



FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

NEWSLETTER NO 7 - AUTUMN 2012

From the Chairman - Rupert Hall

✍ Practical activity on the Common tends to follow a seasonal pattern. The winter months tend to be the months when new areas are cleared of invasive birch, bramble and scrub and the summer months are when the cleared areas are maintained. The maintenance consists of mowing bracken and hand weeding. While completing the work by hand allows for a very sensitive approach it is extremely labour intensive.

The last six months has seen the volunteers struggle to stay on top of the needed maintenance work as we have been frustrated by frequent poor weather and the need to complete the mapping work. We have been fortunate that the Rangers have brought in volunteers from other areas that have made an invaluable contribution to the maintenance of the large area of cleared bracken to the north and the corner glade and have once again cleared a significant portion of the High pond.

Contractors have also been key in keeping some of the larger glades clear and the use of a pedestrian tractor has been an eye opener in terms of the amount that can be achieved. There is still outstanding work on the maintenance of the glades

and the mire this will have to be completed before we can start on any further projects. There is little point in clearing out further areas if we are not able to maintain them in future.



While drying out has not been an issue this year one threat to the ponds is that they dry out too early in the summer. To offset this we have established a



small dam at one side of the high pond which should help maintain the water levels for longer.

As discussed elsewhere we have a very healthy population of reptiles. We were proposed as one of the premier site for reptiles in the Weald when Ray Mears and his team were filming part



of his 'Wild Britain' series. I am happy to report that the grass snakes, slow worms and adders were cooperative enough to allow filming of all three species.

NEWS FROM OUR EVENTS AND OTHER THINGS

MOTH NIGHT in AUGUST 2012

We held a fascinating Moth Night in August. Twelve hardy souls came along, armed with torches, to see what the traps would produce. The evening luckily was fine and still and our expert had placed three traps near the northern bracken fields to see what would be flying that night. The evening was organised by Thyone Outram and the Recorder was Steven Teale. The total species recorded on the night was sixty one with varying numbers of each species being seen.

Here can be seen some of the group looking at a trap.



One trap was fixed with a very strong bulb and this attracted many hornets, which may have been a result of a nearby nest. Despite trapping a few for safety, more came along so it was decided to turn off the strong light and continue with the other two traps with the tubes for lighting.

Steve Teale was surprised and pleased with two special recordings which were the Clouded Magpie (*Abraxis sylvata*) and the Mocha (*Cyclophora annularia*). Both these were unusual. The Clouded Magpie is normally associated with Elm trees, but there none at Markstakes.

Here we can see two moths – Clouded Magpie and below is the Mocha.





For a closer look, small Perspex tubes were used so that the moth could be studied from both sides.



The trapping started around 9.00.p.m. and lasted well into the night, finishing around 2.00.a.m. for the hardy few!

Thanks to everyone involved for a most interesting evening.

RAY MEARS AT MARKSTAKES

Is it fame at last for Markstakes? We rather hope that the seclusion and remoteness of the common will be maintained though.

We have had a visit from Ray Mears and a cameraman and the producer of a new nature series to appear on ITV

next year. They were interested in reptiles and habitats and Rupert was able to show them around and show them the various places where the snakes could be seen.



Here you can see Ray by the gate before the visit and here we can see then showing



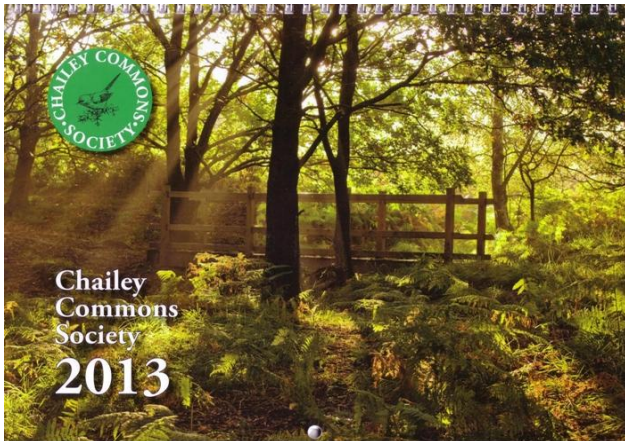
interest in one of the areas where the snakes frequent.

They had been visiting other nature reserves locally such as Bedelands at Burgess Hill and it is all part of a new series to be shown soon.

Look out for the pictures of their visit sometime on ITV.

CHAILEY COMMONS SOCIETY CALENDAR 2013

The new calendar for 2013 is now available and has wonderful landscape views of the North Common and also some from Markstakes Common taken by our photographer Ian Seccombe.



There is plenty of space to write engagements on the dates pages and there is a list of forthcoming events for the Commons Society on the back page.

It is really good value at £6.75 per copy or a discount for more than one copy. Call 01444 831098 to order your copies and we will get them to you, or send an email to markstakes@chaileycommons.org.uk with your order details.

Membership Matters

Our number of Friends has slightly reduced this year but we welcome those who have joined us.

As you will read elsewhere, Our work has been adapted this year to take account of the areas requiring special attention and also we have been busy mapping the whole common using a special programme in conjunction with the Rangers to show a great amount of detail to help us plan the future.

We gratefully acknowledge all the help, both practically and financially, which we have received from the Lewes District Council,

If you know of someone who would be interested in our work and would like to join as a 'Friend' please let us know at markstakes@chaileycommons.org.uk.

SURVEYS and SURVEYING

When activity was initiated on Markstakes a basic map was put together identifying the different habitats. As part of the revised habitat management plan it was felt that a more accurate map was required. The Monday group spent many mornings identifying separate areas of vegetation habitat and discovering just how complex the pattern of different habitats is on Markstakes Common. These results have been developed into a usable map by Lewes District Council, and, while there are some small areas that need further work, this project is more or less complete. Hopefully we will be in a position to post a detailed map of the Common on the website before the New Year.

A very thorough vegetative survey was undertaken last year and aside from the broad vegetative classification undertaken as part of the mapping work there has been no survey of plants or mosses undertaken this year.



Other surveys have continued. Birds are surveyed each month by Ian Woolsey.

Ian Woolsey together with Ian Seccombe have surveyed a butterfly transect with a total of 21 visits over a 2 week period during the summer. The number of species recorded was 18 which are down from the 22 species recorded last year. No doubt the wet weather has had a negative impact on the butterfly populations. In addition a moth night on the 17th August recorded 61 species.

No dormice at all were observed during the dormice surveys -see ranger's report

Reptiles were surveyed intensively this year with more mats in place and being surveyed each week. At the peak reptile counts were in excess of 50 specimens with Adders, Grass Snakes,

Slow Worms and Common Lizards all being recorded.

A survey of toads revealed that they are frequent on the Common although it hasn't been established where they breed. Torching for Newts revealed healthy populations of Palmate Newts although the Great Crested Newts seen in previous years were not observed.

Notes from our Ranger – Thyone Outram

This year we increased the number of dormouse boxes that we have in the area around Markstakes Common in the hope of establishing how widespread the population of dormice is. Data from a large number of sites (including Markstakes Common) is collected each year under the National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme and should be available later in the year. Early results seem to show that the very wet early summer has affected dormice in a number of areas in Southern Britain.

We found no dormice at all using the boxes on Markstakes Common this year (however one was seen using a bat box). The worry is that the very wet weather in early summer affected the animals' ability to feed. They mainly eat blossom, pollen and insect larvae in the early summer. The wet weather meant that this type of food was in short supply when the dormice were waking up and needing to feed up after hibernation. It is also thought that they will not feed if it is raining. There were many nights this summer when it rained a significant part of the night.

There were, however, more yellow-necked mice using the dormouse boxes than we have found in previous years. They too may have contributed to low dormouse numbers. They are very aggressive and will push out dormice of nest boxes.

Hopefully the dormice numbers will recover over the next few years. It is possible that they and did not use the boxes and perhaps did not breed this year, but were still present in the woods nesting in natural tree holes. We will continue to monitor the boxes next year and hope they have survived.

We have also erected some new bat boxes around the common. These are made of woodcrete – a mixture of wood, clay and concrete which has good insulation qualities. On other sites, bats seem to prefer woodcrete to plain wood boxes so we will check them over the next few years and see if the Markstakes bats begin to use them

IDENTIFICATION CHARTS

Have you seen plants, animals or other nature things which you can't identify?



We have a good stock of the Nature Studies Council Identification Charts available covering a wide range of subjects for sale at either £2.75 or £3.50 for the larger ones They look like this and in full colour and laminated to be waterproof.

Do get in touch with us and ask if we have one on your favourite subject and we can get it to you if we have. One or two charts would make ideal Christmas presents for yourself or family members so do let us know if you would like some

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday April 16th 2013 - 7.30.p.m.

**The AGM at the Horns Lodge Pub,
South Chailey**

**Followed by a Talk and informal
gathering**

Regular Working party

Monday mornings start 9.30.a.m.

**Why not join us on one of our
volunteer mornings? We have a varied
programme of tasks depending on the
time of year and season.**

**All meet at the gate in the Flint wall
Markstakes Lane South Chailey**

**Contact Rupert Hall
email – markstakescommon@live.co.uk
Or 01825 722863**