




FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

NEWSLETTER NO 6 – SPRING 2012

From the Chairman - Rupert Hall

 Although there has been less practical conservation work this winter while the Habitat Management Plan is being finalised, the work has continued. An area of rum cherry, an invasive species, that, if allowed would spread throughout the Common, has been felled and the stumps treated by contractors.

We have also been clearing an area between the Mire and the Birch glade. This will improve the links between these areas of cleared ground and which should benefit butterflies. Interesting ground flora, such as lesser skullcap, have been found in this area and should respond well to the increased light. Our picture shows work in progress.



The Monday group have also been undertaking mapping of the Common using GPS. The intention is to create a digital record of the key features of the Common

which will improve our understanding of the site and help with management of the site.

A notable sighting during the winter was a woodcock. The Common should be favourable for woodcock with the large areas of rough cover and it was pleasing to be able to add this attractive bird to the species list. In contrast to last year the winter has been mild and during a bird survey on the 1st of March we observed adders basking in two locations. Two were sub adults which would confirm that adders are breeding on the site.

Early sighting of butterflies include comma and brimstone. This year we plan to build on our butterfly survey work with additional surveys of the transect established last year.

The Habitat Management Plan is close to completion. It gives due consideration to the value of habitats as well as key species and we are very happy with the overall balance. An important aspect of the plan is to understand how the Common relates to its surroundings. Having completed a very thorough survey of the Common last year we are planning to investigate the plant life along Balneath track.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Our membership of the 'Friends' has remained steady since the last Newsletter with a few new Friends joining us.

The subscription for 2012-13 is now due and you should find a Renewal Invitation along with this Newsletter which I hope you will use to send to me.

Should you wish to use a Bank Transfer by Standing Order to make it easier, the details which you will need are Unity Trust Bank - Sort Code 086001 - Account Number 20225137 - Account Name 'Friends of Markstakes Common'. Payment date 01 Feb Annual and add your name to the payment details. Thank you.

As you will read elsewhere in the Newsletter our activities have continued during the year and you are welcome to join us on our Monday working mornings or come along to the walks.

Your support is much appreciated and goes towards our conservation and ever increasing survey work to establish really good and accurate records for the Common. These are used to compare year on year the wonderful flora and fauna of the Common, and are sent to the County Records Centre at Henfield.

SURVEYS AND SURVEYING

Monitoring Vegetation development in the glade

Some of the areas where we have felled young birch and cleared bracken and bramble are, in their third year, beginning to look green and glade-like. In two of them, Birch Glade and the Mire, we conduct yearly estimates of the development of vegetation by sampling 1-metre squares along transect lines. In Birch Glade, just north-west of the old clay workings, the once dense birch thicket has been replaced by a mix of low growing plants.

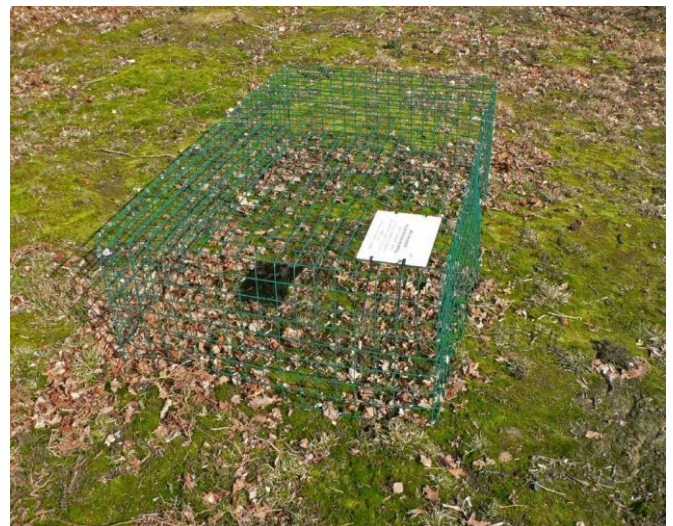
The cover of mosses increased enormously in 2011 and unfortunately included the alien and invasive heath star moss, which is causing problems on many heathlands by squeezing out native mosses. We hope that as the 'higher plants' become more established this moss will, in turn, be squeezed out. but desirable species increased too.

Two-year-old heather flowered as did tormentil, heath bedstraw and wood sage.

Our cutting and uprooting efforts have paid off, with bramble and bracken much reduced, although birch seedlings are numerous and need continual weeding. We have left a good patch of bramble unmolested so that its flowers and fruits provide food for butterflies, birds and dormice.

Grasses increased in this glade too but there was evidence that they were being heavily grazed by rabbits and possibly deer.

We thought that the heather was probably being browsed too, so in the autumn we erected five 2 by 1 metre wire cages over some heather patches to see if the exclusion of browsers and grazers would make a difference to the growth of the heather compared with the surrounding unprotected patches.



The Mire, just to the south-east of Birch Glade, was an almost impenetrable tangle of bramble under birch and willow 3 years ago. It is now a lovely, flower-studded, grassy area with a profusion of lesser skullcap, tormentil, lesser spearwort, violets, marsh thistle and greater bird's-foot-trefoil.

We have called it the Mire because it has a mix of mire or acid-bog species. The characteristic purple moor grass tussocks are derelict in some places, indicating that it is drier there than in the past, but in the parts where water still collects the tussocks flower well and shelter some patches of *Sphagnum* mosses.

Notes from our Ranger

Thyone Outram

You may have noticed that a number of trees have been cut down by the Friends close to the gate at the northern flint wall. These are an American species of cherry, *Prunus serotina* or rum cherry, that is starting to spread onto the Common. They are very vigorous and they spread by seed - birds or other animals eat the cherries and spread the seed; and by vegetative growth – seedlings sprout from the roots of these trees especially after they have been cut.

They have been a real problem in Continental Europe where they were introduced as ornamental trees in the 17th century and as plantation trees in the early 20th century. In some areas they have spread through native woods and across open areas of rough ground and abandoned fields, pushing out native trees and plants. We do not want this to happen at Markstakes Common.

We rarely use chemicals on our nature reserves but we have had to use a herbicide, glyphosate, drilled into the rum cherry stumps and will probably have to carefully glyphosate treat any saplings that sprout from the roots later in the year, if we are to really get on top of the spread of these trees.

Glyphosate is a herbicide that has a low toxicity to wildlife and breaks down readily in the soil so it is one of the safest herbicides to use on a wildlife site. The plus side of felling the cherry is that we have been able to create some log piles which we have moved out into the sunshine in the open bracken field.

Our pictures show Thyone Outram, Rupert Hall and Jon Wood moving piles of cherry logs to create lizard basking piles.



Last year we found lizards basking on the log piles in this Northern area of Markstakes Common so hopefully they will find and use the new piles also.

They like to be able to bask in the sun but retreat fast into a dark cracks between the logs and a high pile allows the morning sun to reach the basking site even when the growing bracken has shaded out most of the ground areas.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

NOTICE OF THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

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

TUESDAY APRIL 24TH 2012

THE HORNS LODGE PUBLIC HOUSE
SOUTH CHAILEY
AT 7.30.P.M.

ALL ARE WELCOME

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING TUESDAY 24TH APRIL 2012

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 Talks

**Birds found on the Common
by Ian Woolsey**

**Interesting Flowers on the
Common
By Jacqui Hutson**

Sunday 13th May 2012

**A Commons Walk with Ranger Dan
Ross
Meet at the Horns Lodge Pub**

**South Street South Chailey
10.00.a.m.**

Wednesday 18th July 2012

**Markstakes Common Wildflower
Identification Walk**

**Come and let a knowledgeable
botanist show you round the
wildflowers at this unique Common
Land site. Markstakes Common is a
beautiful mixture of Ancient Woodland
with ponds and acidic open areas
which produce some interesting plants
and wildflowers. Everyone welcome.**

Leader Jacqui Hutson

Booking advisable 01273 484344

**Meet at Setfords Field, Green Lane,
South Chailey. Map ref:TQ392182**

10.30am 2 hours 2.5 miles

Friday August 17th 2012

**Moth Trapping Night with the Ranger
Thyone Outram**

**Meet at the North Gate in the Flint Wall
Markstakes Lane South Chailey**

**9.00.p.m.
Bring torches**