Welcome to 2013! A bit of a bumper issue this time as we have quite a lot to tell you! We hope you enjoy it – as ever feed-back is appreciated.

Thank you to everyone who attended the Christmas Party – and especially to those of you who took the time to tell us how much you enjoyed it! Not long until we start the planning for the summer BBQ!

Another date for your diary - the next Coffee Morning is planned for Wednesday 22 May at 11.00. This is a great chance for you to meet each other, the staff and Board members. It’s also an opportunity for you to air your views, share your ideas and find out what is really going on. Remember - it’s open to all volunteers, so please do come along and have a cuppa!

A message from Pat that was recently sent out to volunteers who have e-mail regarding the Forest Centre Development - I wanted to write and thank those of you who kindly responded to the consultation regarding the future development of the Ashdown Forest Centre. You will recall the Conservators were considering three options (purchase and move to Llama Farm; staying at and developing our present site or having a ‘split’ site) and were keen to get the views of local people, groups and organisations, our volunteers and partners.

Over the last couple of months we have been considering each of the options and have come to the decision that we will withdraw our interest in the Llama Farm and concentrate our efforts on reviewing, updating and making the best possible use of the space we have here on our current site.

I am very grateful for your interest and continued support and will keep you updated as to the work and improvements we will be carrying out in the future.

Health Walks... 12 volunteers have been successfully trained by TCV as Health Walk leaders and the first walks have now taken place – this is a great addition to our community programme which can, hopefully, become a permanent feature and be of great benefit to the local community. The first walk set off from Broadstone car park on Wednesday 2nd of January with 40+ walkers – which was a great start and they have been going from strength to strength! The walks have been widely advertised in the parishes, GP surgeries, websites, local media, flyers and posters. There is a poster and a flyer included in this newsletter and it would be great if you could put it up somewhere in your community. If you would like more let us know. If there is enough demand we are sure we could organise another Training Day – Please let Pat know.
Braised Lamb...

You can use a leg if you prefer or halve the recipe by using a 1 x 900g (2lb) shoulder joint or you could try shanks!

**Method**

1. Preheat the oven to Gas mark 3, 170°C, 325°F
2. Place the joint on a chopping board and season on both sides.
3. Heat the oil in a large non-stick frying pan.
4. Cook the lamb for 3-4 minutes on both sides until brown and transfer to a 2.8L /5pint casserole dish with a lid or a large non-stick roasting tin.
5. Add the vegetables to the frying pan and cook for 3-4 minutes until brown. Transfer to the casserole dish or roasting tin.
6. Add the honey, wine, stock and rosemary. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat, cover (with a large sheet of foil if using a roasting tin) and transfer to the oven for 2½-3 hours. Turn the lamb over half way through the cooking time.
7. Serve with creamy mashed potatoes and seasonal vegetables.

**Ingredients**

1 x 1.8kg/4lb lean shoulder or leg of lamb
Salt and freshly milled black pepper
30ml/2tbsp sunflower oil
2 medium onions, peeled and quartered
2 large carrots, peeled and roughly chopped
2 sticks celery, roughly chopped
30ml/2tbsp runny honey
300ml/½pint good red wine
150ml/¼pint good, hot lamb stock
10 sprigs fresh rosemary

Update on Grazing...from Caroline FitzGerald

These two charming young heifers are a part of the recently acquired cattle herd that are now going to graze alongside the Hebridean sheep flock on Ashdown Forest. We are initiating the cattle grazing because cattle are largely dog-proof, graze in a different manner to sheep and can act as a precursor to sheep. We have chosen Galloway cattle because they are a very hardy hill breed capable of producing high quality beef from the lowest quality hill grazing.

To add interest we are going to try and breed Riggit Galloways. These are a well-documented archaic strain of the Galloway cattle with a white stripe running down the spine. The Riggits have recently only been seen as sporadic throwbacks amongst other Galloway types principally the White Galloways. Since Riggit marked Galloways are rare and expensive we have bought Riggit bred white Galloways and these will be crossed with a Riggit bull in an attempt to produce the desired line-back markings. The cattle will be seen out on the Forest in the spring. We will be happy to see any volunteers who would like to get involved with looking after the livestock. Get in touch with the Forest Centre – *Caroline FitzGerald.*
probably the most famous quote about Ashdown Forest comes from the pen of William Cobbett, “verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in England”.

William Cobbett (9 March 1763 – 18 June 1835) was an ardent pamphleteer, journalist, reformer and farmer. He was the third son of a farm labourer and born into the rural farming community of Farnham, Surrey.

William was taught to read and write by his father and, after spending time as a labourer, he took the stagecoach to London where he worked for a few months as a clerk before enlisting in the army where he spent much of his ‘down time’ on self-education. Between 1785 and 1790 his regiment was posted to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia where he rose through the ranks to become Sargent Major, finally returning to England and a discharge in 1791. In February 1792 he married Anne Reid who he had met and courted at Jenny’s Spring near Fort Howe, Nova Scotia.

His military service led Cobbett to despise the harsh military regime and he spoke out against the corruption of officers and low pay. Sensing trouble was brewing he fled to France and straight into the turmoil of the French Revolution. Cobbett intended to stay a year to improve his French but quickly decided to move on to America.

He was first at Wilmington, then by the spring of 1793, Philadelphia. Cobbett initially prospered by teaching English to Frenchmen (many of whom had fled the Revolution) and by translating texts from French to English. He became a controversial political pamphleteer, writing from a pro-British stance under the pseudonym Peter Porcupine.

Cobbett also campaigned against the eminent physician Benjamin Rush whose practice of bleeding during the yellow fever epidemic may have caused many deaths. Rush won a libel lawsuit against Cobbett, who never fully paid the $8,000 libel fine, but instead fled to New York and back to England where he arrived in 1800. On his return he founded a political paper which he sold after a year. He tried again publishing the ‘Political Register’ a weekly newspaper that appeared almost every week from January 1802 until 1835, the year of his death. In it Cobbett questioned the political policies of the Pitt government – the national debt, sinecures and the practice of rotten boroughs which he believed were fuelling class division and tension.

Cobbett was charged with and found guilty of treasonous libel on 1810 after objecting in ‘The Register’ to the flogging at Ely of local militiamen. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment in Newgate Prison. Whilst there he wrote the pamphlet ‘Paper against Gold’, warning of the dangers of paper money, as well as many essays and letters. On his release a dinner in London, attended by 600 people, was given in his honour.

The government increased the taxation on newspapers putting them out of the reach of the ordinary working man. Cobbett reacted by publishing the ‘Political Register’ as a pamphlet and selling it for 2d. It soon had a circulation of 40,000. Critics called it ‘two-penny trash’, a label Cobbett adopted.

Cobbett’s journal was now the main newspaper read by the working class. This made him a dangerous man, and in 1817 he learned that the government was planning to arrest him for sedition. Once again he fled to America where he remained, writing and studying, for two years.

He returned to England shortly after the Peterloo massacre of 1819 and, with other radicals, attacked government policies. He was charged with sedition three times. This was a busy period of his life – he set up a market garden to grow American plants in particular maize and, in 1822, published the popular ‘Cottage Economy’ which taught the cottager some of the skills necessary to be self-sufficient, such as instructions on how to make bread, brew beer, and keep livestock.

Cobbett was not content to let newspaper stories come to him, he went out like a modern reporter and dug them up, especially the story that he returned to time and time again in the course of his writings, the plight of the rural Englishman. He took to riding around the country making observations of what was happening in the towns and villages.

Cobbett wanted to be elected to the House of Commons. He was defeated in Honiton in 1806, Coventry in 1820, Preston in 1826 and Manchester in 1832 but after the passing of the 1832 Reform Act Cobbett was able to win the parliamentary seat of Oldham. On taking his place in the House of Commons he concentrated his energies on attacking government corruption and the Poor Law.

Although he was not a Catholic, he became a fiery advocate of Catholic Emancipation in Britain. Between 1824 and 1826, he published his ‘History of the Protestant Reformation’, a broadside against the traditional historical narrative of the reformation. At this time, Catholics were still forbidden to enter certain professions or to become Members of Parliament. Although the law was no longer enforced, it was officially still a crime to attend Mass or build a Catholic church.

Cobbett continued to publish controversial material in the ‘Political Register’ and in July 1831 he was charged with seditious libel after writing a pamphlet entitled ‘Rural War’ in
support of the Captain Swing Riots, which applauded those who were smashing farm machinery and burning haystacks. Cobbett successfully conducted his own legal defence and won his case.

Surprisingly Cobbett was a vociferous opponent of William Wilberforce and although Wilberforce also worked and spoke against Catholic discrimination, Cobbett took a strident and racist opposition to the noted reformer, particularly after Wilberforce in 1823 published his ‘Appeal in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies’.

‘Rural Rides’, the work for which Cobbett is still best known today, first appeared in serial form in the ‘Political Register’ between 1822 and 1826. It was finally published in book form in 1830.

At the time of writing in the early 1820s, Cobbett was a radical anti-Corn Law campaigner, newly returned to England from his self-imposed political exile America.

He disapproved of Parliaments remedies for agricultural distress and in 1821 and he decided to see rural conditions for himself in order to “enforce by actual observation”, the statements he had himself made before the Parliamentary Agricultural Committee. He embarked on a series of journeys by horseback through the countryside of the southeast and the Midlands. He wrote down what he saw from a dual point of view that of the farmer and the social reformer. ‘Rural Rides’ documents the early nineteenth century countryside and its people as well as giving free vent to Cobbett’s political and social opinions.

He first published his observations in serial form in the Political Register, running from 1822 to 1826. They were first published in book form in two volumes in 1830.

Of course Cobbett was interested in agriculture and the farming economy so it is not surprising that Ashdown Forest was such a shock – acres of uncultivated and treeless land. This is what he wrote in at the end of that January day in 1822:

“At East Grinstead, which is a rotten borough and a very shabby place, you come to stiff loam at top with sand-stone beneath. To the south of the place the land is fine, and the vale on both sides a very beautiful intermixture of woodland and corn-fields and pastures. At about three miles from Grinstead you come to a pretty village, called Forest-Row, and then, on the road to Uckfield, you cross Ashurst Forest, which is a heath, with here and there a few birch scrubs upon it, verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in England. This lasts you for five miles, getting, if possible, uglier and uglier all the way, till, at last, as if barren soil, nasty spewy gravel, heath and even that, stunted, were not enough, you see some rising spots, which instead of trees, present you with black, ragged, hideous rocks. There may be Englishmen who wish to see the coast of Nova Scotia. They need not go to sea; for here it is to the life. If I had been in a long trance (as our nobility seem to have been), and had been waked up here, I should have begun to look about for the Indians and the squaws, and to have heaved a sigh at the thought of being so far from England. From the end of this forest without trees you come into a country of but poorish wettish land.”

Passing through the village of Uckfield, you find an enclosed country, with a soil of a clay cast all the way to within about three miles of Lewes, when you get to a chalk bottom, and rich land.”

From 1831 until his death, Cobbett farmed at Normandy, a village in Surrey. In his later life, however, Macaulay, a fellow MP, remarked that Cobbett’s faculties were impaired by age; “indeed that he was paranoid to the point of insanity”. He was buried in the churchyard of St Andrew’s Parish Church, Farnham.

How ideas change!

100 years later in his book ‘Highways and Byways in Sussex’ EV Lucas describes the Forest in very different terms, “some of the finest open country in Sussex, where one may walk for hours and meet no human creature. Here are silent desolate woods and vast wastes of undulating heath, rising here and there to great heights crowned with fir trees. A few enclosed estates interrupt the forest’s open freedom, but nothing can tame it. Sombre dark heather gives the prevailing note, but I once came upon a green and luxuriant valley that would not have been out of place in Tyrol; while there is a field near Chuck Hatch where in April one may see more dancing daffodils than ever Wordsworth did.” – splendid stuff!
In my previous missive I told you how excited I was about our planned trip to Cornwall. Sadly I couldn’t make it. I started to go lame on our previous expedition to Devon almost a (human) year ago. I’d been lame on and off for a while and got much worse just before we were about to go away, so I was unfit for the rigours of the beach and the South-West coastal path. At first the ‘old man’ and the vet thought it was my shoulder, so I had this new laser treatment, but it didn’t seem to be working and I became acutely lame and had to rest up. I had to have a general anaesthetic and X-rays, which showed up a hole in one of my vertebrae (a form of spina bifida). When I came round after the anaesthetic I howled so much the nurses phoned my ‘dad’ to come and take me home (a cunning ruse I thought!). He was quite upset because it can’t be cured but I’ve had more laser treatment directly onto the vertebra that was causing the problem and so far, so good. I’m sound again at the moment and back to charging about on my beloved Forest, although I have to be a bit careful I don’t do anything that puts too much pressure or force through my neck.

Recently I discovered another string to my bow. As you know, I am part-pointer and my gundog instincts are very strong. My man and I were called to a deer that had been hit by a car on the A22 near Long car park. It had managed to get about 100yds down the old airstrip and hidden up in the gorse. Another dog had found it, but when we got there the deer had gone. My ‘dad’ asked me if I could follow its scent and discover where it had got to (my sense of smell is ten times better than his). I followed the trail for about another 100yds and sure enough, there it was. Unfortunately the deer had a shattered back leg and needed to be put down, but it ran away across the heath on 3 legs. I was very good and didn’t chase it. He tried to follow the deer but it disappeared over the brow of the hill. Once again he said to me, “Go on, find ‘im then”. I managed to track it down to a thicket of gorse, but instinctively I didn’t get too close, rather than frighten it I stood stock-still with my tail out and my front paw pointing to exactly where it was, eyes fixed. He still couldn’t see it, but as he approached with his gun the deer made off again – into a really wet bog. This time I followed it until it went down between tussocks; as soon as it stopped I adopted my classic pointing posture (without any coaching or training). This time he could see it and get close enough for a good, clean shot. I didn’t even flinch or get scared when the shotgun went off, even though I wasn’t far away from it. My ‘dad’ was so impressed with me; he said he’d never have been able to find the deer without me, and that I was a complete natural as a gundog!

I’m not sure if you know, but my friend Gwen Place is not well. The good news is that she is in a residential home in Haywards Heath where dogs are allowed to visit – so we’re planning a trip to go and see her next week.

Love Scallywag X X X

From the Director’s Chair...

Although it now seems a long time ago, it was wonderful to see so many of you at the Christmas party; I had been told that it had become a ‘legendary event’ and what a great evening it was! It was particularly pleasing to present, as a small token of our appreciation, the first of our long service awards to Larry Chappell, Rosalie Leng, Janet Wirdnam and Dick & Ann Thompson. We really do value the support, time and commitment you all give to us.

A couple of updates from the last newsletter:

**Every Dog Matters Programme (including ‘dog walker’ volunteers):** this is taking a lot longer than I had hoped it would to get going, mainly down to finding the funding to support it; however, I am pleased to say that it is looking positive that we will be able to get going on the programme this year. It is great to report that AFRA will be starting their sessions for riders in March.

**Forest Centre Development:** a big ‘thank you’ to all of you who have taken the time to respond to the discussions around the various proposals the Conservators were considering for the future of the Centre. You will have seen the news on the front page and hopefully I will be able to update you further at the coffee morning.

And finally.....in case you wonder why I am not around in February it’s because I will be in Australia where I will be enjoying my daughter’s wedding – see you when I get back!
Conservation and Management News...

Mike Payne, West Chase – The first part of the contractor work around the Airstrip has finished for the moment. Spring and summer will be spent on the usual tasks. Lots going on in the Vachery and Charles Smith woods – see page 7 & 8.

Mike Yates, North Chase – Following a contract in February 2012 to clear scrub from below Linton’s and along the edge of the Ridge Road we have at last been able to get a tractor in to do some winter mowing. This area of heathland has not been mowed or managed for many years. We all assumed that the area would be inaccessible due to the deep ditch that runs through the site and the slit trenches, tree stumps, cart tracks and archaeology. Colin with his New Holland TVT and destroyer surprised me by clearing the whole site in spite of all the hazards. With some help from a lively team of probationers who cut and burnt the remaining birch we now have a new piece of heathland under management. It is not much more than a hectare but more importantly it links the heathland between the Golf course and the Ridge and Dumpy’s. So I am very pleased! You will be able to see this new landscape as you drive along the Ridge Road from the Hatch heading to the Forest Centre immediately before Linton’s on the right.

Rich Allum, South Chase - Despite the snow and record rainfall we have completed our South Chase winter scrub clearance around Misbourne Valley and the Airman’s Grave. We were lucky to see a male hen harrier on occasions over Breakneck Ghyll. We’ve also cleared by Stonehill car park and immediately north of Fairwarp Church. We still have some “AHWI-ing” to do once the big tractor is up & running again. This spring / summer we are planning ride repairs near Duddleswell tea rooms, Misbourne Farm, and School Lane (Nutley) and replacing bridges at “Primrose Patch” (Fairwarp) and Dodd’s Bottom. Butterfly monitoring will start in May and the annual bracken mowing program in June.

Chris Sutton, East Chase - We have been working very hard this winter to restore the heathland below Church Hill. The large areas of bracken have had isolated trees removed and a team from Wakehurst has removed the bracken mulch over a large area. This whole area will be mown with our 15ft mower for the next few years to reduce the bracken allowing other heathland species a chance to recover. Down towards the track into Crowborough Warren, it is wetter and we have opened up the old pond. Some more work is being done by people with wood permits as the area is more accessible for them. Hopefully, they, and we, will return next winter to carry on the heathland clearance below the track. As this goes to print, the area behind Kings Standing will be in the process of being cleared by contractors. All this work is being funded by HLS to try and bring the heathland into a ‘favourable’ condition.

Work for me now starts on boundary walking a process we try to complete every year. The Chase Ranger walks all his boundaries, especially around private properties, to pick up any problems that have materialised since the last year, and note any changes. Problems might be a wood pile or compost heap appearing on the Forest. There is never enough space on their land! Changes may be a new hedge or fence which hopefully is on the right line, quite often not, encroaching on the Forest side (for convenience) and adding to their land. One comment frequently heard is ‘what does it matter there is plenty more Forest’.

Chris Marrable on Forest Conservation - Just before Christmas, the winter heathland management programme got into full swing, with Forest staff cutting back birch scrub on Church Hill and contractors working on Broadstone and in the Old Airstrip area. It is now apparent that we have moved from a heathland ‘re-creation’ phase to a definite ‘maintenance’ phase, as the invasive scrub is generally removed before it gets to tree size. Whilst this is a good indication that we are preventing the loss of heathland to woodland, we can no longer use heathland work as a supply of fire wood – ‘estovers’ - for commoners. Estovers, to which many Forest commoners are entitled, will now be provided by completing targets in our woodland management plan, which will include thinning of trees which are growing too close together and clearance around notable trees to let them grow into more stable forms.

The abysmally cold and wet summer was hard on several Forest groups. We have no data yet, but it is likely that bird breeding success was low as eggs and chicks were chilled while parents searched for food. We have had no Dartford warbler records since the spring. Deer fawns seem to have fared no better than the birds. Butterflies were very poor, with fewer records than any in the ten years or so since we have been carrying out systematic recording. To prove that every cloud does have a silver lining, two of our important plant species did well – we had very good numbers of marsh orchids in June and marsh gentians in September.

2012 grazing had the usual ups and downs – several of the Commoners’ animals were killed by dogs and vehicles but the Conservators’ sheep got away with just one dog attack which proved not to be fatal. Our sheep grazed two main enclosures on the East Chase plus a smaller area on the West Chase. We had six borrowed Highland cattle in an enclosure near to the golf course and they did an excellent job through the summer, reducing the purple moor grass and trampling down thick tussocks in the stream. We have now bought some Galloway cattle which will be out on the Forest in the spring.
Events and exhibition review...

“Ashdown Forest: A Portrait in Watercolour” - Oliver’s exhibition is ongoing and will be coming down at the end of March. For those of you that don’t know Oliver is a self-taught landscape photographer and watercolourist and he will be exhibiting his paintings http://www.ashdownfineart.co.uk/. So far his bright, breezy and atmospheric paintings are proving to real hit!

Fungi Day - Took place on 1st November to tie in with the half-term holidays. We thought that finding fungi so late in the year would be a challenge – however, it was the weather in the weeks leading up to Fungi Day that really caused the problems. There was almost nothing to be found on the day and the same can be said about the following weeks. We and the public did manage to find a few things to put on the identification table and we estimate we had one third of the fungi we had in 2010 (the last really good year) with many species being completely absent. Let’s hope for better luck in 2012.

Camp Building - Took place on 1st November in the Broadstone quarry. About 30 children and their parents came along and, despite it being a grey day – there was a lot of fun to be had. We will certainly do this again in 2013!

Ashdown Forest Wood-turners - The Wood-turners have been on site from 3rd November to 23rd December and have reported that there was a great deal of interest but takings were down on previous years. There was certainly a lot of pre-exhibition interest.

Besom Brooms with Stan Card - Stan’s first session was a washout due to the really vile weather – his second session was far more successful with a few sales and plenty of interest. Better weather and a longer advertising period will help if we decide to do this type of event again.

Christmas Tree Sales - Trees were cut and on sale through December (up to Christmas Eve morning) and sales were extremely brisk. A BIG thank you to everyone who helped out!

Wood Permits – At the time of writing 118 applications had been received with 89 being processed (the majority of whom were Commoners).

Charles Smith wood – by Mike Payne...

As you probably know the Friend’s recently purchased Charles Smith. After doing a survey and walk through it was decided the first task was to remove the hedge between the wood and the Forest with the mind to recover it as heathland. There are a few patches of invasive weeds that will be dealt with in due course. A well-established badgers set has been found and some strange subterranean structure that has now been fenced off for safety. Also there appear to be the remains of a sandstone structure with some kind of rusted metal tool laying in it. The folly bridge in the North corner remains part of council property and not Forest. We will keep you posted on progress!

A strange, and rather deep, structure uncovered in Charles Smith wood
Spraying took place during the summer with a further contract put in place to deal with Shalom and rhododendron. At the end of October Adrian Scott Plant Hire completed a contract to clear silt from the upper four ponds of the Vachery Gorge which has resulted in some interesting finds. One of these was the discovery of footings to an old building - so far I have been unable to find out its use.

On the last Sunday of October the Conservation Volunteers, led by Chris Marrable, worked on the gorge completing several tasks around the ponds. On the top bank of the 1st pond several volunteers cleared a small area of oak scrub in order to open up visibility and to reduce the amount of leaf litter silting up the pond. Further down, volunteers cleared the footings, and others cleared brambles and scrub to reveal a retaining rockery wall, a second ram pump house and a blocked pipe. We managed to unblock the pipe which corrected the course of the water so that it flowed through the pipe rather than over the retaining rock wall. I am planning to put together a portfolio containing maps of the gorge including what has been found in and around the ponds with accompanying photographic evidence.

I am planning to revisit on a regular basis, with the Conservation Volunteers, to keep the ponds and cascades free from overgrowth. Also, to slowly remove tree growth within a 15-20 meter radius of the gorge and to control the growth of any scrubbby plants so that we keep a ‘tidy’ line of sight up through the gorge. There are also a few ditches around the Vachery that will eventually require some attention and all of the paths will need continued management.

Along the lakes I can foresee that some rather difficult work will be required to repoint some of the brick work to protect it from frosts and erosion and some of the lake banks will require some revetment works to stop the bank / path collapsing. There are a couple of large, mature, trees I am currently keeping a rather close eye on which due to their condition may require removal for public safety and the protection of the weirs. The interpretation board near the folly bridge will be rebuilt and we are certain it will be a valuable addition to the Vachery.

If you have any questions or further information about the Vachery – please do let me know!
Wendy Austin...
It was with very great sadness that we learned of the sudden death of Wendy Austin. Wendy was a much loved member of the Volunteer team, always happy, with a beaming smile and so keen to help out. Rich and Tracy, along with volunteers who had become her friends, attended the funeral which was a lovely and very moving celebration of Wendy’s life. Rosalie Leng read a lovely poem that she had penned and Wendy’s love of the Forest was mentioned several times as were her many and varied interests. There was some lovely music and beautiful flowers. Our thoughts are with Mike and her children. Wendy will be greatly missed.

Gwen Place...
It was also a great shock to hear that Gwen Place had been taken seriously ill and was in hospital. It seems, at the moment, very unlikely that Gwen will return to volunteering with us. Many of you know Gwen and I know that some have visited her in hospital. Rich and Tracy visited and were really pleased to see Gwen looking so comfortable and well cared for. We all send our love and very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

New Volunteers...
On a much happier note we can say a warm welcome to our brand new information barn volunteers Helen Bardsley (who is also a mounted ranger), Mary Dixon, Jane Green and Julia Fairhall. At the time of writing all were in the final stages of their training! We also look forward to welcoming to training Jennifer Grant and Lynn Merrick (of Gatekeeper Guide fame).

Schools and Education news...
Travel Bursary 2013... many schools tell us that they don’t come to the Forest Centre because they are put off by the cost of coach hire. The Friends of Ashdown Forest have very kindly set aside a sum of money specifically to assist local schools with their travel costs when making a full or half day Sussex Wildlife teacher led visit. The Travel Bursary will refund 50% of the coach hire cost for the first ten schools making a booking in 2013. The bursary will be paid to the school on receipt of the coach company invoice. It is hope that this bursary will encourage more schools to visit the Forest. A flyer is included in this newsletter.

The Ashdown Forest Wildlife Illustration Competition... An interesting competition designed to encourage children to enrich their lives by exploring outdoors and discovering and appreciating the beauty and complexity of nature. Schools are being encouraged to support the recommendations made by The National Trust in their report “Natural Childhood 2012” that children need to “develop a personal connection with the natural world”. We want to encourage children to have the confidence to use their own writing and hand-drawn illustrations to record investigations, rather than using their computers. We are looking for teachers who would like their class to take part in the competition. The prize will be a set of eleven Gatekeeper Educational wildlife identification Guides plus a Discovery and Wildlife Sculpture Day at the Ashdown Forest Centre on Wednesday 19th June 2013. When the children will spend the morning with the centre staff and have fun hunting for the varied creatures which may be found on the Forest and the afternoon creating invertebrate sculptures, using clay, wire and paints, which may be taken back to school or home. Schools need to register their interest in taking part by April 27th 2013 and all entries must be received by 20th May 2013. A flyer is included in this newsletter.

New Events news... Clive Poole has very kindly offered to lead more bird walks in 2013 – dates and times to be announced in due course and extra helpers would be most welcome. There will also be more camp building sessions as they were such a success, easy to run and cheap(!) – again dates and times will be announced and hands on helpers needed. As you will have read the Health Walks have been a great success – perhaps we could arrange some longer non-health walks for the public – anyone interested in leading and helping? Any suggestions for other events that we could run (at little or no cost!) please do let me know.

Conservation Group... The team meets on the last Sunday of each month through the winter, though next year we may organise some summer tasks to control invasive species such as ragwort and Himalayan balsam. In 2012, we’ve done quite a lot of Rhododendron bashing, including half a day on the ground newly-acquired by the Conservators at Chelwood Gate. A slightly more unusual task involved tidying up the ponds at the top of the gorge in Chelwood Vachery after a digger had done most of the heavy work. We exposed features that had disappeared under the vegetation over the last decade or so, including a hydraulic ram chamber which Forest staff didn’t know existed – thanks to local knowledge. Next year will be a case of more of the same – Rhododendron and birch scrub control plus perhaps a bit of pond digging and Gentian counting. Chris Marrable
Coffee Morning...
Don’t forget the coffee morning is planned for **WEDNESDAY 22 MAY at 11.00** and is open to **all** volunteers, so please do come along!

Information Barn Opening...
From 1 April we go back to our usual summer opening hours of every week-day afternoon from 14.00! Please call in and fill in duties so the first week or two of the month are fully covered – thank you in anticipation!

Uniform - Information Barn Volunteers...
A further reminder - If you would like a sweatshirt and / or a short sleeved polo shirt to wear during your barn duties please let us have your sizes. They will be available to collect at the coffee morning in May.

Mileage Expenses...
Don’t forget you can now claim your mileage expenses. Forms can be found under the counter in the information barn.

When did you start Volunteering?
Please let me know the year in which you began your volunteering on the Forest. We would like to recognize long service. The first were handed out at the Christmas Party – we would have liked to have done a few more but we were lacking information!

Next Exhibition...
Our next exhibitors will be the East Grinstead Camera Club. The planning for this exhibition will really get started in February and there will be posters and flyers available nearer the time.

New for 2013...
Step into a countryside photography experience with Deirdre Huston, guidebook author and outdoor photographer. Deirdre’s new guidebook features three walks in the Forest. Deirdre will be running various courses and photography walks in the Ashdown Forest throughout 2013. Choose from varied options such as "Leap Off Auto", "Reflections, Colour and Composition" and **Family Photography Walks** in various Forest locations. Explore rich and fascinating landscape with your camera whilst developing your technical skills, understanding and self-expression through simple creative exercises. Individual all levels welcome. Call 01273 844404 or see our visit [www.deirdrehuston.co.uk/pages/photographypathways.php](http://www.deirdrehuston.co.uk/pages/photographypathways.php)