

# Downlands Trust Newsletter

SPRING 2023



## From the Chairman

Peter Wakeham

Welcome to our Spring newsletter. With winter now behind us, we look forward to another season of actively supporting conservation in the local countryside. This is not say that we have been in hibernation since the last issue of the newsletter! The October AGM was well attended and we enjoyed a most informative talk by Geof Haseler about the work of the WoodChips Conservation Volunteers in Banstead Woods. Presentations about the work of the Trust and management of the countryside have been given to a number of local organisations and have resulted in some generous donations that will help to support our work in the future. At the end of January, a quiz night in aid of the Trust was held in Banstead Community Hall. Organised by Nigel and Janet Rix and their daughters on behalf of the Epsom 41 Club, it was attended by about 120 people and raised the splendid sum of £1,716 for the Trust for which we are exceptionally grateful. This donation will be used to purchase GPS 'Nofence' electronic collars for the Downlands Partnership's sheep and goats.

I am delighted to be able to report that, after a long delay caused initially by a shortage of computer chips and then by a flood in Toyota's Durban factory, the Hilux off-road vehicle that has been purchased for the Downlands Partnership's Task Team has now been delivered. We look forward to seeing it in service - more in the next newsletter!

We are very aware of the rarity and value of good quality chalk grassland, and we look forward once again to enjoying the wild flowers and butterflies that are now appearing. In terms of biodiversity, as measured by the variety of species present, chalk grassland is unrivalled in Britain and an oft-quoted statistic is that more than 40 species of plants may be found in a square metre. The origin of this number is unknown and I suspect that it is now simply repeated from publication to publication! However, last summer a group of botanists from the Sussex Botanical Recording Society accepted the challenge of verifying this statistic on the South Downs. Pleasingly, they succeeded. In the best 2 out of 5 1 metre quadrat samples, they recorded 40 and 44 species respectively. Can we match this on the North Downs, I wonder?

## Alan Brown



Alan Brown retired at the end of 2022, having worked with the Downlands Partnership as Senior Partnership Officer since April 2016.

The Trust has always enjoyed working with Alan over the years and we wish him all the best for his retirement.

Happy retirement, Alan, and keep in touch.

## Meet the Trustees



(from left to right)  
Elspeth Pringle (Social Media), Pam Mascall (Grants), Peter Wakeham (Chairman), Geof Haseler (Newsletter), Sarah Milan (Membership), Roger Findlay (Treasurer), Noreen Siba (Marketing).

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

**Our membership form is on the back page.**

## For your diary

Noreen Siba

- Sunday 7 May \* Dawn Chorus Walk (Queen Mary's Park to Oaks Park Café) – 6.00 - 8.30a.m.
- Sunday 14 May \* Guided Tree Trail 12.30 p.m. in Oaks Park.
- Sunday 14 May Flowers and butterflies of Park Downs. A 2 hour walk led by Peter Wakeham and Jill Hall. Meet at Holly Lane car park at 10.30 a.m. A donation to the Downlands Trust will be appreciated. Part of the Banstead Arts Festival programme.
- Saturday 3 June Croydon's Green Open Day, Central Library, Croydon
- Sunday 11 June Eezesport Teddy Bears Picnic, Nonsuch Park (in aid of NCT and Downlands Trust)
- Saturday 24 June \* Meadow Day & Sutton Landscape Artist 2023 - Oaks Park
- Saturday 1 July Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair
- Saturday 22 July \* Bat walk in Oaks Park 8.30 p.m.
- Monday 28 August Carshalton EcoFair, Carshalton Park, Ruskin Road SM5 3DD
- Tues 24 October Annual General Meeting - 7.45 p.m. The Banstead Centre, The Horseshoe, Banstead SM7 2BQ.

\* Visit [What's On \(friendsofoakspark.co.uk\)](http://friendsofoakspark.co.uk) for further details

## Calling all members and volunteers

We already have the dates below in 2023 when we want to advertise the work of the Downlands Trust and Partnership at local fairs. However, we cannot manage to man a stall all day as well as setting it up and dismantling it.

We need a rota of helpers on these dates who can assist for a couple of hours. If you are willing or know of anyone who is willing to help, please contact **Noreen on 07770 417 796**

- Saturday 1 July Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair
- Monday 28 August Carshalton EcoFair

## Downlands Trust launches a merchandise range

Elsbeth Pringle



The Downlands Trust launched a new line of merchandise at its AGM last October. The range included an environmentally friendly lined jute tote bag featuring the Trust's logo and website details on one side. Also launched were two ranges of cards - one a winter selection with snowy scenes features some of the Downlands Partnership grazing animals; and another selection of spring scenes showing lambs and native chalk loving plants.

Just in time for Christmas, the Trust also sold small potted Christmas trees, either on their own or in one of the jute bags for life. These proved particularly popular at the Fidelity and Downlands Partnership volunteer Christmas events.



These new products will not only help raise awareness of the Downlands Trust, but also bring in a source of revenue to help support the Trust's work.

If you would like to purchase any of the cards or a tote bag, please contact any of the Trustees, or message via the Downlands Trust Facebook page or website.

Following the success of the two sets of cards, the Trust is looking to expand the selection of images to further showcase the flora and fauna of the Chalk Downlands, as well as the work that the Trust and Downlands Partnership undertake to maintain them. If you have any photographs that you would be willing to allow the Trust to use, please send a high-quality image as a jpg to Elsbeth Pringle, either via the Downlands Trust Facebook page, website or email [elsbeth.pringle@downlandstrust.org.uk](mailto:elsbeth.pringle@downlandstrust.org.uk)



## Introducing Banstead Commons Conservators

Lucy Shea

Living in Banstead we are spoilt with beautiful green spaces on our doorstep, but did you know that [Banstead Commons Conservators](#) are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of 1,350 acres of the spaces we enjoy?

Formed under a Parliamentary Act in 1893 Banstead Commons Conservators were tasked to protect Banstead Commons from the activities of the Lord of the Manor. Whilst society and the local area have changed greatly over the 130 years, the role of the Conservators has remained essentially the same; to protect the integrity of the Commons from external pressures.



Small Blue on Banstead Downs

Banstead Downs holds the record for the longest running butterfly transect in Surrey, which was established in 1986, providing significant data related to how butterfly populations have changed over time. Thirty-two species of butterfly, including colonies of the rare Small Blue butterfly, have been recorded on the site.

This winter the Conservators worked collaboratively with the Downlands Partnership to reintroduce sheep to graze Park Downs to support biodiversity. A small flock of fifteen wethers have stealthily chomped their way across the three temporary enclosures across the site leaving Park Downs with a short and uniform sward, an ideal environment to encourage the growth of the characteristic species, such as Salad Burnet, Bee Orchid and Horseshoe Vetch, that are established across the site.



Sheep on Park Downs



Pyramidal Orchids on Park Downs

Next winter the Conservators plan to introduce sheep to both Banstead Downs and Park Downs which will help complement the mechanical management of the chalk downland areas. The Conservators are grateful to the Downlands Trust for providing a grant for the purchase of hand tools that are now in use by conservation work parties.

With approximately 30 miles of paths, permissive rides and bridleways to explore on Banstead Commons, we suggest you grab a pack lunch and see what you can discover this Spring.

Banstead Commons Conservators host a programme of Guided Walks on Banstead Commons each year. You can follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for regular updates and event listings.

If you would like to find out more about the work of Banstead Commons Conservators, please email me at: [clerk@bansteadcommonsconservators.co.uk](mailto:clerk@bansteadcommonsconservators.co.uk)

### Hand Tools for the Banstead Common Conservators >

We were pleased to award a grant of £1,740 for the purchase of tree poppers, bowsaws and loppers to help the Banstead Common Conservators volunteers manage the scrub and remove invasive species on Park Downs and Banstead Downs.

Both sites are chalk downland designated SSSIs due to their unique flora and fauna.



### < New Tables for events at Old Lodge Farm

The tables used at Old Large Farm have developed cracks and become unstable, making them unsuitable for hosting events.

A grant of £785 was awarded for the purchase of more sturdy tables which will be used for a variety of purposes.

The photo shows them in use to display Trust merchandise at a Fidelity day at the farm.

### A heavy duty Brush-cutter for the Grazing Team >

It is often necessary for the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team to clear fairly large scrub with woody stems before land is suitable for grazing. So, whilst the team's existing brush-cutter is fine for clearing smaller scrub, it is inadequate for tackling these thicker bushes.

The Trust awarded a grant of £708 to purchase a heavy duty brush-cutter suitable for this heavier clearance. The photo shows Damien using the new brush-cutter on the steep slopes of Quarry Hangars.



### Electric Collars for Sheep

Following the success of using the 'Nofence' electric collars for cows and goats, a grant of £2,137 has been made to the Downlands Partnership grazing team to purchase four more collars for sheep and another four for pygmy goats. This will enable the pygmy goats to graze on more sites which do not have fencing.

It will be the first time that the Partnership has fitted sheep with the collars.



### < Wet Weather PPE for Old Lodge Farm

Volunteers at Old Lodge Farm are out in all weathers, often in the rain, doing jobs such as sheep MOTs. Even when it is not wet, the farm is very exposed and windy in places. The Trust awarded a grant of £201 to purchase waterproofs. These will enable the volunteers to spend longer out in the fields and can be also used by visitors to the farm in inhospitable weather.

In total over the last six months, the Trust has approved more than twenty grants to the Downlands Partnership and other local conservation groups.

Grants that have been made include:

- equipment for the Downlands Partnership Grazing team
- two scythes for the Downlands Partnership
- a chainsaw for the Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area
- materials for fencing at Little Woodcote Wood
- Silky saw blades and protective gloves for the Woodchip Conservation Volunteers
- Scrub clearance at Park Ham, Chaldon
- Scrub clearance at Happy Valley and Hawkstir NNRs

**Much of the funding for these important projects was provided by our sponsor, Fidelity International. The Trustees would like to express their thanks to Fidelity for this invaluable support.**

## Fidelity Christmas Conservation Days

Elspeth Pringle and Pam Mascall

Staff at Fidelity had the chance in early December to work with the Downlands Partnership on outdoor projects at Old Lodge Farm and Whyteleafe.

The tasks at Old Lodge Farm included making dormice boxes and salt-lick covers, potting up seedlings, planting Christmas pots and carrying out sheep MOTs. All tasks were undertaken with great enthusiasm and with plenty of fun and laughter. It was also lovely to see many familiar faces from previous Fidelity days. So many volunteers also took the time at the end of the day to express their appreciation for everything that had been laid on for them and how they had been looked after. It is all down to the hard work of Sean, Damien and Jamie that this day was so successful.

Forty-nine Fidelity staff turned out at Whyteleafe. One group spent the morning making wreaths under the expert guidance of Sarah whilst the other was scrub bashing with Tom on the very steep hillside of the Dobbin. Groups swapped roles for the afternoon session. There were lots of happy faces and everyone enjoyed the day in the open.



## Blanchman's Farm Local Nature Reserve

Linda Mount

On one of the few dry and sunny days in late November last year I went to explore Blanchman's Farm. I had read about this reserve in the Downland Trust Spring 2022 Newsletter and it sounded like a little natural gem in the middle of Warlingham!

The volunteers' hard work on the pathways provided easy, mud-free routes which were clear to follow. I noticed newly planted trees, which I think were cherries and what looked like the early stages of a dead hedge - all the makings of diverse habitat. I was surprised what a peaceful atmosphere there was despite quite a few dog walkers and other people enjoying this space.



I rested quietly for a while on some logs near where a stack of cut branches were piled. Almost immediately I noticed various birds flitting in and around the surrounding trees and the piles of branches - Blue Tits, Long Tailed Tits, Chaffinch and Robins. Several Blackbirds were feasting on the last Damsons. Somewhere in the distance I heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker "chinking" and just when I rose to leave, a Red Kite circled silently above me....they are such enormous birds!

Thank you Pam for your article on Blanchman's Farm - I shall certainly visit this lovely spot again!

Have you seen any Nettle Creepers lately? And, no, I'm not talking about Downlanders but a bird better known as the Whitethroat, a summer visitor to our shores, but one with many other names in times past: 'Muggy', 'Cut-throat', 'Wheybeard', 'Weeti-why Beard', 'Muff', 'Charlie Muftie' and 'Hayjack'. 'Nettle Creeper' is not a particularly appropriate name as the Whitethroat is more likely to be seen in bramble patches. Before bird names became standardised, most species had a range of name mostly dependent on the part of the country you were in.



"Nettle Creeper"



"Peggy Dishwasher"

Another bird with a strange name is the Pied Wagtail, previously called 'Peggy Dishwasher'. It is said that it acquired this name because the black and white plumage resembled the uniform of a housemaid and the constant movement of the tail was likened to the washing of pans! In Surrey, the Pied Wagtail was known as the 'Ditch Watcher', a far more appropriate name as this is a bird with a strong liking for water habitats. It is not too much of a leap to see that 'Ditch Watcher' became 'Dishwasher'.

Sometimes the old names can lead to confusion – the Willow Warbler was known as the 'Willow Wren' and the Wood Warbler as the 'Wood Wren', both these alternative names being used in some bird books well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Yellowhammer, once a common farmland bird, was called the 'Yellow Yeorling' – a name derived from folklore in which the Yellowhammer was supposed to drink a drop of the Devil's blood every May morning. It was also known as the 'Scribbling Lark' on account of the scribble-like markings on its eggs.



"Willow Wren"



The polite "Fallowchat"

People of a nervous disposition should avert their eyes now, as I have to use coarse language to explain the derivation of the name of the Wheatear. Although the name Wheatear evokes images of this bird on wheat fields, it is far more likely to be found on very short turf (which is why they once nested on the sheep-grazed North Downs). Wheatear is a corruption of 'Whitearse', a reference to the bird's prominent white rump! It is also known as 'Fallowchat', 'Horsematch', 'Snorter' and the 'Stonehacker'.

The Green Woodpecker, surely misnamed as it spends much of its time on the ground hunting for ants (its major food source), was also known as the 'Woodspite', 'High-hoe', 'Hey-hoe' or 'Pick-a Tree'. Perhaps it should have been more accurately called the 'Green Anteater'. The Nuthatch, a common species of Banstead Woods, had the names 'Nutjobber' or 'Woodcracker'. The Greenfinch was known as the 'Green Grosbeak', or 'Green Linnet', the Chaffinch as the 'Shilfa', 'Scooby' or the 'Apple Shell' and the Goldfinch had the names 'Goldspink' or more accurately 'Thistle Finch'.



"Green Grosbeak"



"Robin Goodfellow"

The Robin's common names are connected to the mischief-making elf, Robin Goodfellow. Its Anglo-Saxon name was 'Rudduc', relating to the colour of its breast. Other names include 'Reddock', 'Bob Robin' and 'Ploughman's Bird'. To kill a robin was to invite bad luck. The Dunnock had the names 'Blue Dunnock', 'Bush Sparrow', 'Spick', 'Hedge Spurgie' and 'Hedge Chanter' whilst the Blackbird was known as 'Zulus', 'Colley', 'Merle', 'Blackie' and 'Black Uzzle'.

The Bullfinch was named as the 'Pope', 'Hoop and Hope', 'Bull Spinck' and 'Bully' and in Lancashire the 'Mawp'. It also had the common name of 'Monk' as its black head was likened to the cowl worn by many monks. The Blue Tit had very many common names including 'Ackymal', 'Tom Tit', 'Spick', 'Pickcheese', 'Billy Biter' and 'Blue Cap' whereas its close relative the Great Tit had the names 'Black-headed Bob', 'Black-headed Tomtit', 'Pridden Pal', and 'Saw Sharpener'.



"Billy Biter"

The Song Thrush was called 'Drush', 'Drish', 'Grey Bird' and 'Mavis'. Charming as these old names are, I do not recommend a return to them as it would lead to more confusion!

Photos by Duncan Jennings

This article was originally printed in 2011 in The Downlander



"Grey Bird" or "Mavis"?

## Mistletoe in the countryside - a rare plant

Peter Wakeham

There are more than 900 species of mistletoe around the world, but the only species native to the UK is European Mistletoe (*Viscum album*). The plant is hemiparasitic, which means it takes some of its food from another plant. Growing on the branches of trees, it draws water and nutrients from its host while its green leaves also produce food through photosynthesis. Mistletoe is dioecious, meaning that plants are either male or female, and berries are only found on female plants.



Mistletoe is a common sight in roadside and garden trees in the outer suburbs, certainly in Sutton where I live. In contrast, it is unusual to find it growing on trees in rural areas that have not been planted. The reason is primarily because the majority of trees in the countryside are native, whereas in built-up areas the majority are introductions, hybrids or cultivars. Many native trees, including Ash, Beech, Black Poplar, Oak, and Silver Birch have evolved defences that inhibit infection. These are primarily chemical, but in some cases they are physical such as bark structure. Many, but not all, of introduced species do not benefit from this protection.

According to Celtic mythology, Druids performed a ritual in which they cut Mistletoe from oak trees using a golden sickle. These would indeed have been special plants, not least because there are currently just 13 verified instances of mistletoe-oaks in Britain!

Frequent non-native hosts in suburban areas include Common Lime, False Acacia, Hybrid Black-poplar and cultivated varieties of apple. Common Lime is a frequently planted hybrid between two native species, Small-leaved Lime and Large-leaved Lime. Both are almost entirely Mistletoe free, but the hybrid is lacking the protection of its parents and is often heavily infested.

## Sutton Community Farm

Sonia Cropper

Sutton Community Farm, situated on Telegraph Track, Wallington SM6 0SH, believes in the power of community food growing: bringing people together while caring for the planet. The food is organic and the farm has significant environmental benefits which include contributing to a sustainable farming system, improving the soil and enhancing biodiversity.

Two wildlife ponds have been created on the site and a significant increase in wildlife and biodiversity has been seen over the years, including frogs, newts, dragonflies, ducks, birds of prey, and deer! Not to mention everything living below the ground...



Photo: Peter Wakeham

The farm finds itself in a position of needing to seek financial support from the wider community to secure the future of the farm and has launched a Crowdfunder that will run until 28th April. If you wish to participate, please visit [suttoncommunityfarm.org.uk/](https://suttoncommunityfarm.org.uk/)

## Restoration of Elmore Pond

Peter Wakeham

Last summer's hot, dry weather meant that many ponds in the area dried out completely, providing the opportunity to undertake maintenance more easily. Fidelity international, via the Trust, provided funding to remove silt and invasive vegetation from Elmore Pond in Chipstead. The Chipstead Village Preservation Society successfully used a mechanical digger to remove silt and excess growth of bulrushes and New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*).

The latter originates in Australia and New Zealand but has been spreading across this country since the 1970s. It forms a dense mat that blocks out light and oxygen, killing native vegetation in the process. It is practically impossible to eradicate and is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, making it an offence to introduce this species into the wild.



Photo: John Bunner

## 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

### Support Downlands Trust when shopping online

Use [easyfundraising](#) when shopping and the Downlands Trust will receive donations at no cost to you.

**These donations help us fund projects to keep the countryside accessible to all.**

#### Downlands Trust

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#### Follow us

The Downlands Trust Facebook and Twitter pages include forthcoming events, funding initiatives, the most up-to-date news and views on the practical tasks run by our partners and a whole lot more. We are also on Instagram. Please share us amongst your online friends to help us spread the word about our valuable work.

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