



DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 67 | SPRING 2015



RODENTS IN THE RAIN



THE WESTERN AREA VRS STARTED THE NEW YEAR IN A WATERY WAY WITH SOME IMPORTANT WILDLIFE SURVEYS...

A drizzly Monday morning in early January saw us head across to Noar Hill on the Rotherfield Estate to begin our hunt for harvest mice nests.

Following an earlier meeting held by the Selborne Landscape Partnership, we heard that there was only a single recent record of a harvest mouse within a 5km radius of Noar Hill since 1999. Seeing as the harvest mouse was first documented as a new species by Gilbert White in Selborne in 1767, the Partnership agreed that this was a huge opportunity to now look for evidence of more. So, in conjunction with members of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation Trust, National Trust, Rotherfield Park, local landowners and SDNPA staff we set about organising a new round of harvest mouse surveys.

Harvest mice are the smallest native mouse and make tennis-ball sized nests from strips of grass during the

summer months. They then abandon them over winter when they seek shelter lower down to keep out of the weather. To find their nests you have to look around field edges and hedgerows rummaging for their fine balls of grass. Typically harvest mice like to build their nests around a supporting structure such as a bramble or plant stem so areas of brambles with lots of grass tussocks are ideal. Established field headlands provide such a habitat, which many birds and insects also use for shelter and food. This demonstrates the importance of maintaining a connected, marginal habitat while harvest mice make a good edge indicator species.

In our survey we split into two teams to tackle opposite halves of a large field with an excellent looking hedge in the middle. Unfortunately the weather chose this moment to go from drizzle to downpour; but it takes more than a bit of rain to stop

the VRS! We persisted and in a wet two hours we found 11 nests. This, in combination with a previous training day held at nearby Norton Farm, now puts the total number for harvest mice within the same Selborne area at 55 nests recorded – something of an improvement on the original single record.

With more surveys still to go, things are looking bright for the harvest mouse in Hampshire.

To get involved in this project contact your local SDNPA Ranger – to find out more about this fascinating little mammal visit www.mammal.org.uk/harvestmouse_survey

CHRIS GURNEY
WESTERN DOWNS APPRENTICE RANGER

From left to right: Harvest mouse.
© D.Middleton. Harvest mouse nest.
Searching the field margin for nests.
Searching for nests in the rain.
© Russel Cleaver

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 4**
YEAR OF
HARD WORK
AT MARWELL
- 5**
SECRETS OF
ARCHAEOLOGY
- 9**
THE QUEENS
ARE COMING
- 10**
TWENTY YEARS
- 14**
WHITE LION
POND
- 16**
A WALK OF
A LIFETIME



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE, I HOPE THAT IT WILL BE ONE OF ENJOYMENT AND GOOD HEALTH.

The VRS Committee has been busy these past few months. We welcomed Helena Lewis as the new Central Downs representative, but were very sorry to lose Chris Hicks as the Eastern Downs Exceat representative who has done sterling work over the years – many thanks Chris. On 3 December committee member Stephen Allberry and I gave a VRS update to the SDNPA Members. It was a stimulating session with many questions from Members – I certainly came away with a strong feeling of their support and appreciation for the work done by the VRS. In early December the committee agreed to provide VRS funding of £4,000 towards the Midhurst South Pond Restoration Project from our SDNPA Conservation Reserve (£30,000 given to the VRS for conservation projects following the wind-up of the SDJC) – this is the first time we have utilised this fund. The VRS grant application of £1,000 to ARC (referred to in my last report) for the Rother River boardwalk was approved which made a significant contribution to the project – the second successful grant application in the past year made by the VRS committee.

In line with the SDNPA's desire to expand volunteering into new avenues, Nick Heasman, Western Downs Area Manager, and I met with the management of Queen Elizabeth Country Park and the Alice Holt Forum's (the group who manage Forestry Commission's Arboretum) volunteers to discuss possible affiliation to the VRS. Reaction from both organisations was very positive so work is now under way to draw up respective documents of understanding.

Looking ahead, thanks to all those who responded to our 2015 education survey, we had an excellent response. Proposals are now being discussed by the committee which will be communicated shortly.

NEVILL BROOKE, VRS CHAIRMAN



UPDATE FROM THE VRS TEAM

THE RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR HELP BY THE SECRETS OF THE HIGH WOODS TEAM HAS BEEN FANTASTIC WITH 180 PEOPLE EXPRESSING INTEREST IN SUPPORTING THE PROJECT.

With two more introductory training days held since Christmas, well over 100 people have now taken part in the day. As well as introducing the work of the project, we talk about the National Park as a whole and the role of the National Park Authority in developing and supporting it. We also talk about all the other work going on to understand more about our National Park to help make sure it remains a very special place for future generations.

The Secrets of the High Woods project started with an aerial survey using a technique called Lidar to map the ground surface contours through the trees covering much of the Downs in West Sussex. The biggest area of work for the project is now looking on the ground at areas of potential archaeological interest exposed by the survey. The project team has held 'field survey' training days with Volunteers to look in more detail at how that work is done. Volunteers are also carrying out research in archives to further support this work and will be talking to local people to gather 'oral histories'. This adds a completely new dimension to the work supported by Volunteer Rangers, allowing more people the chance to use existing skills or learn new ones to protect the hugely important heritage of the National Park. After all, some of the very earliest signs of occupation by people in these islands have been found here.

Thanks to all of you who got back to us about items of uniform/protective clothing that you needed. Sarah Brett gathered all the feedback we received and we have now distributed everything that has been requested. If you haven't got what you were expecting, do let Sarah or Cris know by emailing vrs@southdowns.gov.uk or calling 01730 819327 and we can sort that out.

We celebrated a real landmark for the VRS late last year, with two Volunteer Rangers completing 30 years contributing to work for the South Downs. Graham Rutland and Tony Bish joined when the group was only three years old, still based in East Sussex and running with the support of East Sussex County Council. They both helped with the huge task of reopening blocked footpaths and bridleways after the infamous storm of October 1987 and have seen huge changes in the scale and extent of the work of the VRS. We presented a special Long Service Award to Graham at the Stanmer and Seven Sisters pre-Christmas gathering and hopefully will have had a chance to catch-up with Tony by the time you read this. Thanks from us all to them for their remarkable contribution.

IAN HARTLE
VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Above: Graham Rutland receives the first ever 30 year VRS Long Service Award.
© Jan Knowlson

SAND MARTINS IN THE QUARRY

ON SUNDAY 25 JANUARY, I AND FOUR OTHER WEALDEN HEATH VOLUNTEERS WENT OUT ON A TASK WITH GRAHAM WEST (WEALDEN HEATH RANGER) TO A REDUNDANT QUARRY ON THE EDGE OF LORD'S PIECE.

Our task was to remove scrub and trees from the floor and side walls (as far as we could safely reach), to try to bring in more light and create a more unrestricted flight path to encourage sand martins to nest in the exposed quarry face.

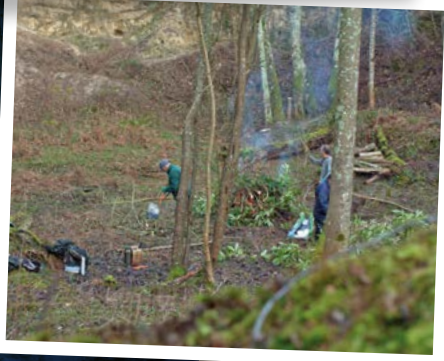
I understand that this work is being carried out in conjunction with the ARC (Arun & Rother Connections) and Bury Parish Council, who I think own the site.

A couple of interesting facts I've learnt after reading up on sand martins (*Riparia riparia*); although they weigh little more than a £2 coin they can excavate a tunnel of up to one metre in length! The male does all the initial manual labour in digging the tunnel and once he has encouraged a mate to inspect his efforts, she comes along at the end to tidy up all the mess and put in the finishing touches.

If people want to visit – the quarry is a peaceful little site hidden away on the southern edge of Lord's Piece. I never knew it was here, but will certainly return in the spring to see if any of the returning sand martins have found this new potential nesting patch. Lord's Piece is a lovely site and an important area of Sussex heathland that is home to the endangered field cricket. I've only had a quick glimpse of one of these crickets, after sneaking up on one slowly before it dived back into its burrow, so I definitely need to return to stake out the field crickets too. Also not far away are Burton and Chingford Ponds that are teaming with wildlife.

CHANTAL LAURENT
WEALDEN HEATHS VOLUNTEER RANGER

Main: Clearing the quarry. © Chantal Laurent
Top right: Sand martin. © D. Middleton
Right: Volunteers on the bottom of the quarry. © Chantal Laurent



A YEAR OF HARD WORK AT MARWELL



OVER THE LAST YEAR MARWELL WILDLIFE HAS BEEN ABLE TO UNDERTAKE A GREAT NUMBER OF CONSERVATION PROJECTS WITH THE KIND ASSISTANCE OF THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER SERVICE.

Marwell Wildlife is committed to habitat restoration and species recovery of native habitats including the semi-natural ancient woodland and chalk grasslands which lie within Marwell's estate. As a conservation charity, being able to call upon the assistance of the South Downs Volunteers for the larger tasks within our work has been hugely valuable. Since the beginning of the year, the Volunteers have completed a number of habitat restoration projects including hazel coppicing within our woodland to restore the valuable shrubby understorey, chalk grassland restoration and even habitat creation through wildflower sowing within the zoological park. Habitat creation is a priority for Marwell, increasing and expanding the area of these diverse and valuable habitats. This has been incorporated into new developments within the zoo, with a particular focus on chalk grassland.

In particular a trial of wildflower over-seeding was undertaken with the South Downs VRS and Western Downs Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark in the African Valley – a large mixed species paddock in the north of the zoological park (holding ostrich, waterbuck and Grevy's zebra). The trial aims to assess



colonisation of wildflowers on this less-intensively grazed chalk grassland. To start the area was raked very hard to scarify the substrate, followed by a second rake to tease out the thatch and finally over-seeded with the chalk meadow wildflower mix, including birdsfoot trefoil, small scabious and yellow rattle. The low stocking density within the African Valley means a diverse, structured and open sward should develop over time once the dominating grasses have been suppressed. Depending on the colonisation rates and dispersal we would like to expand such areas to diversify the overall patch composition and structure. These areas could form part of a network of herb-rich island habitats connecting native areas within and around the park.

The skilled and hard-working commitment of the volunteers has meant we can move forward with such broad projects and we are hugely grateful for their assistance. We continue to work closely with Elaina and the Volunteers and look forward to another year working with the South Downs National Park.

DR MARTIN WILKIE
CONSERVATION BIOLOGIST,
MARWELL WILDLIFE



Clockwise from top left:
Chapmans Zebra. Ostrich.
© Marwell Wildlife
Raking over the paddock.
Sowing the chalk meadow
wildflower mix.
© Martin Wilkie



THE SECRETS OF ARCHAEOLOGY AS DISCOVERED BY A NEW VOLUNTEER

ON 20 JANUARY 2015 I WAS ONE OF A GROUP OF RAW RECRUITS WHO WERE INTRODUCED INTO THE SECRETS OF THE HIGH WOODS PROJECT.

We were undertaking training by looking at different types of map imagery, such as modern and historical Ordnance Survey, Local Relief LIDAR and Composites, as well as the use of tablets (the electronic ones).

We were taught how to compare the different map types and to interpret the features shown. We then went on to learn how to input data onto tablets and how to save our reports.

We had a break for lunch and all sat together talking about the most diverse subjects. I found it very stimulating to meet people, talk about their hobbies, their pasts and their hopes for the future.

After lunch we went to "...the deepest, darkest woods..." in the Queen Elizabeth Country Park to undertake a field survey. We piled into the project's recently acquired Landrover and whilst it started to drizzle on the way, rain had stopped by the time we pulled up at the visitor centre and, with all the maps, rucksacks, winter clothing etc, we were ready for anything.

After two attempts at opening the gate to get into the forest, we at last reached the point of departure for our journey into the unknown. We descended from our trusty vehicle and were given our whistles, tablets, maps and instructions.

We had previously agreed targets on the map to investigate, but when we actually got to the point in question decided unanimously that what was seen on the ground was very different from that displayed on the LIDAR map. This map had suggested that under the

forest canopy around us was an ancient field system. But on arrival my first impression was 'Where? There's nothing to see!'

Yet after careful inspection and using sighting poles it became obvious that there was a feature after all! A slight depression, from which period in time and why it was there we could not be sure. Details were duly recorded and we went on to the second point of call.

Our next feature was a low ridge, difficult to see and also difficult to access due to rampant undergrowth. British brambles were successfully fulfilling their role of protector of all that is below. Our afternoon's field survey was turning out to be much more than a walk in the park!

Well, as darkness came rolling in between the trees, we said our goodbyes to the landscape that had given us an insight into what the next few months and year had in store for us. We thanked the High Woods team, Kimberley and Rebecca, for their patience and their knowledge which had been invaluable to us. For my part, I would also like to thank the leaders and the team for treating me as an equal and not looking at me as a disabled person. I won't be able to work in the field again, but at least I can undertake the archival research to complement the surveys as the project unfolds.

CHRIS LE GALLEZ
VOLUNTEER IN THE 'SECRETS OF THE HIGH WOODS' PROJECT

Above left: Locating the field system.

Right: Learning to use the equipment.

© Chris de Gallez

SOUTH DOWNS FOLK SINGERS (SDFS)



FELLOW VOLUNTEER STEVE ALLBERRY AND I ARE LONG STANDING (AND SOMETIMES FALLING DOWN!) MEMBERS OF THE SDFS.

We sing and research traditional songs of the South Downs (and Hampshire/Sussex) sung accapella in support of local educational, community and fun events. We just sing for the joy of it. Our first CD of 21 songs will sell out by mid-2015 and we are considering producing a follow up CD in 2015/16, as our repertoire has expanded considerably over the last two years.

Steve has recently been researching songs that are specific to the 'Secrets of the High Woods' project as part of the oral history. Both our voices are distinctly bass orientated so don't be shy, you could practise the songs whilst working on the various SDVRS projects. You can access our repertoire from the blogsite (www.southdownsfolksingers.blogspot.co.uk) and come and sing them all evening at one of the three monthly hostelry venues (Midhurst, Lewes and Worthing), fuelled by whatever is your poison!

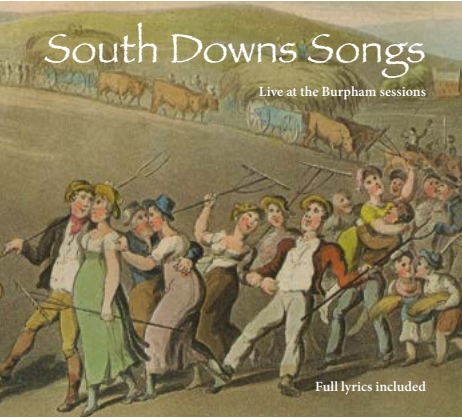
All singers, whether beginners or experienced are welcome at our meetings. We are open to requests from events that want us to sing for them until March, when

Top: South Downs Folk Singers in action © John Crane
Right: South Downs Songs.

we mainly fix the programme for the year and produce our flyer. To date we are provisionally participating at the Weald & Downland Museum in May, Kipling's 'Batemans' (National Trust) & the Arundel Festival in August, South Downs Folk Festival, Bognor in September, and the Weald & Downland's 'Christmas Market' in November.

We are also supporting/participating in the SDS HLF 'Secret Shore' project which will mix the teaching of social history as a background, with the songs of the coastal plain over the next 2/3 years.

JOHN CRANE
SECRETS OF THE HIGH WOODS
VOLUNTEER RANGER



WORKING IN THE SNOW

THERE WAS JUST A DUSTING OF SNOW WHEN I LEFT THE HOUSE IN HAILSHAM ON TUESDAY 20 JANUARY, BUT IT SOON BECAME CLEAR THAT IT HAD WORKED ITS USUAL MALIGN MAGIC ON THE ROADS.

The congestion was awful everywhere. As the Landrover made its way up Butts Lane, Willingdon, the snowfall became heavier and along the crest of the Downs it looked quite arctic. However, away from this highest point it wasn't so bad. We went ahead, clearing gorse, hawthorn and blackthorn and got a decent fire going (note ring of melted snow in the photo), which became so hot, that no-one could bear to stay near it for long. The biggest hazard was sudden drops and rabbit holes, hidden by the snow which got the better of several of us, including yours truly.

DAVID ELLIS
EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

"...GOT A DECENT FIRE GOING, WHICH BECAME SO HOT, THAT NO-ONE COULD BEAR TO STAY NEAR IT FOR LONG."

Main: Keeping warm on Chalk Farm, Butts Brow. Top: Working in the snow. © David Ellis



LIVE FENCING (CERCA VIVA) IN COSTA RICA

A FIRST TIME, ENJOYABLE VISIT TO COSTA RICA NOT ONLY ENABLED ME TO SEE AN AMAZING NUMBER OF THEIR PLANTS, WILDLIFE AND BIRDS BUT ALSO TO UNDERSTAND JUST HOW IMPORTANT A PART CONSERVATION PLAYS IN THAT BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY.

I was soon aware that although agricultural land is enclosed, fencing is rather different from the sort to which SDNP Volunteer Rangers are accustomed to. Plantain, pineapple, guava or cattle meadows are bordered by small, usually leafy Poro saplings and these are regularly coppiced.

Branches of that tree about two metres in length are trimmed of side growth and pushed into the field boundary line about one metre apart. Three single parallel strands of barbed wire are then stapled to these posts, about half a metre apart. The landowner can expect fairly quick results as the Poro roots push into the wet volcanic soil and the sunshine encourages rapid growth. Any needed replacements are easily inserted.

Within a year the tree trunk will start to grow around the stapled wire and the bushy top hamper will be providing shade and insect habitat. Six or seven years later when the

saplings will have increased in height and diameter the tops are pollarded down to the original top and the upper wire is removed. Another parallel lower strand of barbed wire is then stapled in place. The coppiced, leafy branches are heaped for Brahmin cattle feed. These fences are apparently heavy with blossom in the dry period.

The result provides a sturdy, cattle proof fence which is low maintenance, regularly recycled, a boon to wild life and pleasing to the eye!

Incidentally, I passed through more than one 'little gate' recognised by me as a 'New Zealand or Poor mans' gate!

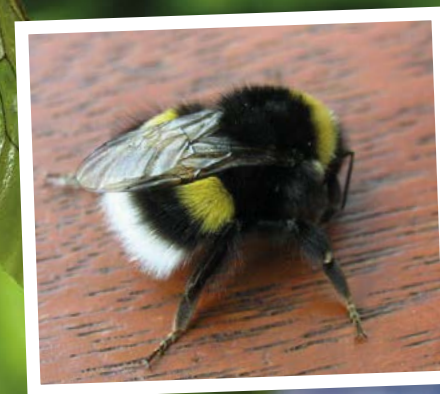
SHIRLEY BRICE
EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

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Above: Traditional fencing in
Costa Rica © Shirley Brice

“THE RESULT PROVIDES A STURDY, CATTLE PROOF FENCE WHICH IS LOW MAINTENANCE, REGULARLY RECYCLED, A BOON TO WILD LIFE AND PLEASING TO THE EYE!”

THE QUEENS ARE COMING

FEBRUARY IS THE USUAL START TO THE BUMBLEBEE SEASON. THE FIRST BUMBLES TO BE SEEN ARE YOUNG QUEENS THAT WERE BORN TOWARDS THE END OF LAST YEAR'S SEASON, BETWEEN MAY AND SEPTEMBER.



Following birth these new youngsters will have quickly mated with a male, then fattened themselves up with surplus nectar and pollen and finally dug a small hole in which to hibernate over winter.

Living off their stored body fat they hibernate for up to nine months, awakening when they sense that the temperature is rising as spring arrives. They emerge from their hibernation site weak and thin, so the first thing they do is forage for their own nectar and pollen. The nectar gives them energy and strength and the pollen builds up their body mass and matures their ovaries, so that they quickly become fully-grown adult queens. They will then build a nest where they can start to develop a new colony. You often see queen bees flying around close to the ground, searching for a suitable nest site.

There are eight common species of bumblebee in the South of England. Most of them emerge from hibernation in March, but there are two that emerge in February, the buff-tailed bumblebee *Bombus terrestris* and the white-tailed bumblebee *B. lucorum*.

These are the species shown in the photographs and they are likely to be the ones you will first see. A common one in March is the red-tailed bumblebee *B. lapidarius*. They are easily identified by the colour of their tail, so focus on this when you see them. Queens are much larger than female workers and males – similar size to a gooseberry – which makes them quite distinctive.

The nectar and pollen essential for bumblebee survival is obtained from flowers, so a queen's emergence from hibernation needs to coincide with early spring blooms. The first trees and shrubs to flower include cherry, willow, hawthorn and blackthorn. Traditional native flowers have more nectar and pollen than cultivates, so spring garden varieties like bluebell, bugle, comfrey, mahonia and pieris will attract the queens.

Bumblebees gather nectar using their tongues but not all tongues are the same length. The various species are usually divided into two categories for simplicity – long-tongued and short-tongued. Bumbles do not feed on every flower just because it contains nectar

and pollen. They tend to restrict themselves to flowers that match their tongue lengths. Spring flowers that are tubular, like comfrey and pieris, will be visited by long-tongued bumbles whereas shallow, open-faced flowers like hawthorn and blackthorn will attract the short-tongued species.

See if you can recognise some differences in the bumblebee species by looking closely at the colours of their bodies. More enjoyment can be gained by learning how to identify the common species and there is a wealth of information on the website of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT) (bumblebeeconservation.org) to get you started. Even better is to attend a free guided talk-and-walk – ask the BBCT for details of any in your locality.

CLIFF HEPBURN
EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

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Main: Red-tailed bumblebee.
(*Bombus lapidarius*). © SDNPA/Jan Knowlson
Above: White-tailed bumblebee
(*Bombus lucorum*). © BBCT

COMPLETING 20 YEARS WITH THE VOLUNTEER RANGERS MAN AND BOY (WELL, ACTUALLY MAN AND OAP!) BROUGHT BACK A FEW MEMORIES OF MY TIMES ON THE DOWNS.

TWENTY YEARS



My first task in 1994 was very nearly my last. We were tackling overhanging vegetation on the South Downs Way by cutting branches while standing on the roof of the Land Rover. Being in those days rather more agile (and I suspect because it was my first task) I was volunteered to be the one to do the lopping while others on the ground cleared the resulting brash. We established a method of operation whereby the driver started the engine as a warning he was about to move off and I then crouched down and hung on to the roof rack. Unfortunately Cris Savill, who was driving, started the engine while the vehicle was still in gear. The Land Rover lurched violently forward while I teetered on the roof and my career as a Volunteer Ranger was launched – very nearly literally!

Cris had a leading role in another of my best memories when he drove the Land Rover full of eager Volunteers into a large puddle near Millpond Bottom. Unfortunately the puddle was a lot deeper than he thought and the Land Rover bottomed out on the central ridge. Despite our many attempts to free it which included attaching the winch to various fence posts until they threatened to break, the vehicle remained stuck firm. Cris then approached the local farmer for some help but it so happened that the Land Rover

was carrying no logo so the farmer, thinking we were a load of off-roaders trespassing on his land, told Cris to get lost in no uncertain terms. It was only after a call to Nigel James in the office that a rescue was finally effected after several hours of hanging around as his honey tones repaired the damage done by Cris and the farmer finally took pity on us.

However, perhaps my favourite memory involved an otter holt, a boat and a ducking for two of our number. The plan was to build an otter holt on an island in the River Arun on a January day. The bridge to the island had been badly damaged by a fallen tree so John Blamire had acquired a small boat to ferry four paving slabs and other building materials over to the island. The slabs were too big to fit inside the boat so they had to be balanced one at a time across the thwart. Initially all went well but then one of the slabs was lost overboard and sank to the bottom of the river. We learnt from this mistake and tied a rope around the next slab but as the boat neared the island this slab too started to slip and tipping the boat to one side decanted Dick Cole into the water. Jake Wright teetering on the muddy bank grabbed the rope to rescue the slab but was overcome by gravity and the slipperiness of his footing and despite all his efforts was pulled inexorably down until he joined Dick in the water. Happy days indeed!

Of course, not all volunteer days have ended in disaster and 20 years of Wednesdays on the Downs and the Weald have brought lots of pleasure and good company. I have now volunteered for more years than I worked for any employer – long may it all continue.

JAMES TOLSON
CENTRAL DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER



"THE LAND ROVER LURCHED VIOLENTLY FORWARD WHILE I TEETERED ON THE ROOF AND MY CAREER AS A VOLUNTEER RANGER WAS LAUNCHED – VERY NEARLY LITERALLY!"



NEW STARTER

FIRST DAY

My first day was WET! When I arrived at the visitor centre at Woolmer Forest I could barely see the car park. However, this didn't stop us and with Ranger Laura and another Volunteer we burnt scrub for the day. This was a really enjoyable day and, despite the rain and the hard-work, I knew immediately that I wanted to join the VRS. The real surprise was during the afternoon we drove off deeper into the woods and came across a really beautiful spot which I had no idea even existed. It was a terrific day!

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED?

I went to the inaugural South Downs Country Fair last August and spotted the South Downs National Park tent. I was lucky enough to speak to Nevill Brooke who advised me on how to get involved. It was perfect timing as I was approaching the end of my Open

University degree in Environmental Sciences and wanted to know how I could get more hands on experience and indulge my passion for woodland.

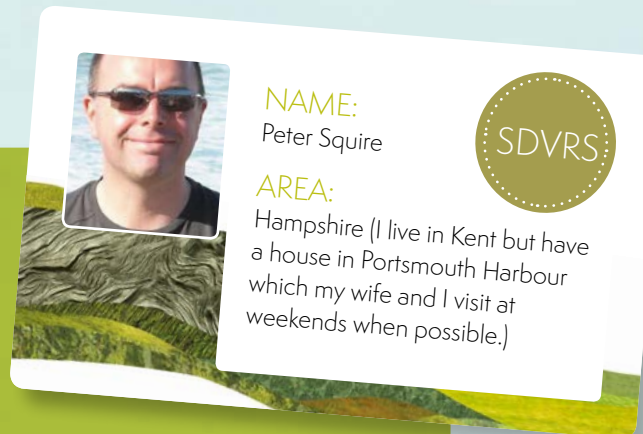
UNUSUAL FACT

Not necessarily an unusual fact, but I have just completed a six year self-funded degree in Environmental Sciences. I did this whilst working full time in IT and whilst juggling the usual commitments of everyday life. I am really passionate about changing career so this has been a great achievement.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY

I love walking on Beacon Hill and enjoy a picnic in the summer months.

I also love the pubs and villages in the Meon Valley – perfect after a long walk!



NAME:
Peter Squire

AREA:
Hampshire (I live in Kent but have a house in Portsmouth Harbour which my wife and I visit at weekends when possible.)

SDVRS

YOUR REVIEWS

This section is all about sharing reviews of your favourite things. Tell us about books you've read, pubs you've visited, tools or gadgets you've used or even websites that you'd recommend to other Volunteers. Email your reviews, of up to 100 words, to dt@southdowns.gov.uk with a picture.



TRADITIONAL
INN AWARD



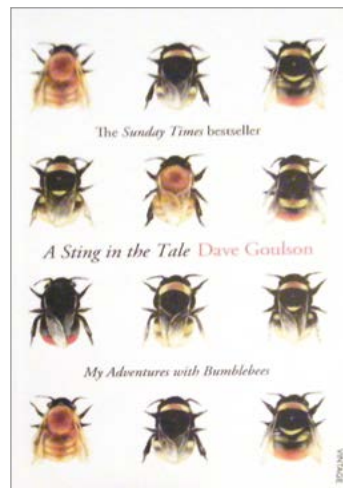
Volunteers, if you know of a pub that deserves this award, please let us know. We're talking about good old-fashioned public houses, rather than gastro pubs or themed inns. We want to know about places where you don't need to take your boots off before crossing the threshold! Send us a photo and 100 words explaining why the pub you nominate should be recognised.

THE TICHBORNE ARMS, TICHBORNE NR. ALRESFORD, HAMPSHIRE, SO24 0NA

This delightful, unspoilt rural pub is the focal point of a similarly unspoilt village. Most of the cottages are thatched and the old manor house still runs the estate on which they stand. Visiting the area today, away from busy main roads, makes you feel like you are stepping back into the 1950's.

When we arrived in our muddy boots, the wood burner was on, the interior was cosy and the local labrador came over to add to the host's welcome. As strangers we were treated like friends. The ale was real and the lunch was hearty. This is a pub worth going out of the way to find, and you might have to, as it is well off the tourist trail.

BOOK REVIEW



A STING IN THE TALE BY DAVE GOULSON PUBLISHER – RANDOM HOUSE (VINTAGE BOOKS)

My children have a knack of picking apt Christmas presents and I was pleased to find this in my stocking.

Dave Goulson is currently Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex and has a long career history specialising in bumblebee ecology and conservation. The book covers this field in detail in an authoritative but very readable, amusing and discursive fashion. It is, above all, a plea for more effort to be made towards understanding and protecting these vitally important insects. It's often thought, for example,

that one bee is much like another in terms of fertilising plants but insects are specialists too. We learn that only bumblebees will satisfactorily fertilise tomatoes and certain other commercially important crops and there's a substantial industry involved in breeding colonies and sending them to producers all over the world. Nevertheless, as we all know, this engaging creature is under threat in ways as yet imperfectly understood.

Prof. Goulson is also, of course, the founder of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and, if you are an Amazon customer, that

company will donate 8% of your spending to the organisation if you click through to them from the link on the Trust's 'Support' page instead of going direct to their website. After reading this book I guarantee you'll always do so.

With an expert-led bumblebee walk written in to our Volunteer rota next quarter this was an invaluable intro. Altogether an engrossing read or, as Mrs W. put it, "Will you get your head out of that book and carve the turkey!"

RON WELLS
EASTERN DOWNS
VOLUNTEER RANGER

FESTIVE ACTIVITIES AT CHRISTMAS

LAST DECEMBER THE VARIOUS AREA TEAMS IN THE VRS WERE BUSY CELEBRATING THEIR END OF YEAR'S VOLUNTEERING BY HOLDING THEIR OWN FESTIVE SOCIAL ACTIVITIES.

In the Wealden Heath, Rangers held their usual Christmas tree cutting task on Sunday 14 December on Ambersham Common where a number of Volunteers came together from different areas to carry out heathland clearance. We spent a pleasant sunny morning cutting out invasive conifers and ended with a lovely barbeque, fire-roasted jacket potatoes and a homemade trifle, all washed down with a little mulled wine, sherry and ginger wine. Everyone who wanted one got to take their very own Christmas tree home too.

Meanwhile, to mark their end of year, the Western Downs Volunteers all gathered at a hostelry in Wickham for an evening's meal plus an exciting game of Christmas skittles.

This has now developed into a serious competition for Roger Stacey was defending his dominance of the event – he has won the prestigious trophy for the past two years (a carved wooden statuette of a kestrel). A third success would see him win the trophy outright.

Volunteers had been keenly awaiting this competition... some were even rumoured to have been practising hard beforehand. And what was this, a pair of young Rights

of Way Rangers had been entered late to the competition; were they 'ringers' set up to challenge Roger for his crown? Tension was mounting and side bets were being laid, including on Nevill the Chairman of the VRS who was strongly fancied in the warm up round. Playing in pairs, the competitors began to fall, in line with the skittles. By the time the last round opened, a tight finish was guaranteed. Elliott and Andy of the RoW team had quelled all other volunteers, only Roger and his wife could catch them now. A breathless hush descended as Roger, calm as ever, elegantly bowled his last ball. You could have heard a pin drop – but sadly the skittles didn't. And so Roger was vanquished, the trophy was awarded to the worthy winners from the Rights of Way. Then, to finish up the evening, our chairman Nevill Brooke played a captain's innings to win the last man standing in the quick knock-out of "Killer Skittles".

The festive end of the year proved to be most enjoyable to many Volunteers throughout the South Downs. Roll on the challenges of 2015...

RUSSELL CLEAVER
WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER



From top to bottom:
Andy and Elliott being awarded the Skittles trophy by Nevill Brooke.
Skittles. © Russel Cleaver
Chatting by the fire at Ambersham Common. © Chantal Laurent



PIC IN THE PARK GRID REF: SU579296

Early morning on the Upper Itchen.

On the coldest day in January we explored the paths along the River Itchen between Tichborne and Ovington. It was cold and clear with hoar frost underfoot, whilst trout were active in the river...

CAPTION COMPETITION

CAN YOU CREATE A WITTY CAPTION FOR THIS PHOTOGRAPH? EMAIL YOUR IDEAS TO DT@SOUTHDOWNSGOV.UK



The winner of last edition's caption competition was...

"YOU TURN RIGHT, NEXT LEFT AND THEN TESCO IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU!"

ANDY SMITH



Photos © Jan Knowlson

WHITE LION POND

AN OLD CONCRETE DEW POND ON THE DOWNS ABOVE BEDDINGHAM HAS BEEN RESTORED BY MYSELF, MARK HAYWARD AND OUR WEDNESDAY VOLUNTEER GROUP FROM SEVEN SISTERS COUNTRY PARK.

The farmer, in this case, didn't want a clay pond lining which is how we normally restore ponds. There is a snail that is sometimes found in muddy water that can carry Liver Fluke – a disease transmitted to cattle. So we were on new territory with attempting to fix the concrete pond.

Volunteers worked hard clearing all the vegetation from the pond to prepare the surface. Mark and I then used an angle grinder and hand tools to get the cracks between the concrete to a smooth and straight-ish edge, ready for sealant. We then sealed the very middle point outwards, roughly 4 square metres, the amount of sealant we had didn't go very far!

The work took a day between all of us, nine Volunteers and two Rangers, however we weren't sure how well it would work having never used the sealant before. We left the pond and hoped for good weather so the sealant could set. A few weeks later after a lot of rain I revisited the pond, expecting a bit of water at least, you can see the results from the photo. We still aren't sure if we have fixed the leak as only time will tell, however it's looking pretty good at the moment!

A big thank you to the farmer for letting us do the job and a massive thank you to our fantastic Volunteers who are always up for a good project!

JAN KNOWLSON
SDNPA EASTERN DOWNS RANGER

“THE WORK TOOK A DAY BETWEEN ALL OF US, NINE VOLUNTEERS AND TWO RANGERS, HOWEVER WE WEREN'T SURE HOW WELL IT WOULD WORK HAVING NEVER USED THE SEALANT BEFORE.”

THE EVENTS SEASON IS HERE!



EVENTS ATTENDED BY THE SDNPA RANGE FROM A FULL STAND OF MARQUEES, DISPLAYS AND ACTIVITIES TO SIMPLY PARKING UP OUR NEW EVENTS VAN ON A SEAFRONT FOR THE DAY AND TALKING TO PASSERS-BY.

Each year events are manned by a mixture of SDNPA staff, Members and SDVRS volunteers.

Volunteer Ranger input is particularly valuable as you are able to talk to the public about all of the different projects you work on across the National Park.

We would love more Volunteer Rangers to get involved with the events we attend so if you'd like to get involved please speak to your Area Team. No particular skills or knowledge are required, just a willingness to chat to the public about the work of the National Park and your role within this – you will always be working alongside SDNPA staff and/or Members. As well as benefitting the public with your knowledge it always surprises me how much you can learn yourself on days like these.

Take a look at the list of events we're attending this year on the intranet here – <http://intranet.southdowns.gov.uk/directorates/strategy-and-partnerships/communications-and-engagement/events>.

I look forward to working with lots of you in 2015!

LAURA WARREN
EVENTS AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS DOCUMENT

Each month we produce a two page document outlining the top work highlights of the SDNPA from the previous month. The document is sent out internally through the weekly Update newsletter as well as externally to the parishes within the National Park. Each edition is stored on the intranet in the Resources section under the Key Facts and Figures page so you can always keep up to date on everything that we're working on.



WINCHESTER CITY MILL

The South Downs National Park Authority and the National Trust are working together on an exciting new interpretation gateway at a significant heritage site in the heart of Winchester. Winchester City Mill is a working museum which is owned and managed by the National Trust. It is also within 100 metres of the end/start point of the South Downs Way (SDW) at the King Alfred Statue. The mill is a rare surviving example of an urban corn mill powered by the fast-flowing River Itchen and produces wholemeal flour ground from wheat grown in the South Downs.

A permanent exhibition and information point within the retail space and through to the main museum area will be installed by mid-June. The exhibition which will run across these two spaces will be used to strengthen the site's key messages by placing them within the wider context of the South Downs National Park (SDNP).

Winchester is a significant western gateway to the SDNP and the city attracts an estimated 4 million visitors each year with Winchester City Mill welcoming approximately 40,000 visitors annually. The Mill was previously the site for a youth hostel which served visitors to the SDW. This joint project will place the City Mill as a key information and inspiration point for visitors who want to experience the SDNP. The heritage significance of the site will be substantiated and enlivened by linking the central theme of food production to the surrounding landscape that supports it.

Above: Winchester City Mill
© National Trust

A WALK OF A LIFETIME

THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH



THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH NATIONAL TRAIL IS RATED AS ONE OF THE TOP 10 WALKS TO BE FOUND IN THE WORLD BY LONELY PLANET.

It provides access to 630 miles of stunning coastal scenery from Minehead, Somerset to Poole, Dorset; nearly all of it on natural ground and right at the edge of the sea. It's a journey along one of the most diverse coastal landscapes in the world where no two days walking are ever the same. The heritage, wildlife, geology and scenery along the way are truly inspirational and every day brings stunning new experiences.

My wife and I finished this walk in November last year at Poole; it has been our retirement project for the past 5 years. We have had numerous visits to the West Country, ensuring that we walked the path in sequence and solving the variety of logistical problems that walking a linear route presents. We found an average of ten miles or so a day the most comfortable, it gives time to pause and explore the beautiful landscape. In all we have had 66 days of walking to complete the 630 miles of this National Trail. Some sections of the path can be demanding and a challenge, the entire route climbs an incredible 115,000 feet in total – that's four times the height of Everest! Whilst walking the

path there have been too many inspirational and dramatic experiences to list in an article like this but we have seen some of the most beautiful, the most dramatic and the most inspiring views that we have ever enjoyed.

There have been incredible experiences, such as coming round the headland at Morte Point, north Devon and feeling the full force of the Atlantic wind suddenly hit you, to sitting in the Cadgwith Inn on the Lizard where a group of fishermen just burst into song for the evening.

Accommodation and refreshment is easy to find, it is after all quite a tourist

area. There is a good support network to help the walker, with a very active support association, an excellent National Trail website and we found discovering public transport times and routes so easy with the Traveline South West website. This integrates all public transport links into one itinerary planner – and I've found that it also works for journeys across the South Downs!

The National Trail guidebooks are invaluable whilst walking, the route is so long there are four volumes which add so much detail and

commentary, allowing one to fully appreciate the dramatic landscape. The route is well signed but unobtrusively so, frequently with just National Trail acorn markers made of stone placed at path junctions to indicate the Coast Path. It can be isolated, one difficult day included 8 valley crossings, each requiring a descent to sea level and steep ascent back to 300ft, and there is no easy escape as the nearest road to this stretch is over 5 miles inland.

It is quite amazing that we still have this historical route, trodden in days gone by the troops of the coastguard who were out to track and pursue smugglers and wreckers. The coastguards literally had to see into every cove and inlet on the coast. This meant that their well-beaten path, often punctuated with stone stiles, had to hug the cliff top providing the splendidly scenic views the Coast Path enjoys today.

We are already missing our regular trips to the south west but our local National Trail now calls, so time for the South Downs Way – sounds like another article for next year's Downland Thymes!

BY RON WILDER

WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

Left: Morwenstow. Right: Bugle Cove.

© Ron Wilder

South Downs
Volunteer Ranger Service

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. Issue 67, March 2015. © SDNPA.

The information contained in this newsletter was, as far as known, correct at the date of issue. The South Downs National Park Authority cannot, however, accept responsibility for any error or omission.

Design: The Way Design (0358)

Paper stock: Printed on Cyclus Offset, 100% recycled paper. Please recycle after use.

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