

# The Volunteer

## The Newsletter for all Ashdown Forest Volunteers



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### DATE FOR THE DIARY!!

19<sup>th</sup> May 2016 – 7pm  
Commoners' Meeting open to all  
Nutley War Memorial Hall



Philip Baker, Assistant Chief Executive (East Sussex County Council) and Mrs Janet Turner, QC will be in attendance to discuss the Governance Review and proposals.

### From the Director's Chair...

Although I was lucky enough to be away in Australia with my family for a month during January and February, it has been incredibly busy one way or another with not enough hours in the day!

The Governance Review consultation/information exercise running since December, whilst being a substantial addition to our workload, has raised all sorts of interesting issues and really got people thinking about what is the best Ashdown Forest governance structure for the future. The Board have set up a Governance Working group, members of which will be coming to the Coffee Morning on the 14<sup>th</sup> April to update you and listen to your views – all the available papers/notes relating to this are on the website.

Other 'big' news is that we have finally received our Agreement for the new Countryside Stewardship scheme with the very unexpected but brilliant news that it is to be for 10 years and not the five years we had been originally told – more on this in the following pages.

Those of you who have visited the Centre since just before Christmas will have noticed Centre staff layered up working in coats, woolly hats and, in my case, fingerless gloves, or have volunteered in the Information Barn and been told to dress for arctic conditions will know that our boiler and heating system was unequivocally condemned, and so other than a few oil filled radiators we have had no heating! Thanks must go to everyone for their good humour and patience – it hasn't been easy! A great cheer went up on the 14<sup>th</sup> March as the new heating system was commissioned – some more work to do but we are getting there, and it's warm!

I hope you all got to watch the Sussex edition of Countryfile? And you enjoyed the Ashdown Forest story lines presented by Matt and Ellie ably assisted by our very own stars Steve, Chris and Caroline. We've had lots of positive feedback and, although we didn't have many minutes of air time, the 'messages' regarding the unique habitat, conservation and the changing landscape came across, I thought, very well.

We really do appreciate your time and support, particularly at this time of uncertainty and change both at the Forest and in the world around us. Last year you gave us **5083** hours –

thank you

Pat

## SOUTH VIEW CLOSE VOLUNTEER GROUP .....

Some of you may not know about the dedicated group of volunteers that visit the Forest each week from South View Close to assist with ecology work, overseen by Mike Yates. Southview Close is a day service for adults with learning disabilities, based in Crowborough. It provides all round person centred support to people with a learning disability offering daily activities both on and off site. By supporting people to access their local community the service aims to encourage individuals to increase their independence.

Here is what they say about why they like volunteering on the Forest:

*Because I like working with wood and helping clear areas, working with the Rangers. I just love it!*

*I find it interesting, I like helping people. I enjoy working with the Ranger and the work they give us*

*I like to learn new skills and have fun with people.*

*I enjoy ditch clearing and sawing with nice people.*

*Having fun, I like sawing.*

*I like making new friends and being treated like an adult and being given responsibilities.*

*I like seeing and learning about nature. My favorite job is making a bonfire, it's very enjoyable. Mike gives us choices of jobs to do.*

Members of the sewing group from South View Close are currently working on some items that will go on sale in the Information Barn – keep an eye out for these new arrivals.



Since 2011 the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has been satellite-tracking Cuckoos to try and discover why numbers in the UK have halved over the last 20 years. As part of the project 2 Cuckoos were caught and tagged on the Forest and named Ash and Chester by local school children.

Over the last few years we have been able to track their migration as they return to the Forest via the BTO website ([www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)). When the website was checked recently the tracking signals for Ash and Chester are unfortunately no longer active – hopefully this just means that they have lost the tracking device or it has become faulty rather than the sadder alternative.

On a positive note the 1<sup>st</sup> cuckoo was heard calling at Stonehill on 12<sup>th</sup> April – the great journey is over for at least one!

## Grazing Update in brief.....



Lambing is going well and the Grazing Team are in the process of installing the enclosures on the Forest so that the livestock can go back out on the Forest. Please keep an eye out for updates on the location on the enclosures on the website or E-News.

## The WagLog #25 – “Dirty Bertie!”

Unfortunately this year I am not invited on his friend Liam’s “stag do”. I’m not really sure what a stag do is (having never been married, myself). It sounds like a hunting trip to me but I can’t believe he’d be up for that (he’s vegan, after all). I know he’s preparing another one of his ridiculous fancy dress costumes. So while he’s off to the West Country I’m stuck at home. I have been promised an exciting trip to the New Forest and Hampshire Coast in September though.



We’ve had quite a bit of time off work in recent weeks so he can gamble on the horses at Cheltenham and Aintree races. Apparently Cheltenham “wasn’t overly lucrative” (his euphemism for blowing all my wages!). He assures me he’ll win it all back on the Grand National... we’ll see.

I am delighted to announce a couple of new arrivals on the Forest. My mate Ashley has become a sire for the first time to a young pup called Thomas Adam Payne. Ash has just got back from his paternity leave and looks exhausted, so maybe me having the snip as a youngster wasn’t such a bad move after all! The other newcomer to the Forest is a young English Pointer named Bertie. Bertie has rescued Joe and Toni and has joined the “grazing team”. Why any self-respecting canine would be grazing I have no idea. Bertie was very thin and sad when he first arrived, but he’s putting on weight and looking very happy & healthy now. Naturally, being a pointer, he’s very handsome and popular (particularly with the ladies!).



As I was so well behaved (or at least I didn’t get caught!) at the summer barbecue last year, I’ve been assured of another invite this year. So I’m looking forward to seeing you all there and sampling the delights of Sammy & Michael’s cooking again!

Love & kisses, Scallywag X



## Conservation and Management News.....

### *Mike Yates, North Chase –*

Two ponds have been dug in a recent attempt to create more grazing on the North Chase one existing below Lumsden Stone Priory Road and another on the ghyll in the Golf Course grazing area. Contractors have cleared scrub over 3 ha site behind Ridge Car Park. Over 40 wood permits were issued this winter which kept me busy. This is sustainable but again many of the people who apply do not have 4x4s. There is plenty of woodland that requires management but access is the problem if you only have a Vauxhall Corsa or Audi! (Apologies of course to all Audi and Corsa drivers).

The wet weather of course creates problems as well but it did not deter two young men in a Suzuki 4x4 from off roading through Priory Road woods at Christmas creating more than a few wheel ruts and a bit of mud. In spite of witnesses and a large number of local informants we were not able to get enough evidence to prosecute. Repairs to the ride and woodland will be carried out by Probation Service Teams which will be done without cost which is good news. We are currently waiting for the grazing team to install invisible fencing at Priory Road. So for future reference the heath between the A22 and Priory road will be grazed by cattle this summer if all goes to plan.

More good news, Traffic Monitoring Site 7 Station (or Brian as I affectionately call him) is going to be relocated as it was placed on a bit of managed heathland without consent from NE! I hope you all enjoy the views, walks and wildlife on the North Chase this Spring. Thanks to all who contribute to litter picking and care of what is possibly the best Chase on the Forest!

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### *Mike Payne, West Chase –*

Conservation volunteers have done an amazing job of thinning the woodland edge along the West side of the Vachery Gorge. Scot Plant Hire was contracted to clear silt from the stream line and all the small pools and ponds along it, whilst also rediscovering 2 ponds that had been long silted over and making minor repairs to the paths and drainage.

Young people with epilepsy volunteer group have made considerable progress clearing a Rhododendron hedge separating Charles Smith Wood from Ashdown Forest and show excellent progress in their use of hand saws and loppers as well as working well in a group.

All my volunteer groups are now moving on to litter picking areas of the Forest to keep them clean and enhance peoples enjoyment of the Forest and its views.

In the next few months I am expecting contractors to be effecting repairs to various areas of fire rides to facilitate safe public access to the Forest and maintain ease of access to fight and prevent forest fires.

Works in the Forest Centre have taken up a lot of my time over the last few months and I am now looking forward to organising this summer and winter's work for the West Chase. This will encompass ride repairs, bracken control, amenity mowing, wooden structure repairs and installation, car park maintenance and so on.

## Conservation and Management News continued.....

### *Rich Allum, South Chase –*

The Exmoor ponies supplied by the Sussex Pony Conservation & Grazing Trust will shortly be leaving their enclosure near Misbourne Farm and heading back to Chailey Common for the summer. They seem to have wintered well on the Forest and done a fine job munching the gorse. As you may have seen we've stepped up our controlled burning programme on the South Chase with fires alongside the B2026 opposite Fairwarp Church, near Spring Garden, Duddleswell and between Misbourne & Chestnut Farm, Nutley.

We've recently completed several weeks of fencing and gate repairs to stock-proof the grazing area in readiness for the Commoners' animals returning to the Forest. More than 70 signs have been posted to warn motorists, dog-walkers and other Forest users that, as of 05 April, cattle and sheep will start to reappear on the Forest. I am hoping that this summer will not see a repeat of the horrific and all-too-frequent attacks on the Forest sheep (at least 25 reported attacks, many fatal).

Contractors & Forest staff have undertaken an extensive programme of Heathland scrub clearance and tree thinning in the Old Lodge Valley & Camp Hill Clump, Paynes Hill (Fairwarp), Ardens (Nutley), and near Whitehouse Farm (Crowborough Road). We've also completed our annual roadside tree safety work as well as dealing with the aftermath of "Storm Katie".

Upcoming works on the South Chase include ride repairs (in particular below Stonehill car park), car park maintenance, wooden structure repairs, Silver-studded blue monitoring and management planning for the next five years of our new Countryside Stewardship scheme. Tree surgeons will undertake more tree safety work following an arboricultural survey. I would also like to take this opportunity welcome a new addition to our Volunteer Ranger team – Heather Johnson

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### *Chris Sutton, East Chase -*

Clearance work behind the Crow and Gate pub and opposite Gills Lap has gone well despite the weather. The contractors still have a bit of burning up to do but it was deemed worse to churn the rides up and possibly get stuck, than leaving it to when it dried up, possibly into the bird nesting season. They will have to be very careful when they return to avoid disturbance.

At last we have a new froling boiler and central heating system. The offices are now warmer than outside and we should have hot water in all the taps. We are working on getting the supply to the Education Barn. The Rangers are getting used to the new boiler and loading it. It is far smaller but more efficient than the last one which will help with the amount of wood we need to bring in but needs more micro management.

With the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme, we now have to do work on ancient monument sites and their lesser classified associates. Hence work has been done to clear the undergrowth around Newbridge furnace for a survey and also downstream from the Packhorse Bridge, Crowborough Warren, to look at the lie of the land. The 1987 storm exposed the foundations of an old building there which was on the site of another furnace. The surveying will be carried out by English Heritage and hopefully will unearth some more of the Forest's secrets.

You might have heard that a pony was found on the Forest below Church hill a couple of weeks before Easter. I am happy to say that she is doing very well at the Sussex Horse Rescue Centre in Uckfield. She is now called Sammy and I am following her progress. Pictures of her and an update can be seen on the Forest's facebook page. A sad abandoned, thin little pony now doing well and will hopefully have a good happy life ahead of her.



## The Conservators of Ashdown Forest

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[www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org)  
(144,167 hits Dec-April)

Ashdown Forest Blog  
[www.blog.ashdownforest.org](http://www.blog.ashdownforest.org)  
(10,067 hits Dec-April)



(3,141 followers)



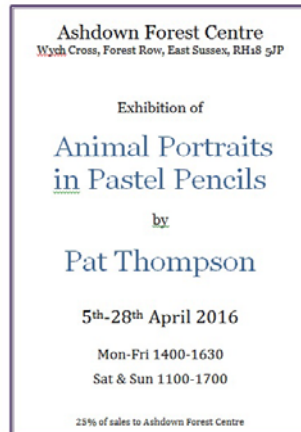
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## Current and Upcoming Exhibitions.....



**5<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> April**  
**Animal Portraits in pastel pencils by Pat Thompson**

An exhibition by local artist Pat Thompson. Visitors will be able to see Pat creating her work at the Centre on several days throughout the exhibition.



**6<sup>th</sup> May – 30<sup>th</sup> September**  
**Trees, Light and Skies by Sally Scott**

An exhibition of watercolour and mixed media paintings by local artist Sally Scott.

## Events on the Forest.....

Throughout the year there are number of events on the Forest that are not organised by the office. Here is a list of what is currently in the diary. Information is sent out via our E-News service on a Friday of upcoming events that weekend. If you haven't already done so do sign up to receive these alerts on our website – [www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org).

- 1<sup>st</sup> May** – Family Support Walk, Gills Lap
- 29<sup>th</sup> May** – Weald Challenge race, Weald and Vanguard Way
- 5<sup>th</sup> June** – Chelwood Gate Fun Run
- 12<sup>th</sup> June** – Evans cycle event
- 18<sup>th</sup> June** – Basset Hound club walk, Gills Lap
- 26<sup>th</sup> June** – Capital to Coast cycle event
- 11<sup>th</sup> September** – Kit Wilson Trust sponsored walk
- 18<sup>th</sup> September** – AFRA Pleasure Ride
- 25<sup>th</sup> September** - High Weald Challenge 50km Ultra Trail race, Weald and Vanguard Way
- 2<sup>nd</sup> October** – ALSAR search dog training, Box or Twyford
- 6<sup>th</sup> November** – ALSAR search dog training, Box or Twyford
- 4<sup>th</sup> December** - ALSAR search dog training, Box or Twyford