



Wildlife

Aside from standard recording (e.g. butterflies, birds, marsh gentians), biological survey work focused on mapping the distribution of bog cotton, useful as a 'barometer' of the extent of damp ground on the heaths against which change can be monitored over time. Surprisingly, two new localities were found for the royal fern, a conspicuously large species.

Deer received much attention. The Ashdown Area Deer Group (chaired by the Clerk) helped launch ESCC's Deer Warden Scheme that offers support for dealing with road casualties over large areas of the county. It also promoted the installation of new warning signs on the

A22 (Fig. 6) and at year's end had organised a meeting for local land-owners- and —managers concerned about deer numbers and damage on their properties. Forest staff dealt with 266 deer casualties in the 2008 calendar year; the drop from the 325 of 2007 is attributable to three, instead of four, staff being available.



Fig. 6. Deer warning sign on the A22, with attached board showing collisions in the previous six months (Hew Prendergast). Most casualties are of fallow deer.



Fig. 7. Rich Allum, Ranger of the Forest's West Chase, on patrol checking riding permits (Mandy Rutherford).

Amenity & Community

Use of the Forest

As usual a host of organisations, as well as individual members of the public, enjoyed the use of the Forest: endurance riders, sponsored walkers, scouts, orienteering competitors, even astronomers (the Forest being relatively free of light pollution). Just how many visitors there are in total will be revealed once the results are published of a survey in September 2008, sponsored by Wealden and Mid Sussex District Councils. It arose out of a requirement under EU Habitat Regulations to assess the potential impact of development close to Special Protection Areas like the Forest. Some hard data came from counters in the Forest Centre and Broadstone car parks which, they revealed, are used by 20,000 and 28,000 vehicles annually, equating to nearly

100,000 visitors in these two (of the Forest's 48) car parks alone.

After close consideration about the future of mountain biking on the Forest, an issue that aroused strong emotions both for and against, the Board upheld the long-standing ban on this activity, in part because of the difficulty in applying controls (under a permit system). Abuse of the permit system (and consequent loss of income) for riding remains of high concern (Fig. 7).

Within the Forest there are several hundred properties, mainly houses. Understanding rights of access across the Forest common, and differentiating their implications from bye-laws established under the Ashdown Forest Act 1974, can be complex and the law has seen recent changes. The Board undertook a thorough review and redrafted both its basic policies on access and the licence it grants to property owners. As ever, staff maintained a watchful eye on properties since their surrounds are the major source of bye-law breaches on the Forest. Court action against one property owner was stopped only because he sold up and left.



Wear and tear, and the impacts of weather, mean that a yearly programme of work is dedicated to the maintenance and repair of paths, rides (some 130km), car parks (48) and bridges (Fig. 8) across the Forest. Since many of the latter were washed away after exceptional rain in 2007, a decision was made to install more robust ones in future. The possibility of getting sponsorship for them, as for memorial seats, was explored.

Fig. 8. Staff replacing a bridge to Rough Ground, below Nutley (Roger Beal).

The Forest Centre

The Board continued its analysis of future needs for the Forest Centre. Funding from the Ashdown Forest Conservation Trust enabled architectural drawings (Fig. 9) to be done to illustrate what has been approved by the Board (see legend) and what is still under consideration. Only the latter has the potential to increase income for the Board since it would create space for a catering facility, long recognised as the Centre's missing element.

Fig. 9. Architectural drawing (by HMY, Tunbridge Wells) of aerial view of possible future Forest Centre with new, green-roofed additions: respectively (from left to right) these are a repositioned wood boiler, modern toilets, and an orientation building. Also new is the public entrance to the site (bottom right).



Information, Interpretation, Education

In November the Heritage Lottery Fund announced the success of the bid by the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme coordinated by the High Weald Unit (HWU). The Board's two projects in the Scheme are aimed at improving understanding and appreciation of the Forest and will get underway in 2009-2010, although a start was made on preparing a series of new walks leaflets.

Cooperation with the HWU and the Sussex Wildlife Trust led to the setting up of new education provision at the Centre led by SWT teachers; 12 schools (511 children) took advantage and another five schools (291 children) were self guided.

Through the year the Centre hosted two exhibitions. **The Forest – war and conflict**, showing items ranging from a late 18C musket made for a militia raised in Forest Row, to remains of a doodlebug that fell some 300 m away in 1944, ran from April to October. Over the winter months a local photographer displayed numerous pictures of the Forest through the seasons.

Communication

As part of its efforts to improve communications, the Board held its first Parish Liaison Panel meeting in September with representatives from six local parish councils. The website continued to develop (229,226 successful requests for pages in

the 2008 calendar year, the first for which such data were available) and an electronic news service was set up for online subscribers. Community-wise the Board continued to play a lead role in the Ashdown Forest Villages Road Safety Partnership (which held an anti-speeding campaign in September), the Ashdown Area Visitor Management Partnership and through giving talks and leading walks. Two issues of **Ashdown Forest Life** were published, with print-runs of 5,000 copies apiece, and mailed or distributed widely in the local community. Forest events and issues also attracted media attention: attacks on sheep by dogs, mountain biking, arson, speeding on Forest roads, and exhibitions.