



# FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

ANNUAL REPORT 2014 - 15

# Sixth Annual Report

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**Chairman – Rupert Hall**

**Treasurer/Membership – William Coleman**

**Secretary – Jacqui Hutson**

**Lewes D.C. Rangers – Dan Fagan and Thyone Outram**

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## ***CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY***

This year has been one of consolidation with the emphasis being on controlling the incursions of bracken, bramble and birch into areas that have been previously cleared. This is ongoing work although the time required on the maintenance in any particular area seems thankfully to be declining. The establishment of grassland has inhibited the establishment of seedlings and the bracken seems to be becoming weaker with each successive season. One exception has been the return of willow seedlings in significant numbers in the mire, which are proving tough to remove.

Although there has been limited expansion of the cleared areas we were able to expand the Corner Glade as far as a broad crowned Oak specimen. The shape of these Oaks bears witness to the open wood pasture in which they grew and it would be lovely to see some of that landscape re-established.

Survey work has been ongoing as discussed later in this report. Although the Dormice have yet to make a re appearance we were very gratified by the confirmation of the Bechstein's Bat. I am very grateful to Tony Hutson and the Sussex Bat Group for their efforts in the past year.

Thanks once again to Ian Seccombe and Ian Wolsey for their work on Butterfly and Bird surveys. Aside from some usual suspects (I think Blue Tits and Great Tits are guaranteed) some unusual species are seen in one year, not to be seen again and new novelties are spotted. This year a Kingfisher was spotted at the High Pond before moving on to a no doubt more suitable site. What I take from the results of the Butterfly survey is that the Mire is without doubt a high value location on the site in terms of numbers and diversity of species although two notable species Purple Emperor and White Admiral are found elsewhere.

The heart of the work of the Friends of Markstakes Common is in the Monday Group. This has been a small band of volunteers but their efforts are crucial to maintaining the site in good condition. I would like to thank all those who turn up each week to do the unspectacular but essential work of keeping the invasive species under control. The efforts of the Friends are of course enhanced by the support of the Rangers at Lewes District Council who bring other conservation groups onto the site and fund work by contractors. I would like to thank the Council for their continued support.

With the efforts of volunteers and the Council this year solid progress has been made in building on both the work we have done in restoring the site and improving our understanding of the wildlife on what is a truly special place.

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.

Our expenses have been minimal 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.

William Coleman

### **FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON**

**Year 01/03/14 to 28/02/15**

<b><u>INCOME &amp; EXPENDITURE</u></b>			
<b><u>INCOME</u></b>		<b><u>EXPENDITURE</u></b>	
Subscriptions	36.00	<b>TOOLS</b>	59.44
Donations	8.00	<b>PRINTING</b>	0.00
Grants	0.00	<b>POSTAGES</b>	0.00
Other	0.00	<b>Other</b>	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.00</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>59.44</b>
		Income over Expenditure	<b>15.44</b>

<b><u>BANK RECONCILIATION</u></b>			
Opening Bank Balance 01.03.14	<u>463.57</u>	Income over Expenditure	<u>-15.44</u>
		Closing Balance	
		28.02.15	<u>448.13</u>

<b><u>BALANCE SHEET</u></b>		
<b>ASSETS</b>		
BANK BALANCES		448.13
OTHER ASSETS		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>448.13</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
CREDITORS		
OTHER LIABILITIES		
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<b>0.00</b>
<b>NET ASSETS(LIABILITIES)</b>		<b>448.13</b>

## *RANGER'S REPORT*

As you read this the wood anemones will be flowering on Markstakes Common with a promise of bluebells on the way, the newts returning to the high pond and the spring butterflies warming in the sunshine.

2014 saw the new glades continuing to thrive with the heather spreading in 'corner glade' and 'heather glade' at the south of the Common and last year turning up in the Northern area for the first time since the bracken control management started in this area in 2009.



(Comma Butterfly)

The dormouse boxes, despite currently no longer housing dormice, are becoming homes for a variety of creatures including tree bumble bees and wax moths which are parasitic, living in the bumble bee nests. Yellow-necked mice which are often associated with well-established woodland like Markstakes Common, also regularly turn up in the boxes.

In 2014, contractors once more cut the vegetation in larger northern glades, continued to treat the invasive rum cherry, pruned and felled unsafe trees around paths and coppiced an area in the South of the Common.

The South Downs Volunteer Ranger service and Brighton Conservation Volunteers once again helped with Bracken and birch control through the summer and pond clearance in the autumn.



But, of course, Lewes District Council main thanks go to the Friends of Markstakes Common for countless hours surveying, doing habitat management work, looking after the Common and educating the public, including a very interesting mosses and liverworts walk by Jacqui Hutson for the Seaford Natural History Group.

Dan Ross, who was the Lewes District Council Community Ranger for 11 years with responsibility for Markstakes Common and then moved on to take on a wider remit for all the Council Nature Reserves, Parks, Cemeteries and open spaces, was made redundant recently, as the Assistant Parks Managers post was cut during a recent re-structure. But we welcome a new Service Manager, Rachel Burrows, who is looking forward to discovering Markstakes Common.

Thyone Outram  
(Pictures from Thyone Outram)

## *Survey Reports and Results*

### *BIRDS*

Our survey for 2014 showed some 45 species which was 1 down on the 46 seen on the last survey in 2013. Given the fact that again 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 I carried out a similar number of surveys, 11 in total, starting in January and ending in December.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<i>Anser Anser</i>	Greylag Geese	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Seen on both ponds	P	P	P
<i>Ardea Cinerea</i>	Grey Heron	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Peregrine Falcon	Not seen	NS	NS	NS
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red Kite		O(1)	NS	NS
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Buzzard	Regularly seen overhead	O(2)	O(3)	O(4)
<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sparrow hawk	One male seen this year	NS	NS	P
<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	NS	NS
<i>Larus Fuscus</i>	Lesser Black Backed Gull	Not seen this year	O(1)	NS	NS
<i>Larus Canus</i>	Common Gull	Group seen overflying	O(5)	O(3)	O(4)
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	Group seen overflying	O(3)	O(9)	O(3)
<i>Columba Oenas</i>	Stock Dove	Male heard calling several times	P	P	P
<i>Columba Livia</i>	Feral Pigeon	Not seen this year	O(2)	NS	NS



<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon	At least 8 breeding territories	6	8	7
<i>Streptopelia decacto</i>	Collared Dove	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo	Heard calling on 2 visits	NS	NS	P
<i>Strix Aluco</i>	Tawny Owl	One bird heard calling	NS	P	P
<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	Nightjar	Not seen or heard	NS	NS	NS
<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift	Group overflying on migration	0(9)	O(4)	NS
<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)	O(4)	O(3)
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House Martin	Occasionally seen overhead	O(6)	O(4)	O(4)
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Pied Wagtail	Not seen this year	NS	P	P
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	At least 8 breeding territories	10	8	8
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock	At least 1 breeding territories	1	1	1
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin	At least 9 breeding territories	10	9	9
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird	At least 9 breeding territories	8	9	9
<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare	Migrant group seen	O(5)	O(3)	O(5)
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	At least 4 breeding territories	5	4	4
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	Migrant group seen feeding	O(11)	O(17)	O(10)
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush	Seen several times	P	P	P
<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Whitethroat	2 possible breeding territory	1	2	2
<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Garden Warbler	Not seen this year	1	NS	NS
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Blackcap	At least 3 breeding territories	3	3	4
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chiffchaff	At least 8 breeding territories	7	8	8
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	Passing migrant	NS	1	NS
<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest	2 possible breeding pairs	2	2	2
<i>Muscicapa Striata</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	Not seen	P	NS	NS
<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 29 breeding territories	27	29	27
<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	At least 9 breeding territories	8	9	9
<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	1	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	O(7)	O(11)	O(5)
<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(9)	O(14)	O(7)
<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	5
<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Greenfinch	Seen in mire	NS	O(5)	NS
<i>Carduelis Carduelis</i>	Goldfinch	Seen feeding on grasses in mire	O(4)	O(5)	O(3)
<i>Carduelis Cannabina</i>	Linnet	Seen in mire area	NS	O(4)	O(3)
<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	Lesser Redpoll	Not seen this year	O(15)	NS	NS
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch	Only 1 pair seen several times	1	1	1
<b>Totals =</b>			47	46	45
<b>Recorders</b>			RH/IW	RH/IW	IW
<b>Number = breeding pairs; P = Present; O = Overflying (no.); NS = Not seen</b>					

Recorders were Rupert Hall and Ian Woolsey in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014.

Amongst the more notable breeding successes this year were the **Blue Tits** with at least twenty seven breeding territories, **Blackbirds**, **Great Tits** and **Robins** with at least nine breeding territories each, **Chiffchaffs** and **Wrens** had at least eight territories each. **Chaffinches** were only four. Again several pairs of **Greater Spotted Woodpeckers**, **Nuthatches** and **Tree Creepers** appeared to have been successful. The cool weather in late April / May caused some birds to nest a little later but overall they were still successful.

As a result of the extended survey period, we were again able to pick up winter migrants and the sightings of **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** helped to increase the number of species seen.

Note:-

Total species seen over last 7 surveys:-

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
30	35	45	46	47	46	45

IanWoolsey



*Blue Tit - Cyanistes caeruleus*



## *BUTTERFLIES*

### **Butterfly Transect at Markstakes Common: 2014 Summary**



The Markstakes butterfly transect was walked on 26 of the 27 weeks specified by the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) between the beginning of April and the end of September 2014. Sightings of butterflies occurred on all 26 transect walks. Data have been submitted to UKBMS using the online Transect Walker system.

In the 26 weeks when recordings were made 602 butterflies were identified in 25 species. This compares with 591 individuals in 2013. Notable features this year were the large numbers of Small Skippers and sightings of a Purple Emperor and a Dark Green Fritillary.

With a few notable exceptions most species were present in similar numbers to 2013. The exceptions were Small Skippers, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Gatekeeper which all recorded a marked increase in abundance while Large White, Small Copper, Comma, Speckled Wood and Small Heath declined. No Ringlets were recorded in 2014.

The three most numerous species account for over half (53%) of all the records:

Meadow Brown	197
Gatekeeper	63
Small Skipper	57

<b>Family and Species</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>HESPERIIDAE</b>				
Thymelicus sylvestris	Small Skipper	2	6	57
Ochlodes venata	Large Skipper	4	4	5
<b>PIERIDAE</b>				
Gonepteryx rhamni	Brimstone	8	29	32
Pieris brassicae	Large White	22	73	33
Pieris rapae	Small White	3	4	12
Pieris napi	Green-veined White	6	16	2
Anthocharis cardamines	Orange Tip	10	5	5
Colias croceus	Clouded Yellow		2	1
Leptidea sinapis	Wood White		1	
<b>LYCAENIDAE</b>				
Lycaena phlaeas	Small Copper	1	8	4
Celastrina argiolus	Holly Blue	1	1	3
Polyommatus icarus	Common Blue		15	33
<b>NYMPHALIDAE</b>				
Limenitis camilla	White Admiral	9	10	6
Vanessa atalanta	Red Admiral	5	3	13
Inachis io	Peacock	8	20	51
Polygonia c-album	Comma	4	10	6
Argynnis paphia	Silver Washed Fritilliar	14	35	27
Argynnis aglaja	Dark Green Fritillary			1
Aglais urticae	Small Tortoiseshell		3	11
Vanessa cardui	Painted Lady		1	
Melanargia galathea	Marbled White		6	7
Apatura iris	Purple Emperor			1
<b>SATYRIDAE</b>				
Pararge aegeria	Speckled Wood	54	55	29
Pyronia tithonus	Gatekeeper	36	44	63
Maniola jurtina	Meadow Brown	83	225	197
Coenonympha pamphilus	Small Heath	7	12	3
Aphantopus hyperantus	Ringlet		3	

For full list of species recorded, and their abundance, over the past three years see table 1 below.

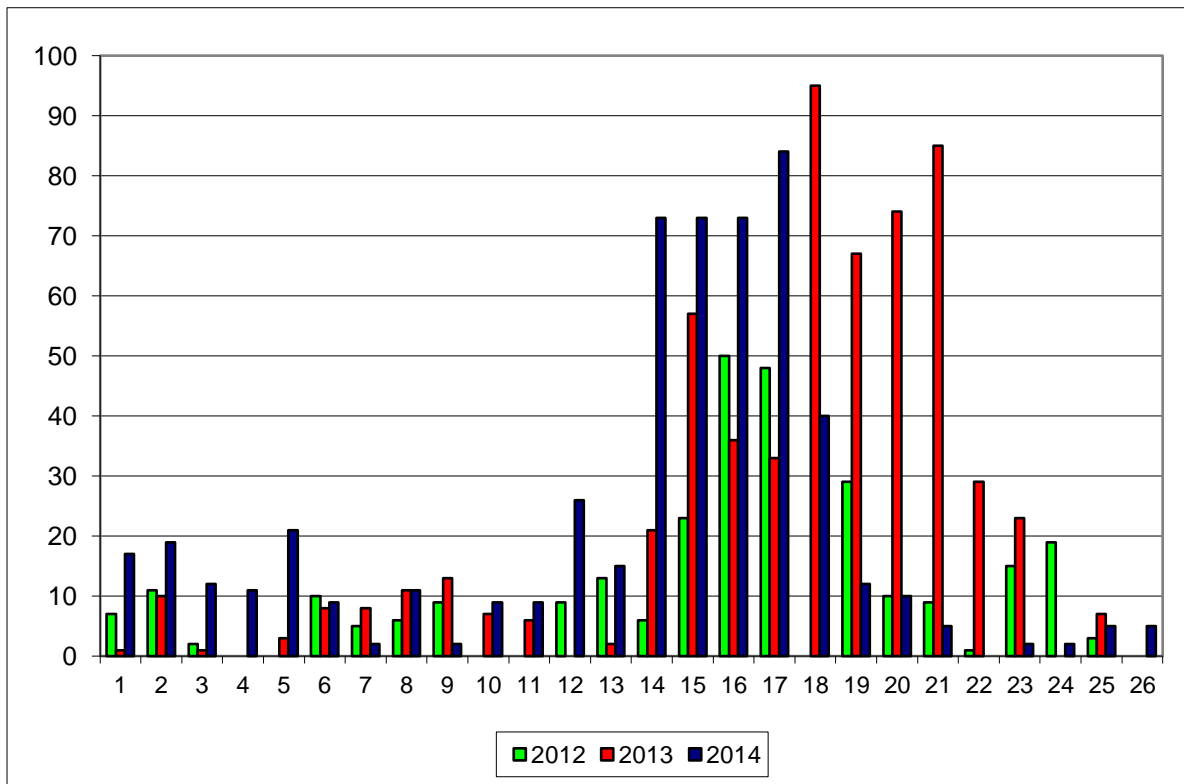
**Table 1 Species recorded in 2012, 2013 and 2014**

The records show a very uneven distribution of butterflies across Markstakes. Section 7 (the mire) had 19 of the 25 species present and 36% (219) of all recordings. Section 5 (which includes the butterfly glades) had 15 species and about 12% (69) of recordings. In contrast section 3 and 10 each had fewer than 5 species and very low numbers. Table 2 shows the number of species and butterflies in each section of the transect in 2014.

<b>Section</b>	<b>No. of species</b>	<b>No. of butterflies</b>	<b>% total</b>
1	9	12	2.0
2	10	46	7.6
3	5	6	1.0
4	10	34	5.6
5	15	69	11.5
6	12	56	9.3
7	19	219	36.4
8	11	66	11.0
9	6	11	1.8
10	3	4	0.7
11	8	16	2.7
12	9	63	10.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>602</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Chart 1 below shows the number of butterflies recorded each week over the past three years. 2014 saw numbers peak earlier – in July which accounts for 57% of all records – compared with 2013, and tail off very rapidly in August and September. More butterflies were recorded in the fourth week of July (84) than in the whole of April (80), May (24), June (59), August (27) or September (14). The chart also shows that more butterflies were present in the spring than in previous years.

**Chart 1 Number of butterflies by week, 2012-2014**



Recorders: Ian Seccombe, Ian Woolsey

### *VEGETATION COMMUNITIES*

While no systematic surveys have been done this year we are pleased to record that the glades we have cleared in the past few years are developing a good plant cover and are in the process of becoming the kind of plant communities we hoped for – rich in flowers and a haven for insects. The glades vary quite a bit and this probably reflects past use, how long they were under the deep shade of trees, how wet the ground is and what seeds from former vegetation have persisted in the soil.

In the old clay pit mire is now well established in place of the once almost impenetrable tangle of Bramble, Willow and Birch. In the National Vegetation Classification system there are 37 types of mire in Britain and ours seems to be a mosaic of M23 Soft Rush-Sharp-flowered Rush-Marsh Bedstraw mire and M25 Purple Moor Grass-Tormentil mire. Apart from the plants that appear in

the names of these two communities, M23 has Lesser Spearwort, Yellow Sedge and some Sphagnum mosses among other species, while M25 has Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Devil's-bit Scabious, Marsh Thistle, Sneezewort and Lesser Skullcap plus many more moisture-loving plants. Grazing by rabbits and deer is helping maintain these communities but we are having to help by removing the seedlings of birch and willow that colonise as well as keeping the bramble at bay.

In Heather Glade, the adjacent Friend's Glade and Corner Glade on the opposite side of the Common were covered with dense birch, bracken and bramble before we started clearance and there was no evidence of many other plants. But our clearance in these places has led to the colonisation by Heather, Purple Moor Grass, Heath Speedwell, Gorse, Wood Sage and Tormentil - they are a delightful sight, especially when the heather is in bloom. Insect life is thriving in these sunny sheltered spots. Grazing helps to maintain the community but, again we have to help by removing birch seedlings. In the National Vegetation Classification System this community appears to be intermediate between the heath H2 Heather-Dwarf Gorse community and an acid grassland community but we have yet to work out which one!

Some other glades are covered with another acid grassland community, U20 with Bracken, Heath Bedstraw, Tormentil among the grasses. It is sometimes difficult to assign a vegetation community with any certainty so it is often just a case of which community best fits the assemblage of plants. We plan to do more detailed surveys to determine which communities are where. Clearings created in 2014 are still quite bare of course and we wait to see what seeds lurking in the seedbank will produce but our aim of creating a series of connected flowery glades among the trees is becoming a reality.

## *BATS SURVEY*

This year, a more systematic bat survey was carried out involving volunteers from the Sussex Bat Group and elsewhere, and with funding from a donation to the bat group from LDC. Firstly, the 36 bat boxes were checked on 7 May. Brown long-eared bats were found in three boxes in groups of 10, 3 and 1; the first two in wooden boxes, the latter in a woodcrete box. We proposed to check again in the autumn, but for various reasons that didn't happen.

We then had three summer survey nights, involving two groups of people walking one of two transects around the common with bat detectors and recording the location and species of all bats they heard. A third group of people, trapping with a group of harp traps and mist nets set in different areas of the common on each visit, resulted in 16 bats of 8 species caught, including the last bat of the year being a second adult female Bechstein's bat, reinforcing the idea that there is a breeding colony somewhere on the common. The transects were a little disappointing in that bats were not very numerous and only four species were recorded, but we got some idea of their distribution around the common. Actually, there was a fifth species recorded: some observers record bat passes all the time they are on the transect and one observer made a remarkable discovery when later analysing the calls he had made on the last night. He found a few calls of barbastelle bat, the other great rarity that we had hoped (and to some extent expected) to find there. One species that we failed to record this year, but which we would expect to be there, and have recorded in the past, was serotine bat.

So, we have recorded 10 bat species, including the two rarest species we could hope to find, and we will use this data to try to suggest how bats can best be integrated into the management plans for the common. Both the Bechstein's and barbastelle bats will almost certainly be roosting in trees and one key plan for this year is to try to locate some of their roost trees.

Tony Hutson