

**Minutes of the**  
**ASHDOWN FOREST**  
**CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

1430, Monday 4 April 2005

Ashdown Forest Centre

Present: Messrs M. Cooper, F. Brown, P. Glyn, Ms L. Hutchby (EN), Messrs F. Marshall, C. Marrable, Ms J. Mortimer (DEFRA), Dr H. Prendergast, Mr A. White

Apologies: Mr L. Gillham, Dr A. Tait

**1) Election of new Committee Chairman**

Mr Glyn proposed, and Mr Brown seconded, the election of Mr Gillham. In the absence of Mr Gillham, Mr Glyn acted as Chairman for the meeting.

**2) New DEFRA schemes - update**

Ms Mortimer described how the Forest's four Countryside Stewardship Schemes (CSS) should pass at the rate of 1/year into the new Higher Level Scheme (HLS). The scattered heathlands on the Forest for which a further CSS application had been made in 2004, and then withdrawn on the advice of DEFRA as details began to emerge about the additional funding offered by HLS, should be submitted to HLS in the first tranche of applications this summer with, if successful, an agreement being drawn up within three months. There are four application windows/year. She recommended this phased approach as the one most likely to succeed in the competitive environment of HLS applications. SSSIs like the Forest must be in 'favourable' condition by 2010. Eventually all the Forest's 1500 ha of heathland will pass into HLS.

HLS involves a more target-driven process than CSS, for example aiming, in heathland sites, to increase the percentage cover of dwarf shrubs or the range of age classes of heather. EN is involved with the setting of targets, and inspections are carried out to ensure that habitats are being maintained or improved. Although HLS brings more funding than CSS, it also brings a higher level of commitment to management.

**3) Entomological surveys 2005**

Mr Marrable said that the 2004 survey has not been fully written up (£5k is being withheld until it has been) but already there is great interest in it; no such work has been done on any heathland in Britain. Initial results indicate that the Forest's grazing area may have fewer invertebrates than non-grazed areas, not surprisingly given that livestock are direct competitors with e.g. sap sucking species. Mr Marrable emphasised that great care will need to be taken with interpreting and explaining the results and that it is important continually to ask questions, and be pragmatic, about the direction of management. It has to be accepted that no one knows all the facts about the impact of

grazing on invertebrates, and on which ones (e.g. heathland specialists and non-specialists).

With EN funding, the survey will now extend into areas such as meadows, road verges and hedgerows adjacent to the Forest. It might also be worthwhile making, and then surveying over time, exclosures in the grazing area that livestock cannot enter. This is the sort of issue to be addressed by a national conservation grazing steering group that is being established.

Mr Glyn thanked EN and other bodies, the Weald Heathland Initiative and the Friends of Ashdown Forest, for their support for the surveys and congratulated Mr Marrable for his instigation for much of the work.

#### **4) AOB**

In answer to a question from Mr White, Mr Marrable said that some of Mr Osborne's cattle that had been on the South Downs in the winter may be put out on the Forest very shortly.

Mr White drew attention to a 1 April newspaper report of a sighting on the Forest of a bear *Ursus poobus* ....

The meeting closed at 1540.