



# The Lynchmere Society

For Lynchmere, Hammer and Camelsdale

## Spring Newsletter

**Life President:** Michael Tibbs **Vice President:** John Hooker

**Chairman:** Michael Shaw (01428 643406)

**Treasurer:** Robert Dows-Miller (07775 548309)

**Membership Secretary:** Louise Searight (01428 723715)

**Membership Records:** Stuart Ibbotson (01428 658179)

**Commons Manager:** Mark Allery (01428 641708)

**Commons Wardens:** Hilary Adair and Chris Pooley (01428 653034)

**Volunteer Coordinator:** Hilary Adair (01428 643219)

**Trustees:** Stuart Ibbotson, Nic Mann, Laura Ponsonby, Judy Rous, Ian Russell, Louise Seagrave, Chris Pooley, Christina Heath, Robert Dows-Miller, Michael Shaw

## Dates for your Diary

### Shulbrede Barbecue - Saturday 5 September

This is a joint event this year because it will also be the Volunteers Barbecue which we had to postpone from July. It is for members, guests and anyone else who would like to join us in this historic environment by courtesy of Laura Ponsonby and Ian and Kate Russell. It will begin at 6pm and barbecued sausages, wine and soft drinks are provided.

The cost is £2 per head and it would help if you could bring something sweet for the second course.

It will also mark the start of our autumn and winter season of volunteer days. We will give a brief outline of what we hope to achieve during that period and we hope as many as possible of our volunteers will be able to attend the barbecue bringing new talent with them.

### Autumn Lecture - Friday 23 October

at the Hardman Hoyle Memorial Hall at 730 for 8pm; Dr John Godfrey will speak on

" The South Downs Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: What the National Park Means to You"

John Godfrey is an historical geographer and writes on the history of the South Downs, particularly the period 1850-1950. He is a member of the National Trust's regional committee for South East England and Vice-Chairman of the executive board of the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton, near Chichester

### Fernhurst Furnace Open weekend - 12-13 September



## **Chairman's Report.**

We have as yet nothing to report about the transfer to us of Peter Burkitt's fields, about which I have written in the last two newsletters. It is pretty scandalous that a Government Department (Revenue and Customs in this instance) can be so dilatory. It has nothing on the Office of Circumlocution about which Dickens wrote in Bleak House; we are now well into the fifth year since Peter died. (And we have similar problems in obtaining our final share of the estate of Miss Morrish who died several years ago; whoever is profiting from this delay it is not the Lynchmere Society!).

But one day Peter's wishes will be fulfilled and we have (with the agreement of Sheila Burkitt) already started remedial work on the fields and in particular the fences. In fact by the time you read this we hope that the splendid South Downs Joint Committee volunteers together with some of our own will have spent four days repairing those fences. In the meantime a local grazier has been helping us out by grazing Stoneyfield, the field we acquired a year ago.

The existing commons have seen a good deal of work on things like bracken control by Mark Allery and trustees have been delighted with the progress he has been making. Mark's article below says it all! We are equally delighted to hear that Mark won a medal for his scything this year at the 5<sup>th</sup> West Country Scything Festival on the Somerset levels.

### **Managing Marley Common with the National Trust.**

Planning permission has been given for the fencing work needed, the various gates have been ordered and we expect the fencing contractors to start work shortly. Indeed they may have already started by the time you read this. It is not impossible that we will see cows on Marley Common later this autumn. So far as we know it is the only project of its kind in the area where two landowning societies have pooled their resources to produce a joint area of heathland. We have, however, also had preliminary discussions with the Forestry Commission since we may be able to do some joint work in the Stanley Common/ Iron Hill area.

### **Volunteers**

We do still need to reinforce our small band of volunteers. There is always work to be done on the commons themselves (see the list of dates for the forthcoming winter season attached to this newsletter). But I would like to see volunteers dedicated to a specific purpose – and doing things which do not require manual labour. For example we already have volunteers manning our small shop and we hope shortly to have others taking over the management of our archives and small library. Laura Ponsonby does flower and plant surveys of flowering plants and ferns for us. I would like to see someone look at the way we provide a suitable environment for moths and butterflies (did you know there are at least 22 varieties of butterfly on our land? – and see the paragraph below on this year's influx of Painted Ladies), for bats and for reptiles.

We have continued to make and put up boxes for birds and bats and to involve children from local schools and cub packs in what we are doing. Christina Heath presented five small birds boxes to Fernhurst Primary School and we have put up owl boxes on our land to try and attract more tawny owls and provide shelter for them (all our boxes have been



made by volunteers using our own home grown timber).

During June and July Christina met Fernhurst cubs pack and Owls class from Fernhurst School to explain how owls have gained their reputation as wise birds and what makes them such successful birds of prey. The cubs were already knowledgeable about the wildlife of the area and were keen to learn more. Roy Wolfe added his recollections of local owls and the children were particularly interested to learn that tawny owls are sometimes mobbed by flocks of smaller birds which are keen to see them off.

Owls Class and their teacher Miss Wickenden were eager to look for evidence of owls from pellets at the foot of trees and we scanned the forks of more established trees for roosting birds. In a very warm afternoon they followed their look at the owl box by searching for one interesting thing to take back to their classroom. They found plenty of things to remind them of their visit to this exciting and much loved habitat on their own doorsteps,

We are also in contact with Camelsdale First School to organise a visit by some of their pupils to the owl box. We regard this educational aspect of our work as being rather important and if you know any other groups who would like an organised visit do get in touch with Christina (tel 642547).

If you want to see Tawny owls which are the most common in our woods you should take a walk just before dusk and look for evidence from droppings at the base of trees. You can hear their evocative calls in late winter when the male and female call to one another using the famous “twit twoo” with which everyone is familiar. You can see them more easily in winter when the trees are leafless. They roost close up beside the trunks to try and camouflage themselves.

## Bats

We have several varieties of bat on the commons, the most common being the pipistrelle. No specific breeding or roosting sites have been identified – but these are probably to be found in the farm buildings and largish houses just outside the boundaries. Roy Wolfe has now put up a number of boxes (made by Stuart Ibbotson) which we hope will encourage them to use us as a residential site rather than just a foraging one. Alas our bat walk in July coincided with the wettest evening of the year. Once the thunderstorm had passed a hardy group of ten of us slithered our way across Lynchmere common, picking up some pipistrelle chatter on the ultrasonic bat detectors provided by Martyn Fillis. But the bats did not think much of the weather either and we will hope for better luck with Martyn next year.

## Painted Ladies

You may have seen references in the national press to the huge influx of Painted Lady butterflies this year and no doubt some of you will have noticed them in your gardens as I have done. Some reach England every summer having set off from North Africa (where the good rains this year meant a particularly successful breeding season) and crossed Europe and then the Channel to reach our gardens. They have laid their eggs, the caterpillars will have gone into cocoons, often on thistles and the new generation of butterflies will emerge in August. At that stage there may be as many as a billion of them in southern England – a one off phenomenon this year. They do not overwinter in the UK. By the autumn some will have migrated to North Africa, but most, including the parents, will die during our winter. If



you have not yet noticed them then perhaps this note will encourage you to look out for them. They are pretty pink/orange butterflies with black and white markings.



**Futher Sightings** Judy Rous reports from Lynchmere common, alongside roundabouts field, sightings of a Honey Buzzard, a Black Adder, the Purple Emperor butterfly and last but certainly not least the caterpillar of the Emperor Moth which is a bright lime green with coral pink spots!

## Gorse

Maureen Blandy writes

“I always enjoy reading the nature articles in the Newsletter and especially that by Mark Allery on Gorse in the Spring edition.

Near where I used to live was a bank of gorse and every year when it came into bloom my mother would always say when passing the bank “Oh, the Glory of Sussex” I was therefore just a little sad that your article did not mention this name for gorse. My mother was brought up near Battle and Hastings so perhaps it is a name used in East Sussex rather than West. But I thought I should mention this name because it is a shame for old names to die out and the gorse was so very beautiful this year – the “Glory of Sussex” indeed.

Oh and do not forget that “when the gorse is out of bloom then kissing is out of season”. I was told as a child that this was because gorse is always in flower somewhere.

## Bracken: Friend or Foe?



Bracken (*pteridium aquilinum* to give it its posh name) is primarily a woodland plant and in most countries it does not colonise open areas. But with our maritime climate and recent warmth it strays out of the woods and can be particularly invasive on open areas around the coast and on heath and moorland.

It's this invasive behaviour which has gained it a bad reputation as a weed, but it might surprise you to hear that there are few other British herbaceous plants that have been of such economic importance.



Managing bracken as a crop was a key part of keeping it in its place. Bracken has been used for bedding, flooring, feed (croziers and rhizomes) and as a compost and mulch. In the building industry it was used as packing, thatching and dried as a fierce fuel to fire bricks and tiles. It was even used extensively in Sussex for road foundations, perhaps an explanation for the state of some of our roads today. But the most important uses in the Weald were to provide potassium for the glass and soap/lye making industries. For this the ferns were gathered in July and August and burnt in enormous bonfires to reduce to the ashes or potash rich in potassium.

This extensive harvest gave rise to many place names where the fern was an important crop, Farnham, Farncombe and Fernhurst are local examples.

As the common land and heathland has fallen into disuse and the demand for bracken as a crop has disappeared the fern has advanced and colonised new areas. This is particularly true of restored heathland where scrub tree cover has kept the bracken down. Once the trees are removed the bracken invades. After a few years the bracken can gain the upper hand and then there is a tendency to use any means at hand to prevent the bracken from suppressing the new heather growth, and generally that means spraying it with a systemic pesticide, Asulox.



Alternatives to managing bracken by spraying are cutting manually, cutting mechanically and rolling. Four years ago we decided not to spray on the Lynchmere commons and since then have been experimenting with forms of cutting and rolling. Rather than attempting to eradicate all the bracken we are focusing our efforts into some key areas to reduce or remove it. Early indications are that this strategy is working well and with each year the bracken thins out, grows smaller and easier to manage allowing us to expand our management to more areas.

It seems unlikely that bracken will make a comeback as a crop of the economic importance it used to have, though to develop some use for it would improve our ability to harvest and remove it. I am experimenting with methods of cutting and composting it in an attempt to produce a peat free compost. You might come across one of the bracken ricks that Alison and I have piled up as a part of this experiment. We'll be turning them from time to time to encourage the decomposition and monitor the progress.

## **A brief Pip's Paw Notes**

You haven't heard from me for a while because I had an accident with a rusty can and the vet put a boot on my paw. Things have been happening on our patch. The pump has been fixed and now fills the upper pond at Lower Brookham. The cows are back, 7 friendly young ones on the big common and 3 more on the little common. My human has worries. She has lots of those. One of them is the amount of litter that is dropped on the commons. Plastic can be worse than old rusty cans and is not biodegradable taking thousands of years to disappear. In the meantime it can be a hazard to wildlife and grazing animals. My human and I would be grateful for any litter that you can pick up and take away with you.



### **VOLUNTEER DATES for 2009-2010**

Volunteer days are on Sundays. We start at 10 o'clock but you can join whenever you wish and stay for as long as possible. There are a variety of different tasks; some light, some heavy. All who wish to spend time in the fresh air and at the same time contribute to the preservation of the commons are welcome.

**6th September** Meet at the Lynchmere Society board on the road from the B2131 to Lynchmere Green

(SU896315) contact Hilary Adair Tel: 01428 643219

**20th September** Meet at the Lynchmere Society Board on the road from the B2131 to Lynchmere Green.

(SU896315) contact Hilary Adair Tel: 01428 643219

**4th October** Meet at the Lynchmere Society /board on the road from the B2131 to Lynchmere Green

(SU896315) contact Nic Mann Tel: 01428 642359

**18th October** Marley Common. Meet at the metal fire gate. ( SU882315)

Contact MacMcart Tel: 01428 656916

**8th November** Stanley Common. Meet on the corner after the first cattle grid on the Stanley Farm drive which is off Highfield Lane (SU855305)

contact Roy Wolfe Tel: 01428 723005

**22nd November** Marley Common. Meet at the metal fire gate. (SU882315)

Contact Michael Shaw Tel: 01428 643406

**13th December** Meet at the Lynchmere Society Board on the road from the B2131 to Lynchmere Green

(SU896315) contact Hilary Adair Tel: 01428 643219

### **2010**

**10th January** Marley Common, Meet at the metal fire gate. (SU882315)

Contact Michael Shaw Tel: 01428 643406

**24th January** Stanley Common. Meet on the corner after the first cattle grid on the Stanley Farm drive

which is off Highfield Lane (SU855305) contact Roy Wolfe Tel: 01428 723005

**14th February** LOG DAY at the Lynchmere Society Board on the road from the B2131 to Lynchmere Green (SU89615)

contact Mark Allery Tel: 01428 641708 Hilary Adair Tel: 01428 643219

**28th February** Meet at the Barn ( SU869309) A whole day of trimming the trees over the fences. Bonfire and many delights in the Barnyard. If you own a 4x4 you can drive to the barn otherwise park on Lynchmere Green and walk to the barn via the Cricket field.

Contact Hilary Adair Tel: 01428 643219

**14th March** Marley Common. Meet at the metal fire gate. (SU882315)

contact Michael Shaw 01428 643406

**28th March** Meet at the Lynchmere Society Board on the road from the B2131 to Lynchmere Green. (SU896315) Judy Rous Tel: 01428 72325