

Friends of Markstakes Common



**NEWSLETTER AUTUMN
2022**

From the Chair

Dear All

The summer months saw us focusing on Bracken throughout the Common, as the drought hardened the ground and made it difficult to lift Bramble and birch seedlings.

One task we were able to tackle was to attempt the removal of the invasive Rum Cherry. The Lewes District Council arranged for a contractor to take out some of the larger specimens. Despite our efforts over the years, we are a long way from eliminating this plant from the site. They have also arranged the tidying and partial clearing of the large Beech tree that came down in the earlier months of this year and which had fallen right across one of the two Public Rights of Way. They also have plans to partially clear the High Pond this Autumn.

This year I have taken on the butterfly survey. This year the highlight for me was spotting four White Admirals on one day. Surveying for butterflies has been a great way of appreciating the Common although to be fair, butterflies are not abundant at Markstakes. During the survey I sometimes came across other sightings especially a good number of damselflies and dragonflies.

At the AGM we heard a very interesting talk from Claire Blencowe, Manager of the Sussex Biodiversity Recording Centre. Many of us have smartphones and there is an app known as 'iRecord', which can allow us to record sightings very easily as we walk around the site. If you are confident in your id skills, feel free to use the records to pass on the information. More data can better support

understanding of the state of wildlife and inform habitat management decisions.

Rupert Hall

Membership Matters

A warm welcome to the new members and volunteers – it is always good to have your support and we look forward to seeing you at Markstakes.

Our team of regulars have made progress again doing the clearance and tidying in the areas of special focus. The Northern Bracken Field is looking better now that the mighty Bracken has been cleared. Currently we are back at the Corner Glade and trying to sort out the other side of the path which will take a while.

If you have not already paid your subscription, hopefully you would like to do so. Some have already paid either directly to me or by standing order so thank you for that. Bank transfers to Santander Bank 09-01-29 06750439 and just £2. Account – Friends of Markstakes. Thanks.

We look forward to seeing you.

William Coleman

Habitat News

FUNGUS TIME

Autumn brings out the fungus and this year is looking amazing after all the hot and dry weather followed by some heavy rain.

Thank you to Jessica on patrol and finding a selection of pictures this time.

The Porcelain Fungus on the Beech tree is quite exceptional – a lovely smooth and

soft looking texture in groups – quite something.
Other ones appear in assorted colours, and the purple ones always look quite threatening.



BEECH TREE WITH PORCELAIN FUNGUS

Another strange fungus is growing a Beech tree. It looks like it is following a direction up the tree and it is quite strong and savage – I don't think the tree will last long if this continues to grow.



BRACKET FUNGUS



PORCELAIN FUNGUS

Earlier in the year, there was a lovely show of fungus on an old log – this is the one known as 'Chicken of the Woods' and is edible if picked young and fresh. Yes, this was the case and next week we passed by, and it was gone!



AMETHYST DECEIVER



CHICKEN OF THE WOODS

More habitat news

The Mire

This has received attention during the year. Sometime in the hotter part of the year the Bramble and other small saplings have been removed. A prominent willow stump received extra attention and it was decided to try and remove it completely. It seemed that it could be too much to take on, but persistent digging around the stump gradually achieved the result. Well done Roger for your tenacity in the task and, as you can see, it was removed and parked elsewhere!



The Heather Glade

The success story continues here with a good maintenance session to remove the Bracken shoots, thankfully much weakened by continuous cutting, and clearance work around the sides to prevent ingress of the Bramble shoots and other plants reaching for the open space.

Just across the path from Heather Glade is a small cleared area we have named The Ride. After we cleared it of scrub and bramble, Heather established here and is looking healthy at present. This is the only area where we have found Heath Plait Moss *Hypnum jutlandicum*, which

is characteristic, as its English name suggests, of ground in acidic heathland.



This year two grass species typical of heathland appeared in this glade for the first time - presumably from buried seed because we haven't seen them elsewhere on the Common. One is Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, which has thin hair-like leaves and graceful, tall flowering stems.



While this is common in sandy, acid woodland, heath and grass-heath on well-drained soils, *The Flora of Sussex* says it appears to increase in areas fouled by dogs, ousting Heather *Calluna vulgaris* as the dominant species. That is not good news especially in view of the worrying increase in dog-fouling we are experiencing on the Common.

The other grass is Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, which is declining in Sussex due to the loss of heathland.



Its tufts of leaves lie close the ground and its rather large seeds are equipped with elaiosomes (fleshy structures rich in fat and protein). These attract ants, which carry them off to their nests and assist in the dispersal of the seeds.

The Azulox Glade

The name is an echo of a previous attempt at clearing the Bracken through application of a spray. We now do hand clearing to remove the Bracken shoots and stray Birch saplings and a good result has been achieved, the two young Oak trees on the area have put on a really strong growth and are now becoming statement trees and look good for the next generation to see.

Northern Bracken Field

Work continues doing detailed maintenance of the southern half of this area resulting in much weakened Bracken and trimmed Bramble. Evidence of Heather here now is established, and we hope for more of this to spread. Pushing back the boundaries is important here too and the Bracken is held to a line where the grass can be seen to be growing and giving a good surface covering and should encourage other plants to move in and provide nectar for the butterflies.

The southern half, crossed by a path, is left to its own annual cycle but there are points of attention. We have removed many small Rum Cherry seedlings and the larger ones, either individual new growth or sprouting from previous coppicing have received attention from the contractor brought in by our Lewes DC Specialist Advisor.

Careful surveying by Jacqui has discovered the Saw-Wort - *Serratula tinctoria* - which has continued to grow alongside the path.

Saw-Wort gets its common name from the serrated, saw-like edges to its leaves. It is a plant of unimproved hay meadows and woodland edges, its purple, thistle-like flowers appearing over summer.

We have attempted to clear the Bracken and provide a glade area to provide a haven for this attractive and welcome plant.

The Corner Glade

This is an area well inside Markstakes situated in the Southeast corner leading towards the Balneath Track. Our initial work here secured an area previously overgrown with Bracken, Bramble and some established birch. The growth of these has been minimised to the extent that a healthy crop of Heather has now been established. Further work was done to extend the glade westwards across the path towards a large Oak tree adjacent to the bridleway.

Whilst the original area is looking good and requires minimal but regular visits, we have now started to clear the extended area again. This has done its best to grow a good crop of birch and Bramble and activities can be limited by the damp and sometimes waterlogged ground fed by a small spring close by. Work will continue here for a while.



THE CORNER GLADE - IN SEARCH OF THE HEATHER AND CLEARANCE ABOUT TO COMMENCE



THE PHILIP RIDLEY MEMORIAL SEAT - SOON TO BE RENEWED

The Crescent Glade

This area extends along the northeast boundary upwards from one of the Public Rights of Way and, in the past, has received a large amount of heavy clearance to contain the ever-expanding strip of willow trees surrounding a streamline. We now visit on a regular basis to clear some of the Bracken at the path sides where the grass has returned together with nectar plants.

Dates for the Diary

Monday Weekly (most Mondays not Bank Holidays)

This is our regular volunteer group time to meet. We gather at the gate in the stone wall by Markstakes Lane at 9.30.a.m. and usually work until around 12.00. Tools are provided, and suitable clothes and footwear are recommended. We have a break so bring light refreshments to keep you going. Come along if you can.