



# CHAILEY COMMONS SOCIETY

Summer 2024 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our Summer 2024 Newsletter.

As we transition from Summer into Autumn, we can look across the commons and see how much growth there has been changing the view gradually and almost imperceptibly. The bracken has been so strong this year, I heard someone say it looks as if it has been on steroids which I thought was amusing but certainly describes how it appears everywhere.

The birch has also been strong again and where there were little plants of say one metre last year, these now seem to be at least three metres. A start has been made on the lower commons with the tractor and bracken crusher and this will be continued generally during the coming month. Our activities on the commons have been going ahead in accordance with our programme and, as is our tradition of rotation, we have been visiting Pound Common.

Thank you to everyone who has been on the walks on Pound Common which have been enjoyed and perhaps challenging at times with the weather. Welcome to our new members who have joined us.

More notes below on our latest activities and lovely to welcome the three new ponies on Red House and thank you to JoJo for making this happen.

William

## **Nightjar and Refuges**

We reinstated the wildlife refuge set up last year on Red House Common. On Memorial common we reinstated last year's refuge to the south of the common and created a new refuge in the central area.

This year we have been doing a more scientific study on nightjars. Two sessions were arranged in conjunction with Izzy Kennedy to record nightjar observations in a systematic way. She has been doing similar nightjar surveys on Ashdown Forest. Eighteen people helped each evening session concentrating on all the Commons at the same time and recorded the sounds and sightings of the nightjars. This has given good data indicating that this year there were 5 territories being defended by male nightjar across the commons. We do not know if they were successful breeding. Interestingly no territories were recorded on Red House Common this year.

Looking at the nightjar data, the refuges were well positioned this year on Memorial common and we think really helped to limit disturbance in the selected areas. Hopefully the nightjar will return again to Red House Common next year. Thank you to everyone who walks on the commons for respecting the refuges and taking avoiding paths for a while. Our focus on the ecology and the biodiversity of the commons is ever more important and thank you to our Conservation officer Michael for this. Working together and with expert help from outside we feel we are really getting to understand the natural history of the commons and will be able to share our findings to help make informed conservation management decisions into the future.

### **Conservation Grazing by Exmoor ponies**

On Red House common those of you who use this regularly will notice that there are three additional ponies, and these have come up from Exmoor to join the existing four ponies. This completes our small herd of seven Exmoor mares grazing on Red House throughout the year. The pony checkers have noticed that they come together at times, sometimes close together swishing tails under the shade by St Georges. Other times the three new ponies graze together as a separate group - adding to the pony checking challenges! Please note that the new ponies do appear more interested in people. We are concerned that they may be being fed or petted! Please do help spread the message that feeding ponies is not only harmful to their health but also encourages greedy behaviour with risk of dogs or people being kicked. They are here to do conservation grazing and have plenty of rough forage that they thrive on.

### **A tour of the commons with updates: -**

#### **Red House Common**



Ragwort – if you walk on Red House and indeed on the other commons you will have noticed the large swathes of this tall yellow plant. The yellow flower heads of common ragwort are highly attractive to bees and other insects, including the cinnabar moth. It is not an offence to have these plants growing and ragwort does have significant conservation benefits. Livestock will avoid eating ragwort when it is growing providing there is alternative forage available to them. So generally on the commons ragwort is unlikely to be a problem.

However, Ragwort, in some situations is a real risk to animal health, with potentially fatal consequences if it is ingested by horses or livestock, either in its green or dried state. Bearing this in mind we have taken account of the huge increase in the Ragwort growing on certain areas of the commons, in particular one area of dense ragwort near the car park on Red House Common. We arranged two clearing parties. Working alongside Andy our ranger, we removed ragwort plants- roots and all! Andy hauled it away for hot composting (to kill the seed). We can monitor how effective this is.

Once again this year we put in place the Wildlife Refuge on the north slope including a similar area as before. The signs and temporary barriers provided information, and the bracken grew again to great heights giving even greater protection to the ground nesting birds. We were grateful for the help and understanding again this time, which helped us to realise the full value of our efforts.

### **Lane End Common**

There has been little activity on this common and it is quietly growing everywhere. Some cattle grazing took place and there will be autumn trimming as usual. There are still a small number of deer who have it as their home and we do ask that care is taken when walking here, especially in the spring. The wood ants have been building their massive piles again and they seem as active as ever.

### **Memorial Common**

The wildlife refuges were set up again with a change from the far eastern edge to one in the south west area on the slope where the gorse is substantial and there are stands of old heather. The public right of way helpfully goes slightly to the south, so this was an ideal area to consider for the refuge. The same area in the centre was marked out being to the west of the cattle trough and it has a lovely spread of recovering heather right across the main space.

Nightjar surveys. Our gathering point for the recording teams was at the sports club pavilion and thank you to them for allowing us to use this facility on a couple of late evening sessions. Our recordings of the nightjars were particularly good in the central area of Memorial with them flying across east and back.

### **Romany Ridge Common**

There has been clearance and crushing of the bracken once again. Earlier in the year there was heavy rainfall, and this filled the stream which runs from the spring adjacent to the A272 at the top and provides a good test for the 'leaky dams' which had previously been put in place. It will be a year or two before they become fully effective, and the birch trimmings decay and the silt builds up but they are clearly in place to provide the objective of slowing the flow.

Trimming of the willow around the car park has exposed the 'vernal' or seasonal ponds.

### **Pound Common**

We have used this common for our outdoor activities this year with walks starting at the car park. Mixed weather has been a feature but generally we have managed to enjoy our circular walks. The nightlife safari happened in continual fine drizzle but although we didn't see much, we were rewarded by good sightings of glow worms.

The late summer walk included a lovely group of members who strolled around enjoying the purple hues of the heathers and some observations of the trees, especially the Alder Buckthorn – shown in this picture.

The butterfly walk was quiet, but we were able to take the footpath just to the south by Flint Cottage and research the old





## Membership

Thank you to all our members and patrons for continuing to support Chailey Commons Society, we hope that you have had a chance to enjoy the Commons over the summer and to join in with some of the Society's activities.

It was agreed at the Society AGM in March 2024 to simplify our membership structure which means that we have removed the 'Patron' tier of membership and are now charging a flat rate of £10 per annum for each adult member with free membership for juniors. Those members who have set up standing orders or recurring payments with their banks will need to check that these are set to pay the new amount in February 2025 when subscriptions become due. Don't worry, we will be reminding you of this again before the time comes.

Thank you once again for your support, we look forward to meeting some of you at one of our forthcoming events.

Sue Berry, Membership Secretary

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1. Pound Common - Heather regrowth



2 Pound Common Gorse and heather and a Buff Tail Bee



3 Pound Common - Centaury- *Centaureum erythraea*



4 Delicate flowers of Water Pepper  
*Persicaria hydropiper*

(Pictures Pound Common)  
1 – William  
2 - Ann McNorvell  
4 – Lori Dempster  
4 – Lori Dempster

**DIARY**

**September 19<sup>th</sup> Thursday 7.30.pm**

**Indoor Meeting – Chailey Village Hall**

**Talk –**

**Ben Crossland Flower Nursery**

**October 6th Sunday 9.00.a.m.**

**Outdoor Meeting – Pound Common**

**Bird walk with Adrian**

**Meet at the car park**

**October 10th Thursday 7.30.p.m.**

**Indoor Meeting – Chailey Village Hall**

**Talk – Lost Woods Project**

**October 18th Friday 10.00.a.m.- 12.15.p.m.**

**Outdoor Meeting – Pound Common**

**Fungus Walk with Martin Allison**

**Meet at the car park**

**(Bookings essential & £5 charge)**

**November 21st Thursday 7.30.p.m.**

**Indoor Meeting – Chailey Village Hall**

**Talk – Barn Owls**

**Terry Halahan**

**Sussex Barn Owls Study Group**