



FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

NEWSLETTER NO 10 – SPRING 2014

From the Chairman - Rupert Hall

✍ After the wettest winter on record it is a real delight to be looking out on the spring sunshine and to see budding plants and the floor of the woodlands turning green with bluebell plants.

Anyone familiar with Markstakes knows how rain impacts the footpaths and this year has seen many of the paths, particularly the bridleway on the south side of the Common turn into an absolute quagmire. There is no doubt that in wet weather the Common is one of the wilder places to walk.

The strong winds have, as in previous years, taken down a few large trees in the wooded areas. While it is sad to see these trees come down it should be remembered that the fallen timber provides an essential resource for fungi and invertebrates which, although not always apparent, form a major element of the wildlife interest on the site.

Unsurprisingly the weather has had some impact on the conservation activities but despite this we have been successful in making a major extension to the corner glade. This area borders the section most closely resembling former Wood Pasture and it will be interesting to see what flora responds to the increased light.

Initially we named the largest area of clearance outside the Mire as the Birch Glade due to the very dense thicket of young birch that had colonized the location. At one point we renamed the site as the Heather Glade more in hope than to reflect the habitat on the site.

To encourage further growth in heather we had protected the heather with cages so as to allow the plants to mature. The cages had a very positive impact and we now have well established heather plants and have moved the cages onto new areas to further help the spread of heather plants.

The patient and persistent work of the Monday morning volunteers has paid off well and the Heather Glade can now certainly justify its name.

The Community Ranger discussed the coppicing project elsewhere but although the heavy work with chainsaws has been done by the contractors there is a lot for volunteers to do in terms of clearing the site of brash and allowing sunshine to reach the forest floor.

Rupert

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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. We welcomed another Dan during the year who has joined the Ranger team (see below). The Common is developing and the areas in which we have been working are becoming very interesting and we are learning all the time.

We are usually working on Monday mornings so come along and join us. We meet at the gate in the flint wall in Markstakes Lane at 9.30.a.m. Our efforts continue to please and surprise us 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

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SURVEYS AND SURVEYING

Mosses on Markstakes

Mosses transform fallen trees, stumps, and the woodland floor into places of beauty and Markstakes Common has wonderful examples. Most of the mosses and liverworts (collectively known as Bryophytes) that occur here are woodland species but where we have cleared woodland to create glades, species of more open conditions are colonising. Here they have a useful role to play, not only in trapping water and making the soil more suitable for the germination of other higher plants but also in providing food and shelter for other organisms. In among the mosses live a multitude of tiny species of invertebrates, which are, in turn, important as food for larger insects and birds.

While most of these open-site species are native and non-invasive, there is one moss that is an intruder and is quite aggressive, if one can use such a term for such a tiny plant. Its name is *Campylopus introflexus* or Heath Star Moss and it is easily recognised, especially when dry when its dark green carpets are conspicuous because of the white 'stars' formed by the spreading hair-points of the upper leaves. Native of various parts of the Southern Hemisphere and the southern states of the USA, it was first found in Britain in 1941 since when it has spread rapidly and is now widely distributed on heathland. While it does obviously compete with our native species, in the long-term we hope that it will become less of a problem when

the glades become more densely clothed with heather, grasses and other flowering plants.

The wet which we have had in recent months has been good for the bryophytes and they are at their best in the winter when they are in active growth and when there isn't much else to look at in the way of plants. So enjoy them while we wait for the splendour of the bluebells.

Jacqui Hutson

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Notes from our Ranger

Deer, Coppicing and a new Ranger

Over the winter, in addition to all the work the Friends are doing, tree surgeons have been out at Markstakes Common clearing some of the trees that fell over paths in the storms and coppicing an area of young trees at the South end of the Common. Where trees or large branches fall in storms, or where they look like they will fall because of a breakage or rot, we only deal with them if they are in an area round the paths or if they are part of the process of habitat management. This means that there are many trees that fall in the woods that we leave where they fell since fallen and decaying trees form an important habitat.

The area at the South of the Common that has been coppiced is shown on the map. This will increase the variety of habitats and benefit the wildlife of the common. In some areas of Markstakes Common, open glades have been created that are re-cut every year. This area has been

coppiced, which means the trees will re-grow over a number of years and not be cut every year.



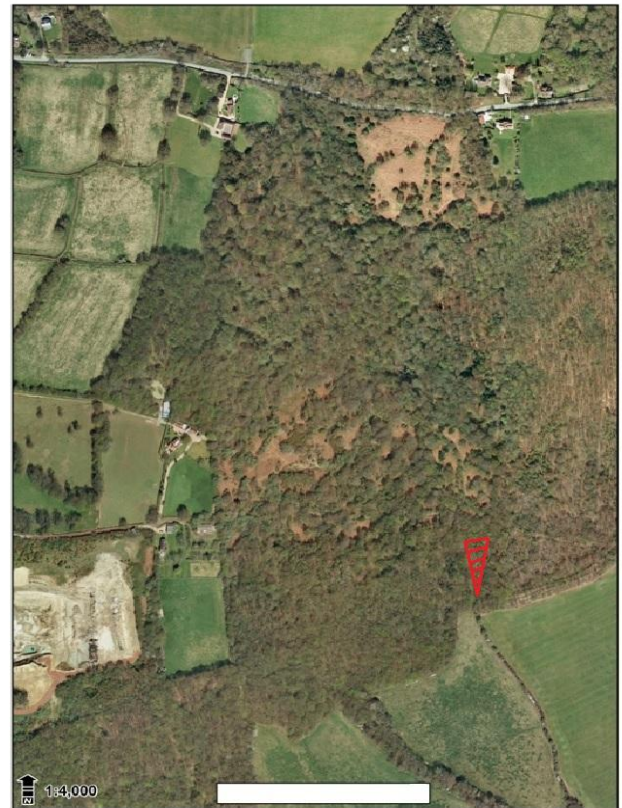
Unlike other woodlands on the Weald, Markstakes Common is not a traditional coppice woodland so there will not be a general coppice cycle and there are no plans to coppice in other areas of the wood. The timber will be cleared later in the year when the ground is dry enough to allow a vehicle in. Some of the brash and small branches will be laid over the coppice stools to help protect them from grazing deer. Deer love fresh shoots and as I'm sure you know, there are a good deal of deer in the area so we expect the shoots to be grazed. We will watch the situation to see if any further protection is needed.

When an area is commercially coppiced, it is important that the trees produce growth that is straight and fast-growing. Because the coppicing at Markstakes Common is for wildlife rather than for wood production, it does not matter if the shoots grow more slowly or in unusual shapes so some deer grazing is fine.

The two aerial photographs below from 1945 and 2006 show how Markstakes Common has changed from a far more open area of wood pasture to how it is



now. The newly coppiced approximate area is shown in red. We do not plan to restore it to how it was in 1945 but it is interesting to see how quickly the landscape changes.



Some of you may have noticed the notices on the Common about deer shooting, A buck was found this winter in the woods, which appeared to have been shot. PC Peter Hall the local Police Wildlife Crime Officer was involved but it was not possible to tell where it had been shot (whether actually on the Common) or how far it had come before dying.

Deer poaching is probably rare but does happen in this part of Sussex. Shooting is absolutely forbidden and would be very dangerous in a public place like Markstakes Common so if anyone knows anything about this or any other incidents of deer poaching, please report it to the police.

In December we welcomed Dan Fagan as our new Lewes District Council Community Ranger. Dan Ross is now the Assistant Parks Manager at the Council so the Nature Reserves are



(An early Small Tortoiseshell)

still part of his area of responsibility but he won't be involved in the main management of the Common.

I am pleased to say that Dan Fagan immediately fell under the spell of Markstakes Common – how could he not!

Come and meet him at the AGM.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday mornings

Working Party

09.30.a.m. (3 hours approx.)

Meet at the gate in the flint wall in Markstakes Lane South Chailey. Tools provided and bring along a snack and drink for breaktime

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NOTICE OF FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

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

ON

**TUESDAY APRIL 22nd
2014**

At HORNS LODGE PUB SOUTH CHAILEY
AT 7.30.P.M

ALL ARE WELCOME

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY 22nd APRIL 2014 7.30.p.m.**

AGENDA

- 1. APOLOGIES**
- 2. MINUTES of 16th APRIL 2013**
- 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 and light refreshments



Brash burning March 2014

