



Downlands Trust Newsletter

AUTUMN 2020

From the Chairman

Peter Wakeham

The six months that have elapsed since the last issue of the newsletter have been dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on organisations and individuals everywhere and the Trust has been no exception. The national lockdown at the end of March meant that all planned walks, talks and events were cancelled and this has impacted upon our plans to raise our profile and attract new members. In addition, much conservation work planned by the Downlands Partnership and by local conservation groups has not been able to go ahead. However, electronic communications have meant that the processing of grant applications and payments has continued unhindered and video conferencing has proved to be an effective substitute for our regular trustee meetings.

Regrettably, it has been necessary to cancel the upcoming AGM and members have been informed of this decision. The trustees explored the options available and considered cancellation to be the best course of action, but members will have the opportunity to submit to the trustees any questions that they may have about the Trust.

On a more positive note, the Trust was pleased to offer extra support for this year's lambing at Old Lodge Farm, assisted by additional Covid-19 crisis funding from our sponsors Fidelity International. A splendid total of 93 lambs were born safely thanks to the dedication of the Downlands Partnership's grazing team who self-isolated at the farm throughout.

Our relationship with Fidelity International has been most enjoyable and very productive and we will miss working with them when their sponsorship ends in December this year. Their support has made a great difference to our achievements and we are exceptionally grateful to them.

Fidelity International's partnership with Downlands Trust

Rachel Davies

Every two years, staff at Fidelity International in Kingswood choose three charities to work with and support. Downlands Trust was chosen in November 2018 as our Environmental Charity and the partnership started in January 2019 for a two year period.

Fidelity International encourage their staff to get involved with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) work and, alongside my usual day job as Senior Vendor Manager, I am a member of the Kingswood CSR team. I have the pleasure of also being the Relationship Manager for the Downlands Trust as I am passionate about nature and conserving our countryside and so was very keen to start work with Downlands Trust.

I have now worked with Noreen Siba, my contact at Downlands Trust, for the past eighteen months and, for us, it has been a very successful partnership. Noreen proposes potential projects and we decide whether we would like to fund them. Projects we have funded include four Sussex cattle, fencing, a microwave for the lambing team, business cards and management plans. We also fundraise at our Kingswood offices for Downlands Trust through cake sales, Smartie challenges and general knowledge quizzes.



Fidelity volunteers at Hooley Meadows

Staff also volunteer with the Downlands Partnership and we have set up a monthly volunteer group which may resume soon. A Christmas BBQ and volunteer day for staff last December was very successful and over-subscribed. We also hosted an evening at our premises to thank Downlands Partnership volunteers for their work. It has been a pleasure to support Downlands Trust.

In the financial year which ended on 31st July, the Trust awarded £21,100 in grants. This is up from £18,840 last year and £6,774 the year before.

The Trust has been able to provide this higher level of grants thanks to the funding provided by Fidelity International. 2020 is our second, and final, calendar year as the Environmental Charity of the Year of Fidelity International's Kingswood offices. They have funded over 80% of the grants made by the Trust in our last financial year.

In the past, grants were made mostly to the Downlands Partnership but in 2018 we began encouraging applications from other groups wishing to improve the bio-diversity of their sites. In the last year, 24% of our funding has been to other groups. The amount of grant given has ranged from £200 to the Sanderstead Plantation Partners towards a strimmer – see below, to £2,000 to Kenley Primary Forest School to part fund a pond to improve the habitats in the school grounds.

We are particularly grateful to Fidelity International this year for their additional crisis funding of £5,000 to cover additional costs due to Covid-19. The grazing team have particularly appreciated this as, amongst other things, it has been used to provide camping equipment, a microwave and a hamper at Easter to make them more comfortable when self-isolating at Old Lodge Farm during lambing. This extra funding has also been used to provide PPE and tools to reduce the need to share equipment in these difficult times.

Several of the grants awarded this year were featured in our Spring Newsletter. More recent grants have been:-

New Portable Shearing Machine

Shearing time means hot and heavy work at the Farm. This year, however, the work has been lightened thanks to a new portable shearing machine. Using this new shearer, with the machine worn on the belt and shearing handpiece holstered to the leg, the sheep can be sheared wherever they are in the pen causing less stress to the sheep and lighter work for the shearer. Having an extra shearing machine also makes work safer in these times of Covid-19, since it reduces the need for shearers to share equipment.



Lamb Feeder

These little lambs are enjoying warm milk from an electric lamb feeder thanks to a grant of £120. Normally when a lamb is orphaned it needs to be bottle fed by hand. Not only does this take a lot of the grazing team's time when they are very busy with lambing but it can result in the milk being cooler than desired. Now these lambs receive warm milk on demand.

Chainsaw for Happy Valley, Coulsdon

A grant of £465 was made for Dominic North, the Countryside Warden at Happy Valley, to purchase a new chainsaw. Coppicing and traditional woodland management are crucial elements of the management of Happy Valley and Dominic quickly put the chainsaw to work. He commented, 'This new saw will make life so much easier to carry out tree work in Happy Valley. My back will thank you!'



Four Sussex Steers join the Grazing Team

Thanks to a grant of £3,000 four Sussex steer cattle have been purchased to augment the Partnership's grazing stock. These new conservation grazers are 18 month old castrated Sussex males that have been reared on pasture and trained to be calm around the public and staff. They should soon be seen out on the North Downs helping manage the species rich grassland.

Other grants

We have also provided several other grants to the Partnership for fencing tools and equipment plus a generator.

Other grants include £1,250 requested by Meike Weiser, the Community Conservation Officer at Croydon Council, for work by the Partnership to improve access and signage at Hawkhurst Wood in Kenley which is part of the new South London Downs National Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, the work has been delayed due to lockdown.

City of London

In addition to the £21,100 spent on grants referred to above, the Trust received almost £15,000 in the last year from the City of London Corporation to fund grazing and work by the Partnership on City land. In the past this funding had been paid direct to the Partnership but it now comes to the Trust via a grant which has to be applied for each year.

A Strimmer for Sanderstead Plantation

Peter Wakeham

The Trust was pleased to contribute towards the cost of a strimmer for the Sanderstead Plantation Partners, who as you can see from the photograph were delighted!

Sanderstead Plantation is an 8.4 hectare woodland located on the Addington Road between Sanderstead and Selsdon and is owned by Croydon Council.

The Partners are volunteers who have been managing the site for over 20 years and the wood has considerable wildlife value and is much enjoyed by local residents. In spring the ground flora includes many native plants that are ancient woodland indicators, including bluebells, Wood Anemone, Wood Sorrel, Sanicle and Dog's Mercury.



Walk on Long Hill

Noreen Siba

The first and last walk of the year, until it was interrupted by Covid, was led by Connor Harrison in March. Six of us were fortunately able to complete the walk in the dry between periods of rain.

Connor was able to tell us about the management of the site and to share his wide knowledge of its flora and fauna, showing us really good photos of wildflowers, sheep and adders!

Park Downs in lockdown

Noreen Siba

In lockdown, I walked the same route every day outside my back gate on Park Downs observing wildflowers and butterflies as they appeared.

I now have 107 diary entries, photos in an album of them all and a basic map to show where they were found!

I was going to stop at 100 which was the rare Pale toadflax but the wildflowers and butterflies keep coming so I have carried on.

A lovely way to have occupied myself in lockdown!



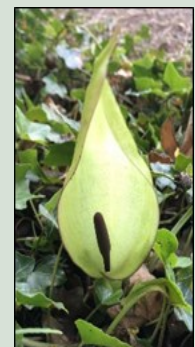
Early visitor to a single daffodil



Two bluebells (next to the famous Banstead Woods bluebells) showing the variety of colour



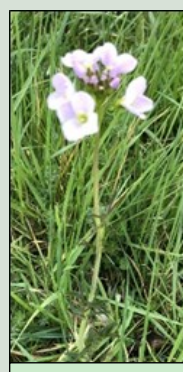
Marsh Thistle - although there are no marshes here on chalk grasslands



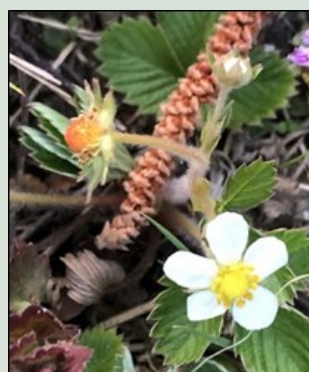
Lords and Ladies flower - it lasted only one day in the heat



Cowslip



Cuckooflower



Wild Strawberry in early March



Greater Stitchwort



Bugle

Volunteering at Blanchman's Farm Local Nature Reserve in Lockdown

Pam Mascall

Blanchman's Farm is a 10 hectare oasis in the heart of Warlingham Village providing a community wildlife area. As its name suggests, it is on the site of an old farm which dates back to 1584. Farming ceased in 1945 following which it became playing fields. Then, in 1991, the land was saved from development and became a community wildlife open space managed for wildlife. In 2006 it was designated a Local Nature Reserve.

It's 11:30 on a Tuesday morning in mid-May. Family groups and visitors in ones and twos, many with dogs, are enjoying a walk round the Blanchman's Farm Local Nature Reserve in Warlingham. Volunteers are working in pairs around the site.

This was a very special day for the volunteers. Lockdown had just been eased and, after eight weeks at home, they were now able to work again, albeit only in pairs whilst maintaining social distancing. Thus, no getting together for a chat over coffee. Indeed, they now had to bring their own refreshments.



Coffee in lockdown
David and Ken



Pam with mower part funded by the Trust

The threat of Covid-19 also meant that tools should not be shared. Fortunately many of our volunteers have a wide range of their own. We also took advantage of the Trust's Covid-19 Crisis fund provided by Fidelity International and received a grant for PPE and tools.

Since the volunteers have been back we have seen a lot more visitors to the site. Many stop to say a few words and express their appreciation of the work volunteers have been doing. Earlier in lockdown Blanchman's had become a destination where visitors, especially children, left tokens to the NHS, and others walked round spotting what had been left which often led them to a welcome chat with other passers-by.

Over the winter months a hard core of six to eight volunteers had been working mid-week hedge laying. They were keen to get back to work improving the habitats at Blanchman's. Being the summer we were very aware that it was bird nesting season so any tasks had to take care not to disturb the birds. So, on one morning each week priority has been given to repairing fencing and bridges around the site. We have also been tending the trees in the orchard, widening paths, creating habitat piles plus the odd bonfire.

Ken working on the path



Dave and Peter working on the boardwalk

Pauline and Sue widening paths

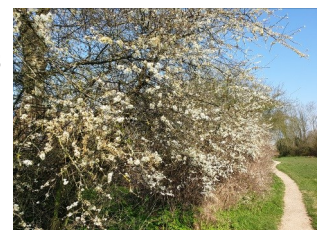


In June we were delighted to discover that Greater Spotted Woodpeckers were nesting in an old dead ash tree. Before long a very noisy brood were calling for food and both parents could be seen returning to the nest with food for their young.

This year has been very good for butterflies. Those seen include Holly Blue, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Ringlet, Small Skipper and Speckled Wood but no Brown Hairstreaks. This was disappointing as there is a lot of blackthorn growing on site, which we recognise from the lovely white blossom in spring and deadly long spines at other times of the year when we are cutting back scrub! Given the abundance of this plant on site we had expected to see Brown Hairstreak butterflies too as they lay their eggs on the youngest spines of blackthorn. We will be looking out for the white eggs of the Brown

Hairstreak next year on the new growth of our blackthorn bushes.

We have been made aware of the importance of young blackthorn shoots in the life cycle of the Brown Hairstreak in our new Management Plan written by Tom Thorn of the Downlands Partnership. Tom knows Blanchman's well and, thanks to a grant from the Trust, we were able to commission him to update our existing plan when he was unable to lead volunteering tasks because of lockdown.



Blackthorn in spring

What is the point?

Andy Keay, WoodChip Conservation Volunteers

“What is the point...?”

I am frequently asked what I am doing when I am caught beating the lower branches of a tree, sieving leaf litter and/or dead wood, or sweeping a net through the ground herbage. I carefully explain that I am catching insects and spiders so that they can be identified and added to the species list for the Banstead Woods & Chipstead Downs Local Nature Reserve.

The question that sometimes follows on from this conversation is 'What is the point of doing all this recording of species?' This is somewhat more awkward to answer. Is there any value in recording all the species that are found?

The answer is emphatically “Yes”. Conservation work in the landscape cannot ever hope to be effective unless it is known what species are present. It is pointless carrying out conservation work aimed at increasing the population of a desirable species unless it is known that that species is present, or it can reasonably be expected to colonise the target area from a nearby source.

Secondly, the records collected so far will form a baseline of what is present at the site at the time – it is hoped that future naturalists will continue with the species monitoring into the future and will be able to identify changes to the flora and fauna and, hopefully, identify those species that are at risk of local extinction and put in place measures to protect/enhance them. A worrying aspect is that there seem to be so few 'youngsters' amongst us that are willing to commit to the 'hobby' of wildlife monitoring.

Conservation work can be aimed at providing conditions suitable for increasing a desirable species' population – such as planting areas with Kidney Vetch in the hope of developing a population of Small Blue butterflies. This can only prove to be effective if there are known populations of the butterfly within flying distance of the newly planted site.



We frequently erect piles of dead wood (tree trunks) at the site, sometimes supplemented by dead hedges (smaller branches and twigs). To some of the public, this is seen as a 'waste of time', or 'it's untidy'.

The purpose of our actions is to provide habitat suitable to some of the many wood boring insects, provide weather protection to insects and spiders, provide suitable habitat for nesting birds and dense cover for some of the smaller mammals, from shrews to weasels.

The orientation of a wood pile can also provide specific species with the physical conditions that they require – the sunny side of the pile often has a very different fauna to that on the shaded side.

Keeping the paths clear of vegetation not only helps humans to traverse the woodland and grassland. It provides the conservationist with considerable raw material to provide another, very rich and important habitat for wildlife – the compost heap! Here you will find a considerable range of creatures, from frogs, toads and slow-worms through to pseudoscorpions, ants, woodlice, beetles and many more.

The public have sometimes complained that these heaps of cut material are 'a mess', but as conservationists we know better!

More details of the WoodChips' conservation activities can be found on their website: thewoodchips.org



Membership

Sarah Milan

We are very grateful to all of our members for continuing to renew your membership each year and for your donations. Your annual subscription is used almost entirely to fund local projects since our overheads are extremely low.

We usually hope to recruit new members each summer via our stalls at local countryside fairs and events but obviously that hasn't been possible this year. We very much value your support in bringing the aims of the Trust and conservation of our wonderful chalk downlands to a wider audience. It would be fantastic if we could increase membership and you can help by spreading the word more widely and also by engaging the interest of the next generation who will in time take over from us.

Your help and support in this would be greatly appreciated.

If you are reading this newsletter and you are not a member, please do consider joining us.

Hope in Spring

Poem by Ruth Bradbury
Illustrated by Karina Siba



Hope in Spring 2020
by Ruth Bradbury

Spring arrives unexpected, welcome
A riot of white, the Blackthorn blooms
Wild flowers emerge from leaf decay
Transfix the eye in gloom.

The speedwell speeds the traveller by
And near the path abounds
Nestling in the hard packed soil
It hugs the trampled ground.

The yellow daffodil, the primrose
Give way to blue and white
Bluebells carpet beneath the trees
The wood anemone so bright.

The brown fields now are greening
Bathed in solar warmth and light
Foretell of summer bounty
Cherries adorned in pink and white.

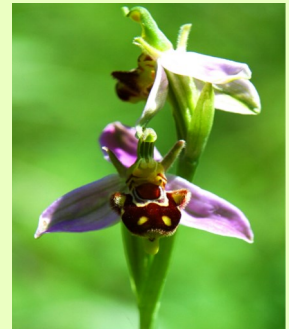
So this is Spring, a time of hope
To replace dark winter's grey
A time of new beginnings
Of change, and brighter days.

Did you read...?

Geof Haseler

Being unable to get out and about forced me to read the daily paper more thoroughly than usual, otherwise I would have missed:

- National Insect Week (21 to 28 June) which is held every year.
- Swift Awareness Week (27 June to 5 July) which is held every two years. The first reports of swifts in Surrey this year were on 26 April.
- The UK's 300,000 miles of roadside verges cover almost three times more land than wild flower meadows (apparently) and contain more than 700 species of wildflower. Exeter University found that unmown verges have three times more flowers and twice as many pollinators as those cut once between May and August.
- Bee orchids are spreading north and have been recorded at sites near Glasgow and Edinburgh (Times 26 March). Obviously, before lockdown!



Blooming well in the Lagoon at Holly Lane/Outwood Lane

Graham Kenward

The planting in and around the Lagoon is flourishing despite the recent drought and this week's wildflower blooms include Cornflower, Viper's Bugloss, Poppy, Common Mallow, Clover, Tufted Vetch, Birds-foot Trefoil, Daisies, Yellow Sweetclover, White Campion and masses of Kidney Vetch in addition to that planted in previous years.

Let's hope the increased Kidney Vetch is good news for the Small Blue butterfly, which may be encouraged to add the Lagoon to its usual haunts.

Wildlife observed included masses of bees, Damselflies and a Small Tortoiseshell, a Broad-bodied Chaser and a young fox, which yelped before running off towards Holly Lane car park.

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Kidney Vetch at the lagoon

Photo: Graham Kenward

Roman Snails (*Helix pomatia*)

Peter Wakeham

Although by no means common in our area, Roman snails (*Helix pomatia*) are often encountered during a walk on the downs. Their habitat is characterised by grassy or scrubby ground with an abundance of loose, chalky soil into which they are able to bury themselves in order to hibernate and also in which to lay their eggs. Sunny, south facing slopes are preferred.

They are the largest species of snail in the UK and the shells may be up to 2" in diameter. They are thought to have been introduced by the Romans as a source of food, hence the name. In order to prevent them escaping, the Romans grew them on land surrounded by water and they were fed on milk, wine must and spelt wheat. In the Middle Ages their population was probably increased significantly by the monasteries, which cultivated them for food.

Nationally, their distribution is limited to specific areas, namely the Chilterns, the North Downs, the Cotswolds and parts of the Mendips. These are all areas of chalk and limestone that provide the calcium carbonate needed by the snails to form their shells.

Eggs are laid in July in clutches of 40-65 in a cylindrical cavity excavated by the female and juveniles hatch after three to four weeks. Roman snails are slow growing, taking up to 5 years to mature and living for 15 years or more. They are often found in small colonies and rarely venture far, generally spending their lives within an area no more than 30m in diameter. This makes them vulnerable to collection and exploitation by the restaurant trade, in spite of being protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.



Glow worms

Geof Haseler



Glow worm

Photo: Robin Scagell

On an evening bat / glow worm walk a few years ago with the Woodchips, I recall hearing that the bank at the top of Hitherfield above the Ramblers' Rest had been a fine spot to see glow worms. The favoured habitat of glow worms is chalk grasslands, flowery banks and woodland edges yet, that evening, we saw only one and that was in Harholt.

I was therefore not surprised to read that, according to the Environment Agency, the number of glow worms has fallen by three quarters over the last twenty years. Glow worm larvae feed on slugs and snails which prefer damp conditions and the recent hot summers have meant less food for them to eat.

Glow worms (*Lampyris noctiluca*) (what an evocative name!) are a type of beetle and take about two years to reach maturity. Adults cannot feed and only live for two to three weeks.

Only female glow worms are able to give off light using a molecule called luciferin which combines with oxygen to form oxyluciferin. The constant greenish glow is produced by a chemical reaction with the light-emitting enzyme luciferase.

Only the males have wings and they fly at night searching for a wingless female which sits in a grassy place emitting a greenish glow from the end of her abdomen. Once she has mated, she turns off her light, lays her eggs and dies.

Interestingly, Peter Wakeham spotted a glow worm larva crossing the path in Hitherfield during daytime in July.

The Keep It Wild Trust has been breeding glow worms in captivity in old tubs of butter for re-introduction into the countryside and have a programme to release at least 500 per site within two years. The site nearest us is in Kingston on Thames.

According to Robin Scagell, who runs the UK Glow Worm Survey, 420 were found during a detailed survey at Painswick Beacon in Gloucestershire this year where in previous years only a handful had been found. Numbers vary considerably from year to year and even from night to night, so all may not be lost!

If you spot glow worms, Robin has asked that you record these on the UK Glow Worm Survey www.glowworms.org.uk, noting accurate position and numbers.



Glow worm larva

Photo: Peter Wakeham

Support us with membership, donation or a legacy

DOWNLANDS TRUST MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

If you are not a member or if you know anyone who would like to support our valuable work in the countryside, we would be delighted to receive the following application form and subscription. Alternatively, you can join via our website

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP (please tick)

- Individual (**£10**)
 Senior /student /unwaged (**£5**) Please delete as applicable
 Family (**£15**)
 Group /company /school (**£15**) Please delete as applicable

Please note: Memberships are due for renewal annually on 1st January. However, any memberships taken out after 1st September in any year are covered for membership for the following calendar year.

PAYMENT OPTIONS (please tick as applicable)

- I enclose a cheque for £..... to cover the subscription. You may like to add an additional donation to aid our work.
 I have made an online payment of £.....to your bank account, Downlands Trust 40-09-04 31439820. Please use your name as the reference so that we can connect the payment to your membership.

GIFT AID Please tick the box below if you are in a position to do so

- I agree to the Downlands Trust claiming tax under the Gift Aid Scheme on all my donations and subscriptions until I advise otherwise. I confirm that I am paying an amount of UK Income and/or Capital Gains Tax that at least equals the amount that the charity will reclaim.

YOUR DETAILS

Title:		Full name:	
Address:			
		Postcode:	
Email:			
Telephone:			
Signature		Date	

Please return completed membership application to:
Membership Secretary, Downlands Trust, 71 Warren Road, Banstead, SM7 1LG

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Downlands Trust

Registered address: 46 Wilmot Way, Banstead, SM7 2PY

Registered Charity No. 1126535
 Company No. 6661092

Email: info@downlandstrust.org.uk

Website: www.downlandstrust.org.uk



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