



Friends of Markstakes Common

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2018

From the Chairman

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.

As I write this, the Chairman's report for Spring 2018 there are flurries of snow falling outside. What has been a wet winter as given way to couple of weeks of snowy weather before spring makes its appearance. The weather seems to have been rather wetter and this has resulted in lost workdays over the last few months.

The Monday group have been focusing their efforts on the Mire, a small patch that is rich in plant species and is the location with the highest density of butterflies and insects in the summer months.

Over the past three years, birch seedlings have turned into saplings and the bramble has started encroaching again. Although a small area we have found it to be quite extensive when one is trying to eliminate all the invasive saplings and bramble shoots by hand. However, over several weeks we have covered almost the entire area.

We have also experimented with the 'Bigfoot', attachment for the tree poppers and this has proved very effective against resurgent willows growing out of the damp and boggy parts of the location.

The Council has also played its part funding contractors using brush cutters to clear sectors within the Mire as well. While very effective there is no substitute for the manual work of the volunteers as it preserves the vertical diversity within the site creating a more favorable environment for insects.

Being close to achieving our aims on the Mire we will be free to return to other areas and clear bracken where it is string to return. The clearance activity on the northern bracken has allowed the return of Heather and we have moved cages over certain parts to allow it to reestablish.

Once again, I would like to thank the volunteers who turn up on Monday and help keep Markstakes a special place. Also, a thank you to Ian Seccombe, Ian Woolsey and Dan Rolt for their ongoing support with the annual surveys.

Rupert Hall

NOTICE OF NINTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE 'FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES
COMMON' WILL HOLD THEIR

NINTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY APRIL 25TH 2018

At READING ROOM CHAILEY GREEN
AT 7.30.P.M

ALL ARE WELCOME

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY 25th APRIL 2018 7.30.p.m.**

AGENDA

- 1. APOLOGIES**
- 2. MINUTES of 18th APRIL 2017**
- 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 Ian
Secombe on Photographic Skills
and Successes**

Please come and find out more.

Membership Matters

Our team of volunteer members has been doing a great job with the many tasks that we become involved with. There haven't been any new members joining us for a while, but work has been going on with excellent and inspiring results.

The very modest membership amount of £2 is due at our annual general meeting and thank you also if you send in a cheque or pay by bank transfer. Donations are always most useful so thank you if you have done this.

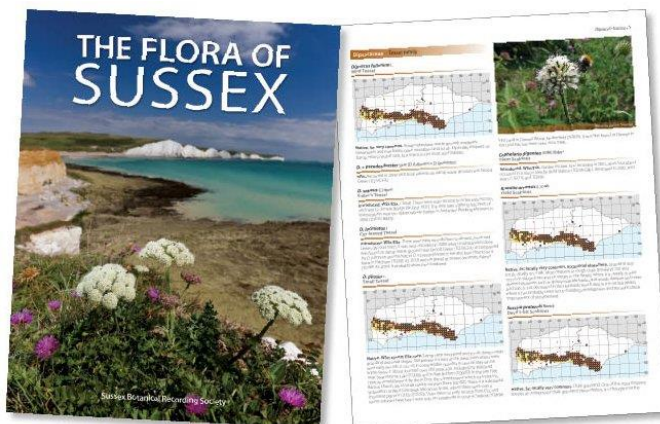
Thank you to the Lewes DC for their support with the bigger items too.

We have used a little of our funds to buy new things such as gloves which we find take a bashing as it were and wear out quite quickly.

2018 is more of the same to ensure our sensitive and careful clearing and maintenance of this lovely place continues. Thank you for your support.

William Coleman

The Flora of Sussex



As a member of the Sussex Botanical Recording Society and as a contributor of plant records from Markstakes Common and the surrounding area over the years, I was especially pleased to acquire *The Flora of Sussex* (Pisces Publications) when it was launched a few weeks ago.

It is a very large and impressive book and its 428 pages contain a huge amount of information. It is the first Sussex plant publication of this kind since 1980 when *The Sussex Plant Atlas* was published, giving accounts of all the plants recorded in the two counties with distribution maps, notes on how abundant or rare they were, whether they were native or alien, and the habitats they grew in. It was incredibly useful when I started recording because I could tell if a plant I had identified tentatively was probably correct or completely impossible in that square on the map. The Atlas was in black and white and had no photographs but had some useful chapters on habitats, geology etc.

In due course the Sussex Botanical Recording Society decided to involve its members in recording plants with a view to producing a new flora. So, between 2000 and 2015, members, either individually or in organized field meetings, sallied forth and recorded the plants they found in 2 km x 2 km squares, based on the National Grid system. Modern technology allowed records to be sent in on line (or on the paper recording cards preferred by some people) and results were uploaded to the web site where a map, updated from time to time, showed how many species were recorded in each tetrad, with lists of species expected but were still waiting to be found.

By the end of 2015 nearly 200,000 records of 1988 plant species had been submitted. These include

non-native species that have established in the wild. The average number of species per square was 350 (excluding squares that were incomplete because of parts being in the sea or in an adjoining county). It is good to know that the squares in which Markstakes Common sits had plant species in excess of this number (386 and 374). Our contributions must have helped gain this number given that we recorded 190 species in the two squares, The Flora itself deals with 2749 species and subspecies, including some that haven't been seen for decades.

There are chapters on Sussex Botany and Botanists, Geology and Soils, Habitats and Vegetation, Conservation, and Changes since 1940. The bulk of the book gives accounts of each species or subspecies with notes on their status, whether Native to Sussex, Archaeophyte (established in the wild before AD1500) or Introduced (after AD1500). There are also details of any conservation designation, how common or rare they are and what habitats they occur in. There are distribution maps (based on the 2-km squares) of all but the most common and rarest species and some species have photographs.

The changes that have had negative effects are well known: human population increase (from 937,339 in 1951 to over 1,600,000 in 2011); intensification of agriculture, building and transport development. Acres of vineyards, golf courses, areas devoted to equestrian pursuits and development have all contributed to the loss of habitat as well as loss of fields and hedgerows to development. Fortunately, Markstakes Common has not suffered from such losses and remains species-rich. It has several plants that are not at all common in Sussex and has only a few non-native species.

The Sussex Botanical Recording Society welcomes new members whatever their level of expertise. The Field Meetings provide opportunities to learn in a friendly and informal group, often visiting places not normally open to the public. There are also indoor meetings, newsletters, a website sussex.flora.org and Facebook Group.

Jacqui Hutson

End of winter scenes at Markstakes

March 2018 turned out to be a month 'full of weather'.

There had been a lot of rain during January and February and then the season turned much colder with an easterly blast accompanied by periods of snow straight from the east over Russia circulating around a large 'Low pressure' system.

These pictures show the common, still in its winter colour and a moss and a lady bird. On 26th March two butterflies were seen, a very yellow Brimstone and a peacock.



The Mire



The Azulox Glade



The shallow pond



Seven spot lady bird - *Coccinella septempunctata*

The Seven-spot Ladybird is a member of the beetle family Coccinellidea, in the Order Coleoptera, and is our most common ladybird. It is one of 25 species found in this country - all have different colour and spot combinations to warn off predators.

(pictures by Jacqui Hutson)



Ring barked Birch in Mire

STRONGER together



From our Ranger

Pygmy Shrews

They live fast, die young and don't socialise with the neighbours.

You may never have seen one but skittering around on the common is Britain's second smallest mammal, the pygmy shrew, *Sorex minutus* (the smallest is the pipistrelle bat). A full size, full weight one weighs in at around 6 grams. They are very aggressive and territorial – even when mating, the male holds onto the female by biting the back of her neck or top of her head. She will only be in oestrus for 24 hours at a time so there are only brief periods of time that they must tolerate any slight truce between them.



Common Tamarisk-moss *Thuidium tamariscinum*: grows on soil in woodland, mostly on soils that are neither too acidic nor strongly basic. It is quite common in parts of Markstakes Common, especially south of the main bridle path.

Pygmy shrews have a high metabolic rate and must consume up 1.25 times their body weight each day, eating small creatures like beetles, spiders, bugs and woodlice. They have been known to starve after just 2 hours without food and, because they do not hibernate, must continue to find food all winter.

It's not surprising that many of them don't survive the winter – the March weather cold blast named the 'Beast from the East' will have claimed some. If you see one this spring, you can be sure you won't see the same one again next spring – they live just over a year so those born last summer will live long enough to breed themselves this summer and then die before next winter.

Pygmy shrews don't dig their own burrows but use holes dug by other creatures or shelter where they can – occasionally those involved in the reptile survey may have seen one under a reptile mat – a rare treat.



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 12.00. Tools and gloves are provided, and suitable clothes and footwear 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.

Email – markstakes@chaileycommons.org.uk



Hazel – *Corylus avellana* Family Betulaceae

Flowers: hazel is monoecious, meaning that both male and female flowers are found on the same tree, although hazel flowers must be pollinated by pollen from other hazel trees. The yellow male catkins appear before the leaves and hang in clusters, from mid-February. Female flowers are tiny and bud-like with red styles.

