



CHAILEY COMMONS SOCIETY

Spring 2024 NEWSLETTER

From the Chair

Welcome to our Spring 2024 Newsletter. Spring is with us again and how welcome it is this year. Too much rain has been national news and the commons have some wet patches but overall the sandy ground drains well. Our activities are taking place on Pound Common this year and we enjoyed an early bird walk with Adrian (report below).

We are taking a greater interest in Nightjars this year and we will do some monitoring on a structured basis to try and establish their presence. There are programmed walks in due course.

We have been out again setting up the wildlife refuges on Red House and Memorial commons. These refuges have been very helpful in keeping areas free from disturbance and everybody's help in respecting the areas is much appreciated. Updates are included below on the individual commons which have been having management work carried out and thanks to our Countryside Officer Andy and, overall, the heathland is looking well.

A warm welcome to our new members joining this year and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Thank you for your support and enthusiasm,

William

From our Programme Secretary

In late February and early March, we joined forces with the Wilder Ouse project creating some leaky dams. We enjoyed some hard work over 3 days in late March and early April creating the refuges for the ground nesting birds on Memorial and Red House commons. Greg Conway who spoke to us in February about nightjar gave us specific advice on where to create scrapes of bare ground for nightjar nesting and hence refuge locations.

The outdoor work tasks are proving popular and attract some new members. Birch cutting for besom brooms, leaky dams and refuge creation will hopefully become regular activities each year.

This Easter we were pleased to create a wildlife themed Easter Trail on Memorial Common with St Peters School. (See separate report below). It was a great opportunity to connect with the local community and chat to other stall holders such as the Chailey litter pickers.

Following the presentation at the AGM by Izabela Kennedy on her nightjar studies on Ashdown Forest, we are inspired to gather better evidence on nightjar numbers on our commons. This will involve two survey nights in June, and we will be inviting members to help. If you would like to take part, please look out for further details.

In addition to our usual seasonal walks and bird walks we have some new ideas including a nighttime safari on May 28th and a bat walk led by Sussex Bat group on June 24th. We have also planned a society visit to Broad water Warren a RSPB reserve on September 6th 2-4 pm. If you are interested in coming along, please let William know. More details to follow.

Please see our calendar [DIARY](#) for forthcoming events which is attached.

From our Membership Secretary

Thank you to all members who have renewed their membership for 2024, we very much appreciate your involvement and support. There are still a few people who are yet to renew, and they will have received emails or letters to remind them that their subscription is overdue.

It is important that people who participate in Society activities such as workdays (e.g., birch cutting) or pony checking are members so that they can be covered under our insurance policy. If you have decided that you do not wish to continue your membership, please let us know (members@chaileyccommons.org.uk) so that we can make sure that we don't send you any unwanted communications.

At the AGM in March, it was agreed to simplify our membership structure which involves removing the 'Patron' tier of membership leaving just Adult and Junior members. The new subscription rate for Adult members is £10 per year with Junior members under 18 Free. This means that most of you who pay by standing order from your bank account will need to amend the payment rate before the next subscription is due in February 2025. We will be reminding you of this again a bit nearer the time.

Thank you once again for your support.

Sue Berry, Membership Secretary

Conservation Notes

Progress has been made during the early part of the year and into the spring with several detailed projects across the commons.

The wildlife refuges have been set up again including a new area on Memorial Common comprising the central area within the existing wide firebreak. This area is overflowed by the nightjars in season and the area has good established thick cover of gorse and old heather.

Red House has the existing site on the north slope marked out again. The nightjars remain a priority and we will be doing a special survey in early summer when we will set up a team of volunteers to cover the wider area which we know is used by the nightjars.

Within the SSSI there are plants deserving more detailed protection and encouragement and there has been progress to enhance the Marsh Gentian population and we are grateful for liaison with the RBG Kew at Wakehurst for their expertise and seed and plant provision.

We are also encouraging the small population of the Meadow Thistle by keeping the area clear. It is disappointing the Sundews are not really in evidence and further work is needed to reestablish the particular habitat which promotes their growth.



Spring early bird walk.

Our morning walk on Pound Common (13.04.24) was well supported, and we were able to enjoy perfect weather which gave us every opportunity to discover the avian population. Here is a list of our finds: -

Robin*
Linnet (8)
Chiffchaff*
Blackbird*
Blackcap (5)
Magpie (2)
Raven
Collared dove (2)
Dunnock (2)
Wren*
Long tail tits (6)
Goldcrest (3)

Swallow
Chaffinch (3)
Crow (4)
Yellowhammer (3)
Stonechat (2)
Kestrel (1)
Goldfinch
Buzzard

*Abundant

The star of the morning was Yellowhammer posing for a clear view.



Also posing on the treetop was Stonechat.

Thanks to Adrian for leading a lovely walk.



Easter Weekend activity

Over the Easter holidays CCS helped to raise money for Chailey St Peters Primary School with a crafts day at the pavilion. We made spring wreaths, chicks and nests and chatted to visitors about the Society and the Common.



There was also a trail on Memorial Common where children had to spot pictures of plants and animals and then re-arrange the first letters of each to spell 'nightjar.'



As well as raising money for a good cause this was a great opportunity to educate people about the wonderful wildlife we have on the Common.

Stephanie

News from the commons

ROMANY RIDGE

The recent wet weather has filled the watercourse which is across this common and has put the leaky dams to a good test. The flow of water had been slowed and gradually the silt and leaves will fill the brash in the stream and create the holding pattern of the flowing water. Being part of the three integrated lower commons, Romany Ridge can be reached by the cattle who will once again be roving widely.

RED HOUSE COMMON

The Exmoor ponies continue their good work grazing and moving around the common, still under the watchful eye of the daily lookers. There has been some trimming and maintenance of the more overgrown parts of the common and drainage has been corrected. The 'Wildlife Refuge' has been set up again on the north slope in the same area as before. Guidance barriers and signs have been put up and everyone's help in keeping the refuge free of use until the bird nesting season is over will be much appreciated.

POUND COMMON

Maintenance and trimming have been carried out again and the ponds have been partially cleared. The wet area to the south side has had a good amount of the old gorse and scrub cleared which should encourage regrowth of the natural plants. There are special areas where the Marsh Gentians and Meadow thistle grow, and we are anxious that these areas are kept free for the plants to continue to grow. The cattle have returned to graze and trample and help towards the management of the heathland. They are quite young, and it is quite an adventure for them to discover the wide area available to them.

MEMORIAL COMMON

There are good areas of reestablished heather in the parts where the scrapes were done in the previous few years. This valuable way of clearing the bracken rhizomes removes the heavy layer of mulch from the decaying bracken and releases the heather seed to recover.

The cattle are on the common again and doing a good job of roaming widely and reaching the areas which have heavier growth.

There are two wildlife refuges set up to help the ground nesting birds from April to July and keeping these clear of access really helps. There are many paths which avoid these for the duration of the refuges.

Lane End Common

There is no grazing here now and the clearance done last year has given the common a much more open aspect. Heather and gorse are a feature of this area which slopes gently down to the north.

The wood ants have woken up again and the huge piles of wood material which they use have come alive with a constant scene of movement and carrying of material. The nests are often a metre wide and half a metre high and can be easily seen now. They are often hidden once the bracken grows over.



DIARY

May

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Tuesday May 28th

Night-time Safari
Pound Common car park BN8 4EB
8.30.p.m. – 10.00.p.m.
Approx. 1 mile
Bring binoculars and torches.
Finish in the dark

June

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Thursday June 13th

Nightjars walk
Memorial Common and Pound
Common
Meet at Sports Club car park by
A272 BN8 4ET.
9.30pm – 11.00pm
Finish in the dark – bring torches.
Approx. 1.5 miles

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Monday June 24th

BAT WALK with Jessica Lewis
SUSSEX BAT GROUP
Meet at Sports Club car park.
By A272 BN8 4ET
8.30.p.m. – 10.00.p.m.
Approx. 1.5 miles
Bring torches.
Finish in the dark

July

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Saturday July 13th

Summer butterfly and bird walk
Pound Common
2.00.p.m. – 4.00pm
Meet Pound Common car park
BN8 4EB
approx. 1 mile

August

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Wednesday August 14th

Bug hunt – Pound Common
Families welcome (children to be
accompanied by an adult) max
30.
10.00.a.m. – 12.00 noon

Meet Pound Common car park
BN8 4EB
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OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Saturday August 31st

Late summer walk with William
Pound Common
2.00pm – 3.45. p.m.

Meet Pound Common car park
BN8 4EB.

September

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

Saturday September 6th

OUTING by car to visit
**RSPB Broadwater Down
Tunbridge Wells TN3 9NZ**
Guided Walk
2.00.p.m. – 4.00pm
Meeting at the RSPB car park
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INDOOR MEETING

Thursday September 19th

Sustainable Cut Flowers - Talk
by Ben Cross of Crosslands
Flower Nursery

Village Hall 7.30.p.m. BN8 4DA