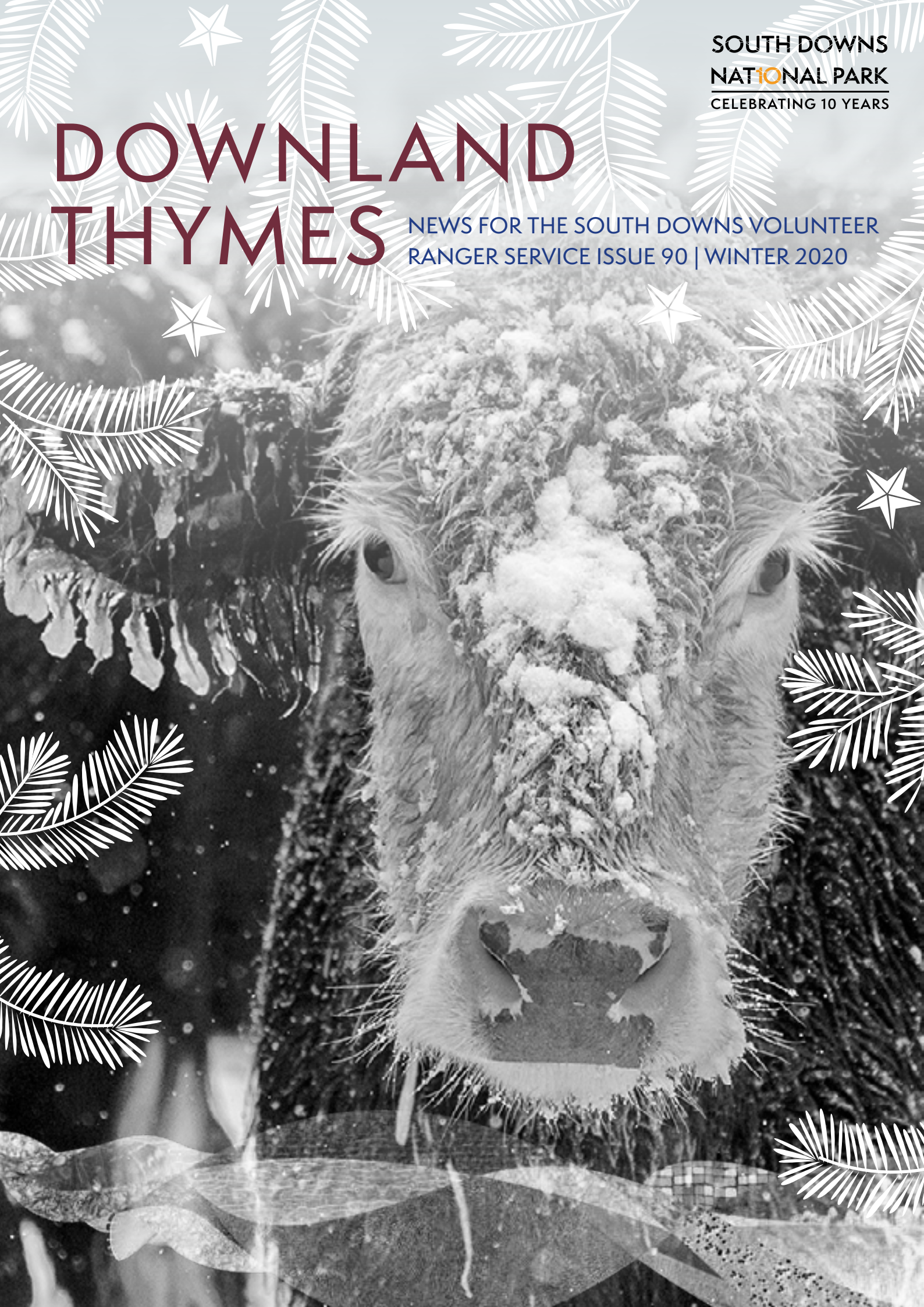


SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 90 | WINTER 2020



CHAIR'S CORNER

DEAR FELLOW VOLUNTEERS,
AT THE TIME OF WRITING THIS, ONLY A FORTNIGHT AGO I COMPLETED MY FIRST 'IN BUBBLE' VOLUNTEER DAY AND NOW HERE WE ARE LOCKED DOWN AGAIN.

It was great to be out with friends again, although a little odd, with just three of us plus a ranger. We had beautiful weather for scrub clearance at Chalk Farm near Jevington. I know from talking to Daniel Greenwood and local rangers that planning the new tasking process and keeping us all involved but safe has been arduous. I am very grateful to the rangers for devising a system that aims to get us all back to work. I look forward to the day when it is safe enough for us to return to volunteering and connect again.

I hope, like me you've probably got a renewed appreciation for the opportunity we have to work and socialise in these wonderful green spaces.

In September I visited the conservation site at Truleigh Hill, near Shoreham. I was elected VRS Chair just as we went into lock down for the first time. I was full of good intentions - I wanted to visit and understand more of the National Park and the volunteering work that is being undertaken. Like a lot of people my plans were suddenly put on hold. So, in September, as restrictions lifted, I decided to go to the reserve at Truleigh Hill, near Shoreham as a first tentative step on my road of discovery. I invited a couple of my fellow committee members for a socially distanced walk. We had, until then only met through Zoom. What a beautiful location and some fabulous work has been undertaken there. See Jeremy Nason's article on page 6 for a full write up.

A couple of weeks later, in October, I was able, for the first time since becoming VRS Chair, to meet in person with Daniel Greenwood and Amanda Elmes. I found the meeting very informative and hugely beneficial. I'd like to put on record what highly professional, dedicated and supportive people we have looking after our interests within the SDNPA.

Recent times have made me acutely aware of the need for volunteering to remain relevant and viable in these difficult times. I am convinced that the key to the sustainability of the work we as volunteers do lies in adaptability and broader community involvement. The more volunteering represents and attracts people from the communities around us the wider the appreciation for the South Downs and the greater protection for the landscape. My fear is that, if volunteering is seen as a niche activity that only a small part of our community benefit from then the less support there will be for our work when difficult decisions need to be made.

I am pleased to report that the VRS committee September meeting was very

positive and forward looking. As a small, but hopefully significant first gesture, I have agreed with the VRS committee for the terms of the Conservation Fund be changed slightly. Although the fund is currently suspended due to Covid, when applications open again applicants will need to show that whilst delivering conservation they will also deliver diverse community involvement.

I know that it must feel as though the world of volunteering has ground to a halt but I would like everyone to feel confident that, in the back ground we are still talking and planning. My very best to all volunteers. I hope that you are all able to make the most of this period of quiet. Above all, stay safe.

STEVE BROOKMAN
CHAIR OF THE VRS COMMITTEE

Steve on a walking meeting with Amanda Elmes

© Daniel Greenwood



Fly agaric at Ebernoe Common
© Daniel Greenwood



UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM

In October, it was a great relief to know that volunteer groups were able to head out into the National Park again after 6 months recovering and reacting to the Covid-19 pandemic. Of course we have now spent November back under strict Government measures to tackle the virus and save lives. Whatever happens in December, we have positive news on the horizon regarding vaccines which are proving effective in their advanced trials, and breakthrough treatments that will mean the virus is less potent in society going forward into 2021. Let's hope the hardest part is behind us now and we can look forward to being able to get on with the important tasks that make up a National Park's volunteering programme in the not too distant future.

It shows how things have changed for us in 2020 that we are not expecting to be able to hold the normal Christmas social events. It's unclear what December will look like in both social life and volunteering, so I hope that there can be some chance to meet and reflect on the achievements this year.

In the wilder side of the National Park, this has been a bumper year for the iconic, red and white fly agaric mushrooms. I visited Sussex Wildlife Trust's Ebernoe Common in October to undertake some fungi ID training with apprentice rangers Rachel, Gemma and Maddy. Fly agaric was out in force, as well as many other species. It was incredible to see. It got me thinking about stories I've heard of the mushroom's unusual cultural history.

This famous red and white mushroom is thought to have a role in how the early

images of Father Christmas emerged.

I have been doing some research into this in my spare time. It's quite bizarre. It's said that in both northern Scandinavia and Siberia, fly agaric was once picked and gathered in sacks by shamanic figures. The mushrooms were then dried in coniferous trees like spruce and fir, the Christmas trees of choice still today. The image of the mushrooms sitting in the trees looked much like decorations.

The shaman is said to have visited families in winter, arriving on a reindeer-led sleigh. He entered via the roof - what would have been a smoke-hole in a yurt made from animal skins. In some cases the shaman may have climbed down a birch timber used to keep the yurt upright.

Fly agaric is extremely toxic, but when dry it was consumed and shared by the shaman as part of a tribal ritual. I have no idea if this still happens today, but it's very unlikely. The visions people experienced were said to be that the shaman and his reindeer herd would fly away.

Now, of course I am not proposing that anyone ever follow this tale and consume a toxic mushroom, or any other such thing in this way! But in some way it gives sense to the origins of Father Christmas and his epic journey on Christmas Eve. I will certainly be keeping an eye out.

Wishing you all well this Christmas. Thank you for all your effort in 2020 and let's look forward to kicking on in 2021.

DANIEL GREENWOOD
VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

EDITOR'S NOTE

At the time of writing this we are in the midst of lockdown number two, unsure of how December will look and more importantly Christmas! I hope that this edition of Downland Thymes finds you well and safe, and brings you some much needed distraction and entertainment in these uncertain times.

As always we have some excellent articles submitted from your fellow volunteers in this publication. I don't like to pick favourites but I must say the facts I've learnt about earwigs in Roger Kiernan's piece on page 5 will stay with me for life! This along with Daniel's story about the origins of Santa's flying sleigh have given me some cracking dinner party conversation for when we're allowed around a dinner table with loved ones again.

As it's getting close to Christmas, and we've all got a bit more time on our hands this year, we've sought out some excellent ways to make your Christmas more sustainable and eco-friendly, with links to some great websites with inventive, yet do-able, ideas (see page 13).

As you will have seen in a recent volunteer email we are hoping to get lots more video content included in Downland Thymes now it is an online-only publication. This means that when you are out and about in the National Park, whether for personal reasons or eventually on site when volunteering begins again, you can now get creative with filming on your phone for Downland Thymes stories. Daniel Greenwood recently circulated some top tips for using your smart phone for video - if you'd like to see these again, or have any other questions about filming, please contact Daniel directly.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this year's run of Downland Thymes, it wouldn't be the fascinating and engaging publication without you. Stay safe and have a very Happy Christmas.

REBECCA
SAUNDERS
EDITOR



PHOTO COMPETITION



SEASONS OF THE SOUTH DOWNS

WE ARE VERY EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF A BRAND NEW, VRS PHOTO COMPETITION!

We know there are lots of great photographers in the VRS – be it with a big fancy camera, or a simple mobile phone. So we have decided it’s time to run a photo competition just for you!

Running throughout the year we are challenging you to take photos showcasing the ‘Seasons of the South Downs’.

To kick the competition off we’re now accepting entries for the ‘Winter’ category. Send us your snowy snaps, your wintery wonders, your frosty frames – as long as the photo is taken

in the South Downs National Park you are free to photograph anything which you think showcases the winter season here in the stunning Downs. It could be your favourite view, a beautiful cultural heritage treasure or your family enjoying a day out on the Downs.

The winner will walk away with an annual membership to the Sussex or Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

You don’t need to have a fancy camera – phone pics are welcomed too. See the [full terms and conditions here](#). Please remember to get people’s

written consent if taking their photo for this competition. We, the Downland Thymes editorial team, will be judging the entries and sharing as many of them as possible, as well as the winner, in Downland Thymes. Any suitable photos entered will be added to the Authority’s photo library to be used on the website, in publications, on Instagram and other press – crediting you fully of course.

Email your photo to dt@southdowns.gov.uk by midnight on Sunday 28 February to enter our ‘Winter’ category of the Seasons of the South Downs photo competition.

GOOD LUCK!



Common earwig

EARWIGS

THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 2,000 SPECIES OF EARWIG GLOBALLY.

Easily identified by their conspicuous pincers, earwigs are not well studied in the UK, but seven species have been identified of which four are considered native and three are established aliens. Most of these can be found on the Downs.

Identifying the species can be difficult but sexing them is easier as male pinchers are distinctly curved and those of females are much straighter (see photos). Earwigs are nocturnal and hide under stones and in dark crevices during the day but can be spotted by lifting stones, looking under loose bark, or examining plants at night with a torch. Most earwigs have a pair of large, delicate wings that they seldom use and are rarely seen as they prefer to run. Their wings are cleverly folded and concealed under small leathery covers (see photo).

The pinchers are used in courtship, fighting, defence and prey capture but are not strong

enough to pinch through our skin. Earwigs are harmless as they have no venom and cannot bite us. They have simple chewing mouthpieces and are omnivorous. Although considered a pest by gardeners as they eat young leaves of plants and flowers, they can be beneficial to fruit growers as they will eat pests such as aphids.

Common earwigs mate in the autumn. The female digs a tunnel in the soil and then lays about 50 eggs. She will carry the eggs up and down the tunnel to keep them at an even temperature. They have a simplified metamorphosis in which they transfer in one step from eggs to nymphs, that look like little adults. After about 70 days and five to six moults, they become adults. What is unusual for an insect is that the female provides some maternal care. She defends the eggs against predators, licks the eggs to keep them mould free and initially cares and feeds the hatched nymphs with regurgitated food. However, by the time the nymphs have reached their second moult they have to run to avoid being eaten by their mum. They live for about a year from hatching.

The body appendages of most creatures come in pairs, e.g. legs, arms, ears and antennae, but rarely the penis. However, some earwig species are an exception to this, including one of our established alien species, the striped earwig (*Labidura riparia*) which has two functional penises. What evolutionary advantage was gained by having two penises will probably never be known for sure. This feature has been studied quite extensively in universities in Japan and Australia and it has been established that only one penis is used during copulation. In some cases, the penis snaps off and is left inside the unfortunate female so perhaps the second penis, which remains functional, is a backup.

Like so many insects, the lives of earwigs are both complex and fascinating. Sadly, earwig populations are declining like those of most other insects. So please think twice before spraying your flowers.

ROGER KIERNAN
SEVEN SISTERS VOLUNTEER RANGER



Common earwig, male



Common earwig, female



Wing covers

TRULEIGH, TRULEIGH STUNNING!

IN THE SEPTEMBER EDITION OF THE DOWNLAND THYMES, STEVE BROOKMAN MENTIONED IN HIS CHAIR'S CORNER PIECE THAT WE WERE INTENDING TO VISIT A SIGNIFICANT SITE WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARK. AUTHORITY STAFF SUGGESTED THERE WAS AN OBVIOUS #1 VENUE – TRULEIGH HILL.

A vision had been created to protect this part of the National Park and to structure its development and future through combined engagement between the local community and the National Park. It was this different approach that attracted Steve and me to meet up with the project manager Phil Paulo and local resident, and fellow committee member, Helena Lewis to experience the Hill first-hand.

For those of you, like me who are not familiar with Truleigh Hill, it is a high point on the South Downs (216m) with a history that goes back to the WWII when its radar installation was part of our defences.

ON THE DAY

The September day dawned bright and clear with a strong blustery wind that had cleared the sky of any remaining clouds. We all met in the car park of the YHA hostel and Phil told us about the project to date and showed us what had been created in the past year or so.

Leading off down the path towards the newly created features, we came across a dew pond bathed in sunlight with the surface shaded by vegetation, reeds and bull rushes. Such ponds are a notable feature of chalk downland, essential for watering livestock, sheep particularly, in years gone by. Further on a butterfly bank had been created by the volunteers from scratch and was now regularly maintained, although on the day no butterflies could be spotted. Fortunately, we were in luck in the afternoon as we strolled along the Monarch's Way and were treated to the sight of many Adonis blues.

A NATURE MENU

The developments at Truleigh provide both diversity for nature and attractions for visitors. They provide a range of activities, a form of 'nature menu' to schools and colleges in the surrounding area in terms of educational opportunities and the chance to engage young people directly with the outdoors. Equally they offer others in our community the physical and mental health benefits that arise from time spent in close association with nature.

WOOLLY VISITORS

We turned the corner and there nestling under the trees were a small flock of rams, of varying size, colour and horn. As it happened they, like the ewes we walked amongst later in the day, were 'on holiday' from Mudchute City Farm, the largest city farm in London with over 32 acres of countryside in the middle of the Isle of Dogs with a wonderful collection of British rare breeds. In front of us on the day of our visit were representatives of the Southdown, Oxford Down, Norfolk Down, Castlemilk Moorit and Black Wensleydale breeds. Yet another reason to visit Truleigh!

When we departed we realised the day had been an overall success and had triggered a variety of thoughts and ideas to contemplate in the weeks and months ahead. I wish to thank Phil for the time he spent with us and for the hospitality generously given by Helena and her husband.

JEREMY NASON,
WEALDEN HEATH VOLUNTEER RANGER



AN EPIPHANY OF WILDFLOWERS IN SUSSEX – PART TWO – THE RESULTS! (THAT SOUNDS LIKE STRICTLY!)

I REPORTED IN THE SPRING EDITION OF DOWNLAND THYMES THAT LAST AUTUMN WE CONVERTED OUR DRY, SOUTH-FACING, STEEP GARDEN BANK ON THE SIDE OF THE SOUTH DOWNS IN EASTBOURNE, TO MAINLY NATIVE CHALK DOWNLAND FLOWERS TO HELP WILDLIFE, AS WELL AS TO REDUCE MAINTENANCE AND WATER USE.

Following weeks of preparation, we sowed seed and a few naturalizing bulbs and then waited with bated breath to see what would appear in 2020! Colin Reader, wildflower consultant, advised that we would see mostly annuals the first year or two whilst the perennials lie dormant or grow good root systems... and he was right!

A few crocus began to push through in early spring as well as LOADS of green seedlings and then great excitement in late March as a solitary common spotted orchid appeared! Over the next three months I cut back leaves of bulbs as they went over (so they didn't shade the stars of the show beginning to come through) and the gloom of Lockdown was lit up by a sea of bright red poppies! They were interspersed with the steady march of scattered colourful annuals including magenta corncockle, white and yellow corn chamomile, egg-yolk yellow corn marigold and the stunning blue of a few cornflowers. We were incredibly fortunate to enjoy such an uplifting sight and the accompanying bugs and butterflies during such a challenging time.

By August most annuals were a mass of brown stems but a smattering of perennials began to come through such as pale pink musk mallow, a few ox-eye daisies and bird's foot trefoil. Hopefully next year the latter will multiply and attract common blue butterflies.

So the next decision was when and how often to cut? Key to this is when the most important plants have ripened and shed their seed, invertebrates have completed their life cycle, bulbs are safely below ground and the weather is dry, so clippings are easier to collect (to prevent increasing soil fertility). After removing the now redundant drip hosing (yay!) we strimmed the bank in September and left the clippings for 10 days so the seed dropped through onto the soil and then raked them off on a dry day.

REFERENCES:

Christopher Lloyd, Meadows, Cassell Illustrated 2004
Colin Reader – check out his luxury chalk seed mix at wildflowerlawnsandmeadows.com
Pam Lewis, Making a Wildflower Meadow, Frances Lincoln Ltd 2003

It is now October and I have just weeded patches of purple toadflax (*Linaria purpurea*) which had naturalized rather too well and planted some plugs of blue round-headed rampion (*Pride of Sussex*) thanks to a kind donation of seed from fellow volunteer ranger Kate.

It is early days but we are thrilled with the results to date! As Pam Lewis says "every little helps when we make our gardens wildlife friendly" and another bonus is that our knowledge of native chalk downland flora and fauna is increasing so making dog walks and my recently re-started work as a VRS ranger on the South Downs even more enjoyable. Colin Reader says that "No two years will be the same as different species will bloom at differing levels of abundance, producing an ever-changing feast of colour and form for your enjoyment." Yes please!

LIDDY DAVIDSON
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

Images: Liddy Davidson



TRADITIONAL SUSSEX FIELD GATES

THERE WAS A TIME, REALLY NOT SO LONG AGO, WHEN PRACTICALLY EVERYTHING WAS MADE LOCALLY BY A LOCAL CRAFTSPERSON BE IT THE WEAVER, POTTER, BOOTMAKER, COOPER, WHEELWRIGHT, BLACKSMITH OR CARPENTER/ CABINETMAKER ET AL.

This led to regional variations and the evolution of local distinctiveness as each apprentice learned the “proper way” to make something from their master craftsman. Later on in their career they may have added small personal “improvements” and these very slowly evolving designs were passed down from generation to generation. So it was with agricultural gates; each locality had its own distinctive design that would be almost identical to its neighbours’ but which did change noticeably if you travelled far enough.

A study of photo archives will reveal what our gates used to look like. They have a single diagonal brace supporting a top rail

and a curtain of five bars with the lower ones being closer together to prevent lambs squeezing through. The distinctive Sussex Gate is now rarely seen as most of our countryside furniture is mass produced in some remote region to a common design (known by me as the Double-Cross-Braced Eurogate) which can be found from Lizard Point to Cape Wrath robbing us of high quality design and damaging our local sense of place.

This may not seem really important to some of you but surely within the South Downs National Park we should be preserving such iconic features and celebrating our own local distinctiveness. The National Trust in

West Sussex found some of these gates surviving in places like Saddlescombe Farm and, notably, the Slindon Estate where Freddy Wooton Issacson, the donor, was clearly a fan as he apparently had the gates specially made and they were marked with his initials. The National Trust, at that time, continued his practice, ensuring that all their new gates installed on their South Downs properties were made to the traditional design.

Wouldn’t it be a fine thing if the South Downs National Park Authority also encouraged and facilitated their continued use today? The Friends of the South Downs has a current project to replace difficult stiles on the South Downs with kissing gates and we will ensure that our gates are made to the proper traditional Sussex design.

GLYNN JONES
SOUTH DOWNS SOCIETY MEMBER



Traditional single diagonal brace supporting a top rail and a curtain of five bars gate



Double-cross-braced Eurogate

A WORD ON GATES FROM THE SDNPA

The SDNPA takes its responsibility for our cultural heritage and its remit for public access very seriously. The design of gates has always generated a lot of debate and the design of gates that we install or fund is given a lot of thought. All of our gates are made by local craftsmen from within the National Park, using timber from local sawmills. We only use handmade oak gates for a number of reasons. One, to reflect the long tradition of using oak gates across the South Downs, two, to support our local craft men and women and our local sawmills (that in turn support sustainable woodland management across the National Park) and thirdly, because they

have a smaller ecological footprint than treaded softwood or metal gates.

The actual design of our gates is the result of tweaks or an evolution from the traditional Sussex design. This is necessary due to the increase in recreational use of routes and the need for gates to self-close. To achieve the swing, gates are hung with hinges slightly ‘off set’ from each other. This can result in the top of the gate sometimes hitting the closing post fractionally before the bottom of the gate, causing the gate to twist. The natural drying of the timber can also make the gates twist slightly. The second cross brace reinforces the gate against this twisting.

The SDNPA is always looking to innovate and find better ways of doing things. Recently we have changed the design of the hinges we use to allow for a better and smoother closing action. So it is possible that we can move back closer to the original Sussex design (also found in Hampshire and the west country) and we’ll be asking our craftsmen to trial a new South Downs design.

The evolution continues, but the principles remain.

ANDY GATTIKER
NATIONAL TRAILS & RIGHTS OF WAY LEAD,
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL
PARK AUTHORITY

GATES FOR A FUNERAL

LYING ON THE EASTERN TIP OF THE SOUTH DOWNS ARE JEVINGTON AND FRISTON VILLAGES. BOTH HAVE VERY WELL MAINTAINED AND INTERESTING CHURCHES, EACH WITH A KIND OF GATE WHICH I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYWHERE ELSE.

These are wide gates capable of swivelling around a centre post. A 90 degree turn of the gate creates two entrances, side by side?

After several years of walking through these gates, I finally decided to consult with my volunteer friends to see if they could shed any light on the purpose of this unique design. It did not take long to get the answer! They are called Tapsel gates and are named after a Sussex family of bell-founders, one of whom invented it in the late 18th century. Only six examples survive, all within a 10-mile (16 km) radius of Lewes. Tapsel gates have the dual advantage of keeping cattle out of churchyards and allowing the efficient passage of coffins carried to and from the church during burials. The name sometimes is used more generally to describe swivelling gates of a similar design elsewhere.

The first record of a Tapsel gate is in the churchwarden’s accounts book from St. Pancras Church in Kingston near Lewes. An accounting entry in 1729 notes that 1s. 6d. was paid by the church for the installation of a gate in its churchyard.

To my great surprise, only six genuine Tapsel gates exist and they can only be found in the very eastern end of the National Park. They have many advantages. They can be opened easily, in either direction, with a small push; they therefore are much easier to negotiate than more typical gates. Common problems of side-hinged gates — heaviness and susceptibility to breakage, for example — are avoided. Also, a Tapsel gate can be opened in a smaller area than would be needed for a side-mounted gate. Because the gate is mounted in the centre of the opening in

a wall, it effectively halves its width, which prevents passage by large animals, but allows people to pass through on either side easily. This characteristic is especially beneficial in churchyards, enabling pallbearers to carry a coffin through the churchyard without difficulty.

Knowing all this, every time I pass through one of these gates I imagine a group of pallbearers in the 18th Century resting the coffin on the central post to have a quick rest before continuing to the graveyard.

You can find more information on Tapsel gates [here](#).

ALAN JONES
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



Tapsel gate closed



Tapsel gate open

BROOM MAKING AT IPING COMMON

BACK IN JANUARY 2020, WHEN THE WORLD WAS IN A DIFFERENT PLACE AND COVID-19 HAD ONLY JUST APPEARED IN CHINA, A GROUP OF 12 PEOPLE GATHERED ON IPING COMMON TO COLLECT BIRCH FOR THE FUTURE MAKING OF BESOM BROOMS. THE BIRCH WAS BUNDLED AND DRIED (SEASONED) IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK RANGERS WORKSHOP IN MIDHURST.

I, Chris Letchford, a keen broom maker or 'Broom Squire' to use the traditional term, guided proceedings ably assisted by Beth Nicholls and Kate Dziubinska from the Heathlands Reunited Project and SDNPA respectively. By just after lunchtime when the rain set in we had around 20 bundles. I set the attendees homework by asking all to come back for the broom making sessions later in the year with a handle they wanted to use for their broom. It was important that handles were gathered and allowed to dry out before they were used for brooms.

On October 10 and 11, in the new Covid-19 world, we undertook socially distanced Besom broom making sessions. Each individual had a set of tools to use, a shave horse to sit on and work with and all were spaced at least 2 meters apart. After I demonstrated how a broom was made the attendees each made their own brooms, some made two. All attending learnt how to create the head of their broom(s), bind it very tightly with wires and tidy the end of it ready to receive the handle. They then set about shaving the bark from their handles and smoothing them, which is quite a challenge for someone who has never used a shave horse, draw knife and rounding shave before. Cutting down

the knots on handles proved challenging for some but is essential to end up with a smooth handle.

Then came the satisfying bit of putting the broom head and handle together. Trying to get the pointed handle into the centre of the broom head can be a challenge. Sticks in the head bundle don't always do what you want them to do but in the end, with a little assistance, heads and handles became united. All that remained was putting in a nail, tying a string around the centre of the head and trimming any stray bits.

The whole experience was enjoyed by everyone that attended. Locating ourselves where we did for the making sessions added to the experience. It was only a few feet away from where the birch had been cut back in January giving attendees a real sense of the value of resources available to them from what many would consider as invasive heathland birch.

We also had lots of real interest from those enjoying a leisurely walk on Iping common. Many expressed interest in attending future sessions so keep eyes peeled for advertisements!

CHRIS LETCHFORD
BROOM SQUIRE



Happy broom makers



Socially-distanced broom making



Pre-pandemic birch collecting

GET INVOLVED WITH SLOW WAYS

A NEW PROJECT LOOKING TO CREATE A NETWORK OF WALKING ROUTES THAT CONNECT ALL OF GREAT BRITAIN'S TOWNS AND CITIES AS WELL AS THOUSANDS OF VILLAGES, IS ON THE HUNT FOR VOLUNTEERS.

During lockdown around 700 volunteers across the country collaborated to produce a first draft of existing footpaths that people can use to walk between neighbouring settlements or combine for longer journeys.

The project is now looking for more volunteers to walk, test and review all of the routes that have been drafted, and in some cases design new routes too. This work will help develop a map of walking routes which will be published online.

Find out more about the project and sign up to help at slowways.uk.



KALEIDOSCOPE SKY

Ditchling Beacon

Driving early through woods and
Mottled Sussex lanes to see you.
Dawn rising.
Sun brightening the Autumn sky.
Shafts and beams of flickering light
In places surprisingly,
Blindingly bright.
Steam rising from green frosted fields.
Colours of purple, magenta and blue.
Pale Silver Birch

That seemed to lurch,
Across the road.
Trees leaves.
Colours of green, red and yellow.
Adding to the aureole display.
White clouds disjointed and askew.
Black tarmac and brown trunks.
Purple, pink and blue Cyclamens.
Soft yellow of Winter Rose.
Grey of a squirrel.

Beige of dried, dead straw and grasses.
Nature declining in the shining sun.
Winter approaching with a White.
And a Black night.
To wipe out.
The Kaleidoscope Sky.

ROGER P. READ
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER



DID YOU KNOW?...
THE VOICE OF THE BEEHIVE

Place names are strange things and none more so than Empshott, that unassuming village between Selborne and Greatham. The first reference to the name is given in 1086 when it is known as 'Hibesete' and by the 13th century it was 'Imbeschate.' But what does it all mean? The name stems from the Old English 'Imbanscietē' which means 'corner of the bee swarm' which makes it probable that the village was once part of the Greatham estate and that the bit of land the village took was where the estate kept their bee hives. Simple really!

BENJAMIN BRUCE

CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS
TREATS

HOWEVER WE END UP
SPENDING CHRISTMAS THIS
YEAR, HERE ARE A FEW RECIPES
FOR SOME FESTIVE TREATS TO
GET YOUR CREATIVE IDEAS
FLOWING – ENJOY!

Simple but effective (and even healthy!)
[Cucumber Christmas trees](#), [click for link](#)



An excellent family festive baking
opportunity: [Christmas cornflake wreaths](#),
[click for link](#)



A festive twist on a British classic: [Christmas
spiced Victoria sponge](#), [click for link](#).

FESTIVE UPCYCLING

No one really likes tinsel do they?
The planet certainly doesn't, so
why not make this the year of
sustainable festive decorations. Not
only will you be cutting down on
unnecessary plastic in your home,
you'll be able to sit back smugly
looking at your beautiful creations
knowing it didn't cost you a penny
and you had fun doing it. Here
are a just a few suggestions of the
many things you can make from bits
gathered on walks, in your garden or
round your house.

[Make a pine cone mouse to adorn
the window sill or tree](#), [click here](#).

Have a go at making your own
Christmas wreath using an old wire
coat hanger as the base. Fir, holly,
ivy, old man's beard and berries can
be collected – just remember to
only take what you need and always
leave some (especially berries) for
the birds. [You can even make the
base from flexible wood like in this
video demonstration](#).

One of the biggest curiosities of
the human kind (proven fact from
google...) is that we spend money
on wrapping paper – a product
that's sole purpose is to be ripped
apart in seconds and thrown in
the bin. It just doesn't make sense.
But you don't have to follow this
environmentally damaging tradition.
Get creative with your wrapping.
Save up your brown bags from the
grocers, save your old maps and
newspapers, better still flatten out
the stuffing paper from your recent
online purchases and decorate them
with red and green dots of paint for
some homemade charm. Once you
start looking, you'll see wrapping
possibilities everywhere! [Here are
some top ideas](#).



AND IT WOULDN'T BE CHRISTMAS WITHOUT SOME
FESTIVE JOKES...

What do
Santa's little
helpers learn
at school?

Why does
Santa have
three gardens?

What did the
stamp say to
the Christmas
card?

What do angry
mice send to
each other at
Christmas?



The elf-abet! So he can 'ho ho ho'! Stick with me and we'll go places! Cross-mouse cards!

KEEPING SAFE

WHEN WE WERE BRIEFLY ABLE TO START UP VOLUNTEERING BACK IN OCTOBER WE CIRCULATED THIS POSTER TO HELP VOLUNTEERS UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ALL NEEDED TO DO TO KEEP SAFE.

As we navigate the next few months, hopefully starting volunteer bubbles up again when restrictions allow, please familiarise yourself with this poster and what we each need to do to keep safe.

Thank you for Volunteering for the SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

HOW TO STAY SAFE:

TOOLS: Sanitise and don't share



HANDS: Practice good hand hygiene



DISTANCING: Keep a safe distance



SYMPTOMS: Report symptoms to protect others



VEHICLE USE: Follow the vehicle use policy



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SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

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



THE HEATHLAND SCULPTURE TRAIL

Resting Reptiles

INTRICATE PIECES OF ART THAT TELL THE STORY OF THE HISTORY, WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH DOWNS HEATHLANDS WERE UNVEILED IN SEPTEMBER AND ARE NOW READY TO BE EXPLORED.

Inspired by stories from communities and drawing upon sources as diverse as the poet Tennyson and a 391-year-old local map, the educational trail links seven precious heathland sites in the National Park.

The Heathlands Sculpture Trail aims to encourage people to visit their local heathland and learn more about them – as well explore other heaths in the area.

The beautiful sandstone carvings tell the story of why heaths are so important – as commonland enjoyed by local people throughout the centuries and as a rich haven for biodiversity, including rare insects, birds and all 12 of Britain's native reptiles and amphibians.

The trail, which includes a downloadable leaflet for walkers, links up heaths at Wiggonholt, Stedham Common, Lavington

Plantation, Shortheath Common, Graffham Common, Black Down and Woolbeding.

The project has been spearheaded by the lottery-funded Heathlands Reunited Team, working alongside the RSPB, National Trust, Hampshire County Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust.

The tactile artwork created by award-winning sculptor Graeme Mitcheson, has been inspired by information and materials gathered from site owners and managers, local communities, school workshops and volunteers conducting oral history interviews and researching archived material.

To add to the experience each sculpture has a coded plaque that can be used to watch a fascinating video about each heath on people's mobile phones.

Enjoy!



Dragonflies Rest



Red admiral on ivy

PLANTS IN THE PARK: IVY

THE HUMBLE AND OFTEN MUCH MALIGNED IVY IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PLANTS FOR BIODIVERSITY, HELPING TO MAINTAIN 50 OR MORE OTHER SPECIES OF WILDLIFE, PARTICULARLY INVERTEBRATES.

Only the juvenile growth of ivy has the familiar adhesive roots which allow it to grow up trees and walls. The mature or 'tree' ivy loses its clinging habit and develops simple elliptic leaves rather than the triangular lobed leaves it starts life with. It develops dense, bushy growth and, in late summer, produces wonderful umbels of scented green and gold flowers which are followed by globular matt-black berries.

The dense foliage provides hiding places for small insects and spiders which are sought after by small birds such as tits, goldcrests and chiffchaffs. The dense cover also provides safe nesting sites for birds.

The flowers are a rich source of nectar for a huge range of bees, hoverflies, wasps, moths, flies and other invertebrates, and you cannot fail to notice how attractive they are to red Admiral butterflies.

Come the autumn, the fat-rich black berries are a welcome feast for blackcaps, blackbirds and other thrushes. Also, the beautiful holly blue butterfly lays the eggs, only for its second brood, on the developing berries of ivy.

Later on, the dense foliage is a safe winter haven away from predators for those butterflies which hibernate as adults over

winter including the small tortoiseshell, peacock, red admiral and brimstone.

The lack of grass in the drought this spring and summer has seen the local sheep on the Seven Sisters stripping all the ivy they can reach as alternative forage, so the old saying is true 'little lambs eat ivy'. It's hard to think of a common plant that has more uses in the world.

KATE FRANKLAND
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER

SOUTH DOWNS
VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

Downland Thymes: News for the
South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service.
Issue 90, November 2020. © 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.

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Design: The Way Design (2123)

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