

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 88 | SUMMER 2020





CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

I hope that this message finds everyone well. In early May the volunteer team I work with held a video catch up on Skype, our first. Just trying to get everyone linked in was a hilarious comic event – see more on this on page 13. When we did get chatting it was great to see everyone. It was particularly interesting to hear how people were coping with the lockdown. It reminded me how important the social element of volunteering is to us.

I have thanked the SDNPA for the excellent range of educational material that has been made available at such short notice. I'm sure a lot of us will enjoy the webinars and videos that are coming our way over the next few weeks. I'm also really enjoying the regular contact from the local rangers by email.

On Monday 4 May I chaired my first VRS committee meeting, by Skype. We discussed the recent national debate regarding recovery from Covid. The national debate will undoubtedly lead to speculation as to what this means for volunteering. It is really important that any decisions about volunteering are based on the best advice, the Authority will base decisions on the latest government guidance.

The SDNPA needs to consider the wider impact of all decisions it makes when opening roles back up. The VRS situation requires careful consideration due to the complex demographic of volunteers and the environment we volunteer in, which impacts on land workers, staff and other members of the public. It is likely that a meeting will be held in June to discuss where we sit in relation to unlocking across the board.

It was agreed at our committee meeting that messaging in relation to the Covid response would continue to be managed by the Authority but that the VRS committee would remain sited on the latest information.

Best wishes to everyone.

STEVE BROOKMAN, VRS COMMITTEE CHAIR

UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM

FIRST AND FOREMOST I HOPE EVERYONE IS WELL AND IN GOOD SPIRITS. THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS RALLIED TO PRODUCE PHOTOS, ARTICLES AND SNIPPETS FOR THIS VERY SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE DOWNLAND THYMES.

Becka Saunders is the Editor of this issue and from the very first email I received regarding this edition Becka made clear that the show must go on!

It's evidence enough that though for many of you the reason you volunteer is to be out in the National Park's special landscapes, the places and relationships we build out there also come back home with us. We get that, and that's why things like the Downland Thymes are so important. A landscape is not as simple as something felt under foot, it is something that, as a volunteer you can develop a deep affinity with.

It's reflected in the fact that where I live in West Sussex, many more people than normal are out walking every day in green spaces. I know it will be the same for many of you. Though talk of nature's 'recovery' may be more complex than that, in difficult times we can turn to nature to give us a sense of the bigger picture and of our place in the world.

We have been keen to use this time to promote the role of the microvolunteer in society. There are many charities and organisations out there who are desperate for our support in providing sightings of birds, insects and the flowering of certain plants in gardens. Research shows that Citizen Science is providing the vast majority of data to the conservation movement. I hope that what you might have learned from your own garden, your local green space or the view from your window can give you something to look forward to when the worst of this situation is over and our groups can gather again.

Please do bear in mind that any return will only be when it is safe to do so and this will not be rushed for the sake of it. In the meantime it's really encouraging to see so many of you engaging with our series of webinars which were put together for volunteers. I hope it is something we can continue to use in future.

Each day we are faced with sobering tales of the impact this situation is having, but we want this issue of Downland Thymes to give the chance to appreciate the South Downs in any way we can, more than ever. To many of you, that will be the shared friendships and experiences you have developed over time with both fellow volunteers and staff. I hope reading this gives you a sense of anticipation for when volunteers can be back out in the Downs and we can all appreciate the landscape most of us have become temporarily removed from.

One thing I will take from this is the clear evidence of how important volunteering is to society. Across all sectors of volunteering it should be a reminder to many that there exist people who are willing to donate their time, energy and efforts to protecting a greater good. In this case that's the South Downs National Park. We are thankful to you for your ongoing support.

Wishing you all a lovely summer and I look forward to seeing you again soon, be that by video-link or eventually in person.

DANIEL GREENWOOD
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR



NATURE RULES

I HOPE THIS EDITION OF DOWNLAND THYMES FINDS YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES SAFE IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES.

It has been a testing time for all of us over the past few months but as restrictions ease we have been keeping visitors and residents of the National Park updated with the key information needed for them to enjoy the South Downs safely. If you haven't yet read this guidance please do so and where possible pass on this link to your local communities inside the National Park – southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update. This webpage will be updated whenever government amends its Covid-19 guidance.

Living in Clanfield, on the outskirts of the National Park in Hampshire, I have been missing being able to get up onto the South Downs to enjoy the big open sky and endless views. My garden, like many, has become my oasis and is definitely tidier now than my house! As I write this I am watching sparrows, blackbirds, starlings, robins, collared doves and some very large pigeons enjoy the homemade bird feeders I've made with my daughter. Often "too busy" to stop for long to enjoy the simplicity of these



common birds, the past few months have offered some time to appreciate and enjoy even the most simple of things nature has to offer us. From rescuing snails from a deflating paddling pool, trying to capture the beauty of a forget-me-not on an iPhone camera or chasing centipedes with a magnifying glass (they are speedy critters!) – time with nature has provided a much needed escape.

We hope that this edition of Downland Thymes also offers you some escapism too and a connection to the Volunteer Ranger Service, the National Park and the Authority. Whatever your circumstances, you are part of the South Downs and it will still be here whenever we are able to return to it in some form of normality. In the meantime, sit back and enjoy some great articles from your fellow volunteers, as well as some lovely birdsong and video links to get a bit of virtual National Park.

Thank you to everyone who has submitted articles for this edition. If you have any articles, photos, stories or reviews for the September edition please send them to dt@southdowns.gov.uk by the end of July.

Stay safe.
REBECCA SAUNDERS
EDITOR



Top: Slithering snail
Bottom: Speedy centipede and a woodlouse spider

All images © Rebecca Saunders

Forget me nots

A TASTE OF THE DOWNS

WITH TRAVEL LIMITED WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NICE TO BRING A LITTLE OF THE SOUTH DOWNS TO YOU. IT MAY BE ON A SCREEN OR THROUGH YOUR SPEAKERS BUT HOPEFULLY IT'LL TRANSPORT YOU INTO THE NATIONAL PARK FOR JUST A MOMENT OR TWO UNTIL YOU'RE REUNITED AGAIN SOON...



A SPIRIT LIFTER

If you haven't already seen our 'Be Inspired by the South Downs' Video, watch it now for a spirit lifting hit of South Downs iconic species and stunning landscapes.

youtube.com/watch?v=pjzxWGgAh-Q



A SONG!

One of the absolute treats of volunteering on the downs is the sound of the skylarks flying overhead. Every time I hear the sound of a skylark's song it conjures a mental picture of a warm summer's day, the chalk downland and these little birds flying overhead.

The link below takes you to the the RSPB web page with a description and sound track of the skylark's song.

Beautiful.

rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/skylark/

STEVE BROOKMAN
VRS CHAIRMAN



A MAGICAL ESCAPE

The woodlands of the South Downs National Park are special. With more woodland than any other National Park in England or Wales, they are a vital habitat for a number of species as well as a resource that requires considerate management. Explore this epic treescape and meet the creatures that call them 'home' in this 9 minute video with the familiar voice of Nick Heasman – youtube.com/watch?v=uVqggsxxAEk



A LOVE STORY

This year we are releasing a new series of short films about the South Downs to mark the National Park's 10th anniversary.

The "Your National Park" clips feature dedicated local heroes of the National Park, including foresters, farmers, historians and local people, who collectively are helping to care for this special place and ensure it will be there for future generations to enjoy.

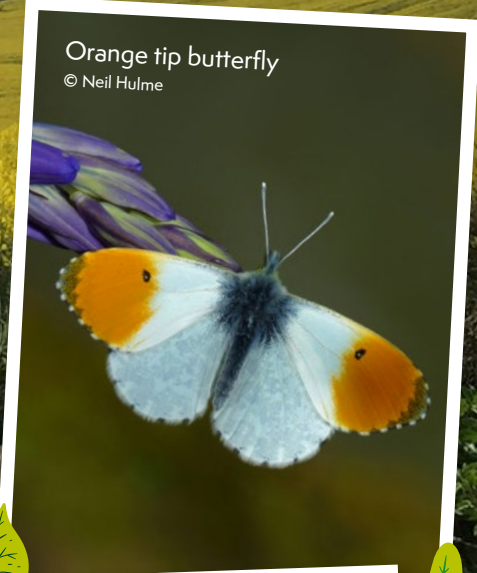
Each hero represents one of the outcomes of the Partnership

Management Plan – which was unveiled by the National Park Authority in April and reveals 10 key objectives for the future of the National Park.

The first of these is about Brighton and Hove City Council Ranger Paul Gorringer who some of you may have worked with. Read the full story about Paul and watch his video here – southdowns.gov.uk/poignant-video-reveals-rangers-love-of-magical-south-downs-landscape/

And finally – who doesn't love a cute family of otters on the river meon!

southdowns.gov.uk/otters-thrive-river-meon/



ORANGE-TIPS AND ALFRISTON

IN MID MARCH I MOVED TO ALFRISTON, A VILLAGE ON THE RIVER CUCKMERE ENSCONCED IN ONE OF THE MOST ANCIENT LANDSCAPES IN ENGLAND.

Dotted around are remnants of Neolithic barrows and linking these is a network of well-worn footpaths, including a stretch of the long, windswept South Downs Way which traverses the chalk grassland that gives Sussex so much of its unique character and habitat. The more local Vanguard Way criss-crosses farmland and traces forgotten byways and twitters, joining chapels and hamlets, bisecting the A27 and skirting residential properties.

Just outside the village this footpath follows a blossoming hawthorn hedge at the top of two large open fields where skylarks nest and display at this time of year. The ground is hard and cracked after an exceptionally dry April, but the equally unprecedented winter

floods have the Downs brimming with life now it's spring. Male orange-tips, common but striking relatives of white butterflies, dance along the cow parsley in search of a mate. Their flight is soft and cyclic; they explore every nook and shoot of the scrub at the field's edge. Further downhill, from among the green shoots of new wheat, larks twirl skyward improvising their fluid, delirious song. Higher still than the larks at the apex of their flight, three buzzards, a pair and a juvenile, wheel and cry, riding a thermal. The formation is broken when a crow blusters in and harries them to the edge of the next field, where they flee to find more amenable airspace.

Something scuttles away as I pad along the baked pale soil of the path, climbing towards Berwick church. I expect to see an adder or common lizard disappearing into a tussock of grass, but don't spot any.

The bare hills curve and roll like slumbering primal beings – this sensuous folding of the Sussex landscape has mesmerized me for twenty-five years and I don't expect it to release me any time soon. A friend says she prefers woodland and is bored by the naked, open spaces of the Downs, but I happily don't concur.

MARTIN MESSENT
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



WHAT IS A FARM CLUSTER?

IT IS WHERE FARMERS, LAND MANAGERS AND LOCAL PARTNERS WORK TOGETHER ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE TO IMPROVE AND ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT.

It is a bottom up approach where the farmers and owners in the group decide their own aims and objectives. A trusted local adviser is appointed to run and co-ordinate the work of the group. It is a national initiative and after trialling in places such as the Marlborough Downs it was then piloted in South Downs National Park in an area between the Arun and Adur. The concept was well received by the farming community and brought further benefits to the work that individuals were doing on their farms. There are now over 100 farm clusters in England.

There are six farm clusters across the South Downs National Park varying across the different soil types and agricultures. They range in size from 5,000 hectares to 30,000 hectares. They can have between 10 and 45 members acting as a forum to enable conversations with a large group of landowners at the same time. This allows an exchange of knowledge and this in turn increases the landowner's knowledge of wildlife on their farms.



Arable wildflowers in field margin, Old Idsworth
© Nick Heasman/SDNP



Common blue on salad burnet
© Terry Doyle

Brimstone feeding
© Terry Doyle

Harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*)
© D. Middleton

The Winchester Down Farmland Cluster comprises 35 farmers and organisation and is the only farm cluster within the South Downs facilitated by a member of the National Park staff, Western Area Ranger Rob Nicholls. 18 landowners originally signed up and, in keeping with the bottom up approach they were asked "What wildlife do you want to see on your farm?" – from the replies it was agreed that the priority species would be lapwing, grey partridge and barn owl.

So far so good. Now what does this have to do with the VRS? To successfully implement habitat management for these priority species the Rangers will rely on VRS support to complete scrub management, coppicing, hedge management and species surveys. Volunteers also take part in events and have been involved with Blackmoor Apple Tasting Day and the Boomtown Festival, events organised by farmers in the Selborne Landscape Partnership and Winchester Downs Farm Cluster respectively. So far in the Winchester Down Farm cluster

a total of 15 hectares of chalk grassland has been restored. Woodland management has been carried out on the Preshaw Estate, Avington Park and Hill View Farm. Barn owl box creation and placement has been carried out by the VRS. Their management now taken on by the farmers themselves.

In the Western Area surveys that are carried out by volunteers include, lapwing, butterfly and harvest mice. We have also supported a Bio Blitz in the Winchester Downs Cluster and the results of these, and the species data derived from them, was used to support the landowner's application to Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship.

It is great to see this co-ordinated, co-operative approach bearing fruit thanks to the hard work of the area's Rangers and Volunteers.

TERRY DOYLE, WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

My thanks to Western Area Rangers Elaina, Rob and Chris for their time and trouble in preparing this article.



Female *Torymus* sp. a genus of chalcid wasps which are mainly parasitoids of gall forming insects.
© Roger Kiernan

WASPS

IN AUGUST I TOOK A WALK ON LULLINGTON HEATH AND IT MUST HAVE BEEN A WASP DAY OUT AS I MANAGED TO PHOTOGRAPH FOUR DIFFERENT SPECIES.

Until I became interested in insect photography I was only aware of the easily identified common wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) with its striking yellow warning stripes. I was totally unaware that in the UK there are over 9,000 named wasp species which come in different colours, shapes and sizes. They vary in size from parasitic wasps too small to be seen without a microscope (0.3mm), to the largest, a queen hornet (*Vespa crabro*) (35mm).

Only eight or so wasp species are social, this includes our common wasp. They live together in large nests with an egg-laying queen and non-reproducing female workers. They are voracious predators and control plant pests like caterpillars and aphids. The remaining UK wasps species are solitary and parasitoidal. The female lays her egg on, or inside, the victim such as butterflies, moths, sawflies and beetles or other insects. When the eggs hatch the larvae initially eat the fat in their victim and eventually eat its organs, killing it.

Not all wasp species have a sting and in those that do only females with ovipositors modified to deliver venom rather than lay eggs can sting. The bad news is that wasp stingers, unlike bees do not have barbs and can sting multiple times. The sting is used

to disable their prey, protect their nest and deter predators. UK wasps are not aggressive and only attack when threatened – like when you try to swat it away from your sandwich.

All wasps belong to the group of insects known as Hymenoptera which also includes the sawflies, ichneumons, bees and ants. Like all insects they have four wings but the key characteristic of this order is that the hind wings are connected to the fore wings by a series of hooks. This enables them well controlled, rapid flight. Sawflies, such as wood wasps, can be confused with true wasps but they do not have the characteristic wasp waist, none can sting and they feed on foliage unlike other wasps whose larvae feed on insects.

Although many consider wasps a nuisance they play a very positive and critical role in the ecosystem. They are effective pollinators. More importantly they have a very significant economic impact by containing agricultural pests. Without them our agriculture would be in a sorry state and more insecticides would need to be used threatening still further our already seriously endangered insect population.

ROGER KIERNAN, SEVEN SISTERS VOLUNTEER RANGER



Gasteruption male, a parasitoid usually focused on solitary bee grubs.
© Roger Kiernan



Xyphidia sp. wood wasp (sawfly). If you look closely you will see three mites sitting on its thorax. They must have had one hell of a ride.
© Roger Kiernan

SPOON CARVING IN THE DOWNS

FOUR YEARS AGO I WAS GIVEN A SET OF HAND GOUGES FOR A BIRTHDAY PRESENT AS AN INITIATION INTO WOODWORKING.

This interest soon spread to whittling as an activity I could do with just a knife and a piece of wood sitting around a campsite of an evening. From here it was just a short jump to spoon carving helped by a one day course run by Mike Bennett at Butser Ancient Farm.

Volunteering in the western region of the South Downs provided me with an ample supply of small pieces of wood and then with minimal tools I found I could transform a simple log into an article of beauty and also a useful implement.

Everything I do uses locally sourced wood and is carried out by hand using three basic tools:-

A carving axe is used to split the log and then remove as much waste wood as possible. It creates the basic shape of the spoon.

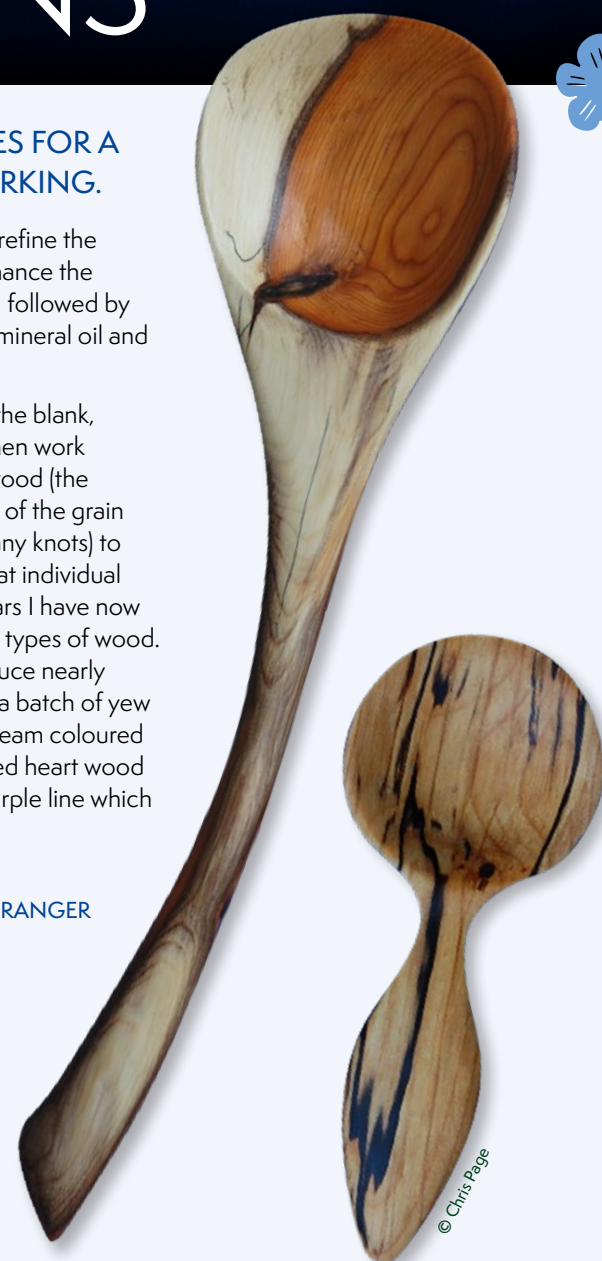
A craft (sloyd) knife is then used to refine the shape of the handle and the outside of the bowl of the spoon and creates the detail shape and various facets of the spoon.

A crook knife is used to hollow out the concave bowl of the spoon.

The spoon is then sanded to refine the surface of the spoon and enhance the grain and colour of the wood followed by treatment with a food grade mineral oil and a balm of oil and beeswax.

The challenge is to produce the blank, either a half or quarter log, then work with the features within the wood (the various colours, the direction of the grain and the position and size of any knots) to create a unique design for that individual spoon. Over the past few years I have now produced spoons from many types of wood. My current project is to produce nearly sixty spoons and bowls from a batch of yew wood; a beautiful blend of cream coloured sap wood, deep gold coloured heart wood often separated by a grey/purple line which can then be sold for charity.

CHRIS PAGE
WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



© Chris Page

ASH DIEBACK AND MY LOCAL AREA



I AM SURE THAT ALL THE SOUTH DOWNS EASTERN VOLUNTEERS BELIEVE THAT THE NATIONAL PARK, AND ALSO THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY, "STARTS" AT EASTBOURNE.

Living in Eastbourne, I know this area well and know that at the very tip of the National Park and of the South Downs Way, is a large area of woodland stretching from Butts Lane to Meads. It overlooks Willingdon Golf Club and contains delightful woodland walks, a rarity in this part of the National Park. But now the woodland canopy that runs between Butts Brows in Willingdon and Meads has turned a deathly grey colour, clearly showing the extent of Ash Dieback.

A diseased tree becomes dangerous, with branches or the tree itself at risk of falling onto footpaths, roads and property. Currently there is no preventative treatment available. The Forestry Commission has now identified the areas of woodland between Butts Brow and Meads that must be removed.

Eastbourne Borough Council developed a long-term plan in liaison with the Forestry Commission that saw felling begin in early December 2019. The whole project will take up to five years to complete. The first phase of the felling operation was adjacent to Butts Lane and Butts Brow car park. This was a favourite area for my local Rambling Club! The contractor has made footpaths and roads safe and ensured much valued public access to these areas is maintained. However, it was inevitable that some woodland walks would be inaccessible to the public while this essential work is undertaken. The felling

operation only takes place during the winter months to better limit the impact on wildlife and because fewer people use the woodland at this time of the year.

However it is not all bad news. While ash dieback is a deadly and dreadful disease, the removal of the trees will lead to very significant improvements in biodiversity. It will create new glades and small meadows that will encourage insects and chalk grassland species, old dew ponds will be reawakened as a water source for wildlife, replanting with mixed species will mitigate against global warming and avoid a future vulnerable monoculture and the 'lost' panoramic views from the upper reaches of the local downland will be restored. Even the timber cost is not such a problem. The trees will be taken to a biomass energy facility. The council will receive payments for the timber that will broadly offset the cost of the tree removal operation.

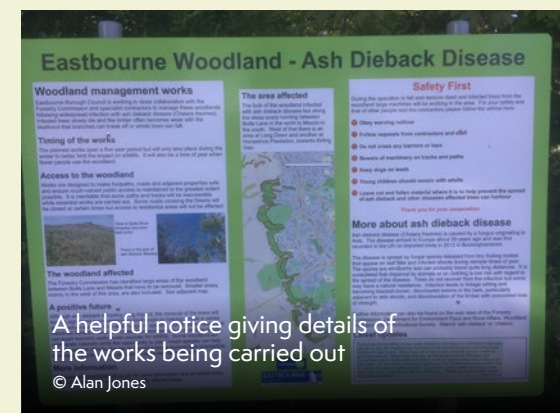
So, I look forward to the time when I (and my fellow ramblers!) can once more walk through this woodland area but actually have a much richer experience than we do now.

For further information visit actionashdieback.co.uk/ action-on-ash-dieback

ALAN JONES,
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



Opening up the views from the path
© Alan Jones



A helpful notice giving details of the works being carried out
© Alan Jones



Seeing some of the work carried out to remove the trees
© Alan Jones

Visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs for details on how the South Downs National Park Trust are raising money to fund tree planting across the South Downs.

AN INSPIRING TASK DAY AT RIVERSIDE PARK, NEWHAVEN

LAST NOVEMBER A SMALL GROUP OF EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEERS WERE INVOLVED IN AN INSPIRATIONAL LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECT INVOLVING THE PLANTING OF OVER 800 TREES IN NEWHAVEN, ON AN OLD LANDFILL SITE.

Travelling light with just a handful of spades, we arrived at Riverside Park and were warmly greeted by SDNPA Ranger Jan Knowlson. She briefed us about the aims of the project, essentially to provide a habitat for wildlife and enhance the beauty of the area. Nestling between the Downs, Riverside Park is located in the Ouse Valley with the conspicuous silhouette of the Newhaven Energy Recovery Facility providing a space-aged backdrop to the site.

An impressive number (approx. 200) of the local community also arrived, and together we proceeded to plant over 800 mixed tree saplings donated by the Woodland Trust. It was humbling to interact with families of all ages and backgrounds who were clearly passionate about caring for their environment and precious green spaces. The day transpired to be a tremendous shared effort and an inspiring testimony of just how much can be achieved with a little community spirit.

TONY MOULD, SEVEN SISTERS VOLUNTEER RANGER

The Friends of Riverside Park formed over five years ago with a view to protect an area of open space for public recreation at the edge of Newhaven. This land was closed to waste disposal in the early 1980's and capped with clay and hardcore; for 30 years it was monitored for site emissions but otherwise unmanaged. Used by dog walkers and others for casual recreation it was gradually taken over by bramble, alder and blackthorn. Paths were created by walkers, but there was no 'active landscape management' until about 10 years ago when ideas for the use of this land were put forward.

The guiding principles of the Friends group are that this area should be reserved for informal public recreation and accessible to all. We have been working with the current landowners (East Sussex County Council and Lewes District Council) and a range of other organisations (Newhaven Town Council, the Environment Agency, the Woodland Trust and South Downs National Park Authority) for advice, assistance and guidance to further the realisation of our vision for this site.

PAT OST, MEMBER OF THE FRIENDS OF RIVERSIDE PARK



All ages getting involved in planting the trees
© Alan Jones



A proper community effort
© Alan Jones



Trees planted!
© Alan Jones



Hairy-footed flower bee
© Steven Falk

THE HAIRY-FOOTED FLOWER BEE

THROUGHOUT THE LOCKDOWN WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE THE WONDERFULLY PEACEFUL SEVEN SISTERS TO WANDER ON.

In March we started noticing these loose colonies of excavated holes in the chalk. Holes which seemed considerably larger than those of most solitary bees so I sent a request for identification to Sussex Wildlife Trust's excellent Wildcall service.

The advice came back as the nest holes of the delightfully-named hairy-footed flower bee (*Anthophora plumipes*). These are solitary bees but they are bumblebee sized. They also like nesting in soft mortar in old walls. The males which emerge first in March are ginger and the females are totally black. They are quite commonly seen feeding in gardens and are particularly fond of pulmonaria or lungwort flowers.

Lo and behold, whilst feeding some roses in my garden I saw a completely black furry bee zipping about feeding avidly from those very flowers. Result! They are also attracted to comfrey, primroses and dead-nettle flowers.

They are one of the earliest solitary bees to emerge and their swift darting flight helps identify them. Once mated, females collect pollen on their hind legs and take it back to the nest cells. They lay an egg in each cell, provision it with enough pollen to feed the larva and then seal it up to allow the young bee to develop.

KATE FRANKLAND, EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER



Hairy-footed flower bee in flight
© Steven Falk

Thanks to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust website for information for this article

SURVIVING LOCKDOWN

WE ASKED YOU TO SHARE WITH US WHAT YOU HAD BEEN DOING DURING LOCKDOWN TO STAY UPBEAT. HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE IMAGES AND WORDS THAT YOU SENT US:



LANDY SECURITY ALERT!

Hoping you are well. Here's one I made that I think the majority of the VRS groups will be able to relate to.

Take care,

**TONY MOULD,
SEVEN SISTERS
VOLUNTEER RANGER**



SPRING FLOWERS

Eastern Area Volunteer Ranger Hazel Still has been enjoying the spring flowers in her garden and allotment. She has waited three years for the Geranium Maderense (giant herb robert) to flower – perfect timing! Its supposedly not hardy but it survived the Beast from the East.

Top garden moments for Hazel have also been this pretty perfectly symmetrical camellia, and bees buzzing on the rosemary.



MY SELF-ISOLATION QUARANTINE DIARY

Day 1 – I Can Do This!! Got enough food and wine to last a month!

Day 2 – Opening my 8th bottle of wine. I fear wine supplies might not last!

Day 3 – Strawberries: Some have 210 seeds, some have 235 seeds. Who Knew??

Day 4 – 8:00pm. Removed my Day Pyjamas and put on my Night Pyjamas.

Day 5 – Today, I tried to make Hand Sanitizer. It came out as Jello Shots!!

Day 6 – I get to take the bins out. I'm so excited, I can't decide what to wear.

**AUTHOR UNKNOWN, SOURCED
BY ALAN JONES, EASTERN AREA
VOLUNTEER RANGER**

INSPIRATIONAL ART

Pupils from the Audley Primary School created this inspiring painting of the South Downs Way. I am involved with delivering Forest Schools, Gardening Club and the Eco Green Team at this school. My time and experience volunteering with the VRS has helped immensely with this. Usually at this time of year, our wonderful children are busy preparing for The Schools South of England Show Competition in which we have gained 1st places for the last three years in addition to a 1st place in the RHS Budding Gardeners Competition. I think you'll agree that this peaceful scene captures the South Downs beautifully. I have been admiring it often during lockdown – it reminds me that the South Downs are still there.

**TONY MOULD, SEVEN SISTERS
VOLUNTEER RANGER**



The South Downs Way
by Audley Primary
School students



FINDING SOLACE IN WORDS

Some quotations from a book called 'A Word from the Wise' contributed by Wealden Heaths Volunteer Ranger Cass Moran:

**"When it is dark enough,
you can see the stars."**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

**"Hope is the feeling you
have, that the feeling you
have, isn't permanent."**

Jean Kerr

**"Kindness is the golden thread
that holds society together."**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

**"A positive attitude may not solve all
your problems, but it will annoy enough
people to make it worth the effort."**

Herm Albright



KEEPING IN TOUCH

A group of volunteers from the Eastern Area decide to keep in touch – using modern technology can be great fun! What a great way to spend one and a half hours on a dull, wet, lockdown afternoon! At the suggestion of Alan/Peter/Joyce Jones (more about that later) 11 members of the Seven Sisters Tuesday group met for a good old chin wag, via that wonderful app, Zoom.

The meeting started hesitantly, with lots of camera peering, resulting in close ups of nostrils, as well as thumbs and fingers dominating the screen as the eager participants got to grips with the necessary technical issues. This was followed by hand waving and gasps of recognition as one by one, everyone appeared, sitting in the comfort of our own homes and wearing our "own" clothes, apart from one participant who has obviously been programmed to wear VRS uniform every Tuesday!

Alan, whose real name is Peter and who sometimes sends emails in the name of Joyce (don't ask!) suggested that we raise a toast to Steve Brookman, our new VRS chairperson and those of us lucky enough to have cups of tea in our hands, did just that. Steve then shared with us his philosophy and hopes for the next three years, which was both interesting and thought provoking. I definitely think he will take his role seriously and I'm sure I'm not the only volunteer who looks forward to all the new innovations and amendments, which he will be making.

After a serious discussion on the issues surrounding the evil virus which has disrupted life as we've always known it, we all had

the opportunity to say what we've been doing to keep busy throughout the past few weeks. Activities ranged from fence painting and doing jigsaws to making bags to store PPE equipment. I kept quiet about what I've been doing however, which was making Christmas decorations! One member of the group informed us that his wife and several neighbours had been involved in something called " Sardow". Evidently it had been passed from one person to another. "Goodness me" I thought, "That sounds intriguing, how come no one's asked me to join?" When I had the opportunity, I tentatively asked "Is that a secret society?". " No" came the reply, " It's a type of bread". Turns out the word wasn't "Sardow" after all, but what he had been talking about was sourdough! Oh well, maybe I need a hearing test after all!

The time went on with lots of chuckles and the usual ribbing which accompany our regular Tuesday afternoons and then all too soon, Alan/Peter/Joyce informed us that he had another meeting to attend, so we would need to say "Bye Bye". We all agreed that we would like to meet again in two weeks time and with waves and nostril exposing once more, we all disappeared as in a puff of smoke. Roll on Tuesday in two weeks!

**JOSIE HOBBS
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER**

If you would like to set up some form of video call with your volunteer group and aren't sure where to start, please contact Daniel Greenwood who will be happy to help.



BOOK REVIEW

THE LYNX AND US

Text by David Hetherington,
Images by Laurent Geslin
(SCOTLAND: The Big Picture) 2018

This is a majestic, large-scale and beautifully illustrated book focusing on what earlier Britons named 'speckled lions', which we now call the Eurasian lynx, a species missing from Britain for 400 years. However, this book is very much about the European lynx, resident in countries as far apart as Norway and Poland.

The book is stuffed with information about lynxes and includes astonishing photos of them stalking, rearing their young and dealing with their main prey, the deer. The book's aim is ultimately to consider whether the lynx might be reintroduced. This animal, the size of a Labrador, needs a home range of at least 100-160km squared to hunt in, suggesting only the Scottish highlands could provide a home with enough woodland to shelter this elusive creature. Pick up a copy and see what you think!

BENJAMIN BRUCE



NEW PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN



Tackling climate change, helping nature flourish, supporting the rural economy, creating a National Park for all and providing a green health and wellbeing service are among the priorities of an ambitious five-year plan which was launched in April by the South Downs National Park Authority.

If you haven't yet seen this document the ten key outcomes outlined in the new Partnership Management Plan, which sets out a bold collective vision for the future of the National Park, are detailed below.

The 73-page masterplan focuses on bringing together environmental organisations, land managers, farmers, community organisations, businesses and volunteers to make the South Downs National Park an even better home for people and nature.



Sunset on Devil's Dyke
© Sam Moore/SDNPA



Yellow hammer
© John Bridges

The Partnership Management Plan focuses on 10 outcomes:

1 Landscape and Natural Beauty

- Work is under way between a range of partners to create a "people and nature network" that identifies key areas for investment in biodiversity, local economy, climate change adaptation and flood risk management.
- The Authority will bring farmers, foresters and estates together with Defra and Natural England to pilot the new Environmental Land Management System (ELMS), which focuses on nature-friendly farming.

2 Increasing Resilience

- Improve the soil and water of the South Downs through innovations such as winter cover crops, which can reduce nitrate pollution by 90 per cent. The SDNPA, Brighton & Hove City Council, Environment Agency and Southern Water have joined forces to protect drinking water supplies via The Aquifer Partnership.
- Improve the quantity and quality of trees in the National Park. For instance more than 1,500 disease-resistant Elms have already been planted, with thousands more planned for the future.

3 Habitats and Species

- Create corridors for species movement and enlarge existing habitats for wildlife. For instance the lottery-funded Heathlands Reunited project is seeing 11 partners join forces to create and improve heathland at 41 sites across Hampshire and Sussex covering an area greater than 1,200 football pitches. The heathlands are a habitat rarer than the tropical rainforest and are a haven for some of Britain's rarest amphibian and reptile

species, such as the smooth snake and Natterjack toad. Meanwhile, the Bee Lines project will create wildflower corridors across the the National Park for pollinators to move along.

- Create a nature recovery network across the National Park and the wider South East region.
- Tackle invasive species, pests and diseases that threaten our habitats.

4 Arts and Heritage

- Increase investment in the protection and interpretation of cultural heritage through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy money.
- Promote awareness of heritage crime and its impact, encouraging public custodianship of heritage assets.

5 Outstanding Experiences

- Enable everyone to experience the National Park and reduce barriers (physical, economic and social). Projects include Miles Without Stiles, creating fully accessible routes for those with limited mobility and families with young children, and the Authority's growing family outreach programme.
- Encourage the retention and expansion of rural transport services.

6 Lifelong Learning

- The highly successful South Downs Learning Network will continue to deliver high-quality learning outside the classroom for young people. Activities will include designing programmes of study with headteachers, delivering teacher training and INSET day sessions with school staff, and working with universities to upskill trainee teachers.

7 Health and Wellbeing

- Continue to build partnerships with health bodies and local networks to encourage social prescribing and a better appreciation of the South Downs as a place for healthy outdoor activity and relaxation. For instance, the GROW project runs from Saddlescombe Farm near Brighton and aims to give people experiencing psychological and emotional distress a chance to recover by taking part in nature activities, including nature walks, practical conservation work and helping at the farm.

8 Creating Custodians

- Diversify volunteering, including more Youth Action Days where young people aged 16 to 25 can get hands-on conservation experience.

9 Great Places to Live

- Increase affordable housing stock in the National Park, with a focus on high-quality design and using local sustainable materials.
- Support community-led initiatives which enhance the towns, villages and landscapes of the National Park.
- Grow and retain business in the National Park by improving digital infrastructure right across the National

Park. A partnership project led by West Sussex County Council aims to overcome issues of poor connectivity in rural areas by providing full-fibre infrastructure between Chichester and Horsham districts.

10 Great Places to Work

- Work with Government to increase the amount of business support and ensure a good supply of employment space through the South Downs Local Plan.
- Supported by a wide variety of holiday accommodation, we want visitors to delve deeper and connect with wildlife, history, culture and cuisine. The Authority and its partners will work together and create unique experiences for visitors that will also benefit our communities and businesses.



Weald and Downland Museum
© Mischa Haller/SDNPA

The new Partnership Management Plan builds on the foundation of the South Downs National Park's first PMP, which covered the period 2014 to 2019.

The full document can be viewed in detail at southdowns.gov.uk/PartnershipManagementPlan



DISCOUNTS FOR VOLUNTEERS

You'll be pleased to know that several retailers are offering discounts on the sorts of things you'll need in the countryside. The VRS has successfully negotiated discounts with:

Cotswold Outdoor, Snow & Rock, Gatleys, Runners Need, Clusons, JDSports/Millets/Blacks/Ultimate Outdoor, Goodrowes, Rohan, Roger Gunn and Southdown Bikes. Also Fitzcane's café in Midhurst.

Simply present your VRS photo identity card at the time of your purchase – or use an online discount code. The discount amount varies, and is not available in conjunction with any other discounts or offers and is subject to terms and conditions.

Please visit the SDVRS Volunteer Information webpage: sites.google.com/view/southdowns for full details of each discount.

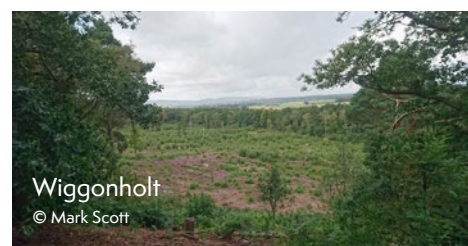
If you don't have an ID card, or have lost, damaged or mislaid it then please email vrs@southdowns.gov.uk for a replacement.

JOIN THE SOUTH DOWNS MONTHLY eNEWSLETTER

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK?

Sign up for our monthly newsletter for the latest South Downs news, stories, ideas for days out, competitions, to hear about our ranger and volunteers' work and much, much more...

southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/



DELVING INTO HEATHLAND HISTORY

I HAVE BEEN A VOLUNTEER RANGER SINCE RETIRING IN 2017, BASED WITH THE EASTERN AREA TEAM AT STANMER PARK. IN LATE 2017 I ANSWERED A CALL FROM THE HEATHLANDS REUNITED TEAM TO GET INVOLVED IN RESEARCHING THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF HEATHLANDS IN THE NATIONAL PARK.



Heathland is a man-made habitat created by our ancestors thousands of years ago, and the involvement of humans has been vital in developing the unique characteristics of these open habitats. The aim of the research was to capture and preserve the stories of local community connections with seven heathlands in the South Downs.

As I live in Brighton, I was allocated Wiggonholt Common as the most easterly of the heaths, and I proceeded to conduct my research via a number of sources, kicking off at the County Archives in Chichester and covering local organisations such as Worthing Library, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (unearthing a gruesome fact to do with a notorious Brighton murder in 2003!), Storrington Museum and last but not least RSPB Pulborough Brooks who manage Wiggonholt. In the end, my research was

very academic, particularly once I connected with John Oliver, RSPB Volunteer Support Team Manager and fountain of all Wiggonholt knowledge!

Together, myself and the other cultural heritage volunteers have created a valuable archive of historical articles, photos and maps, and in June 2019 the results of this labour bore fruit in the form of a charming storybook for children *"The Fish, The Goatsucker and the Highwayman"*, available for download from the SDNP Learning Zone. The Goatsucker in the title is an old-fashioned name for the ground-nesting bird the nightjar, and refers to the tale associated with Wiggonholt. Our research also inspired the wonderful carvings by award-winning sculptor Graeme Mitcheson, which will soon form part of a trail linking the seven heathland sites.

My role as a heritage volunteer really expanded my appreciation of the National Park further afield into West Sussex and beyond, and I came to understand the importance of connecting and expanding our heathlands.

There are still a number of volunteer roles available in the project, and I am working on a Wiggonholt Heritage Trail with the RSPB, which will highlight both the natural and historical features of the heath, such as the foxholes and trenches dug by Canadian troops stationed at Parham Park during World War II. The route will ultimately be uploaded to the ViewRanger mobile app, so watch this space and don't worry, this short article will not spoil the final revelation of other treasures along the walk!

MARK SCOTT, EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

**SOUTH DOWNS
VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE**

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**

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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.

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