



AUTUMN/WINTER 2006

ASHDOWN FOREST

Given to all those who volunteer on the Forest

life



New funds for heathland

On 1 August the Conservators signed an Environmental Stewardship Agreement with Defra that will fund the conservation of the Forest's heathlands for the next ten years.

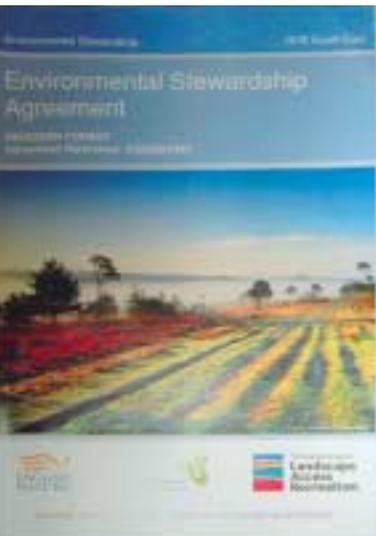
The particular scheme involved, so-called Higher Level Scheme (HLS), has five main objectives:

- a) **wildlife conservation**
- b) **maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character**
- c) **natural resource protection**
- d) **protection of the historic environment**
- e) **promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside**

HLS will provide up to £300k per year for the Forest's 1500 hectares of heathland, i.e. £200/year/hectare. This sizeable sum recognises the immensities of the challenges ahead as well as the Conservators' good work over many years in looking after the South East's largest stretch of this important and threatened habitat.

We are now preparing the next steps. These include working with colleagues in Natural England (a new organization that subsumes English Nature) on Conservation Objectives, in effect what the heathland should like at the end of the ten years; planning for a public consultation process on how to reach these Objectives (for example through grazing - fenced or not); and drafting an evolving work programme to encompass not only practical activities but also the monitoring of wildlife.

HLS replaces the Countryside Stewardship Schemes under which many parts of the Forest's heathlands have been managed since 1996.



Councillor Pat Kennedy,
Chairman of Wealden
District Council, admiring
one of the exhibition panels
(picture supplied courtesy of WDC)

Forest Ranger

Randle Manwaring

*Across his many hectares
he drives with eagle eye,
custodian of a land
Saxons and Normans knew,*

*where hunting lodges once
graced the royal park
now dragonflies and dragonflies
beautify the air.*

*In heather and the heathlands,
coppiced woodland ways
roads and running brooks
desolate in winter,*

*the fallow deer still roam,
roe-buck proud with antlers,
the doe just so with fawns,
coney creeping by.*

*The Ranger's watchful eye
sees unpleasant litter
but gratefully surveys
a lonely Airman's grave.*

Randle Manwaring is a local poet who has lived in Sussex for 40 years and is the county's oldest cricketer.

Exhibitions

Stephen Dalton's photographic exhibition *Hidden lives of Ashdown Forest* was a stunning success. It ran from Easter until early August when, with the publishers of the Pooh books, Egmont, we put up *Winnie-the-Pooh-in the landscape*.

Councillor Mick Hall, Mayor of Crowborough Town Council, kindly opened it to a gathering of about 120, mostly Friends and volunteers of the Forest. The landscape of Pooh is of course the pine-topped, heather-clad slopes of the Forest, as E.H. Shepard so evocatively illustrated in his coloured drawings.

Part of the point of the exhibition was to show that, despite the 80 years intervening since the publication of the first Pooh book, there is still much in the feel and look of the Forest that A.A. Milne and Shepard would recognise - but not necessarily round Gills Lap where the Pooh stories take place.

Forest Row photographer David Gadsby did a magnificent job in matching 2006 views of the Forest with Shepard's 1924 drawings. The exhibition will run until spring 2007.

Bye-law enforcement

Bye-law enforcement on the Forest is one of the more unpleasant tasks facing staff. Without it, however, the Forest would be enclosed, dumped upon, littered, torched and abused.

On 7 August in Lewes Magistrates Court a property owner on the East Chase pleaded guilty to three charges of enclosing part of the Forest and parking on it. He was fined £95 and ordered to pay £100 towards prosecution costs.

On 5 September we were grateful for the power of the bye-laws when travellers encamped behind Long car park. Served with an order to go, they did so within the requisite 24 hours - but left mountains of filth for Rich Allum to clear.

Plant of the season

Marsh gentian

Of all plants on the Forest the marsh gentian is surely the most iconic. An heathland specialist, it has been known here since at least 1835.

Every year Chris Marrable surveys all the known populations, pin-pointing and retracing their exact locations with a Global Positioning System. This year has been a good one for local gentians, especially within the grazing area.

According to the English Nature website "The ideal management for marsh gentian is probably a combination of light grazing, to reduce competition from vigorous plants such as purple moor-grass, and small-scale turf-cutting or controlled winter burning, to remove the surface vegetation around the plants and provide sites for germination".

More and better for our visitors



*New memorial seat at Broadstone Warren
(picture by Mike Yates)*

Thanks to funding from the Forestry Commission, and the input and support of the High Weald Unit, notably from Matt Pitts, we have installed new interpretation panels at Goat, Hindleap, Forest Centre and Church Hill car parks. We have also put up a new welcome panel outside the Centre. The woodwork for all of these, and of the new memorial seats we have put out, was made by David Green of High Weald Furniture.

Walkers will welcome five brand new walks leaflets produced by Matt to replace very old existing stock. You'll be able to download them from our website.

For the diary

Volunteers Christmas party
at the Forest Centre at 18:30
for 19:00 on Thursday
(not Friday!)

7 December

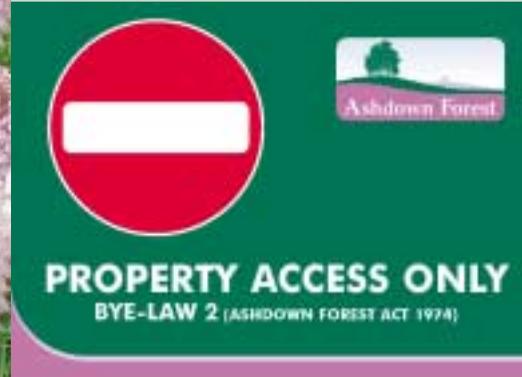
Please let us know if can come



Heath spotted orchids at Poundgate at the end of June (picture by Chris Marrable)

Signs

Sign for the start of access tracks across the Forest



You can hardly fail to have noticed that signage on the Forest has been poor or even absent for some time. A further failing feature has been a lack of any standard style (or 'corporate image'). First we had to think of a new logo and Alan Rees, of Arka Cartographics in Forest Row, came up with the one you see now outside the Forest Centre. Similar ones will be put up over the winter at gateways into the Forest.

The other signage we have been working on relates to bye-laws. A3 size ones, designed with the assistance of Matt Pitts of the High Weald Unit, will replace the rather indigestible posters in some of the main car parks, while smaller ones, designed by Matt Marriott of Hartfield (who also does *Ashdown Forest life*), will go up for e.g. rides and access tracks.

Chelwood Vachery

Dormouse at Chelwood Vachery, taken by Conservation Volunteer Maggie Cullen last winter - the first record for the area for some 15 years



About 25 hectares of land at the Vachery returned to the Forest in 1994 after a 300+ year absence, when the whole estate was sold by British American Tobacco. The Conservators have done little management since. Conservation Volunteers have taken up the gauntlet, however, and this year have put in a lot of effort to improve paths by the lakes and up either side of the Gorge - the stream that, flanked and floored by Somerset limestone, tumbles steeply downhill to the lakes.

At Wealden District Council's launch of the Wealden Historic Gardens Survey in September, the Vachery gardens, comprising both the private and Forest parts, were "considered of special interest in a national context". This is a good spur to continue work on restoring a little lost paradise!

In the public eye

The Forest has had a good share of media coverage over the summer. On Sunday 23 May several staff appeared in BBC 1's *Countryfile*. The opening of the *Winnie-the-Pooh in the landscape* exhibition in August led to an appearance on Radio 4's *Go for it* programme by Chris Marrable's son, Thomas; and press releases about speed on Forest roads and the deer problem were picked up widely by newspapers and television.

Don't always believe what you read in the press however: Hew Prendergast was described by one local 'freebie' as the owner of Pooh Corner shop in Hartfield! At national level it was interesting to note the headline, front-page coverage by *The Independent* of the "most remarkable clash yet between environment and development in Britain" over building schemes in the Thames Basin threatening populations of heathland birds familiar to us on the Forest, the nightjar, Dartford warbler and woodlark.

Volunteering on the Forest

The Forest is hugely fortunate to have a large number of volunteers: helping out visitors in the Information Barn, backing up the Rangers at weekends, doing practical conservation work once a month on a Sunday, and surveying the Forest's rich variety of bird life. We need more help however! As an example, one of the recommendations of the Parkin report on the future

of the Forest Centre (see the last issue of *Ashdown Forest life*) was to extend the opening hours of the Centre. Without more volunteers it is difficult to see how this can be done.

We also need more Volunteer Rangers - on some weekends we have none - and the amount

of work that Conservation Volunteers could do is endless. At the time of writing we are preparing for a recruitment 'campaign' to get more volunteers, culminating in an open evening at the Centre at 1900 on Wednesday 22 November. If you know anyone who might be interested in coming, do please let us know.

Peter and Madeline Reader

Peter was a Volunteer Ranger on the Forest back in the 1970s and Madeline, a keen birder and botanist, started as an Information Assistant in the early 1980s - in a caravan in Four Counties car park - and 'retired' only this year.

If we had a long-service medal to give, Madeline would be the first to get it! She continues to edit *Ashdown Forest news* for the Society of Friends and to keep a watchful eye on all that goes on here. *Thank you, Madeline, for all that you have given to the Forest!*



Leaflet produced this summer to encourage lower traffic speed on local roads. The Partnership includes East Sussex County Council, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, six local Parishes and the Conservators

Are you concerned about speeding on Ashdown Forest and in its villages?

Please sign up and make the Commitment to:



The Ashdown Forest Villages Road Safety Partnership

Forest factfile – *Number of*

- 1** Hectares of land acquired by the Conservators at Whitehouse Farm, Duddleswell (site of a new barn)
- 20** Hectares of Forest being cleared of rhododendron (roughly!)
- 215** Last year's number of known deer casualties on local roads - already exceeded by October this year
- 16,709** Pounds received this year from the Forestry Commission for maintaining woodland rides



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Want to help? Contact us!

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