

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 91 | SPRING 2021



CHAIR'S CORNER

I struggled to know what to say to everyone this time around. Volunteering has been so quiet. What on earth is there to talk about?

On 25 January the VRS committee held a zoom meeting to discuss the finer details for the AGM, due in March. A very pleasant and productive meeting, but a committee meeting on Zoom is hardly newsworthy stuff. This year is the 40th anniversary of the VRS, so it is important to mark the occasion at the AGM.

But what to say now? I note down a few bullet points.

I wrote: *'Share a personal perspective'*.

I badly hurt my back a couple of months ago! The cause? Lockdown activity! Breaking up concrete, resulting in a slipped disc. Those who know me will know that I am always over doing things. But this has been really painful and difficult. I've been pretty much completely laid up. Very painful.

Particularly in the current situation, being unwell has been an emotional roller coaster, as I guess it has for many people. Latterly, one of the very few physical things I have been able to do, with the help of prescription drugs, is walk.

I only live half a mile from the South Downs. As part of my recuperation I've been walking a lot with my wife. Half a mile at first and then on to more ambitious walks. Recently, to give the walks focus I've shown her some of the local sites we as volunteers have worked on. We've talked about what those sites are like in full summer and the fact that we must go back in better times, and better weather.

Above all I realised how much I owe the place I live in for my current sense of optimism and speedy recovery. Even when ill, during a lock down and in the pouring rain, the Downs inspired me to 'get going' again.

Is that newsworthy? I'm not sure... but isn't our respect for, and connectivity to the world we live in the most pressing issue right now? After months of feeling sorry for myself, today I spoke to my consultant who advised that I could do 'a little' extra physical something. Great! Optimism!

Yes, I think. Back to it! Hubrism.

Gently my wife reminds me. Scepticism.

At least I've done the responsible thing and stayed indoors. Self-aggrandism.

Like I had a choice. I was immobile most of the time. Reflectivism.

Can't wait to get back at life though. Futurism.

Ah, but 'gently' the specialist said. Respect. Specialism.

And we are still in the middle of this thing. Realism.

Now get on and write something. Journalism.

Return to 'normal' is often a slow, challenging and emotional process. Not being stupid and hurting yourself in the first place, much more sensible.

I wish all volunteers well. I hope that you are all finding your own ways through the current situation. Looking forward to seeing some of you at the AGM, albeit via a video link.

Stay safe and keep connected.

STEVE BROOKMAN, CHAIR OF THE VRS COMMITTEE



Editor's Note

If the last year has shown us anything, it's that we can all get some strength and solace from our natural surroundings. As a member of the Comms Team at South Downs National Park it's been astonishing to see that even when access to nature and inspiring views is restricted to digital means alone it can still resonate with so many people.

We've made it a priority to try and bring a little bit of the National Park to those people who are missing it or can't get outside, through imagery and film, virtual walks and social media. From the feedback we've had it has been greatly appreciated.

At the time of writing we're still in national lockdown but we're all hoping that the spring will lift us with the extra light, sunshine and warmth. We can only hope it will get us on a path to some sort of normality soon.

We're all looking forward to you getting back to volunteering tasks en masse but it's wonderful that so many of you have managed to send in content for this edition. Thank you – as ever it's a pleasure to read your contributions and to help put together Downland Thymes for your enjoyment. Don't forget when you do get out there again – try to take some video footage of tasks for others to see. The usual reviews, photos, poems and local interest stories are also most welcome. We look forward to seeing what you send in to dt@southdowns.gov.uk.

In the meantime stay safe and enjoy the spring!

CHARLIE HELLEWELL, EDITOR, DOWNLAND THYMES



UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM

We all know the difficulties of the past year, so let's focus on what we have to look forward to. The days are getting longer, primroses are in full flower and the butterflies are taking to the wing again. It's the perfect time to do a spot of microvolunteering. In this issue I'll be talking more about the UK-wide National Parks project to promote species recording through *iNaturalist*.

National Parks volunteering officers are working together to promote *iNaturalist* as a phone app that can be used by anyone visiting the South Downs or any other National Park. One of the great things about *iNaturalist* is its artificial intelligence, which can help towards a species identification regardless of your level of knowledge. For more detail about *iNaturalist* and to find out how to get involved in the National Parks UK *iNaturalist* project, go to Page 14.

Microvolunteering has been a key area of work in our volunteer development strategy, alongside projects which include youth volunteering. The events of the past 12 months have made microvolunteering far more relevant with the advances in technology allowing this kind of small-scale (but high impact) volunteering to continue unabated. In terms of identifying species,

I really hope it can be adopted and honed to help people in future to understand the spread of species. If natural history tells us anything, it's that it won't be the same as it is now.

Wishing you well and looking forward to seeing you soon.

DANIEL GREENWOOD, SDNPA VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



WINNER!



Winter at the Seven Sisters
© Roger Kiernan

Photo competition:
Seasons of the South Downs

FROZEN WINTER DELIGHTS

Thanks to all of you who entered our new VRS photo competition!

We asked you to showcase the first of our ‘Seasons of the South Downs’ challenges ‘Winter’. What a gorgeous snowy set of snaps you have sent in!

The Downland Thymes editorial team had a really tough job choosing a winner but we thought it had to be ‘Winter at the Seven Sisters’ by Roger Kiernan, who really captured the seasonal chill at this iconic spot. We particularly loved the rays of sunshine breaking through the cloud, the finely grained layers of chalk and the talon like structures at the base of the cliffs. Many congratulations to Roger who wins

a year’s family membership to his local Wildlife Trust.
Highly commended went to James Tolson for ‘Winter in North Stoke’ which beautifully captured the light and movement of the snow drifting at the side of a track, almost evoking the shapes of the downs themselves. Also to Mark Seaman for his wintry image of ‘Stansted House’ which combined the charms of cultural heritage in the South Downs with the farming landscape, neatly framed by trees. A huge well done to James and Mark.
The images shown here today will make their way in to the Authority’s image library and may be used on the website, Instagram and other press. We will of course credit the photographer.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? COULD YOU DO BETTER?

We know we have a talented bunch of photographers out there. Can you capture something that will embody ‘Spring’ in the South Downs? You don’t need a fancy camera, a phone pic is welcome too. As long as the photo is taken in the South Downs National Park you are free to photograph anything that might feel Spring-like in the beautiful Downs. It could be lambs gambolling, a chalk stream in full flow, your favourite view, spring wildflowers or your family out for a walk.
See the **full terms and conditions** [here](#). Please remember to get people’s written consent if taking their photo for this competition.



Stansted House © Mark Seaman

HIGHLY
COMMENDED



Winter in North Stoke
© James Tolson

HIGHLY
COMMENDED

To enter our ‘Spring’ section of Seasons of the South Downs photo competition, send your photo(s) to dt@southdowns.gov.uk by midnight on **Friday 28 May 2021**.
Good Luck!



Images © Mick Heywood

CHANCTONBURY RING, AN ICONIC SOUTH DOWNS WALK

There are many great walks in the South Downs National Park, but only a few reach “iconic” status! According to Mick Heywood, Chanctonbury Ring is one of those.

1 Inhabited during the Bronze Age, Chanctonbury Ring has been an Iron Age fort that has also seen service as a Roman Temple. The Ring’s current fame stems from a crown of Beech trees planted in 1750. It is also said to be one of the most haunted places in England and, if you walk backwards seven times around it on a dark or moonless night without stopping, the Devil will appear and offer you a bowl of porridge and if you accept, grant you your dearest wish but the price is he will take your soul.

Now, I have never tried this, but I can say that whatever the weather, this walk is always worth it, offering superb panoramic views over Sussex and into Hampshire. There are many routes you can take, most will involve a steep climb to the top.

2 My walk starts in the Chanctonbury Ring car park, located at post code BN44 3DR. This will be a seven-mile circular walk, encompassing beautiful views and some interesting sites.

3 Turn left as you leave the car park and walk about 100 metres, immediately you have a choice, if you go straight forward, you can shorten the walk to about four miles. The path in front of you, climbs the scarp slope and leads you to the South Downs Way (SDW) National Trail footpath, however we want to turn left and walk through a farm yard. The area is being tidied up, but there are still some “odd” vehicles lying about, a tram for instance. I would love to know how that got there.

4 Continue on the track, to your left you get glimpses of Wiston House and Estate. The estate is mentioned in the Domesday Book. The Goring family have owned the estate since the 1700’s. It was Charles Goring who planted the ring of beech trees at Chanctonbury Ring. Although the estate remains in the Goring family, the House has been leased out to various tenants, it was the HQ for the Canadian Army in WW2, the Foreign and Commonwealth office have leased the property for the past 65 years or so.

5 To your right you are looking up the scarp slope to the top of Lions Bank, we will be walking up there shortly. After around two miles you will come to a large display board telling you about the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS). The SDS was launched in 2007 when the Goring family decided to set aside 67 hectares (165 acres) of the Wiston Estate in the South Downs National Park (SDNP) for the benefit of the community, the land and its wildlife. Turn right on the track and as you start to walk uphill, you can see examples of what the SDS are doing, with community orchards on your right. After half a mile or so, you pass into an open field and keep going forward and this will take you up to a disused rifle range. The Steyning Rifle Range was first used in the late 19th century to train army volunteers. The last shots were fired in the mid 80’s and since then the whole area has been kept as a conservation area.

6 There are eight target lifts still in place hidden behind a large mound as well as the fire control room. The SDS and local grammar school as well as the SDNP Rangers are trying to maintain the area and keep a sense of the history of the place. If you have time, you can have a look inside, it is still possible to find expended bullets in the earth mound behind the targets.

As you leave the range, look to your left and follow the path up the steep hill. At the top of the hill there is a bench where the SDS has put some poetry in a tin. These “poetry sites” are dotted around the SDS, but if you have time and the weather is nice, here’s a good place to stop and have a rest and refreshment and take in the views across Steyning and the Downs towards East Sussex. Suitably refreshed, walk through the gate and turn left, walking up the well-made track. As you climb, keep taking the right track. You will pass an area that has been set aside for mountain bikers, so you do not want to stray into this area!

7 At the top of the hill take the right path and follow it for half a mile or so until it meets the SDW. Turn right and follow the SDW to Chanctonbury Hill. You should now have spectacular views over the channel looking towards the Isle of Wight to the west. Normally there are red kites flying about as well, to keep you company. You should also be able to see Cissbury Ring, which is one of the largest Middle Iron Age hill forts in Europe. The earthworks date back to 250BC

8 To keep the chalk grass land healthy, the normal “grazers” are augmented with other animals not often associated with the South Downs, so you may come across long horned cattle and New Forest ponies. Keeping the chalk grassland trim creates a thriving habitat, home to species unique to the South Downs such as the round-headed rampion, orchids ranging from the burnt orchid and early spider orchid to autumn lady’s tresses, and butterflies including the Adonis blue and chalkhill blue

As you approach Chanctonbury Hill, the views really open up to your left across the Weald – you can see the North Downs, BlackDown and a host of villages

9 After passing Chanctonbury re-join the SDW and follow the path down towards the village of Washington. You will now descend steeply down a grassy slope through the woods. Look out for an unmarked path on the right as you go down the slope, just after a clearing. This path descends to a track, which leads you back to the car park. Enjoy the walk through the trees and after a mile or so you should be back on the road where you started.

MICK HEYWOOD, VOLUNTEER RANGER, CENTRAL DOWNS

Please note: At the time of going to press the current Covid-19 restrictions state that you should only take exercise in your local area. If Chanctonbury Ring is not your local area please save this walk for a time when you can spread your wings further.

CELEBRATING OUR WONDERFUL WOODLANDS

The trees and woodlands within the National Park are often overlooked when you think of the Downs. This is a pity when you consider the jewels that we have from the Hangers in the west to the elms in Brighton. Kingley Vale (the largest yew forest in Europe) in the south and Alice Holt forest park in the north. Together with the Weald, the woodlands have a far richer biodiversity than the chalk grassland that so encapsulates the Downs themselves.

The South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service (SDVRS) has carried out tasks in many of these woodlands, one of which is Ebernoe Common and

is the subject of the accompanying article. There is so much to celebrate about our trees and woods, from those ancient trees such as the Queen Elizabeth oak in Cowdray Park and the ancient yews in our churchyards to the coppices and woods throughout the National Park that have supported so many rural crafts and industries. The SDVRS has been part of this heritage so why not share your experiences and knowledge with all of us by writing a few words about your favourite wood or special trees? Send through to dt@southdowns.gov.uk.

TERRY DOYLE, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
WEALDEN HEATHS

Ebernoe Common Reserve
© Colin Booty

EBERNOE COMMON RESERVE

Ebernoe volunteers
laying a hedge
© Colin Booty

Close to the National Park boundary in northwest Sussex is Ebernoe Common, a National Nature Reserve owned and managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT).

According to the 'Flora of Sussex' it is 'perhaps the most interesting woodland on the Weald clay in Sussex'. It's an example of a habitat which has been almost completely lost from Sussex – a wood pasture where cattle roam, feeding in the glades and under the trees. However, there is also evidence of industrial use with a rare example of a small scale 18th century brick and tile kiln, and associated clay pits, and a Furnace Lake associated with the Wealden iron industry in the 16th century

Geologically, the reserve is basically a story of two parts. The northern half is on Weald Clay, slightly acidic and inclined to be very wet and sticky in winter. The southern half is a 'head' deposit, sandy material transported from the Greensand escarpment a few kilometres to the south under periglacial conditions. The underlying geology, of course, affects the plants present and, along with the variety of habitat, results in a rich flora including 68 species which are indicators of ancient woodland. It is home to important populations of

bats including the rare barbastelle and Bechstein's, important populations of deadwood insects and at least 1,000 species of fungi.

In recent years the National Park rangers and VRS have helped with various aspects of habitat management. These include scything bracken in one of the old rews* which SWT had opened up to improve conditions for flowers such as wild daffodils, bluebells, primroses and pignut. However, probably their favourite task has been laying a hedge along the boundary between flower-rich old grassland and the neighbouring farmland. This went well in the winter of 2019/20 but, like so much else, COVID-19 disrupted plans for the 2020/21 season, but with luck some hedge will still be laid in the winter.

COLIN BOOTY, VOLUNTARY RESERVE
MANAGER, EBERNOE COMMON.

*Rew – An old English word for
hedgerow. Also 'hay-rew' or
'hedge-rew'.

SPRING UP THE DOWNS

A crusty green and white
Hoar, grass and hair frost
Soon to be lost.
As Spring's warmth slowly thaws Winter's blight.
The dawn sun turns the water silver.
Then orange and bright.

Longer days and less night.
From beneath the earth bulbs.
Seeds start to push and fight.
To work their way to sun and light.
To appear yellow, blue, red and white.

Floating and rolling banks of fog and cloud.
Only brief glimpses allowed.
Of the valleys and the Downs.
From High n' Over,
Ditchling Beacon, Beachy Head.
Seven Sisters cliffs to drool over.

Ouse, Cuckmere, Adur, Arun and Rother.
Have flooded plains.
No bother to migrant birds to feed and wade.
From their northward journey made.

The green Downs splashed with sheep and a
white gambolling dot.
Occasional deer skittish with fear not so easy to
spot. Cows and calves munching the turf.
Badgers setts to see, their earth paths clear.
Rabbit burrows also suddenly appear.

Walk for an hour.
On the top and sea afar.
Stop for a thermos of tea.
More walking thereafter.
To a Pub for a pickle sandwich and a jar.
Long afternoon tramp back to the car.

Through woods, and over a stile
Or a kissing gate.
That always makes me smile.
Along farm tracks, muddy lanes and a chalk path.
Heading home with a warm tired glow.
For a meal and a warm bath.
A few pictures of the sights to show.

BY ROGER P. READ, JANUARY 2021



Cuckmere Haven at sunrise
© Tom Sigler

With restriction on our movement due to Covid-19, I turned to my garden for suitable photographic subjects. I saw an awful lot of aphids and thought they would be interesting to photograph and investigate. What I learned was fascinating...

APHIDS



Aphids are true bugs (*Hemiptera* order) as they have a straw like proboscis that enables them to suck sap from plants. In large numbers this damages plants, and they can also carry destructive plant viruses. These soft bodied, pear-shaped insects, measure 3mm at most. Nymphs look like little adults. Common names include greenfly and blackfly, and they can be other colours including yellow, orange and grey and appearances can be quite different.

In optimum conditions it has been calculated that a single aphid can produce millions of offspring. At the start of a season, newly hatched females reproduce themselves without fertilisation, males not needed! They save time in the reproductive process by giving birth to live young rather than laying eggs. During the spring and summer all these births are pregnant females that can replicate the process giving birth to the next generation of live new fertile females. This goes on and on, so their numbers increase exponentially without a male in sight.

Aphids will freeze and die in the winter so when the temperature cools, they give birth to some males. When the males are sexually mature, they mate with the females, who then produce eggs that will survive the winter and carry on the species. The eggs hatch into more female aphids in the spring, and the process starts again. The males die off in the winter like the females.

If food is plentiful and the host plant is not overcrowded aphids remain wingless to conserve their energy as wing production is protein intensive. However, when food resources run low or the host plant gets over-crowded, they grow wings to fly to pastures new. However they have no control over flight and may end up wherever the wind takes them, some are lucky to land on suitable host plants, many are not.

Aphids have a mutualistic relationship with some ant species. By sucking sap from plants aphid excrement contains sugar. Sugar is a nutrient highly valued by ants, so they will herd aphids and protect them from predators to safeguard their sugar supply. Some ant species go further by carrying aphids' eggs laid at the end of summer into their burrows to protect them. When the warm weather returns, they carry their eggs out to the aphids' favoured plants to create a new herd.

So, what value are aphids to nature? The best answer I can give is they are at the bottom of the food chain and should they disappear an unknown number of species higher up the chain may disappear creating untold damage to our fragile ecosystem.

If your plants become overwhelmed with aphids, please use soap solution to remove them not insecticides likely to kill other species.

ROGER KIERNAN, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
SEVEN SISTERS





Images © Martin Cowell

THE STONE STILE AT WEST MEON CHURCHYARD

There is popular footpath on the boundary of our garden that crosses the old brick and flint wall of West Meon churchyard. At that point, there is an unusual stile that I have never seen anywhere else.

No-one seems to know the purpose of this hole-in-the-wall (it is certainly not a source of ready cash) but it could allow a small dog through. You can walk alongside the wall in the churchyard for a few metres and then step over it at a point where it is lower. However, this then involves slithering down a steepish

chalk slope on the other side which is definitely not an "official" route.

Walkers wearing skirts rather than trousers sometimes go that way or dog-walkers with larger or less athletic animals that they don't want to lift over the stile! Anyway, the hole makes a nice frame for a photo of gravestones but I'm sure that's not its real purpose.

If anyone can throw any light on this design of stile or knows of others, I would be interested to hear from them.

MARTIN COWELL, VOLUNTEER RANGER, WESTERN DOWNS

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DID YOU KNOW?

TOAD IN THE HOLE AND PEA THROWING IN LEWES

Did you know that the town of Lewes hosts the annual international Toad in the Hole competition? Not to be confused with the famous sausage and batter dish, the game involves throwing brass coins at a small table with a hole in it. The competition takes place in the Town Hall in Lewes every April and normally attracts over 40 teams. The game is undergoing a revival; in recent years people from East Sussex have been exporting it around the country. The town also hosts the annual World Pea-Throwing

competition, which has been filmed by TV crews from around the world. Locals are unclear as to the origins of the event, although some estimate it has been going on for over 40 years. In 2003 the world record was set at the competition, when a pea was thrown a whopping 38.7 metres! The wind and the softness of the peas (frozen ones are allowed) are said to be important factors for competitors on the day of the competition.

TOM REYNOLDS, SDNPA APPRENTICE, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR



© Ben Barker, Flickr, CC

LEWES MARTYRS: HIDDEN HISTORY ON A SOUTH DOWNS GOLF COURSE

Like many of you, as well as helping as a volunteer, I enjoy walking in the National Park. But I also have another passion which takes me to some very interesting and scenic areas of the downs: golf.

We are blessed with many beautiful golf courses in the National Park and, at the eastern end, a few of these are situated on top of the downs, affording wonderful views across a wide and extensive vista. One such course is Lewes Golf Club, sitting next to Mount Caburn and providing breathtaking and panoramic views in all directions.

It is little wonder then that although I have played this course many times it is only recently that, in my many attempts to find a poorly hit golf ball on the eighteenth fairway, I discerned what appeared to be an obelisk of some description, perhaps 15 to 20 foot tall, almost hidden by overgrowth, looking somewhat forlorn and forgotten and standing in what appeared to me to be a most unlikely spot just 50 yards from the middle of the 18th fairway.

Having finished my round of golf, I wandered back to the obelisk, intrigued and bewildered. Closer inspection revealed it to be a memorial to the 'Lewes Martyrs'. I had a vague memory of being told of the Lewes Martyrs by a Lewesian friend some years ago. I read the plinth with interest.

The text was just about legible and read:

"In loving memory of the undernamed seventeen protestant martyrs who, for their faithful testimony to God's truth were, during the reign of Queen Mary, burned to death in front of the then Star Inn now the Town Hall."

This was grim reading but it nonetheless motivated me to do some research.

The Lewes Martyrs were a group of 17 Protestants who were burned at the stake in Lewes, East Sussex, England between 1555 and 1557. These executions were part of the Marian persecutions of Protestants during the reign of Mary I.

On 6 June 1556, Thomas Harland of Woodmancote, Near Henfield, West Sussex, carpenter, John Oswald (or Oseward) of Woodmancote, Near Henfield, West Sussex husbandman, Thomas Reed of Ardingly, Sussex and Thomas Avington (or Euington) of Ardingly, Sussex, turner, were burnt.

Richard Woodman and 9 other people were burned together in Lewes on 22 June 1557, on the orders of Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London — the largest single bonfire of people that ever took place in England. Somehow, knowing the names and occupations of those involved makes it more poignant. What I had not realised is that the celebrations in Lewes on November 5th commemorate both the Martyrs as well as the Gunpowder Plot.

The obelisk was erected in 1901 and an annual service is held at the foot of the memorial.

ALAN JONES, VOLUNTEER RANGER EASTERN DOWNS



© Alan Jones



© Alan Jones

Related web sites:

The Sussex Martyrs

TripAdvisor Lewes Martyrs Memorial

Lewes Bonfire history page



Lewes
© Anne Katrin Purkiss



Youth action, Truleigh
© Daniel Greenwood

VISIT:
UK National Parks
iNaturalist Project
Download iNaturalist
app for iPhone and
Android
Seek app

Microvolunteering with the National Parks

This year all 15 UK National Parks are working together to establish a microvolunteering project on *iNaturalist*.

This project will aim to increase awareness of species in National Parks using the software *iNaturalist*. Though it will have a strong visitor focus, the project can provide a long-term, highly rewarding experience for anyone interested in species monitoring.

What is iNaturalist?

iNaturalist is a website and app which you can submit species records to. Species records require a basic organism type, a location and a date. You can submit records over the website or from your phone or tablet using the app for iPhone or Android.

What happens to the species records?

The species records are aligned by location and will automatically be filed in the project by location. This data will then be sifted by staff and volunteers to ensure accuracy and to avoid duplication with species records submitted to *iRecord*.

Why aren't we using iRecord?

iNaturalist is preferable to *iRecord* in promoting this kind of species recording as it is more interactive and accessible for those who are recording for the first time. That is not to criticise *iRecord* which is a vital resource for species monitoring and conservation in general in the UK. Steps are being taken to ensure the two pieces of software don't compete with each other.

iNaturalist is easy to use and quick to pick up. For someone visiting the National Park for the first time looking to support with species monitoring, *iNaturalist* makes it easy. It also has the amazing *iNaturalist Seek* app partnered with it which can generate an identification just by using your phone's in-built camera, without actually taking a photo.

How will this benefit the National Park?

If you look at *iNaturalist* you can see that the most observed species is Himalayan balsam. This is an invasive species which many of you know well(!). Having a distribution map that is maintained by the public will be a great help to understand its impact. You can say the same for many other invasive species. If a rare species is submitted, its location is automatically protected by the software.

The National Park will also benefit from raising ecological awareness among visitors. Visiting groups and families will be able to use the app to learn about new species and habitats. This could be a huge step forward in promoting responsible behaviour among visitors. It also allows more people to become involved as volunteers through the micro-task of submitting a species record.

How can I find out more?

The officer leading on the project **has recorded this video outlining the plans** and potential ways volunteers could be involved in future. As well as this, stay tuned for an *iNaturalist* training session that I will be delivering for volunteers on **Wednesday 5 May** at 11.00.

When will the project begin?

Species records are being submitted all the time but we are planning for a full launch in April, in time for Microvolunteering Day on 15 April.

If you have any further questions or comments **please get in touch by email**.

DANIEL GREENWOOD, SDNPA VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



SOUTH DOWNS HEATHS ARE SPRINGING TO LIFE

Hesworth common
© Olivia French

I recently joined the Heathlands Re-united team (HeRe) in November 2020 as the new Communications and Engagement Officer.

Of course it's been a strange time to start a new job, even more so working for a National Park when we are told to stay at home and limited on how far we can explore. During this latest lockdown, I've been using my daily exercise outing to get to know my local heaths and sections of the Serpent Trail with my dog.

As with all of the National Park engagement, Heathlands Reunited activities have largely moved online, running virtual walks with the Wealden Heath Rangers so that visitors can still get their fix of the Park and the heathlands, previous walks can be found on **the website here**. The heaths are beautiful all year round but as the rusty coloured bracken and iron rich puddles give way to green again it's a great time to get out and enjoy the tranquillity and beautiful sounds

of the heathland habitat as it springs to life. As part of the project, we've been revamping the Serpent Trail guide. Wealden heath Ranger Kate has been busy replacing all of the 500+ way marker disks along the trail in all weathers. As well as an updated logo and waymarker for the trail, the direction will now be colour coded, with the 'Tail route' from Haslemere to Petersfield marked in purple, and the 'Head route' from Petersfield to Haslemere in green. Watch this space for the launch of the new trail guide soon!

As many of you will know, now is a crucial time for the heathlands. March to September marks ground nesting bird season on our heaths. You can help to spread the word about our **Take the Lead campaign** encouraging responsible dog

ownership by telling friends and family to remember to stick to paths, keeping dogs out of vegetation and under control and bagging and binning dog poo. This allows the young of rare ground nesting species such as the Dartford warbler the best chance to survive. If you are lucky enough to photograph some heathland wildlife in the coming months, we would love to see your photos!

Why not go one step further and become a **Dog Ambassador**? You can help us educate people and encourage responsible behaviour so that this beautiful place we love can be enjoyed for generations to come.

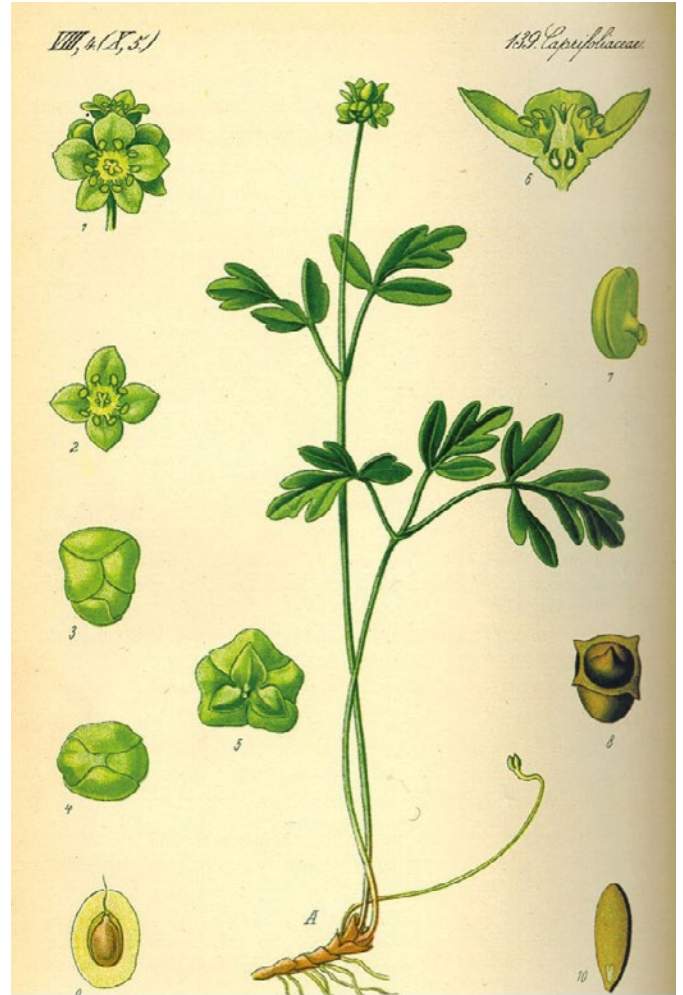
I hope to meet lots of you on the South Downs heathlands soon!

OLIVIA FRENCH, HEATHLANDS REUNITED COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT OFFICER.

Plants in the Park



Town Hall Clock, *Adoxa moschatellina* Credit: Wikipedia



Credit: *Adoxa moschatellina* from Thomé, Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz (1885)

A SPRING CURIOSITY

One of the advantages of walking with a wildlife group, be it your local RSPB or Sussex Wildlife Trust etc. is the extraordinary wealth of knowledge that resides in many of your fellow walkers.

This was how I was lucky enough to be introduced to a miniature but charming little plant known as the Town Hall Clock, *Adoxa moschatellina*. It's a carpet-forming perennial rhizome but interestingly it is not closely related to other plants so is the only member of the Moschatel family.

It does rather hide its light under a bushel being only up to 12cm high and green

in colour and I'm sure I wouldn't have noticed it if it hadn't been pointed out to me. It flowers around April. It has five tiny flowers at the top of each stem, but in a very unusual arrangement; four facing outward at right angles to each other like the faces of a clock and the fifth facing upward.

They are pollinated by tiny flies and nocturnal moths. It is a plant of damp, shady woods so there are many more records

of it in the central and western areas of the National Park although there is a large colony on the path leading up from Jevington church in the eastern Downs. I hope more people will look for it in future and appreciate its quirkiness. Take a hand lens!

KATE FRANKLAND, VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS

**SOUTH DOWNS
VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE**

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Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. Issue 91, March 2021. © SDNPA.

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Design: The Way Design (2166)

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