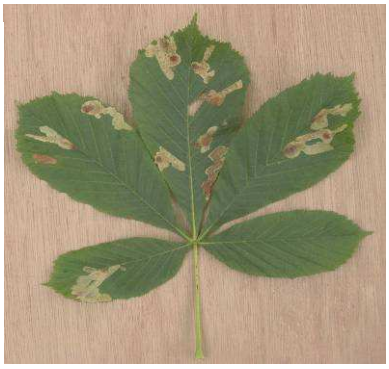
Kempshott Conservation Group e-Newsletter
June 2014

Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*

A popular tree of towns and parks but seldom seen in woodland; instantly recognised by its palmate leaves, clusters of white/pink flowers that resemble a candelabra and later in the season by its conkers. The Horse Chestnut is a deciduous broadleaf tree native to northern Greece and Albania that was first introduced to Britain in 1616 and has since naturalised. They can reach a height of 28m and live for up to 300 years.

Horse Chestnut trees are hermaphrodite, meaning that male and female parts are contained within each flower, which in turn provide a rich source of nectar and pollen for insects, particularly bees. The sticky sap on the Horse Chestnut buds protects them from insects and frost damage. The soft texture of its creamy-white timber makes it ideal for woodcarving, but is unsuitable for commercial use. When the leaf falls the stalk leaves a scar on the twig which resembles an inverted horseshoe with nail holes. The first record of the game of conkers is from the Isle of Wight in 1848, the name of conkers derives from the 19th C dialect word for a small snail. The annual World Conker Championship has been held in Ashton, Northhants since 1965.



Horse Chestnut trees can be heavily infested with the larvae of the Horse Chestnut Leaf-miner *Cameraria ohridella*. A leaf mining moth of the Gracillariidae family, first seen in Macedonia in 1984, and first recorded in Britain in 2002 on Horse Chestnut trees in London and has quickly spread north and west. The female moth lays her eggs singly on the upper surface of the leaf, when the larvae hatch they burrow into the leaf and create cavities (mines) as they eat their way through the plant tissue. So far there is little evidence that trees infected with this moth suffer any long term damage. It appears that the damage caused by the moth occurs too late in the growing season to greatly affect the tree.

Wing length 3.5-5mm

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Pale Tussock
Calliteara pudibunda
left

Peacock
Inachis io
right
Feeding on nettles

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

♀ Blackcap

Blackcaps used to be thought of as summer visitors; however ringed birds that have been captured here in autumn and winter have shown that they have in fact originated from southern Germany and have migrated to the UK for the winter. Many of our Blackcaps overwinter in southern Europe and northern Africa. Fossils of the Blackcap have been found in European countries dating back as far as 1.2-1.0 million years ago

Birds of deciduous woodland with good scrub cover, they first breed at 1 year old; the male will build one or two simple nests (cock's nests) near to his song post from which the female may select one and continue to line the nest with finer material or she may build a completely new one.

♂ Blackcap

The female usually lays 4-5 eggs which are incubated for about 11 days by the male and female although only by the female overnight. The young leave the nest in about 11-12 days, before they can fly and are fed by the adults for a further 3 weeks.

The birds are mainly insectivorous during the breeding season and the young are fed on soft bodied insects especially caterpillars and craneflies. Beetles become more important as the young grow. Insects are rich in proteins - just what a young chick needs for making feathers, but low in carbohydrates. So in July the diet changes to mainly fruit and berries which are full of concentrated sugar which is efficiently absorbed and converted to fat, allowing the birds to put on weight quickly prior to migration.

Spangle Gall Wasp *Neuroterus quercusbaccurum*

The cynipid wasp *N. quercusbaccarum* has both agamic (reproducing without male/female union) and bisexual generations which cause different galls to occur on oak trees. The gall is more likely to be seen than the adult wasp.

Currant Gall on Oak in Meadow in May

Spangle Gall

After overwintering in the fallen leaf litter beneath the oak, the female generation of the wasp emerges in April and lays her eggs in the catkins or leaves of the oak. Resulting in the Currant Gall (left) which can vary in colour from yellow or green to red. The male/female generation emerge from the Currant Gall in June, mate then lay their eggs on the undersides of the leaves producing the Spangle Gall (right). The leaves drop in the autumn to the ground and the cycle begins again.

Peregrines in Winchester – have just heard that the Peregrines nesting on the Police HQ in Winchester have hatched 4 chicks, and 3 are almost ready to fly!