…to the winter 2015 issue of Ashdown Forest Life.

As well as Charlotte Bain (known to all as Charlie) joining us as Forest Centre Administrator earlier in the year, we’ve experienced other personnel changes since the last issue. We said a fond farewell to Ros Marriott who retired after many years’ invaluable service, first as Administrator and then Clerk and Finance Officer to the Board of Conservators. We decided to split the post and welcomed Kirsty Dirs as Clerk and Louise Meehan as Finance Officer to the team.

This issue is also full of news of our programmes, events and activities. I am delighted by the continued success of the Education programme, so ably led by teachers Lisa and Rachel and its expansion into working with local pre-school groups which we hope to develop further as a regular activity.

I’m pleased to report that everyone should at least feel warmer in the Education Barn this winter with the completion of insulation and glazing works during the summer. We are also coming to the end of the 10 year Higher Level Stewardship scheme with staff, Conservators and advisors working hard to prepare for and develop the new Countryside Stewardship hopefully starting in January 2016 – you will learn more from Steve later in this issue.

I’d like to take this opportunity to say ‘thank you’ for all the support we receive from our volunteers, the Friends, commoners, residents, partners, contractors and local communities. In such an ever-changing world, your ongoing support is greatly appreciated. Finally, The 14th October weekly Health Walk morphed into a BBC Countryfile Ramble for Children in Need – thanks to the generosity of the Walk Leaders and walkers we were able to donate a massive £100!

Pat Buesnel, Director pat@ashdownforest.org
Our new Forest Centre team

Kirsty Dirs, Clerk to the Conservators

As Clerk, Kirsty is responsible for the Board and Committee governance processes, Licences and Bye-law infringements and handles planning applications affecting Ashdown Forest. She also supervises office administration and personnel matters.

Aside from Forest life, Kirsty enjoys walking, gardening and bird watching and has a very keen interest in marine wildlife. She has plans to assist in a shark conservation project in South Africa in 2016.

Louise Meehan, Finance Officer

Louise joined the Forest in July 2015 in the new standalone role of Finance Officer. She is responsible for the day-to-day financial management at Ashdown Forest and provides financial support and guidance to the Board of Conservators.

Outside of work, Louise enjoys spending time with her family and friends walking on the Forest or by the coast and is a novice camper. She also enjoys traditional pubs and local ales.
The Countryside Stewardship Scheme

For the last ten years, conservation work on the Forest was primarily funded by the Higher Level Stewardship scheme. This was European money, given out by Defra under the supervision of the Government’s conservation advisors, Natural England.

Over those ten years, Higher Level Stewardship funded a wide range of activities on the Forest, including:

- The purchase of a number of pieces of specialist machinery for heathland management;
- The introduction of temporary fencing to the Forest;
- An extensive programme of scrub and bracken control across the open heathland areas;
- Survey and monitoring programmes;
- The production of a wide range of leaflets and publications such as Ashdown Forest Life
- The increase on the Forest of species such as Woodlark

This funding is now coming to an end, but luckily is being replaced by a similar scheme called Countryside Stewardship and we are hopeful that not only will we be able to continue the good work of the last ten years but even to expand our management of the Forest. Whilst the work we have carried out has been vital in halting the loss of heathland to scrub woodland and bracken, we still have some way to go if we are to get the Forest into what Natural England call ‘favourable condition’.

In particular, gorse has become a big issue over the years, and both birch and bracken continue to dominate large areas. The annual mowing of bracken results in a sward of grasses as the cuttings rot back into the soil and the lack of follow-up management, such as grazing, can lead to large areas of uniform vegetation.

The plan for the next five years is to remove bracken cuttings, wherever possible, with a forage harvester and to extend grazing to more areas of the Forest using so-called ‘invisible’ fencing, which employs a loop of wire buried in the ground. Other techniques — such as burning and scraping — will add more diversity to the heathland areas and provide space for key species such as heather to colonise and spread.

All of these techniques simply mimic activities that humans have carried out on the Forest for thousands of years; local villagers would have grazed their livestock, cut bracken and gorse, dug turf and burned areas of the heath to keep it open as part of their Commoners’ rights. Most of those activities are no longer undertaken, so it falls to us to carry them on. But to do this costs money, and we are very much reliant on grant aid.

Our bid for Countryside Stewardship funding was submitted in October 2015, and we await the outcome. If successful, the funding should come into effect on 1st January 2016, allowing us to move seamlessly into the next five years of vital conservation work.

Steve Alton
Conservation Officer
Woodlark

Proudly wearing her "invisible fencing" collar
The Ashdown Forest Bird Group

The Ashdown Forest Bird Group (in association with the Conservators) was set up in 1989 with the principal objective of monitoring bird life on Ashdown Forest.

Data collected by our members is sent annually to the Sussex Ornithological Society who in turn submits it to the Sussex Biodiversity Council and the Forest Centre. Information provided to the Forest Centre contributes to the planning of its management and conservation work.

In practice, members are each allocated an area (a ‘patch’) which they walk from time to time to record the species of birds seen, their numbers and in particular, any evidence of breeding.

Those of you that have visited the Forest Centre will no doubt be aware of the significance of individual species such as Woodlark, Nightjar, and Dartford Warbler that rely on the special habitat that the heathland nature of the Forest offers and how this valuable, yet declining, resource is vital to their continued survival and growth.

If you are a regular walker across the Forest, you will have seen some of the clearance work that Forest Centre Rangers perform from time to time. The effects of this activity can be seen in a surprisingly short space of time in avian terms, with woodlarks and nightjars quickly taking occupation in the newly ‘bare’ or tree-reduced areas, and the Dartford warblers also do better in the younger, ‘regenerated’ gorse.

Together with the work of the Forest Centre, our recording activities contribute to the on going retention of conservation designations and the protection they provide.

It’s not an onerous task and, aside from being useful, it means you can combine some bird watching, healthy walking and the chance to get to know an area of the Forest that you might not otherwise visit! You don’t need to be a ‘twitcher’ to participate and though some knowledge of birds makes for a useful starting point, help and assistance with identification and method is, of course, available.

We also have an annual programme of trips and events, a list of which can be found via the link on the Forest website.

So, if you would like to become a member and recorder on the Forest, please do get in touch with us. We look forward to hearing from you.

www.ashdownforest.org
Ashdown Forest Education Programme

During the last school year, the Ashdown Forest Education Team worked with almost one thousand children from 22 schools around Sussex and Surrey to study the local area, its wildlife and history, as part of their curriculum studies.

We engage the children through hands-on activities, games and exploration. They might have a go at making their own Stone Age shelters, role-play being nightjars nesting on the ground, or seeing how many different plants they can find in a square metre of the Forest. School groups use the area between the Forest Centre and Broadstone car park.

As activities will often involve getting down on the ground and looking closely, the one downside is dog fouling. There can be nothing worse than getting covered in dog mess on your school trip and it doesn't help to engage and inspire children to want to look after this amazing landscape in the long term. So we are asking you to be especially vigilant in picking up and taking away any dog mess in these specific areas and not just flicking it away. The edge of the path may be just the place we are exploring next. Thank you for your help.

In addition, our Outreach programme involved eight schools and 488 children and we also gave training to 11 teachers on map work, the Stone Age linked to Ashdown Forest, literacy and science.

We have worked with local parent and toddler groups and welcomed approximately 70 families together with 32 toddlers at two sessions at the Forest Centre. 14 Children attended the Easter play scheme and 16 came in the summer.
A Poet’s Walk

Our Poets’ Walks have been running for over two years. They take place seasonally and offer a chance for people to walk, write and meet kindred spirits. The Forest is our muse and, as we amble along, we talk about what we can see and hear, then return to the Forest Centre to write.

There we share our writing. A lot of people who come haven’t written since they were at school but it doesn’t matter—everyone’s work is vibrant and interesting.

The walk’s slow pace adds detail to our observations, as you can see in the following lines by Helen Bardsley:

- Smell of pine trees,
- Stagnant ground with rotting leaves
- Rustling when the wind blows.
- Sky—wild, clouds hurry past.
- It rains, then stops.
- There is a chill in the air.
- Birch leaves float silently down.

Likewise, Alison Sanders’ work is also richly detailed:

- I became aware of how the roots of the tree against which I leant radiated out almost evenly like the multiple points of a compass, supporting the tree unhindered in their length and direction, some covered in moss—others, glistening wet.

When I began the walks I wondered where to put the apostrophe: A Poet’s Walk or A Poets’ Walk, one poet or several? Either way, the walks are open to everyone and they bring together people who love Ashdown Forest, perhaps even as much as we love words.

Siân Thomas, Ashdown Forest’s Poet in Residence
The Natural World of Winnie the Pooh

Friday 9th October saw the Forest Centre launch of the book, *The Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh: A Walk Through the Forest that Inspired the Hundred Acre Wood*, by American landscape historian, designer and writer Kathryn Aalto.

Kathryn came to England in 2007 to live in Exeter with her husband and young family and, as a landscape historian getting to know the very different countryside of England and at the same time re-visiting the Pooh stories with her children, she began to wonder whether in fact, the magical landscape of the books really existed.

On discovering that not only did the Hundred Acre Wood actually exist but, due to the environmental designations and protections that Ashdown Forest enjoys, was almost untouched from A. A. Milne’s day, led her to write about Christopher Robin’s extraordinary childhood in the natural environment of the Forest. She also realised that the concept was so relevant to parents today, many of whom are desperate for a return to classic childhoods of freedom in the natural world.

Kathryn spent a great deal of time in Ashdown Forest, Hartfield and Cotchford Farm, where the Milne family lived, visiting in all seasons so that she could get a sense of a year in the Forest. She read original manuscripts, researched drawings and interviewed some of the last people who remembered talking with A. A. Milne while also immersing herself in the history and flora and fauna of the Forest, supported by the Forest Centre staff and many Hartfield villagers.

Nothing else like it has been published on the natural world of Winnie-the-Pooh and the result is a visually stunning book with 41 E.H. Shepard illustrations, about 130 modern photographs taken by Kathryn and lots of wonderful archive material including A. A. Milne letters, Shepard drawings, and historic postcards. Kathryn has also dedicated a page where people can donate to the Friends of Ashdown Forest so that people around the world can support the conservation of this important literary and natural landscape. *The Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh* is available from the Forest Centre cover price £15.

Readers of Ashdown Forest Life however, can order copies for the special price of £13 (rrp £15) including free postage and packing to UK mainland addresses. To order, please contact EFC Bookshop on 01872 562327 or on-line at www.efcbookshop.com quoting offer code: Life magazine.
Bye-laws

The Bye-laws of Ashdown Forest are enforceable laws to protect and preserve the Forest.

They are imposed to safeguard the Forest from encroachments and conserve the Forest as a quiet and natural area of outstanding beauty and whilst our Commoners, residents and regular visitors are no doubt aware of these Bye-laws, unfamiliar visitors to the Forest may not be.

Can we therefore take this opportunity to remind those households who lease or rent their properties, to advise their tenants that cycling on the Forest and disposing of garden waste on the Forest are a serious breach of Bye-laws for which the perpetrator can be prosecuted. Furthermore, DEFRA, on behalf of the Secretary of State, have now increased the Bye-law fine for Ashdown Forest to Standard Scale Level 2, a fine not exceeding £500. Your attention is drawn to the general Forest Bye-laws, details of which are available in all Forest car parks. For a comprehensive list of Ashdown Forest Bye-Laws, please visit our website or call in to the Forest Centre.
The Society of the Friends of Ashdown Forest

A big thank you to our existing Friends who are continuing to contribute towards the conservation and preservation of this very special area in the heart of the High Weald.

Since its inception, the Society, a local charity established well over 50 years ago, has helped the Conservators to finance the on-going programme of capital expenditure such as the purchase of vehicles, radio systems and many other items of equipment, which help towards the maintenance of this unique place. More recently we have provided financial support for projects such as the Education Programme, which as you will read in this issue, encourages local schools to visit the Forest. We have also financed the production of two very successful films about Ashdown Forest which can be viewed at the Forest Centre, on the website, or on YouTube.

Most importantly, the Friends have financed the purchase of areas of land, usually within the Ancient Pale, which have now been added back to the Forest.

So, if you come to the Forest on a regular basis for walking, dog walking, horse-riding or just as a visitor to one of the many free car parks for a picnic and to take in the magnificent views, please consider joining us. You will receive a twice-yearly magazine and be invited to events such as walks and talks covering issues relating to Ashdown Forest.

If you would like to ensure that everyone enjoys the Ashdown Forest and in the future that others will continue to do so, then, visit our website www.friendsofashdownforest.co.uk or email ashdownfriends@aol.com
FRIENDS DIARY DATES

Sunday, 17th April 2016  A Bird Walk on the Ashdown Forest
9.00 a.m. at Old Lodge Car Park with members of the Ashdown Forest Bird Group

Thursday, 30th June 2016  A Nightjar Walk
9.00 p.m. location to be decided nearer the time and led by members of the Ashdown Forest Bird Group

For further information and to book a place on an event WHICH IS FREE TO MEMBERS OF THE FRIENDS (£5 for non-members or join on the day), please contact Pat Arnold on 01892 611414 or email ashdownfriends@aol.com.

DIARY DATES

14th November to 20th December 2015
Ashdown Forest Woodturners

4th November 2015 – 5th January 2016
Lee Miller at Farley Farm - A glimpse into the everyday life of one of the most remarkable photographers of the 20th century

9th January – 31st March 2016
Ros Faram ‘Wet Boot’ an unusual exhibition of Forest paintings

All at the Forest Centre, weekends only, 11am - dusk

Follow news on the Forest via Facebook and Twitter!