



# FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

## NEWSLETTER NO 8 – SPRING 2013

### From the Chairman - Rupert Hall

✍ It does not seem so long ago since we were planning the clearance activities for the winter season.

Despite continued hostile weather conditions we have made some satisfactory progress with further clearance of the heather glade and the felling of some major trees in the ride that connects the Heather glade to the Mire.

We are grateful to the Council for funding the felling of the larger Birch trees by contractors. The result is a rather pleasing vista as one walks along the path towards the High pond

This is where another significant piece of work by volunteers has been completed. Felling the larger trees has given rise to a significant amount of brash and we have used this to create a dead hedge around the pond. Despite signs asking people to keep their dogs out of the pond there were clear signs of disturbance and it is hoped that the dead hedge will provide a more effective deterrence while not being too obtrusive.

It was one of the more satisfying tasks completed by the volunteers and it is hoped that by the time it rots away the weed within the pond will have re established itself.



**New cleared area- Heather Glade to Mire**



**High Pond with new 'Dead Hedge'**

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The dam on the shallow pond had been dismantled over the Christmas period presumably for the fun of watching the water run out. Although we were disappointed by such a wanton act of destruction the event was at a very quiet time of year with regard to wildlife. We have repaired the dam and made it more robust so hopefully it will be proof against idle hands in future. The wet weather resulted in it being filled to the desired level within days.

The cages on the Heather glade have proved very effective in protecting the heather and allowing it to achieve a decent height. The intention is to add a few more and perhaps to move one or two around so see how the heather fares once the protection is withdrawn.

Rupert

## **MEMBERSHIP MATTERS**

Welcome to our new Friends who have joined during the year.

Subscription renewal time has arrived again and I am sending the usual Reminder with this Newsletter. I do hope that you will continue to support us in the valuable and sensitive work which we are doing as we have achieved so much during the last Year.

Thank you to Lewes District Council – Dan Ross and Thyone - for all the support which they have given us and we certainly benefit from all their advice which they so readily give and which we discuss at our regular

meetings. The Common is looking really great and the areas in which we have been working are becoming very interesting and we are learning all the time.

Hopefully you will find the Newsletter interesting and a good way in which to keep in touch. If you feel the urge to get involved, we are usually at work on Monday mornings so come along and join us. It is like a 'Green Gym' and gives us exercise as well as achieving our aims for the future of the Common and the ecology and biodiversity which abounds there.

I look forward to hearing from you with the renewal subscription. Send me a cheque or you can pay by Standing Order or by Internet Banking Transfer to Unity Trust Bank 08-60-01 20225137 Account – Friends of Markstakes Common. (£2 annually)

William Coleman

## **SURVEYS AND SURVEYING**

We recorded all the tree, shrub and herbaceous plant species growing in each 100 x 100 m square on the Common in 2011 so with the emphasis on mapping in 2012, we didn't do any other surveys for these plants.

However, this year, we will continue surveys for mosses and liverworts (bryophytes) and these will be ongoing for a while. There are so many species, some only a couple of millimetres high, and their identification is often difficult, requiring samples to be collected and examined using both

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dissecting and compound microscopes. Our list of species was boosted considerably in January when Tom Ottley, the new national bryophyte recorder for Sussex, visited the Common one morning and by chance met us engaged in our task of 'weeding' birch seedlings from one of the glades. He sent us a list and said he will be back to do some more recording one day.

An evening visit to look for glow-worms in late summer found six individuals scattered in different parts of the Common, some in places where one wouldn't expect to see them. The females whose lights shone in densely wooded areas or under the shade of trees on the edge of glades were not ideally placed to attract males.

On that same evening we heard rustling in the leaf litter in several places in the wooded areas and our torches revealed groups of young toads feeding. Toads are not known to breed in any of the water bodies on the Common so we don't know from where they come. Although we come across individual young ones while we weed the glades and older ones sheltering under log piles we have not come across large groups like this before.

Jacqui Hutson

## **Notes from our Ranger**

Mud, mud, glorious mud! It's not really a surprise that during the wettest year on record, the Weald should have a lot of mud and Markstakes Common was not spared its share. Those of you that have known the Common for many more years than myself, have told me that there have been muddy paths in places that you have never experienced mud before.

This wet weather also meant that the pull-in for cars near the northern gate became very pitted over the winter. Some of the deep water-filled holes were starting to be a problem so we filled 2 of the worst with MOT (crushed stone) which is a quick and easy, and a very temporary solution but hopefully should stop the holes getting so deep that they become dangerous.

All the water, of course, means that the ponds are particularly full at the moment so as spring comes on, the amphibians will return to them to breed.

In the autumn, the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service came in to help us clear some of the branched bur reed out of the high pond. We need to clear part of this pond every year otherwise this plant will take over the whole pond. Most pond life thrives in a thickly vegetated pond but Great Crested newts need open water to breed so the ideal for a pond like this is to keep 1/3 of the area as open water.



### High Pond weeds removal

Newts are most active at night so we survey for them on a warm spring night by torching (shining very bright torches into the water). We do not disturb them by trapping them and only go into the water to clear bur reed in the autumn after they have bred and left the pond.

For the past 4 years we have been photographing the pond at a number of fixed(ish) points around the Common. Hopefully in years to come this will give some valuable records as to how the Common is changing and what effect recent management is having.

Thyone Outram

### **DATE FOR YOUR DIARY**

***Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April  
2013***

**A Joint Commons Walk with Sussex  
Ornithological Society  
Meet at SETFORDS FIELD GREEN LANE  
SOUTH CHAILEY Map Ref TQ392182  
09.30.a.m.**

**2 hours 2.5 miles**

### NOTICE OF FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE 'FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES  
COMMON' WILL HOLD THEIR  
**FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL  
MEETING**

ON

**TUESDAY APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup>  
2013**

THE READING ROOM CHAILEY GREEN  
AT 7.30.P.M.

ALL ARE WELCOME

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
TUESDAY 16<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2013 7.30.p.m.**

#### AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES
2. MINUTES of 24<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2012
3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND ADOPTION
4. TREASURER'S REPORT AND ADOPTION
5. ELECTION OF OFFICERS
6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Followed by Talks including

**YEAR'S ACTIVITIES ON  
MARLSTAKES**

By  
**THYONE OUTRAM**