



ASHDOWN FOREST VOLUNTEERS NEWSLETTER

Dear Volunteers ...

Issue 1, Spring 2008

Welcome to issue one of the new re-vamped and resurrected Volunteers Newsletter!! I hope this will keep you in touch with what's going on, what changes are taking place, what events are planned and what news there is on the Forest. Please feel free make comments, suggestions and contributions! If you enjoy reading this first bumper issue let me know. If you would prefer an e-mail version please drop me a line!

Information Barn Volunteers Meeting- Feedback

Many months ago we had a 'brainstorming' meeting about the Information Barn. It has been very quiet since then and you are probably thinking we have forgotten all about it. NOT SO!! There has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes on top of the normal day to day stuff.

Feeling safe in the barn - a lock will shortly appear on the door to create a safe haven (depending on fire safety regulations) and the Rangers will be reminded about the emergency call system!
Handbag security - a small locker has been ordered to help keep your bags safe, this will be arriving soon. *Opening hours* - we have looked at this and our current hours are on too many documents and places so we will leave the hours as they are; obviously if the weather is terrible and the barn empty have a word with the Ranger about closing early. *Exhibitions* - if you hear of any local artists or craftsmen that would like to exhibit - please put them in touch with us! *Till problems* - these thankfully seem to be intermittent and I will try to put together an 'idiot guide' to problem solving, if all else fails transfer to the black till and use the sales sheets! *Stuffed animals* - we agree the stuffed animals are looking a little tired and dusty, but to replace them is really very expensive; if you can think of a way around this please let us know.

Hew has been busy putting together a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) that will help fund many of the items you suggested (see page 3). Educational materials for school groups are also coming on line soon and there is a meeting taking place with teachers on March 19th to find out more about their requirements.

What's On

CONSERVATION GROUP
30th March and April at 10.15
meet at the Forest Centre

SCHOOLS FORUM
19th March at Forest Centre

EASTER HOLIDAY WEEK-END
21st to 24th March

SPRING HOLIDAY
7th to 18th April

INFO BARN SUMMER
OPENING Tuesday 2nd April

BARN STOCKTAKING
Monday 1st April

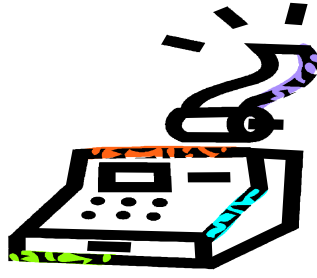
NEW EXHIBITION OPENING
Wednesday 23rd April

SHEARING DAY
Bank Holiday Monday 26th May
From 11.00 to 16.00



WHAT THE HECK IS THE AV UNIT?

You have probably all seen (and heard) the new black television screen near the night corner in the barn. The unit has a series of short films and still pictures stored on a computer memory card rather than the usual CD or tape. There are instructions in the Volunteers Manual on how to switch it on and off and how to increase and decrease the volume, which is all that should need doing under normal circumstances. One problem is that the picture size is rather wide and that can only be altered with the remote control and every time it is switched on. The remote is kept in the office and I will leave instructions for the duty ranger if you feel it needs changing - personally I think it looks OK if your standing a little way back from the screen - what do you think!



The EASTER HOLIDAY WEEK-END is Friday 21st to Monday 24th March - could we have volunteers for both the am and pm sessions please! The SPRING SCHOOL HOLIDAY is Monday 7th to Friday 18th April - again if we could we have afternoon volunteers plus the usual week-end duties that would be great. SUMMER OPENING times will start on Tuesday 1st April at 14.00!!

THE DREADED CREDIT CARD MACHINE



The credit card machine has finally arrived!! BUT FEAR NOT it will not come into general use until Ros and I are totally, and completely, comfortable with it. We also need to know how to fix it ~~when~~ if it goes wrong! Once we feel confident we will start your training when you come in to do a duty, if, after that you really don't feel comfortable that's fine! We are assured it is very easy!

THE TILL

Talking of dreaded bits of equipment....on to the till!! I know you often have odd error messages - if you look in the back of the manual there is a list of the messages and what they actually mean in English! E031 is the weirdest and there is a set instruction on how to fix it in the volunteer's diary. Another odd one is when bar codes stop working - this is a complete mystery and the only answer is to replace the bar code and re-programme the till! If you get into a muddle, don't panic, just continue the day using the black till and sales sheets - leave a note of what happened and what you tried to do to fix it - Ros and I can usually sort out the money and fix the till!



Exhibition Opening

Hew is preparing an exhibition on the use of the Forest in times of war. He is still acquiring material and we have an opening date of Thursday 23rd April! You are warmly invited between 17.00 and 19.00 for drinks and nibbles and a special preview!

A nice cuppa!

It was suggested that tea and coffee should be provided for you. There are plenty of cups in the cupboard over the sink and some coffee, tea bags and sugar will be laid out for you. As there is no fridge (and we don't have the cash or the space) I have bought some mini milk. Please wash up your cups at the end of the duty. During the week I always come and see you and offer tea / coffee (and a bikkie if we have them) and will continue to do so!

Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

A bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is underway to improve education and interpretation on the Forest. The bid is being coordinated by the High Weald AONB Unit (HWU), based at Flimwell. HWU's remit is to implement the Management Plan for the High Weald AONB and is focused on the so-called Forest Ridge, referring to that part of the High Weald between Crawley and Tunbridge Wells that holds the four Norman hunting forests of St Leonards, Worth, Ashdown and Broadwater.

For the bid I wrote two outline project proposals titled "*Discovering the magic of Ashdown Forest: interpretation of Ashdown Forest*". Its primary aim is to "foster understanding and responsible enjoyment of this special landscape". The main means of doing this are through a) replacing the interpretation (exhibition) in the Information Barn, b) using mobile phone/MP3 technology to allow remote access to information and interpretation (e.g. visitors dialling up from Forest car parks), c) providing new walks leaflets (five have already been done in the last couple of years), and d) carrying out a visitor survey (to assess, for example, the effect of the interpretation).

The education proposal is titled "*Development of educational resources at the Ashdown Forest Centre*". Its primary aim is similar to the above. It will a) encourage and enhance greater use of the Centre than at present, b) attract visitors to the Centre through organised activities and c) (rather different) put online (i.e. into the public domain) 120 years worth of minuted meetings of the Board of Conservators a fascinating but sometimes difficult to read document..

What next?

The outcome of the bid as a whole will be known in September with the earliest funding coming on stream in January 2009. The HLF project lasts from 2009-2011. For the Forest some work is set to start in early 2009 (e.g. purchasing educational equipment) but most, especially the largest element of interpretation, will take place in the second half (i.e. July 2010-December 2011). Fingers crossed!

Hew

The Draft Strategic Forest Plan

The Conservators recently held four meetings in the Parishes with the single purpose of discussing the Forest Plan with the public. The Plan has been available on-line since December and can still be found on the website at http://www.ashdownforest.org/docs/Draft_Forest_Plan.pdf. Copies are also available in the Office.

Sheep Day

The Sheep Day back in February was great success. The weather was fantastic and we had 160+ people on the sheep walk with Louise (who herded the sheep through the entrance gate at the car park, across the front grass and into a pen - which was incredibly impressive!!) There were 270 visitors through the Barn the majority children. The library service had a great day and even managed to sign up new members. The face painting table was very busy and the Barn was full of butterflies and flowers as well as two collies and a vampire! Thank you to Sue and her team for their help and enthusiasm - we are looking forward to having them back for the 'Big Read' in the summer. The ladies of the Guild of Spinners Weavers and Dyers all commented on what fun it had been and how much they enjoyed the event. Heathland Hebridean and Townings Farm (Hebridean meat sales) were busy 'networking' and meeting like minded people - some interesting new contacts have been made. Most importantly a great big THANK YOU to Janet and Gwen for their much needed help! There are a few lovely photographs on the website in Louise's sheepblog, go to <http://www.ashdownforest.org/blog.php>



To our new information and Ranger volunteers!
 Roger Gray, Annette Gurr, Barry Hassell, Kirsty Pelham, Jackie Wood and Wayne & Tracey Stuckey, who are just starting out on their training - I am sure you will make them feel very welcome and help them settle in!

East Grinstead Volunteering Day

Ashdown Forest will have a stand at the above event on Friday 25th April (venue and times to be confirmed). Rich and Tracy will be going along - it would be nice to have a volunteer there for part of the day. We will be recruiting for new Information Barn volunteers and generally promoting the Forest - if you are interested please contact Tracy on the usual number!

"The WagLog" (Sallywag's Diaries)

Me and "the boss" (as he deludes himself) we're on duty this weekend. He was a bit grumpy on Saturday (I think he lost his money on the horses again). Still, Gill was on Saturday morning, which is always a laugh. I like Gill even though she doesn't bring me in any biscuits, she always says how handsome I am, so I know she's a good judge. Saturday afternoon was great because my "Auntie" Anne was on duty. I have to confess that Anne is my favourite, especially this week because she brought me in some delicious heart-shaped treats (I think she might be in love with me). I think he-who-must-be-obeyed (yeah, right!) was a bit disgruntled as he had some rather worthy-looking organic digestives (that looked and tasted like cardboard to me). Surprisingly he even got off his bum, and we went out on the Forest with Max this afternoon. This was great because I got to race the truck across the Forest down to the Garden of Eden where some horse riders without permits had been riding across the heath. On Sunday morning, we went to pick up Janet from Nutley (or utterly Nutterly as I call it). We were late as usual - it wasn't my fault (it never is), I'd finished my breakfast and was waiting by the front door. He was in the bathroom. Don't know what he gets up to in there, certainly not combing his hair! I spent most of the morning chasing stick. Frankly I find it moronic that a grown man can want to throw a stick over and over again, but still, I humour him. Wendy came to see me in the afternoon. She always makes a fuss of me and tells everyone what a lovely boy I am. I especially like it when I stand with my paws on the counter so I can lick everyone else who comes to the centre to see me. I got told off for weeing on the book stand in the middle of the information barn, which seemed a bit unfair as some fat spaniel did it first. My "dad" was really out of order - removing any trace of my scent with this foul-smelling antiseptic spray. So that's it for another weekend. No doubt we'll be late for the Monday morning meeting again. He'll come up with yet another unimaginative excuse. He always relies on me to get him out of trouble - I've got Hew wrapped round my little dew claw.

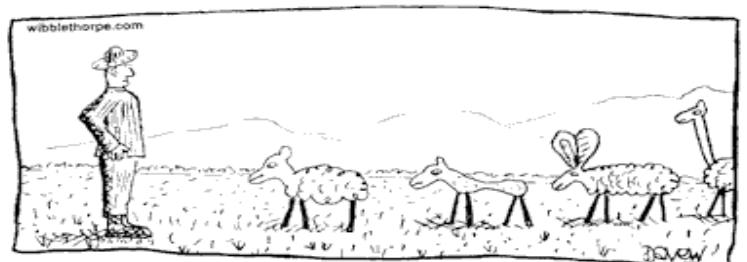
Conservation Group

The group has been working in the woodland garden of Chelwood Vachery through the winter and will carry on until the March session. The site has seen startling changes! Thanks to funding from the Sussex Gardens Trust, a management plan has been drawn up, recommending, among other things, the clearing of saplings, rhododendron and Gaultheria. The plan will be posted on our website. Work at the Vachery has been well supported, and advertised, by the Sussex Ornithological Group. In February members put up five nest boxes to attract Redstarts for which the Forest is the county stronghold. Over the summer we will be turning our attention to completing the removal of tree shelters from far flung parts of the Forest; after 20 years they show no sign of degrading.

Hew

Wildlife Note!

It's been a good winter for the Hen Harriers or at least for those watching them! There have been sightings of males and females in many parts of the Forest.



Farmer Wibblethorpe was particularly pleased with his collection of 'bargain basement' sheep.

