent weeks. At least some good has come from this over-long road closure. There is much more of this work still to be done, but we have been able to make a good start on work which has been delayed because of Covid.

The more substantial work is necessary because of ash dieback (ADB). As we explained in one of our newsletters earlier this year, ADB is a bacterial infection which is decimating ash trees around the country and has started to appear on the Commons over the last year or so. One very large 25m high ash tree along the footpath that runs parallel to Prince Imperial Road has had to be taken down as a matter of some urgency.



We had been monitoring the tree over the last year after it started to show signs of ADB, but in recent months large bracket fungi have started to appear on the trunk (see photo) - an indication that the tree was in significant distress. The decision was made to take it down as soon as possible.

Felling a tree of this size is fraught with problems. A tree surgeon may climb the tree to do the work or, if the tree is not safe to climb, the work may be done from a Mobile Elevated Working Platform (more commonly known as a cherry picker). In either case, a fully qualified tree surgeon is required. Sadly, the problems with this ash tree are a sign of things to come, and more ash trees will inevitably have to be taken down over the next few months.



However, the work arising from ADB does not mean that our other tree safety work can be set aside. Recently a very large mature sycamore tree was taken down along the same footpath as the ash tree referred to above. We had been carefully monitoring this tree over a number of years because of potential defects, and a climbing inspection was carried earlier this year. Unfortunately, this inspection confirmed our worst fears that there were significant amounts of dead wood in the tree, combined with large holes in

major limbs and fungal growth (see photo).

As with the ash, the size of the tree required the work to be done by tree surgeons. We did discuss a range of options for this tree with our tree surgeon to try to prolong its life, but we came to the conclusion that the only thing we could do was to reduce the tree to a monolith about 5m high.

All of this work costs significant sums of money, in addition to the amount needed to carry out the routine tasks involved in maintaining the local common land in Chislehurst.

Although the 180 acres are protected by an Act of Parliament for the benefit and enjoyment of the community, there is no guaranteed funding, and we rely on the generosity of local people.

We have two full-time Keepers whose knowledge and dedication is invaluable.

Everyone else who works to manage and maintain the area does so voluntarily.

**If you would like to support our work, you can donate
via our website www.chislehurstcommons.uk
or via [PayPal Giving](#)**

Thank you!

Our Wonderful Keepers and Volunteers



Our wonderful volunteers have been busy as usual this month on a range of seasonal tasks. One Wednesday, gutters at Mill Place and the Ramblers Rest area were cleared of leaves, and overhanging foliage was cut back, to enable rainwater to flow freely.



On some occasions the working party has split into smaller groups to undertake specific tasks. For example, as described above, one group has been thinning the willows around Rush Pond, and digging out roots. Muddy work with some paddling!



In addition to our Wednesday working parties, we have volunteers who regularly go out to collect litter and report on fly-tips. Their contribution is invaluable, and our thanks go to them all. The Commons would not be such a pleasant place without them. This lawnmower, together with the black sacks, was dumped along St. Paul's Cray Road – another job for our Keepers.

Biodiverse and Beautiful

A walk on the Commons can be a magical experience. Wherever you look there is something amazing and beautiful to enjoy.



This photo shows two comma butterflies and a male southern hawker dragonfly, recognisable from the large distinctive green "headlights" behind its head and blue "tail-lights" at the end of its abdomen.



And this is the female southern hawker depositing eggs on a log in Rush Pond.



Wasp spiders build large webs in heathland and grassland and attach their silk egg sacs to the grasses. They are brightly coloured like wasps to deter predators, but they are not dangerous. This photo was taken in the Overflow Glade.

And finally





..... two views of the Commons that illustrate the rural charm of

Chislehurst, which makes it such a special and unique place to live and work.

We will continue to do our best to manage, maintain and enhance the 180 acres of common land for present and future generations.

We are sorry to announce that a former Chairman and Trustee of the Commons, Guy Neely, has died.

His funeral is at St Mary's Church, Hawkwood Lane, Chislehurst at 2pm on Wednesday the 21st September.

Guy was a Trustee from 1988 to 2004 of which he was Chairman from 1996 to 2002.

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THANK YOU!

Thanks for this month's photos to - Jim Connor, Peter Edwards, Jonathan Harvie, Kevin Jennings, Alan Porter, John Stiles, Mary Wheeler and Peter Woodward.

Thanks also to the editorial team – Christine Wearn, Ross Wearn and Mary Wheeler



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