



FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

ANNUAL REPORT 2012 - 13

Fourth Annual Report

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Chairman's Summary

The year began with broad agreement between the Friends of Markstakes Common and the Council Rangers as to the best approach for the ongoing management of the Common. The inclusion of the Common in Higher Level Stewardship has ensured longer term funding so we should have been in good position to take the management of the Common forward.

Solid progress has been achieved but not as much as might have been hoped for due to the poor weather. The Friends do not operate in heavy rain and many days of volunteer operations have been lost. It has been a struggle at times to keep on top of the maintenance of the areas that have been cleared so far let alone clearing further areas. However, we have extended the birch glade and cleared a ride between the Mire and the Birch glade, which has opened out a pleasant vista.

The work of contractors has been invaluable with felling of some of the older birch to complete the clearance of the Ride. The use of a mower powered by a two-wheeled tractor proved particularly effective in both scything the bracken and gathering up the brash.

The Common has always merited a better quality map and the Council have lent the Friends a more capable mapping device. The results of many days of mapping were then downloaded on to a full Graphical Information package at the Council Offices enabling us to produce the most detailed map of the Common yet.

Human impact is becoming more noticeable with a higher volume of dog walkers and an increased disturbance of the ponds. During the Christmas holidays one of the dams installed was partially dismantled for no very clear reason but we were able to repair it quite easily. The damage occurred at a time when the pond would be refilled rapidly and wildlife was at a low level of activity. The high pond has seen further disturbance by dogs despite the notices and some major incursion by humans. A low dead hedge has been erected to create a more effective deterrent giving the pond vegetation a chance to re-colonise the affected areas.

Survey work is ongoing. Botanical survey work took a back seat in the last year but the surveys of butterflies, birds and reptiles continued and the results are discussed in more detail elsewhere. Notable absences this year were Dormice and Great Crested Newts although several of the Dormice boxes were colonised by Yellow Necked Mice. We are always grateful for the efforts of the Friends in surveying the Common. In addition further survey work and analysis is being undertaken by outside experts to deepen our understanding of reptiles, bats and mosses.

I remain optimistic that the condition of the Common will continue to improve and, weather permitting, further progress should be made this year.

Rupert Hall

Treasurer's Summary

The 'Friends' of Markstakes have supported us again this year with their subscriptions and we also acknowledge the help and support of the Lewes District Council through their services and provision of tools and advice.

This year has been one of consolidation and our funds will be used, as appropriate, to support our work on the common as we proceed with our surveys and building of our knowledge of this valuable site.

Year 01/03/12 to 28/02/13

INCOME & EXPENDITURE

INCOME

Subscriptions	41.00
Donations	16.00
Grants	0.00
Other	0.00
Total	57.00
	57.00

EXPENDITURE

TOOLS	200.94
PRINTING	0.00
POSTAGES	0.00
Other	10.00
Total	210.94
Expenditure over Income	-153.94
	57.00

BANK RECONCILIATION

Opening Bank Balance 01.03.12	556.51	Expenditure over Income	-153.94
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	556.51	Closing Balance 28.02.13	402.57
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BALANCE SHEET

ASSETS

BANK BALANCES	402.57
OTHER ASSETS	0.00
TOTAL ASSETS	402.57

LIABILITIES

CREDITORS	0.00
OTHER LIABILITIES	0.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES	0.00
NET ASSETS(LIABILITIES)	402.57

William Coleman

Ranger's Report



This has been a year where one of the big highlights has again been the reptiles – so much so that Ray Mears and the Wild Britain team came and filmed the reptiles that had been attracted to our survey mats.

The programme went out on prime time ITV in early March and showed not only some Markstakes Common Slow Worms, Grass Snakes and Adders but also some of our fantastic old hornbeams including the old boundary bank at the south of Markstakes where there are some magnificent coppiced and hedge-laid hornbeams. Markstakes Common was never mentioned in the programme because we did not want to attract unwanted disturbance to the reptile survey.

This survey has been conducted for three years now so we have now removed the refuges. We will survey again in the future to see if the populations have changed over time. The survey data was collected mainly by the Friends (Rupert Hall and Jon Wood) with the data and site analysed by Barry Kemp, who is an expert on Reptiles and Amphibians.

His report is attached to the AGM reports and shows that the populations of lizards and adders are 'Good' compared to other sites nationally with the populations of grass snakes and slow worms being 'Exceptional'. This does not surprise those of us who know the site and have been involved with the survey but it is good to have it formally confirmed again that Markstakes Common is Special!

The Friends and Lewes District Council were once more helped during the year by other volunteer groups. Brighton Conservation Volunteers and the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service helped to cut bracken in the larger Northern Bracken Fields and to clear 1/3 of the High Pond of branched Bur Reed.

The wet weather has played a large part in the year as the Chairman's Report states, but has meant that the ponds including the 'Hidden Pond' (pictured) are very full. The paths on the common (pictured) were also affected by the rains and became very soggy. They become wider as people try to avoid the worst areas. The Hidden Pond is a temporary pond which is dry for much of the year but is marked on the old maps as a pond. The Friends dug a deeper area some years ago to encourage water to sit in the pond for longer into the spring and summer. During this winter the Hidden Pond has been considerably larger than usual.



There were two public events on the Common during the year - a Wildflower Identification Walk led by Jacqui Hutson and a Moth Night led by Steve Teale.

Thyone Outram
Asst Ranger – Lewes District Council

Survey Reports and Results

Birds

Our survey for 2012 showed some 47 species which was 1 up on the 46 seen on the last survey in 2011. Given the fact that several species that are often seen, were not seen this year, the potential is there for

the total species seen to exceed 50. This year we carried out a similar number of surveys, 10 in total, starting in January and ending in December.

Species	Common Name	Distribution	2010	2011	2012
<i>Anser Anser</i>	Greylag Geese	Not seen this year		0(3)	NS
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Seen on both ponds	P	P	P
<i>Ardea Cinerea</i>	Grey Heron	Not seen this year	P	NS	NS
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Peregrine Falcon	Not seen	O(2)	NS	NS
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red Kite	Occasionally seen overhead			O(1)
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Buzzard	Occasionally seen overhead	O(3)	O(2)	O(3)
<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sparrow hawk	Not seen this year	NS	P	NS
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	1 male seen several times hunting	P	P	P
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Pheasant	Occasional birds seen in woods	P	P	P
<i>Larus Ridibundus</i>	Black Headed Gull	Not seen this year	NS	O(3)	NS
<i>Larus Fuscus</i>	Lesser Black Backed Gull	One solitary bird seen overflying	NS	NS	O(1)
<i>Larus Canus</i>	Common Gull	Group seen overflying	NS	O(5)	O(3)
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	Group seen overflying	O(6)	O(3)	O(9)
<i>Columba Oenas</i>	Stock Dove	Male heard calling several times	NS	NS	P
<i>Columba Livia</i>	Feral Pigeon	Not seen this year	NS	O(2)	NS
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon	At least 7 breeding territories	6	6	7
<i>Streptopelia decacto</i>	Collared Dove	Not seen this year	P	NS	NS
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo	Neither heard or seen	P	NS	NS
<i>Strix Aluco</i>	Tawny Owl	Two birds heard calling	P	NS	P
<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	Nightjar	Not seen or heard	NS	NS	NS
<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift	Group overflying on migration	NS	NS	O(9)
<i>Picus Viridis</i>	Green Woodpecker	Occasionally seen or heard	P	P	P
<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Greater Spotted Woodpecker	1 confirmed breeding territory possibly 2	2	2	2
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow	Seen overflying	O(5)	NS	O(5)
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House Martin	Occasionally seen overhead	O(6)	O(5)	O(6)
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	Not seen this year	P	NS	NS
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Pied Wagtail	Not seen this year	P	P	NS
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	At least 10 breeding territories	9	10	10
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock	At least 1 breeding territories	2	1	1
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin	At least 10 breeding territories	9	9	10
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird	At least 8 breeding territories	8	9	8

<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare	Migrant group seen	O(18)	O(22)	O(3)
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	At least 5 breeding territories	3	4	5
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	Migrant group seen feeding	O(11)	O(24)	O(11)
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush	Seen several times	P	NS	P
<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Whitethroat	1 possible breeding territory	1	1	1
<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Garden Warbler	1 possible breeding territory	NS	1	1
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Blackcap	At least 3 breeding territories	3	4	3
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chiffchaff	At least 7 breeding territories	6	6	7
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	Not seen at all this year	2	1	NS
<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest	2 possible breeding pairs	2	2	2
<i>Muscicapa Striata</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	1 seen in August	NS	P	P
<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Long tailed Tit	At least 2 family parties seen	2	2	2
<i>Parus ater</i>	Coal Tit	Occasional sightings of 2 pairs	2	2	2
<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit	At least 27 breeding territories	12	30	27
<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	At least 8 breeding territories	8	9	8
<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Nuthatch	At least 3 breeding territories	3	3	3
<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Treecreeper	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Jay	At least 1 breeding territories	2	1	1
<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie	1 possible breeding territory	1	1	1
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook	Seen overflying	NS	NS	O(7)
<i>Corvus corone</i>	Carrion Crow	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling	Small flocks seen during year	O(6)	O(16)	O(9)
<i>Passer Domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	Small group near stables	P	P	P
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch	At least 4 breeding territories	4	4	4
<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Greenfinch	Not seen this year	O(5)	NS	NS
<i>Carduelis Carduelis</i>	Goldfinch	Seen feeding on grasses in mire	NS	O(7)	O(4)
<i>Carduelis Cannabina</i>	Linnet	Not seen this year	NS	O(2)	NS
<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	Lesser Redpoll	Migrant group feeding on buds	O(15)	O(20)	O(4)
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch	2 pairs seen several times	2	2	1
Totals =			45	46	47
Recorders			RH/IW	RH/IW	RH/IW
Number = breeding pairs; P = Present; O = Overflying (no.); NS = Not seen					

Recorders were Rupert Hall and Ian Woolsey in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Amongst the more notable breeding successes this year were the **Blue Tits** with at least twenty seven breeding territories, **Wrens** and **Robins** with at least ten breeding territories, and **Blackbirds** and **Great Tits** had at least eight territories. **Chaffinches** seemed to be down to only four. In the case of the **Chiffchaff** and the **Blackcap** whilst the number of territories was low they were still consistent with previous years. Also several pairs of **Greater Spotted Woodpeckers**, **Nuthatches** and **Tree creepers** also appeared to have been successful. However the cold, wet weather in late April / May caused some nests to be abandoned, these were mainly blue tits.

As a result of the extended survey period, we were again able to pick up winter migrants and the sightings of **Fieldfares**, **Redwings** and **Lesser Redpolls** helped to increase the number of species seen. Amongst the more unusual sightings was again a solitary spotted flycatcher and for the first time a Red Kite which was seen on two occasions flying overhead.

Note:

Total species seen over last 6 surveys:

2004	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
26	30	35	45	46	47

Butterfly Transect at Markstakes Common: 2012 Summary



Photo – Ian Seccombe

The Markstakes butterfly transect was walked on 21 of the 26 weeks specified by the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) between the beginning of April and the end of September 2012. It wasn't possible to walk the route on any day in the remaining five weeks because of persistent rain and/or cold weather.

In the 21 weeks when recordings were made 277 butterflies were identified in 18 species. The five most numerous species were:

Meadow Brown	83
Speckled Wood	54
Gatekeeper	36
Large White	22
Silver-washed fritillary	14
Orange Tip	10

None of the other 12 species reached double figures. For full list see table 1 below.

Table 1 Species recorded¹

Family and Species	Common Name	Count
HESPERIIDAE		
Thymelicus sylvestris	Small Skipper	2
Ochlodes venata	Large Skipper	4
PIERIDAE		
Gonepteryx rhamni	Brimstone	8
Pieris brassicae	Large White	22
Pieris rapae	Small White	3
Pieris napi	Green-veined White	6
Anthocharis cardamines	Orange Tip	10

LYCAENIDAE

Lycaena phlaeas	Small Copper	1
Celastrina argiolus	Holly Blue	1

NYMPHALIDAE

Limenitis camilla	White Admiral	9
Vanessa atalanta	Red Admiral	5
Inachis io	Peacock	8
Polygonia c-album	Comma	4
Argynnis paphia	Silver Washed Fritillary	14

SATYRIDAE

Pararge aegeria	Speckled Wood	54
Pyronia tithonus	Gatekeeper	36
Maniola jurtina	Meadow Brown	83
Coenonympha pamphilus	Small Heath	7

The records show a very uneven distribution of butterflies across Markstakes. Section 7 (the mire) had 13 of the 18 species and over 30% of all recordings. Section 6 was also well populated with 8 species and 12% (33) of recordings. Similarly, section 5 (which includes the butterfly glades) also had 8 species and about ten per cent of recordings. In contrast section 3 had only one species (speckled wood) and a small number of recordings (10) while sections 9, 10 and 11 had five or fewer butterflies each. Table 2 shows the number of species and number of butterflies in each section of the transect.

¹ Purple Emperor may be present in Markstakes but I only saw one individual and that was in Starvecrow Woods just to the south of Markstakes.

Table 2 Number and distribution of species by transect section

Section	No. species	No. butterflies
1	4	11
2	12	31
3	1	10
4	5	16
5	8	27
6	8	33
7	13	86
8	9	18
9	4	9
10	2	4
11	3	5
12	11	31

Speckled Wood is the only species that was recorded in all 12 sections. Meadow Brown was also widely distributed, being found in 10 sections.

Large White (8), Silver washed fritillary (7), Gatekeeper (6) and Brimstone (6) were also fairly widely distributed.

For several species we only recorded one individual or a very small number of butterflies: Small Copper, Holly Blue, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, and Small White. A number of other species recorded at Markstakes in the previous two years ad hoc sightings were not recorded at all in 2012. These (with year of last sighting) were: Green Hairstreak (2011), Ringlet (2011), Purple Hairstreak (2010), Painted Lady (2010), Common Blue (2010).

Chart 1 below shows the flight times i.e. months when each species were recorded.

Over half the records were made in the five weeks between mid-July and mid-August. Note that in some cases there are only a very small number of recordings. Speckled Wood is the only species recorded in all six months.

Chart 1 Species flight times April to September 2012

	April	May	June	July	August	Sept
Small Skipper				■		
Large Skipper				■		
Brimstone	■	■			■	
Large White		■		■	■	■
Small White	■			■		
Green-veined White	■	■				
Orange-tip	■					
Small Copper				■		
Holly Blue		■				
White Admiral			■	■		■
Red Admiral		■		■	■	■
Peacock	■	■			■	
Comma			■			■
Silver-washed Fritillary				■	■	■
Speckled Wood	■	■	■	■	■	■
Gatekeeper				■	■	
Meadow Brown			■	■	■	■
Small Heath		■	■	■		

Recorders Rupert Hall, Ian Seccombe, Ian Woolsey

Some pictures from last year



Ray Mears at the gate in the flint wall

The new dead hedge by the High pond
Feb 2013



The new cleared ride between
the Heather Glade and The
Mire March 2013