



# FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

## ANNUAL REPORT 2009-10

# *Welcome to our first Annual Report*

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### *Chairman's Summary*

The year began well as the Council confirmed that they would provide significant funding for Markstakes Common. This includes path maintenance freeing volunteers for habitat restoration work. In addition to tree safety work, contractors have also helped with habitat restoration by clearing overhanging branches from around the high pond and by treating stumps left by birch clearance work. Further to this there was a major bracken clearance undertaken on the Northern Bracken field not only clearing the bracken but taking the brash away.

The Monday volunteer mornings have continued although we lost many days to adverse weather conditions. The main focus has been keeping the glades clear, and we have been able to create another glade. The Community Ranger led a day of pond clearance which has done much to reverse its silting up.

Having produced and distributed a leaflet describing the Common we held an Open Day in October which was well attended and which has been followed up with additional work parties on the Third Sunday of each month.

Having cleared invasive bracken birch and bramble we have had a chance to observe the natural succession that has followed. While bracken and bramble have proved persistent, the opening up of parts of the common has led to the return of wildflowers and the appearance of heather seedlings.

Overall this has been a year of significant progress with increased support, an active volunteer group and a higher profile for Markstakes Common within the community.

### *Treasurer's Summary*

Our first year has been one of setting up our database of 'Friends' and opening a Bank Account. We have used the Unity Trust Bank in Birmingham as they have facilities for free banking to social groups such as ours, and also online facilities to make monitoring easy and efficient.

We have 27 Friends and 6 Junior Friends and we keep in touch by Newsletter using email with attachment for economy and efficiency, and this seems to be working well. Postal copies are sent for those, not on email.

We are grateful to the Lewes District Council for all their support in kind with provision of small hand tools which have enabled us to take a sensitive approach to our clearance work. The disturbance levels on the ground have been kept to the minimum to allow for natural regeneration and stability to continue. Thank you to our Friends for their subscriptions and donations.

The support of the Chailey Commons Society is acknowledged and we thank them for their support of £250.00 in this year and for future support over the next three years of a similar amount.

Here is a Summary of Income and Expenditure so far during our first accounting year which runs for 1<sup>st</sup> March through to the following 28<sup>th</sup> February.

<b><u>INCOME &amp; EXPENDITURE</u></b>		<b><u>Year 01/03/09 to 28/02/10</u></b>	
<b><u>INCOME</u></b>		<b><u>EXPENDITURE</u></b>	
<b>Subscriptions</b>	53.00	<b>TOOLS</b>	0.00
<b>Donations</b>	18.00	<b>PRINTING</b>	265.00
<b>Grants</b>	250.00	<b>POSTAGES</b>	0.00
<b>Other</b>	0.00	<b>Other</b>	0.00
<b>Total</b>	321.00	<b>Total</b>	265.00
		Income over	
		Expenditure	56.00
	<u>321.00</u>		<u>321.00</u>

<b>BANK RECONCILIATION</b>			
Opening Bank Balance 01.03.09	<u>NIL</u>	Income over	
		Expenditure	<u>56.00</u>
		Closing Balance	
	NIL	28.02.10	56.00

## *Ranger's Report*

Markstakes Common is wonderful at any time of year but at this time of year it has the soft beauty of wood anemones and the anticipation of bluebells. It is a privilege to be helping to look after it for wildlife and for people.

There has been a lot of habitat work and maintenance work this year.

Some of the small trees and overhanging branches in and around the high pond have been cleared and some of the silt dredged out by hand letting far more light down to the water and slowing the process of the pond silting up. As the spring growth takes hold we will be keeping a close eye on the pond.

Loose hanging branches and those in danger of falling on the paths or blocking paths have been cleared especially after storms. We leave all the wood and brash on site to rot naturally as wildlife habitat. Many of the paths were cut in the summer to keep them open where bracken and brambles were starting to close them up.

Two large trees were taken down and one had its crown removed by the north wall. All were rotten and in danger of coming down across Markstakes Lane. Some areas of bracken at the north of the common were cut mechanically and the bracken removed. This process will continue in 2010.

Other general maintenance tasks including weekly site inspections, clearing vegetation from the paths, maintaining the rights of way furniture and maintaining the flint wall have been ongoing throughout the year. We are fortunate that at Markstakes Common there has been very little litter to clear and few problems with vandalism and crime, the notable exception being the theft of the new gates from Markstakes Lane.

The rangers have been working closely with the Friends of Markstakes Common on recreating the glades and the mire, surveying the wildlife and running guided walks. Lewes District Council thanks the group for all their hard work this year and congratulates them on all they have achieved.

We also thank the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service and Brighton Conservation Volunteers for the work they have contributed this year.

For such a small site Markstakes Common has a lot of wildlife interest and is lucky to have so many knowledgeable Friends interested in surveying. Between the Friends and the Council this means that there are now, or soon will be, records for reptiles, newts, bats, birds, dormice, lichens, plants and ancient trees.

## *Survey Commentary*

Surveys continued at intervals throughout the year, and several 'new' species of plants and animals were added to the list for the Common, including hazel dormouse, great crested newt and the tiny water purslane, which grows on muddy path edges.

A start was made on recording the individual ash, oak, beech and hornbeam trees whose girth measurements qualified them as ancient. When this survey is complete their details and photographs will be entered on the ancient tree register run by the Woodland Trust.

In order to monitor the restoration of the glades and the mire we started to record the vegetation along some permanent transects across these areas and this will be done yearly to see how quickly grass, heather and other plants that like open conditions re-establish.

### *Bird report*

Our survey for 2009 showed some 35 species and is slightly up on the 30 seen on the last survey in 2008. This year we carried out a lot more surveys, 7 in total, starting in February and ending in October.

Species	Common Name	Distribution	2004	2008	2009
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Not seen	NS	P	NS
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Buzzard	Occasionally seen overhead	O	O	O(2)
<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sparrow hawk	Pair seen flying through wood	NS	NS	O(2)
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	1 male seen several times hunting	NS	P	P
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Pheasant	Occasional birds seen in woods	P	P	P
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon	At least 5 breeding territories	8	3	5
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo	Not seen or heard	P	P	NS
<i>Strix Aluco</i>	Tawny Owl	1 seen roosting during day	P	NS	P
<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	Nightjar	1 heard calling on one occasion	NS	NS	P
<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	3	2
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	1 seen around pond	NS	NS	P
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Pied Wagtail	Not seen	P	NS	NS
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	At least 10 breeding territories	P	3	10
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnoek	At least 2 breeding territories	3	P	2
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin	At least 9 breeding territories	11	5	9
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird	At least 9 breeding territories	6	13	9
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	At least 3 breeding territories	6	3	3
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush	Occasionally seen	3	P	P
<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Whitethroat	1 possible breeding territory	NS	NS	1
<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Garden Warbler	Not seen	P	P	NS
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Blackcap	At least 4 breeding territories	6	2	4
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chiffchaff	At least 5 breeding territories	10	4	5
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	At least 2 breeding territories	4	1	2
<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest	1 possible breeding pair	2	1	1
<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 1 pair	1	NS	1
<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit	At least 11 breeding territories	6	9	11
<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	At least 8 breeding territories	7	6	8
<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Nuthatch	At least 3 breeding territories	4	3	3
<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Treecreeper	At least 2 breeding territories	NS	2	2
<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Jay	1 family group seen	2	1	1

<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie	1 possible breeding territory	NS	1	1
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw	At least 2 breeding territories	2	1	2
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook	Occasional sightings overhead	NS	O(6)	O(25)
<i>Corvus corone</i>	Carrion Crow	At least 2 breeding territories	NS	O	2
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling	Small flocks seen during year	NS	NS	O(9)
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch	At least 6 breeding territories	7	4	6
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch	1 pair seen several times	NS	NS	1
<b>Totals =</b>			26	30	35
<b>Recorders</b>			JS	RH/IW	RH/IW
<b>Number = breeding pairs; P = Present; O = Overflying (no.); NS = Not seen</b>					

Recorders were John Smitherman in 2004 and Rupert Hall and Ian Woolsey in 2008 and 2009.

Amongst the more notable breeding successes this year were the **Blue Tits** with an estimated eleven breeding territories, **Wrens** with ten breeding territories and the **Robins** with nine. **Great Tits** had at least eight territories, and the **Chaffinches** which occupied six. In the case of the **Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler** and the **Blackcap** whilst the number of territories was low they were consistent with previous years. Also several pairs of **Greater Spotted Woodpeckers**, **Nuthatches** and **Tree creepers** also appeared to have been successful.

Amongst the more unusual sightings were a pair of Whitethroats and a pair of Bullfinches that were seen on a number of occasions. A Tawny Owl that was seen roosting in a large oak tree during the middle of the day and a pair of Sparrow hawks that were seen flying at speed through the canopy no doubt in pursuit of a possible lunch.

Ian Woolsey and Rupert Hall.

### *Forthcoming events in 2010 and Diary Dates*

**Thursday April 22<sup>nd</sup> 10am–12pm. Bluebells or Anemones Walk - Meet at Setfords Field and take a short walk around Markstakes Common with the Community Ranger, Thyone Outram**

**Tuesday July 18<sup>th</sup> 6.30 pm An early evening stroll around Markstakes Common with the Community Ranger, Thyone Outram**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday monthly, practical work morning.**

**18<sup>th</sup> April - 16<sup>th</sup> May - 20<sup>th</sup> June - 18<sup>th</sup> July**