

Cornwall Cricket Groundskeepers Report, 2024.

As the prophets of doom persist in warning that the end is nigh, amid apocalyptic floods, fires and tempests wreaking havoc across the world, groundskeepers could be forgiven for going into permanent hibernation, never to be seen again.

An ever-weighty dossier of evidence related to global warming, climate change and extreme weather appear to confirm that things are only going to get wetter. Optimists among us are becoming an endangered species.

According to meteorologists, 2024 saw Cornwall experience its warmest and wettest 12 months on record, interspersed with its coolest summer and 9 named storms starting with Henk and finishing with Bert, Conall and Darragh giving us ever-more frequent batterings.

Despite all that, groundskeepers did not throw in the towel. As and when conditions permitted, they continued to toil on grounds and pitches to salvage as many games as possible, and the forward-looking then worked post-season all the way into December in readiness for 2025.

As League disciplinary officer, as well as CACG Hon Sec, I am aware that quite a few of our cricketers tend to converse with 4 letter words but, for the purposes of this report, I shall take the liberty of throwing in a 14 worder with which they may not be familiar: homogenisation.

It means that the seasons - spring, summer, autumn and winter - are becoming blurred in temperature terms. No longer can we rest up in winter. Grass is growing all the year round. Weather permitting, there is now regular mowing and brushing always needing to be done.

It might just be that we shall be able to venture on to squares and outfielders in late February and March, with a view to having some of our quicker drying grounds, especially in coastal areas, rolled and ready for cricket from mid-April. I suspect however that few, if any, will bet on that.

Meanwhile I would like to thank in particular Phil Jeggo, the Grounds Management Association's South of England pitch adviser, and Cornwall pitch adviser Steve Fry for all their ongoing support and encouragement of groundskeepers and clubs across the county in 2024.

As part of the England and Wales Cricket Board's Pitch Power initiative, they carried out a number of site visits and full inspections of grounds, machinery and equipment, while also guiding clubs in the end of season renovations of their squares and outfielders.

Phil came down from Essex to put on early season pitch preparation courses at Liskeard and Constantine, and returned in the autumn to visit 6 grounds: four where CACO's pitch marks for 2024 were below the ECB's required 70% mark and two - Grampond Road and Perranporth - where their Ist XI's have been promoted to Premier and County 1 respectively.

The plan for 2025 is to put on spring and autumn groundskeeper training courses in the East and West of the county. A number of clubs have already signified interest in attending these courses. We would be keen to hear from others and any individuals wishing to find out more about what is on offer to help them enhance their skills and improve their grounds.

Cornwall Association of Cricket Groundskeepers will hold its annual general meeting in mid-March on a date to be confirmed. We are also expecting to learn more in May about the National Lottery, Sport England and ECB's £5 million Grass Pitch Improvement Fund and where those monies are to be targeted for the enhancement of cricket.

Robert Jobson (Hon Sec, Cornwall Association of Cricket Groundskeepers), January 12, 2025.