

HEATHLANDS NEWS



HELPING YOUR HEATHS

**Funding raised by
The National Lottery**
and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



Welcome to the first bi annual Heathlands Reunited Newsletter, keeping you up to date on project progress and opportunities. If you have any comments and questions please send them to us at heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

SAVING OUR HEATHS

Rare reptiles and amphibians such as the sand lizard and natterjack toad thrive on heath but less than 1 per cent of former heathland remains in the South Downs National Park. What's left is fragmented, reducing the diversity of plants and animals that make heaths both interesting and scientifically important.

The Heathlands Reunited project, led by the South Downs National Park Authority with 10 partner organisations, aims to create and improve heathland at 41 sites – covering an area greater than 1,200 football pitches and we have just finished the first year of this five year project.

Bruce Middleton, Heathlands Reunited Project Manager, said:

“Heathlands are ‘man-made’ and only exist because our ancestors used them to dig peat for fuel, harvest heather and graze animals, unwittingly creating a unique ‘mosaic’ of habitats which many plants and animals now can’t survive without.

“Without people working the ground, our heaths have gradually returned to scrub leaving the wildlife trapped and vulnerable in a few remaining ‘islands’. A staggering 60 per cent of heathland species are dependent on bare, sandy, south facing ground.



“A key part of our work will be with the local people who use and enjoy the heaths, for example, to get involved in scraping patches of bare earth or even encouraging communities to adopt and take responsibility for their heath.”

Rare heathland species that will benefit from the project include:

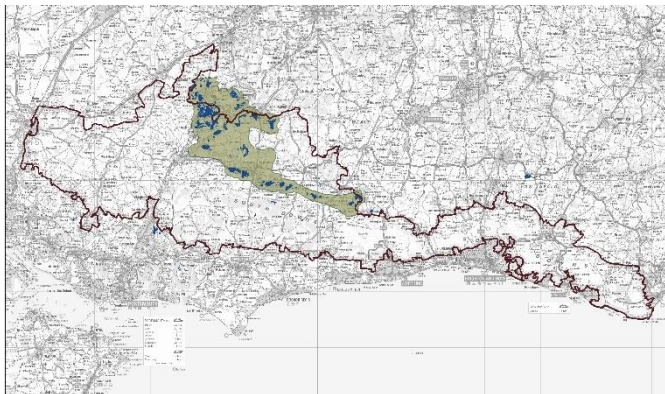
- The sand lizard, Britain’s rarest reptile, needs open sandy ground to incubate its eggs.
- The striking Minotaur beetle needs sandy ground to burrow in.
- The natterjack toad, Britain’s rarest amphibian, hunts best in warm, open sandy ground and needs warm shallow pools to breed in.

- In the 1980s less than 100 field crickets, *Gryllus campestris*, remained in the UK, on one heathland site in what is now the South Downs National Park. A careful reintroduction programme saved the species from extinction but Heathlands Reunited will create more places where these insects can be reintroduced.
- Like many UK butterflies the silver-studded blue has suffered a decline due to loss of its preferred habitat – warm lowland heath.

We officially launched the project in September 2016 at our Secrets of the Heath event with 2000 people attending.

This project has been generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund which have provided a £1.44 million grant which has been match funded by partners to bring the project total to £2.37m.

"Heathlands support many rare and endangered species but are themselves among the world's most threatened habitats," says Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East. "This is an important intervention that will not only restore and recreate many hundreds of acres of heathland but also greatly increase people's understanding of just how vital these habitats are."



Project Area in green. Project sites in blue.

OUR FIRST SUCCESS

Last October under the dark skies, in the depths of the heath, a scarecrow was born.

In reality Project Manager Bruce Middleton spent a lot of his own time building Heather out of heathland scrub to help spread the message about Heathlands Reunited at the Weald and Downland Scarecrow Parade.

Heather was put in place with a small plaque explaining who she was and then left to the mercy of the



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crowds at the Autumn Countryside Show. Judging took place over that weekend by the public, there was stiff competition from around 13 other organisations but the crowds crowned Heather the winner.



'She really was a very impressive scarecrow and definitely does a good job of representing the SDNP and Heathlands Reunited Project. Congratulations from all of us here at the Museum to everyone who was involved in her creation. There should hopefully be plenty more people coming to see her.'

Weald and Downland Museum

ON THE GROUND

**WE ARE IN *GROUND NESTING BIRD* SEASON
1 March–15 September**

Over the last winter 60 hectares of heath have been recreated and 3 kilometres of corridor have been made to link heath sites together.

The first corridor works happened in the Severalls between Midhurst Common and Stedham Common on the Cowdray Estate. This heathland has been mainly out-competed by invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* so contractors were called in to help us get on top of it.

The next clearance work happened between Lynchmere Common and Marley Common on the Cowdray Estate known as the Lynchmere Ridge. The main issue here was the growth of silver birch trees. These native trees grow readily all over Britain and often colonise heathlands very quickly – shading and outcompeting the heather. If they are not felled they

risk changing the heathlands back to a wooded landscape.

The corridors were created to re-join isolated heath islands to help improve the gene pool of species existing on these sites. Both corridors have helped widen the heath areas along the Serpent Trail as well.

Now that contractors have helped carry out these major works and clear these areas it is now possible for volunteers to maintain the area and will help with the continued widening of the corridors by mainly removing the *Rhododendron ponticum*.

Bracken will be a problem to some degree in the future and we will be continuing to look into options of controlling it, either with contractors or volunteers.



Bare ground creation on a south facing bank in the winter.



Bare Ground Creation – how it looks in the summer.

Sixty per cent of heathland insects rely on bare ground at some stage during their life cycle. They use it to heat themselves up so they are able to move and carry out their mating rituals. They also lay their eggs in bare ground too. If they become cold they can no longer move quickly when required – which can be a problem if they are being chased by a large predator.

Therefore the creation of bare ground is a critical part of the project works and will allow species to move across and thrive in these landscapes. This winter, bare ground was created at Bramshott Common, Longmoor, Broxhead Common, Weavers Down East, Lavington Common, Woolbeding Common and Black Down. In total this equalled 8.9 hectares which is equivalent to around 9 international rugby fields!



HIDDEN GEMS

Species to look out for on the heath this summer:

Rare Silver Studded Blue

In June and July look out for this rare butterfly (above) mainly restricted to heathland sites. It has a symbiotic relationship with ants. The silver-studded blue caterpillar feeds on young shoots of bell heather, protected from predators like sand wasps by black ants, ferrying it into their nest to pupate, but why? The grubs secrete sweet honeydew which the ants “milk” as payment. The adult butterfly emerges from the cocoon safe in the nest and crawls into the light to let its wings unfurl, protected until it is able to fly off and start the sneaky business all over again.

Sundew

Round-leaved sundews are found on damp heaths and bogs. Our ancestors thought that because the dew lived on after the sun had risen, the plant had alchemical properties and held the “elixir of life”. Sundews were used in herbal remedies for chest complaints including whooping cough and asthma. It was also used to kill streptococcus, which causes pneumonia and fevers. It is hemi-parasitic and avoids the need to grow extensive roots by tapping into surrounding grass roots.



Become a Wildlife Monitor for your local heath!
FREE TRAINING. Find out more here:
<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/heathlandsvolunteer>



WALK THE SERPENT TRAIL THIS SUMMER

Are you looking for your next long-distance walking challenge?

Join our FREE 64 mile long guided Serpent Trail walk from 17-22 July

The Serpent Trail isn't any ordinary walk. These heaths are a haven for some of Britain's rarest wildlife. They are an open, unique landscape teeming with hidden treasures and historical tales, no two of these heaths are the same.

Over six days we will be tackling this 64-mile-long trail joined by story tellers who will be bringing the heaths to life with re-enactments of real heathland stories. We will also be joined by the site manager for each heath we cross who will tell us a little more about the site's management and biodiversity.

There is even a FREE mini bus shuttle services from the South Downs Centre in Midhurst each day. This will pick you up and take you to the start point and bring you back at the end of the day.

We will be covering approximately 10 miles a day and you can join us for one day, a couple or all six.

Day 1 – Haslemere to Lynchmere

Day 2 – Iron Hill to Older Hill

Day 3 – Older Hill to Petworth

Day 4 – Petworth to Sutton End

Day 5 – Sutton End to Midhurst Common

Day 6 – Midhurst Common to Petersfield Heath

Please email heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk or call 01730 819320 to book your place.

To find out more about the serpent trail visit our website: www.southdowns.gov.uk/serpent-trail/



TAKE THE LEAD

Become an ambassador, enter the photo competition and watch canine confessions.

More than a million dogs, and their owners, live in the South East of England and with more than 3,300km of rights of way the South Downs National Park welcomes many thousands for their walkies every day.

Thanks to Heathlands Reunited the National Park's Take the Lead campaign re-launched in March and will continue through the whole ground-nesting-bird season across the heaths until September.

Since the vast majority of dogs behave well, this is a celebration of great dog owners – with a dog ambassador programme, social media competitions and a new series of films. We're asking responsible owners to help us encourage the few that are 'giving dogs a bad name' to step up and Take the Lead and this is how:

FOUR STEPS TO BEING A GOOD POOCH

1. Take the lead. Free-roaming dogs can harm and kill livestock and wildlife – or stray into dangerous territory.
2. Scoop the poop. Dog poo contains worms and diseases that can harm wildlife, humans and the environment.
3. Avoid the red flags. Ministry of Defence (MOD) land is free to use at certain times, but when red flags are flying, stay away!
4. Don't scare the birds. Ground-nesting-birds love our heathlands but curious dogs can scare birds, causing them to abandon their nests and their young. Stick to the paths, especially from 1 March to 15 September.

Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/takethelead for more information and to watch the canine confessions. For details on becoming a dog ambassador email heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk



GET INVOLVED! FREE EVENTS AND TRAINING

Through Heathlands Reunited we have several **FREE** events for you to get involved with, including family events like **Secrets of Your Heath at Ludshott Common**. Events especially for dogs such as **Hairy not Scary! Meet The Cattle** and training events such as **Species Identification courses**.

Heathland Species Identification Session

When: 17th June

Where: South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Join Heathlands Reunited Project manager Bruce Middleton who will teach you how to identify key heathland species. We will then go out into the field,

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look at the heathland habitat and put the new skills into practice. Later in the afternoon we will be joined by a member of the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre team who will run through how to easily upload the species you have found via irecord. This will allow you to add to Sussex's own data base of records, providing valuable information for others to access and share.

BioBlitz on the Heath

When: July 30th 2017 (10.00-16.00)

Where: Graffham Common GU28 0PT

JUST TURN UP

Local experts will be gathering at Graffham Common to see how many species they can discover in a day and they would love it if you'd join them! Be prepared to see the world through new eyes as the experts lead you around the common whilst together, you note down everything you discover.

This new data will be added to the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre database and will play an important part in providing conservationists with valuable monitoring data.

For our full list of events please visit:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/events and filter by heathlands reunited.

Heaths Need People! FIVE WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE HEATHS

Find role descriptions and sign up information at:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/heathlandsvolunteer>



- Become a wildlife monitor at your local heath site
- Take part in practical management
- Lead walks on the heath
- Become a dog ambassador on your nearest heathland site.
- Share with us historical knowledge of your local heath



BEEF FROM THE HEATH

Many sites which are managed for nature conservation are grazed by cattle and sheep. Grazing is essential for the restoration and management of the habitats vital for the survival of our native wildlife species. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust currently manages herds of British White and Shetland cows along with Shetland sheep. Their management system produces high quality meat in an environmentally responsible and sustainable way.

The cattle take approximately three years to mature before they are sent to slaughter. The age of sheep sent for slaughter is classed as mutton. Mutton has a richer flavour but requires longer and more careful cooking. Their animals take longer to mature than commercial breeds giving a deeper flavour and marbling. Beef is hung for three weeks and mutton for one week.

This local meat is available to buy and supports the work of the Wildlife Trust. The meat is sold in a variety of selection boxes. The larger the box, the lower the price per kilogram. A small beef or full mutton box should fit into three large freezer drawers. Boxes will be priced individually on actual weight. Larger quantities are available. If a larger amount is ordered butchery options can be tailored to your individual requirements. Prices are a guide only and vary due to weight.

A whole mutton box approximately contains 2 whole legs, 2 shoulder joints, 4 packs of 2 chops, 4 x 500g bags of mince and costs £90-£100. A half mutton box contains half of the above quantities and costs around £50-£60.

Unfortunately the majority of the meat from this year may already be sold. For more details or to order your HIWWT conservation grazed meat box, please get in contact using the details below. You can also be added to the mailing list for next year. All those on the mailing list are then contacted in advance of a meat run to determine demand.

Jack Norris – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust Stockman, jack.norris@hiwwt.org.uk

Locals and visitors can find out where to eat, buy and enjoy local food at southdownsfood.org

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow the Heathlands Reunited project using the hash tag #HelpTheHeaths.

Follow the Take the Lead campaign using #TakeTheLead and enter the competition by using #TakeTheLeadTo

Want to learn more about what is happening in the wider National Park? Sign up to the South Downs National Park Newsletter at www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/