



# FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 16

# Seventh 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***

Following the program of clearance undertaken by the volunteers at Markstakes over the past few years a mosaic of habitats has now been established. There are areas of deep scrub, areas of open grassland and well established heather in several glades. There are currently no plans for the clearance of further areas. As a result, the bulk of activity at Markstakes Common is now maintenance of the glades and cleared areas to prevent their reversion to bracken, bramble and dense birch stands

The Monday group has always been small in number and an effort was made to recruit further members with posters put up at the site entrance and elsewhere. The response has been a positive and we now regularly have six or more volunteers on the site.

While the glades are maintained by hand in the same manner as previous years there has been a change in approach to the areas that

were previously mown by contactors with machinery. Contractors have now been leaving broad stripes unmown to allow more areas of taller grass and deep cover provided by bracken. This has, however, allowed birch seedlings to grow up and the volunteers have spent several Mondays clearing away the young saplings that were in danger of taking over the site. While winter rainfall can make the Common very muddy it does make the ground softer and this makes the pulling of young saplings easier. The same issue of young seedlings had been identified in the Mire and we have been able to this year to clear the majority of seedlings.

The high pond needs regular clearance if it isn't to be choked up with weeds. Every year the Rangers at Lewes District Council have been able to bring in a volunteer team on to the site to clear a section and as a result it remains in excellent condition. The dead hedge has helped deter dogs from jumping in and this needed to be repaired this year. It is one of the more satisfying jobs on the site to see the hedge back in its former glory. The Council has also engaged contractors to maintain the more open areas.

One consequence of the activity is that the Common is rather more inviting for visitors and their dogs. We are concerned that this may have had an adverse effect, particularly on reptile populations. This coming year we will repeat the surveys that have been done in previous years and have placed mats for reptiles to hide under in broadly the same locations. The surveying of butterflies and birds continues. This involves weekly site visits for the butterflies and monthly visits for the birds. I would like to thank Ian Seccombe and Ian Wolsey for their continued efforts. Additionally, Jacqui Hutson has been surveying mosses this year.

Overall the Common appears to be in good condition and this is thanks to continued efforts of the volunteers and the Council.

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 heavy tools and advice.

Our expenses have been on some replacement small tools and also a further supply of strong work gloves. Our funds will be used, as appropriate, for our continuing 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 01/03/15 to 28/02/16**

<b><u>INCOME &amp; EXPENDITURE</u></b>			
<b><u>INCOME</u></b>		<b><u>EXPENDITURE</u></b>	
Subscriptions	54.00	TOOLS	97.24
Donations	98.00	PRINTING	0.00
Grants	0.00	POSTAGES	0.00
Other	0.00	Other	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>152.00</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>97.24</b>
		Income over Expenditure	54.76

<b><u>BANK RECONCILIATION</u></b>			
Opening Bank Balance 01.03.15	448.13	Income over Expenditure	54.76
		Closing Balance	
		28.02.16	502.89

<b><u>BALANCE SHEET</u></b>		
<b>ASSETS</b>		
BANK BALANCES		502.89
OTHER ASSETS		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>502.89</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
CREDITORS		
OTHER LIABILITIES		
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<b>0.00</b>
<b>NET ASSETS(LIABILITIES)</b>		<b>502.89</b>

## *RANGER'S REPORT*

This has been a year of consolidation of the work at Markstakes Common for both Lewes District Council and the Friends. We have been observing how the management we have been doing is developing and generally maintaining the Common.

The triangular area that was coppiced in the South of the common has been showing some tree re-growth. There has been some grazing of new shoots but in this area but some growth is now being protected by bramble, and a good deal of aspen is growing with the hornbeam and birch. The plan for this area was always to allow it to thicken up naturally and not to re-cut as with the heather glade and other glade areas that are establishing.

With the help of Brighton Conservation Volunteers the high pond was once again cleared of around 1/4 of the vegetation that spreads rapidly across the pond each year. The Marsh Cinquefoil in Shallow Pond is showing some signs of establishing but there are still very few plants there. There are very few sites in Sussex where this plant grows so we hope it will thrive at Shallow Pond.



A small amount of birch was cut down by our contractors near the large Northern Oak to continue the process of 'haloing' to allow light to the crown of this large old tree. Some other tree work has also been carried out notably near Markstakes Lane for safety reasons. Much of the management has of course been carried out by the Friends of Markstakes Common with the Council helping by providing back-up work such as stump treatment of removed trees in Corner Glade where the Friends have been restoring an open heather-rich area.

Thyone Outram

## Survey Reports and Results

### BIRDS

Our survey for 2015 showed some 43 species which was 2 down on the 45 seen on the last survey in 2014. 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, 10 in total, starting in January and ending in December.

Species	Common Name	Distribution	2013	2014	2015
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Seen on both ponds	P	P	P
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red Kite	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Buzzard	Regularly seen overhead	O(3)	O(4)	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 Canus</i>	Common Gull	Group seen overflying	O(3)	O(4)	O(6)
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	Group seen overflying	O(9)	O(3)	O(3)
<i>Columba Oenas</i>	Stock Dove	Male heard calling several times	P	P	P
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon	At least 6 breeding territories	8	7	6
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo	Not heard this year	NS	P	NS
<i>Strix Aluco</i>	Tawny Owl	One bird heard calling	P	P	P
<i>Alcedo Atthis</i>	Kingfisher	Seen during winter visit	NS	NS	P
<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift	Not seen this year	O(4)	NS	NS
<i>Picus Viridis</i>	Green Woodpecker	Occasionally seen or heard	P	P	P
<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Greater Spotted Woodpecker	2 confirmed breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow	Seen overflying	O(4)	O(3)	O(7)
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House Martin	Occasionally seen overhead	O(4)	O(4)	O(2)
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	One seen this year	NS	NS	P
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Pied Wagtail	Seen this year several times	P	P	P
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	At least 8 breeding territories	8	8	8
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock	At least 1 breeding territories	1	1	1
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin	At least 8 breeding territories	9	9	8
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird	At least 10 breeding territories	9	9	10
<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare	Migrant group seen	O(5)	O(5)	O(7)
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	At least 4 breeding territories	4	4	4
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	Migrant group seen feeding	O(17)	O(10)	O(14)
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush	Seen several times	P	P	P
<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Whitethroat	2 possible breeding territory	2	2	2
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Blackcap	At least 3 breeding territories	3	3	3
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chiffchaff	At least 7 breeding territories	8	8	7
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	Not seen this year	1	NS	NS
<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest	2 possible breeding pairs	2	2	2
<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Long tailed Tit	At least 3 family parties seen	2	2	3
<i>Parus ater</i>	Coal Tit	Occasional sightings of 2 pairs	2	2	2
<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit	At least 25 breeding territories	29	27	25
<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	At least 8 breeding territories	9	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	1	1	1

<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie	1 possible breeding territory	1	1	P
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook	Seen overflying	O(11)	O(5)	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(14)	O(7)	O(14)
<i>Passer Domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	Small group near stables	P	P	P
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch	At least 3 breeding territories	4	5	3
<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Greenfinch	Seen in mire	O(5)	NS	NS
<i>Carduelis Carduelis</i>	Goldfinch	Seen feeding on grasses in mire	O(5)	O(3)	O(2)
<i>Carduelis Cannabina</i>	Linnet	Seen in mire area	O(4)	O(3)	NS
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch	Only 1 pair seen several times	1	1	1
<b>Totals =</b>			46	45	43
<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 and Ian Woolsey in 2014 and 2015.

Amongst the more notable breeding successes this year were the **Blue Tits** with at least twenty five breeding territories, **Blackbirds, Great Tits, Robins and Wrens** with at least eight breeding territories each, **Chiffchaffs** had at least seven territories each. **Chaffinches** were only three. 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.

Again 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:-

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
35	45	46	47	46	45	43

IanWoolsey



## *BUTTERFLIES*

### **Butterfly Transect at Markstakes Common: 2015 Summary**



The Markstakes butterfly transect was walked on 22 of the 27 weeks specified by the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) between the beginning of April and the end of September 2015. Sightings of butterflies occurred on 19 transect walks. This is the fourth consecutive year of recording on this transect. Data have been submitted to UKBMS using the online Transect Walker system.

In the 19 weeks when recordings were made 530 butterflies were recorded in 24 species. The UKBMS algorithm provides estimates for the missing weeks which gives a total *estimated* abundance of 590. The recorded data (530) compares with 591 individuals in 2013 and 602 in 2014. Perhaps the most notable feature this year, apart from the overall decline in numbers, was the re-appearance of Ringlets. Eleven Ringlets were recorded in 2015 compared with none in 2014.



With a few notable exceptions most species were present in smaller numbers compared with 2014. Numerically the largest declines were amongst Small Skippers (-23), Meadow Brown (-19) and Common Blue (-19). These three species account for 86% of the overall drop. Small Copper and White Admiral numbers have fallen for a second year in a row, with very few individuals recorded. The main exceptions to this overall decline were among the early spring butterflies - Brimstones and Orange Tips - which both had much better years. Comma, Marbled White, Gatekeeper and Small Heath were also recorded in larger numbers.

As in previous years, the three most numerous species account for over half (56%) of all the records:

Meadow Brown	178
Gatekeeper	77
Peacock	42

For full list of species recorded, and their abundance, over the four years see table 1 below. Note that species which declined between 2014 and 2015 are shown in bold.

Ian Seccombe  
30th October 2015

**Table 1**  
**Number of each species recorded in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015**

Family and Species	Common Name	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>HESPERIIDAE</b>					
<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	Small Skipper	2	6	57	34
<i>Ochlodes venata</i>	Large Skipper	4	4	5	5
<b>PIERIDAE</b>					
<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	Brimstone	8	29	32	41
<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Large White	22	73	33	24
<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Small White	3	4	12	2
<i>Pieris napi</i>	Green-veined White	6	16	2	3
<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	Orange Tip	10	5	5	12
<i>Colias croceus</i>	Clouded Yellow		2	1	
<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	Wood White		1		
<b>LYCAENIDAE</b>					
<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Small Copper	1	8	4	2
<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	Holly Blue	1	1	3	2
<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Common Blue		15	33	14
<b>NYMPHALIDAE</b>					
<i>Limenitis camilla</i>	White Admiral	9	10	6	2
<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Red Admiral	5	3	13	4
<i>Inachis io</i>	Peacock	8	20	51	42
<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Comma	4	10	6	10
<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	Silver Washed Fritillary	14	35	28	15
<i>Aglais urticae</i>	Small Tortoiseshell		3	11	3
<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Painted Lady		1		1
<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	Marbled White		6	7	14
<i>Apatura iris</i>	Purple Emperor			1	1
<b>SATYRIDAE</b>					
<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Speckled Wood	54	55	29	21
<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Gatekeeper	36	44	63	77
<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	Meadow Brown	83	225	197	178
<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Small Heath	7	12	3	12
<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	Ringlet		3		11

The records show a very uneven distribution of butterflies across Markstakes. Section 7 (the Mire) had 17 of the 25 species present and 30% (160) of all recordings. Section 5 (which includes the butterfly glades) also had 15 species and nearly 18% (95) of recordings. In contrast sections 3 and 10 had only one record each. Table 2 shows the number of species and butterflies in each section of the transect in 2015.

**Table 2 Number and distribution of species by transect section 2015**

Section	No. of species	No. of butterflies	% total
1	5	7	1.3
2	6	20	3.8
3	1	1	0.2
4	11	50	9.4
5	17	95	17.9
6	14	40	7.5
7	17	160	30.2
8	13	69	13.0
9	5	15	2.8
10	1	1	0.2
11	6	17	3.2
12	11	55	10.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>530</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Chart 1 below shows how the number of butterflies recorded in each section has varied from year to year over the past three years. Despite 2015 being a poorer year overall, some sections (4, 5, 8, 9 and 11) actually recorded an increase.

**Chart 1 Abundance by transect section, 2013, 2014 and 2015**

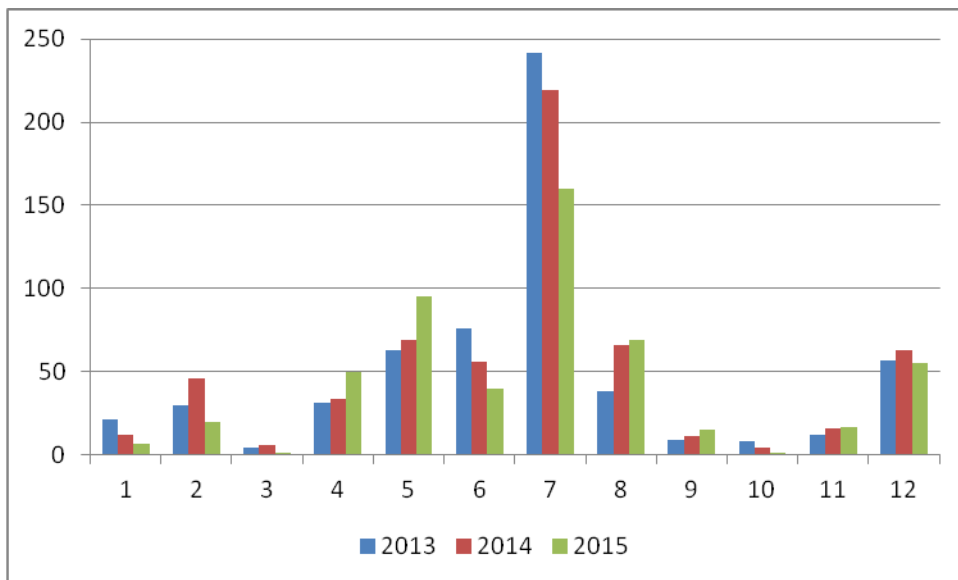
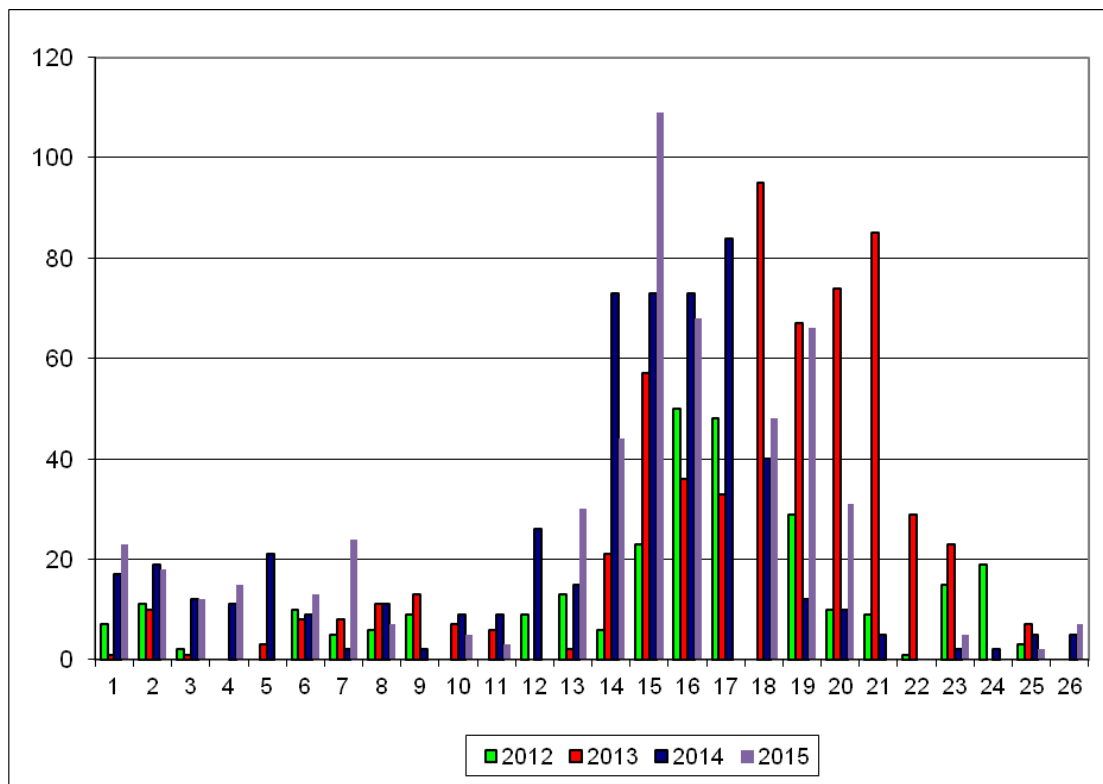


Chart 2 below shows the number of butterflies recorded each week over the past four years. Recordings in April and May account for 21% of the 2015 total, compared with 17% in the previous year. Numbers again peaked in July, which accounted for over half the total - with the second week of July accounting for a fifth of all records. Numbers dropped off rapidly with the wet weather from early August. Only 14 butterflies were recorded over the last six weeks of the period - that was fewer than in the first week of April.

**Chart 2 Number of butterflies by week, 2012-2015**



Recorders: Rupert Hall, Ian Seccombe, Ian Woolsey