

News and Updates

The Ashdown Forest Villages Road Safety Partnership has been continuing its campaign to reduce traffic speed on local roads. On one day in June, Sussex Police prosecuted 10 motorists breaking the 40mph limits painted on Forests roads, which are MANDATORY not advisory.

Despite the police crackdown and the appearance of the new road signs on the A22 warning motorists of the danger of deer on the roads, many still treat the Forest roads as a race track and by mid-September 174 deer had already died.

BRIAN WEMBRIDGE MEMORIAL BENCH
Brian was one of the fire fighters tragically killed in the fireworks depot explosion in Ringmer in 2006 and a bench has been unveiled by his family and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service in his memory. Situated at Brian's favourite spot on the Forest, overlooking the Airman's Grave, it is best visited from Stonehill car park.

Conservation Officer Chris Marrable has completed a survey of the distribution of cotton grass, a good indicator of increasingly threatened damp ground on heathland. He has also completed surveys of fragrant and marsh orchids which are rare in Sussex.



How you can help

Become a Friend of Ashdown Forest

If you're interested in preserving this wonderful environment, then why not become a Friend? Simply contact us for an application form or download it from the Friends website www.friendsofashdownforest.co.uk

Become a Volunteer

We are always grateful for help in looking after the Forest, so if this interests you, please get in touch. All ages welcome!



THE CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

Ashdown Forest Centre, Wych Cross, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5JP
T: 01342 823583 E: conservators@ashdownforest.org

www.ashdownforest.org

Editorial: Paul Cooper, forest.marketing@btinternet.com Design and production: Studio 4, m.marriott@btconnect.com

Photography: Richard Bond, Paul Cooper, Chris Mole, Hew Prendergast, Veronica Wilson and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Diary Dates

From mid-October onwards, the Forest Centre will be hosting the Ashdown Forest Woodturners' exhibition and photographs of the Forest taken by Crowborough resident Dave Brooker.

Wednesday 29th October 2008 FUNGI IDENTIFICATION
Bring your own fungi to be identified by Chris Marrable. 11am-1pm and 2pm-4pm

FRIENDS DIARY DATES

Friday 24th October 2008 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
8 pm Nutley War Memorial Hall

Wednesday 12th November 2008 LOUISE AMOS
2.30 pm Ashdown Forest Centre

Louise is the Forest Shepherd and will talk about her flock of Hebridean sheep and give an insight into how she, her sheep and dogs are helping restore the heathland.

Thursday 12th March 2009 THE WEALD FOREST RIDGE PROJECT
8 pm Nutley War Memorial Hall

Simon Aguss of the High Weald AONB Unit will explain the project which aims to widen access to and conservation of the area's unique landscape and the cultural and historic features. The project has many national and local partners, including the Conservators.

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We are grateful to Natural England for supporting Ashdown Forest Life.



ISSUE NO. 6 AUTUMN/WINTER 2008

ASHDOWN FOREST

For all those who care about the Forest www.ashdownforest.org

Life

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Welcome

Cover & right: views of the Forest taken by local resident Chris Mole

Welcome to the latest issue of Ashdown Forest Life and my continued thanks to Natural England for funding various aspects of our work, including this publication.

In this issue you will find information on the work being carried out at Chelwood Vachery, details of our Shepherd Louise and her flock, we highlight things to look out for in the forthcoming season on the Forest, explain the role and responsibilities of our team of Rangers and keep you up to date with what's been going on recently.

As part of our on-going commitment to communicating with those who care for the Forest, we have published our new Strategic Forest Plan on our website. Also on the website you will find the 2007-2008 Annual Report of the Conservators and, on the home page, a web link to our new online news service which will allow you to receive regular news updates by email. Louise's sheep blog continues to report from the 'front-line' of our pioneering grazing project.

I hope that you continue to enjoy Ashdown Forest Life and thank you to those who offer suggestions on topics we might cover in future issues. Through this publication, I am pleased to have the opportunity of explaining our aims and objectives, so that we all have a clearer understanding of what needs to be done to protect the Forest. I hope you enjoy the autumn and winter on the Forest and I look forward to seeing you at the various events we are organising.

Hew Prendergast CLERK TO THE CONSERVATORS



Autumn and Winter on the Forest

Obviously the fantastic colours of autumn bring visitors in their thousands to the Forest to enjoy the breathtaking views across this part of the High Weald. Some of our other visitors however are attractions in their own right.

At the end of the summer holidays Mid Sussex District Council sponsored a visitor survey in many Forest car parks. The survey was part of a process required under EU legislation for assessing the potential impact of plans and developments on important wildlife areas like the Forest - for example the 2500 new homes proposed for East Grinstead. More people living locally may mean, of course, more wear and tear on the Forest and more disturbance of wildlife. The Conservators are looking forward to learning about the mitigation measures that should be available under this legislation.

During the autumn and winter months we shall be continuing our heathland restoration by clearing more areas of scrub and young trees. Details of where we will be working can be found on the website as well as at the sites themselves.

Sometimes heathland can seem devoid of birdlife in the depth of winter but large numbers of pipits, buntings and finches come in to roost at dusk. Don't forget that the Ashdown Forest Bird Group collate all the information on our resident and visiting birdlife. There is a link to the Bird Group on our website www.ashdownforest.org.

HEN HARRIER

This species is officially listed as a Species of European Conservation Concern.

Only a few hundred pairs nest in the UK, largely on moorland. Few spend the winter in Sussex and consistently the most reliable place to see them is here on the Forest — either pale grey males or brown females or young birds with distinctive white rumps. The best way of



Great grey shrike
photographed by Richard Bond

finding them is by watching and following bird-watchers! Last winter harriers were seen in most of the Forest's heathlands. Watch out for them on the Forest flying low over the ground searching for prey.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE

Ashdown Forest is probably the best place in Sussex to see this scarce visitor from Scandinavia where it breeds.

In the UK the great grey winters on heathlands such as here. One, at most two, come to the Forest and are most frequently seen in Wrens Warren and Old Lodge valleys. Watch out for a medium sized bird with a black mask and grey plumage, sitting high on the top of a tree. Its prey includes beetles, small mammals and birds and the food is often impaled on a thorn in a "larder" for later!

War Exhibition

Our thanks to all who contributed to the success of our exhibition detailing the relationship between the Forest and the “business of warfare”, one that continues to this day. Everyone who attended the exhibition seemed fascinated by the exhibits, both hardware - musket, cannon cases, grenades etc. - and documents such as that detailing what to do in Hartfield in the event of invasion in WWII.



Some entries in the visitors' book illustrate the interest the exhibition generated.

“I’ve lived here all my life and didn’t know the history behind the Forest during the war”

“The exhibition brought back many memories of both my early childhood and wartime on the Forest”

“A wonderful place to bring my American daughter to learn a little of her heritage”

The interest from local people who dropped in with photographs, diaries and information complemented the recent archaeological survey which has uncovered, amongst other things, this so-called kitchen mound, one of many between Camp Hill and Nutley Windmill made in July 1793 by troops on exercise.

The Royal Sussex Regiment uniform of Mr Tom Mitchell of Hartfield, worn during his National Service



Sheep Success Story Continues

Since the introduction of our Shepherd, Louise and her flock of Hebridean sheep, their presence has been very positively welcomed by everyone.

After the tragedy of the early days when, sadly, two of her dogs were involved in an accident on the A22 which resulted in the death of one, Sally, and serious injury to the other, Coire, the pattern of life, although still fraught at times and full of twists and turns, has settled down and the project is turning out to be a great success attracting great public and media interest.

A new assistant Shepherd, Veronica Wilson, is enjoying her role; Coire, after a series of failed attempts to save one of her injured legs, is now a

three-legged sheepdog, but still as keen and enthusiastic; the public have enjoyed talking to Louise and Veronica and asking questions about the aims and objectives of the project and, most importantly, the sheep are grazing on moor grass, birch and scrub, the control of which is a vital feature of restoring the Forest’s heathland.

A second public “sheep day” in May was a little difficult due to the fact that torrential rain meant the cancellation of the shearing, but disappointment was averted by an impromptu display of hand shearing at the Forest Centre

and the 130 or so members of the public who had braved the weather enjoyed meeting the sheep and hand feeding them.

The flock has increased to 120 and the number of dogs has also increased with the addition of youngsters Elsie and Breac and, most recently, 11 year old Ben. To see this close herding and grazing working so well is a real tribute to all concerned.

Don't forget to keep up to date with Louise, Veronica and the flock by reading the sheep blog on the website www.ashdownforest.org.



Above: Harry looking cool

Above: one of the flock browsing the leaves of a small birch



Chelwood Vachery

Engineers from East Grinstead-based firm, Capita Symonds, volunteered their skills in July in order to assess the condition of the ornamental cascade of ponds at Chelwood Vachery.

Together with Harry Skinner, a chartered land surveyor, they identified the work and costs involved in restoring the ponds and weirs to full working order. The gardens at Chelwood Vachery were made during the early 1900s and the Conservators are restoring them as a safe, accessible and exciting area for visitors.

The team was assembled by The Employee Volunteering Project, which specialises in bringing together corporate and community partners for mutually beneficial projects such as this.

This winter the dredging of the heavily silted two top lakes will commence thanks to funding from former owners of the site, British American Tobacco.



A Day in the Life of a Ranger

Our team of Rangers operate in the following areas:
North Chase (Forest Row, Colemans Hatch) **Mike Yates**
South Chase (Nutley, Duddleswell, Fairwarp) **Roger Beal**
East Chase (Chuck Hatch, Friars Gate, Mardens Hill) **Chris Sutton**
West Chase (Twyford, Birchgrove, Chelwood Gate) **Rich Allum**

The bye-law sign pictured here prohibits cycling on the Forest, but recently the Conservators have been asked to reconsider this by allowing mountain biking under certain circumstances.

What do you think? We would be pleased to hear your views.

For a full summary of the Forest bye-laws go to www.ashdownforest.org/about/byelaws.php

Although they maintain a highly visible presence on the Forest, how many people know what the job actually entails?

As well as generally managing the Forest in line with conservation schemes, their responsibilities also encompass maintenance of rides, car parks, paths, bridges and signs; fire control; reporting and enforcing breaches of Forest bye-laws; maintaining relations with residents, commoners and visitors; leading guided tours and dispensing information about the Forest to visitors and all interested parties; dealing with deer casualties; supervising the teams

of countryside workers and volunteers and finally helping to maintain the Forest vehicles and keep them in good condition.

Perhaps one of the most difficult of these tasks is the enforcing of the bye-laws because, although they are clearly signed and the information constantly available to residents and visitors alike, some still choose to ignore them. In August a resident of Clockhouse Lane, Nutley received notice of County Court proceedings for an injunction to prevent further breaches of Forest bye-laws.