

Friends of Markstakes Common

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2017

From the Chairman

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.

The past few months have seen continued efforts in maintaining the areas cleared in prior seasons. This does sometimes feel like painting the Forth Bridge but the enhanced presence of Heather, grasses and other plants does remind us both of the progress that we are maintaining and the need to continue if we are not to lose what we have achieved.

A major focus over the winter has been restoration of the Crescent Glade and the cutting back of encroaching scrub. This has given rise to large amounts of brash that needed to be disposed of. This was achieved through burning despite what at times were challenging circumstances. While the area may look a little bare at present, the intention is to initiate a coppicing regime on the encroaching willows and allow some clumps of bracken and long grass to develop into a mosaic habitat.

Working as we do in such close quarters with the site we notice a when new species make their appearance. The discovery of Bell Heather on the Friends' Glade was a highlight last year and this year it was good to see it crop up on the Corner Glade as well. In the Ride it is good to see signs that Heather is colonising the newly exposed earth alongside Gorse while the

extension to the Corner Glade has so far given rise to extensive coverage of Rush.

The progress made so far is only possible due to the continued support of the Monday morning volunteers. One morning stood out for me when the volunteers stood round a damp fire feeding it with small twigs in steady rain. It was a fine example of the group's persistence which was, in the end, rewarded by a splendid and productive fire. Once the morning's objective was achieved, the volunteers went home wet and bedraggled and surprisingly cheerful! Thank you once again for your support.

Rupert Hall

NOTICE OF EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

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

TUESDAY APRIL 18TH 2017
At HORNS LODGE PUB SOUTH CHAILEY
AT 7.30.P.M
ALL ARE WELCOME – Drinks available

WEB SITE – <http://chaileycommons.org.uk/page21.htm>

And also see - <http://friendsofmarkstakescommon.weebly.com>

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY 18th APRIL 2017 7.30.p.m.**

AGENDA

- 1. APOLOGIES**
- 2. MINUTES of 19th APRIL 2016**
- 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 a Talk by Barry
Kemp on 'Conserving our native
reptiles and amphibians
*Please come and find out more.***

Membership Matters

Thank you once again to our 'Friends' for their support this year and also to those who come on our regular working parties on Monday mornings. The work is varied and sometimes detailed which involves close and exacting weeding, but this does produce a very worthwhile result.

Thank you to our Ranger Thyone Outram and the support of the Lewes District Council and also to our leader Rupert Hall, without whom we would not have achieved such great results.

Our subscription remains modest at just £2 and this goes towards some necessary tools and gloves etc. to help us in our work.

Subscriptions are due at the AGM.

William Coleman

Surveys and Surveying

Bog mosses in Markstakes

Sphagnum mosses - bog mosses - are among the most remarkable of all plants. They are unique in that they can hold up to 20 times their own weight in water, with each small, porous leaf acting like a tiny sponge. They live in very inhospitable, wet, acid conditions and can make their surroundings even more acid by releasing hydrogen ions from their cells in exchange for mineral ions. Their growth pattern is also unique in that shoots grow continually upwards, dying back below where they eventually form peat. Thus, each shoot is potentially immortal if the right conditions continue to prevail.



Sussex is not richly endowed with these mosses. The Ashdown Forest has some bogs but these are on the small side compared with the enormous examples in the north and west of Britain. Out of 35 species of *Sphagnum* recorded in Britain, Markstakes Common has three species: *Sphagnum fallax* (Flat-topped Bog-moss) under willows and bracken by

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Crescent Glade; *Sphagnum denticulatum* (Cow-horn Bog-moss) in the Mire and *Sphagnum fimbriatum* (Fringed Bog-moss) by High Pond.



(*Sphagnum fimbriatum* growing by High Pond)

As well as being important in soaking up water and helping prevent flooding in areas of high rainfall, *Sphagnum* mosses have been used - and still are - in horticulture and this has contributed to enormous losses of habitat in some areas.



(*Sphagnum fallax* growing by Crescent Glade)

Their mild antiseptic properties and high absorbency made them useful for staunching wounds on the battlefield and they have been used for this purpose since at least Anglo-Saxon times.

Sphagnum was used on a large scale during the Napoleonic Wars and in the First World War enormous quantities were collected from Scotland, supplying the British Army with over a million dressings every month.

Sphagnum has been used in nappies for babies and researchers in Canada are investigating the possibility of farming *Sphagnum* for this purpose so that natural sites are not over-exploited.

Beech and Oak bundle



This tree clump consists of oak and beech trees, which have grown together, maybe the result of a bundle-planting. In the past it was not an unusual practice to plant not a single seedling or sapling but a fistful of them, all in the same hole. The expectation was probably that one could be expected to prosper but sometimes several would become trees and as their girths swelled individuals might grow together and unite. This example is growing in the strip of common land just north of the flint wall boundary on the opposite side of Markstakes Lane but there are several similar examples on the Common itself.

Jacqui Hutson

(Pictures from Jacqui Hutson)

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From our Ranger

The Bee-flies are out and about.



Bee Fly at Markstakes -
Bombylius major (look for black marks on wings)



What a proboscis!

Now that spring is well and truly on the way, look out for these little balls of fluff at Markstakes Common. The name really gives it away – they are flies but they look like small bumble bees. The rather alarming looking spear at their front end is not a huge sting but a very long proboscis (tube tongue). They use it for drinking nectar from spring flowers such as primroses, violets, wood anemones and blackthorn and can be important in pollinating these early flowering plants. It is parasitic on some species of mining bees. The bee fly searches out mining bee nest holes in bare soil and then lays its egg by flicking them out in the direction of the hole. It's not a very accurate way of laying your eggs but if you lay a few thousand you have some to spare.

The larvae then hatch and make their own way into the nest if the eggs have ended up close enough.

There's plenty of bare soil at Markstakes Common and you will sometimes see them on the paths sitting warming up or rubbing their bottoms on the ground while 'buzzing' their wings. The first time I saw this I was very confused. This creature was obviously very busy but not laying eggs or nesting. Apparently they are picking up soil on a brush on their rear end to coat their eggs before they lay them near the bee hole. This may help camouflage the eggs or to weigh them down as they are dropped or chucked out in the direction of the chosen nest hole. Bee flies fly from March to May.

Thyone Outram

(pictures from Thyone Outram)

Dates for the Diary

Monday Weekly (most Mondays)

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 12.30. Tools are provided and suitable clothes are recommended according to the weather. We have a break so bring along light refreshments to keep you going.

If you have not been already, do come along and help us with this worthwhile and sensitive conservation work which is very rewarding and keeps you fit. No phoning required, just come along and join us – we shall be pleased to see you.



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