



FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

NEWSLETTER NO 2 – SPRING 2010

From the Chairman - Rupert Hall

✍ Welcome to the second newsletter of the Friends of Markstakes Common. Having had a rather wet, cold and miserable winter I am personally looking forward to the coming of spring and the sight of bluebell shoots appearing this month is a cheering reminder of what is to come. What was notable this winter were the heavy snows and the damage the heavy snow on the branches inflicted on some of the older and weaker trees. I know it is a part of the natural processes of mature woodland but it still saddens me to lose some of the larger specimens. We have surveyed for veteran trees, which was the topic of a winter walk, both of which are discussed later.

The wet weather has really slowed down volunteer work over the winter with November, being almost totally lost and several task days cancelled in December and January.

Despite this we have made excellent progress on the Mire with all the large birch trees cleared bar one rather stout specimen. The area that has been opened up is now quite extensive and the spring and summer should see a resurgence of wild flowers with the purple moor grass and other grasses re establishing itself.

On the glades besides the woodland edge we have been raking up the bracken litter and digging out the brambles and are seeing pleasing signs of grasses and wildflowers and even heather shoots returning. The aim is to regain patches of what was formally meadow and heath land and we expect this will take several years as the bracken puts up a stubborn resistance. During the summer we plan to mow the bracken with scythes. We have funding for a second scythe but if anyone has a scythe that they would be willing to lend out for Sunday task days that would be much appreciated.

Our Lewes District Council Community Ranger has used the winter season to continue work on the high pond with a further digging out by volunteers and contractors clearing overhanging branches. The result is that the pond has a much more open aspect and the slow decline caused by silting up has been arrested.

Membership Matters

Our Friends Group continues from strength to strength and we have another three new Friends who have joined us. We shall soon be having our first Annual General Meeting and we look forward to meeting as many of you who can come along to the Horns Lodge.

William Coleman

SURVEYS and SURVEYING

The Sussex Lichen Recording Group visited the Common on 3 October and recorded 38 lichen species on trees. The most interesting trees of the day turned out to be the old hornbeams. Some of them were covered in huge patches of *Graphis elegans*.



Graphis elegans

These lichens get their name from the resemblance of their fruiting bodies to writing.

Many of the trees on the Common are young. Counting the annual rings of the birch felled to recreate glades this winter revealed that they were about 20 years old. There are also some very old trees of beech, hornbeam and oak.



One of the old Hornbeam pollards

It is very difficult to estimate the age of old trees but using a complicated formula devised by the Forestry Commission it appears that some specimens may be at least 250 years old. Those that have achieved the status of ancient trees (girths of 230

cm for hornbeam, 300 cm for beech and 450 cm for oak) are being recorded for listing on the ancient tree hunt website: <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/>

Throughout last year Ian Woolsey has put a lot of effort into surveying birds and as a result we have recorded a total of 35 species in 2009 (compared to 30 in 2008 and 26 in 2004) Of particular note was a Nightjar, which was heard churring and the resident tawny owl which was sighted in an oak tree adjacent to the glades.

Jacqui Hutson

Notes from our Ranger – Thyone Outram

One of the most exciting things you can see at Markstakes Common is an adder. I saw my first one this year on the 10th March and there are plenty about if you keep your eyes open. Snakes are very shy and don't like to be disturbed so they like to stay near cover – dead bracken and scrub are ideal for them but they need to warm up so they have to bask in the sunshine, which draws them out into the open where they are seen more easily. One of the best times to see most reptiles is the early spring. As the weather starts to warm up, reptiles emerge from the dens where they have been hibernating and because the sun is still weak, they bask in the sunshine for long periods. If you are leaving the path especially if you are straying through the dead bracken in early spring, you must wear boots. I have trodden on an adder myself in the early spring when adders are still 'sleepy' and been bitten on the boot (although not at Markstakes Common). The males wake up first and search out the females. Adders are not ready to mate until the temperature reaches 13-15 degrees centigrade and then the

mating season lasts about 6 weeks. The males tend to be more striking than the females since, whether very pale or darker, they always have a black zigzag down their back. Females however have a brown zigzag.

We are surveying the Common for reptiles this year (we know that there are adders, grass snakes, slow worms and common lizards), which involves laying out refuges, squares of roofing felt which warm up in the sun so lizards and snakes seek them out as good places to warm themselves. If you come across one of these, please leave it alone. It may look ugly but they are important for the survey.



Adder in bracken at Markstakes Common



Grass snakes do not have the clear zigzag marking

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday April 13th 2010 7.30.p.m.
The AGM at the Horns Lodge Pub,
South Chailey

Thursday April 22nd 10am-12pm.
Bluebells or Anemones Walk - Meet at Setfords Field and take a short walk around Markstakes Common with the Community Ranger, Thyone Outram

Tuesday July 13th 6.30 pm
An early evening stroll around Markstakes Common with the Community Ranger, Thyone Outram

3rd Sunday monthly, practical work morning.

18th April
16th May
20th June
18th July

NOTICE OF FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
 THE 'FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON' WILL HOLD THEIR
FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
 ON
TUESDAY APRIL 13TH 2010
 IN
 THE HORNS LODGE PUBLIC HOUSE SOUTH CHAILEY
 AT 7.30.P.M.
 ALL ARE WELCOME

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY 13TH APRIL 2010
AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES
2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND ADOPTION
3. TREASURER'S REPORT AND ADOPTION
4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS
5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Followed by a Talk by
 Thyone Outram
 Asst. Community Ranger