

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 92 | SUMMER 2021



CHAIR'S CORNER

I hope that this message finds everyone well.
The big question on the VRS Chair's mind over the last quarter has been 'Will the wind never stop?'

I seem to have spent half my life since the last edition carrying out running repairs at the allotment. But as I said to my wife, the other day when she exclaimed, in not very polite language that she wanted the wind to stop; 'We helped create the increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather through our lack of hubris and thirst for material satisfaction, so maybe we ought to accept responsibility, heed the warning and change our behaviour'.
OK, maybe it wasn't the best time to have that conversation at 6am, whilst trying to lash down the escaping tarpaulin covering our chicken run, in howling wind and lashing rain. But... I stand by the sentiment. The chickens themselves were even less impressed. Every time the wind blew up their tail feathers they squawked loudly.
On the positive side though, it is great to

see the crops growing so fast after the recent rain. Everything has grown hugely this last couple of weeks.
What has worried me though, is the lack of insects. Lots of lovely flowering plants and hardly an insect to be seen. We are so careful not to use pesticides and to plant things that will encourage wildlife recovery and yet the air is not full of the wonderful life that we want to see. Clearly the weather has played a part but then that simply brings me back around to the conversation about the frequency of extreme weather.
The volunteer news that dominates this month is, of course the fact that volunteering is starting to unlock. I would like to thank the ranger teams for the hard work they have put into making a return possible. As providers of a service to the



environment it is important that the VRS gets back to what we do as soon as is safely practical.
I know that we are all eager to get going, particularly as the first signs of decent weather start to become apparent. The speed at which the South Downs National Park is unlocking broadly reflects the speed at which other National Park volunteers are unlocking.
I must remind Mrs B of that the next time she is hanging on to the tail end of a tarpaulin in a howling gale, whilst I frantically lash bits together. 'It's collaboration darling!'
STEVE BROOKMAN – VRS CHAIR

UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM

I hope you had a pleasant spring and, as restrictions have eased, that you've managed to get out and about that bit more, not least into our wonderful National Park.



One of the key functions of the Volunteer Ranger Service is to support partner organisations across the National Park. Our partners have had a very challenging time of it, and it will take longer for these important organisations and projects to get up and running again.
I have been involved in environmental volunteering for a decade now. Never in that time did I think that almost an entire

year of volunteering tasks would have to go on hold. Never again! It's important that we take this opportunity to do things better than before and to make use of the space available to see how we can all develop things for the better.
We will be offering volunteers an annual survey to let us know how your experience is going and to gather your valuable feedback. This will be launched when we are back into our stride, without the threat of looming lockdowns and virus outbreaks in the community. Let's hope that we have begun to turn a corner now.
As you return to the Downs again in groups, please do download **iNaturalist** and take some snaps of the wildlife you encounter whilst you're spending such valuable time in the landscape. I promise it will enrich your

experience and help you to learn more about the landscapes you are helping to conserve.
Microvolunteering is something everyone can do and, personally, it is becoming something of an addiction! I hope to see your orchid and butterfly images appearing on the **National Parks UK project page** as your sightings are submitted this summer.
In April we launched our public microvolunteering mailing list to inspire members of the public to support the National Park in small but meaningful ways. You can sign up by **visiting the webpage**.
Thanks again for sticking with us in a difficult year and I hope you enjoy your time supporting the National Park this summer. Onwards and upwards!
DANIEL GREENWOOD, VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



Bee orchid
© Charlie Hellewell/SDNPA



EDITOR'S NOTE

At the time of writing, we still seem to be suffering from a cold and wet May. I know that will not stop you hardy volunteer types that get out in all weathers but it would be nice to have some warmth and sunshine in the near future.
BEE-AUTIFUL BEE ORCHIDS
Last year, once the first lockdown eased I was determined to get out and find one of my favourite wild flowers – the bee orchid. This year will be no different, but I wonder where I will find one?
The bee orchid is an iconic species of chalk grassland, identified by the flower's pink sepals that look like wings and the brown velvety lips with yellow markings that mimic a female bee. Pollination occurs when males fly in mistakenly trying to mate with it. Sadly, the right bee species, which

is thought to have driven the evolution of the flower, does not live here so the bee orchid is self-pollinated in the UK. This diminutive chalk grassland beauty always seems to pop up in the most unlikely of places. Two years ago, there were half a dozen at the edge of a carpark in the Western Downs. Last year in the same spot, there were none. They are found throughout the UK but are most common on dry, chalk and limestone grasslands between June and July. Flower spikes can be up to 30 cm tall and can have a number of flowers growing up each stem. It is always a surprise when you do eventually find one, as the flower heads are much smaller than you would imagine. The cover image was a bee orchid found at the western end of the South Downs, last June.

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS
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 is 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. This edition we are also asking for your top tips on how to encourage wildlife to your garden or local greenspace. 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, enjoy the summer!
CHARLIE HELLEWELL,
EDITOR, DOWNLAND THYMES

SPRING IN THE DOWNS

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

In the second of our **‘Seasons of the South Downs’** challenges we asked you to showcase **‘Spring’**. What an interesting and diverse range of snaps you have sent in!

Again, the Downland Thymes editorial team had a really tough job choosing a winner, but this time we thought it had to be **‘Early morning Woolbeding’** by **Cass Morgan**. At first, we were a bit confused thinking that Cass had sent in a winter shot for the Spring competition. However, on closer inspection, we saw that the gorgeous early morning photo of a swan serenely floating on a beautiful, but chilly looking pond on Woolbeding Common was in fact captured on May Day itself.

Spring has definitely been open to interpretation this year. Many congratulations to Cass who wins an annual family membership to her local Wildlife Trust.

Highly commended went to Terry Doyle for his stunning ‘Spring view from Butser Hill’. In his panoramic Downs shot, Terry captured the slowly emerging blackthorn blossom and green shoots appearing in the fields. Also to Tom Caton for his image of ‘Toads crossing, Meon Valley’ highlighting the perils of spring road-crossings for breeding toads, and the lengths the community have gone to in helping them cross without danger. A huge well done to Terry and Tom.

HIGHLY
COMMENDED



Photo competition:
Seasons of the South Downs

Spring view from Butser Hill © Terry Doyle



Toads Crossing, Meon Valley © Tom Caton

HIGHLY
COMMENDED

WINNER!



Early morning Woolbeding
© Cass Morgan

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 ‘Summer’ 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 like Summer to you. It could be wildflowers blooming on chalk grassland, grazing cattle on a heath, insects and butterflies enjoying nectar or your family on a picnic with a view.

Send your entries to:
dt@southdowns.gov.uk by
Wednesday 25 August 2021.

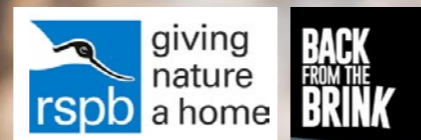
See the [full terms and conditions here](#). Please remember to get people’s written consent if taking their photo for this competition.

To enter our ‘Summer’ category of Seasons of the South Downs photo competition, send your photo(s) to dt@southdowns.gov.uk by midnight on **Wednesday 25 August 2021**.

Good Luck!

FIELD CRICKETS... BACK FROM THE BRINK

Field Cricket (*Gryllus campestris*)
© Nigel Symington



Field crickets are awesome! I first discovered these wonderful critters in May 2018 while out for a walk; feeling a little lost and peckish, I stumbled out of some trees onto a heathland hillside and into a wall of song. Honestly, the sound was incredible.

Curious about who was singing, I made a recording in the hopes of playing it back to someone more knowledgeable; I volunteer at RSPB Pulborough Brooks with many staff and volunteers who have significant wildlife knowledge.

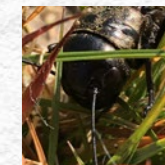
At the same time, a memory tickled my mind – I had recently attended an RSPB volunteer talk about the Back from the Brink project. Back from the Brink is a highly ambitious, National Lottery funded project to save 20 species from extinction, while also benefitting over 200 other species, across 19 projects. RSPB Pulborough Brooks is involved with two species – the field cricket and the little whirlpool ramshorn snail. After hearing that incredible sound, I wondered whether I had just heard field crickets.

The answer was yes! And, enchanted by their song, I resolved to get more involved. The team at Pulborough Brooks worked hard preparing suitable habitat for field crickets, and in April 2019 a group of us went to collect some nymphs, young crickets, for their new home.

Field crickets, *Gryllus campestris*, live on lowland heathlands where the grasses they eat grow and there is suitable habitat for their burrows. They are around 2cm long, black or brown in colour with yellow wing bases. A flightless insect, their wings have beautiful designs on them that look like wrought iron. Males use modified veins on their wings, called harps, to sing and attract a mate, usually from early May to the end of June. Once adult, they can walk up to 100m a day, and they dig winding burrows, sometimes within minutes. They also clear an area outside the entrance, on which to sunbathe and sing, the shape of it acting as a natural amphitheatre. They are quite fussy about their habitat, which may have contributed to their decline until the 1980s, only one population of fewer than 100 individuals was known to survive. Since then, through various projects, and latterly through Back from the Brink, they have increased in number and now have six populations across Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.

The translocation work is done strictly under licence, and involves coaxing cricket nymphs out of their burrows, then carefully transporting and releasing them on a suitable site. During summer 2019, I was delighted to hear the translocated nymphs singing as adults at Pulborough Brooks. At RSPB Farnham Heath, another site for the project, they did particularly well, and over 337 males were heard singing that summer. Another translocation was planned in 2020 but circumstances led to it being postponed. However, an unexpected consequence meant that, when crickets were heard singing at Pulborough in summer 2020, it proved that they had bred successfully on the site! Translocations have been able to resume on both sites this year, and I look forward to getting out on the heaths again in the next few weeks to listen for their glorious song.

**ELINOR NEWMAN, VOLUNTEER,
RSPB, PULBOROUGH BROOKS,
ASSISTANT COMMUNICATIONS
AND ENGAGEMENT OFFICER
HEATHLANDS REUNITED PROJECT**



Listen to a field cricket here!



Field cricket
(*Gryllus campestris*)
© Bruce Middleton



Field cricket (*Gryllus campestris*)
© Elinor Newman



Queen Elizabeth Oak © Terry Doyle

THE JOHN COWDRAY ARBORETUM, WEST SUSSEX

Set in typical rolling downland and lying just a couple of miles from the National Park offices in Midhurst, The John Cowdray Arboretum is part of the Cowdray Estate. The Arboretum was established in 2000 and opened to the public in 2009. It is situated in the old Deer Park at Benbow Pond. In the arboretum you'll find the Queen Elizabeth Oak which is estimated to be between 850 and 1,000 years old.

The Deer Park has other veteran trees and is located close to the Queen Elizabeth Jubilee Walk. If you are coming by car then park at Benbow pond, on the A272 and go through the gate, up the slope and follow the signs. If you come by public transport, the bus station isn't too far from the estate. It is worth stopping at the Cowdray

farm shop and picking up a walk leaflet (or coffee and a cake) and start your walk from there. Once you are in the arboretum the choice is yours from a variety of walks. The views across to the Downs from the crest of the hill is well worth the slightly strenuous walk.

The new planting is beginning to fill out and there are a good number of veteran trees, not just the Queen Elizabeth oak but some wonderful lime and sweet chestnuts as well. The lime has attracted large quantities of mistletoe and there are stands of limes looking like oversized Christmas trees bedecked with huge ball decorations of the plant.

**TERRY DOYLE, VOLUNTEER RANGER
WESTERN DOWNS**



Lime and mistletoe © Terry Doyle

FLAMING JUNE



Flaming June!
Can't come a moment too soon.
Midsummer's Day.
Send CoVid on it's way.

Everyone outdoors in the fields, rivers,
lakes, mountains, forests, countryside and city park.
All up for a good time
and a lark.

Dogs loose or on their leads.
My, hear how they bark.
Panoramic vistas.
Feet with blisters.

Castles, cornets, cakes and cream teas.
Memories of those who have kissed us.
Beaches ,sand, warm seas
and gentle breeze.

Gone the long dark days of winter
and lockdown. Sun strong,
restoring the frown.
On faces to smiles.
As ramblers happily climb over fences,
gates and stiles.

Having walked many miles in boots
and a pair of shorts they bought.
Now refreshment is sought.
A picnic or a pub lunch.
Or fish and chips to eat on the crunch
of the pebble beach.
Hours and hours of glorious sunshine.

The longest day allowing
the nation to play.
Enjoying ! Not suffering the power of nature.

Swallows and Swifts nesting from Africa.
A campfire and the chord of a guitar.
Singing happy voices heard from afar!

Getting on for ten thirty at night.
Still a bit of light.
Time to go home. Back to reality school,
computer, work and the mobile phone.

Get back before its too late or dark.
Amazing to think that for so many of us,
this flaming and glorious day has been
set in a National Park.
Conserve it we must. It is the Nation's blood,
breath and heart.

ROGER P. READ – VOLUNTEER RANGER



Images
Swanbourne Lake, Arundel
© SDNPA/Sam Moore



FEATHERED FRIENDS

Every year, thousands of visitors flock to the South Downs National Park, but not just of the human kind.

The South Downs is an important place for wildlife too; particularly migratory birds. Many of the UK's most threatened breeding bird species pass through each year. Some stop here to breed, while others like striking ring ouzels and pied flycatchers just stop to refuel.

I can plot my year by arrivals and departures; nightingales serenade in spring, turtle doves purr through summer and curlew calls mix in with winter flocks of geese and wigeon.

For the last few years, I've been documenting the wildlife here with my camera, sharing the images to help raise conservation awareness. You don't need fancy camera kit either, you'd be amazed at the close-up captures you can take just with a mobile phone. It's an easy and accessible hobby to get into, especially for families wanting to help connect kids to nature!

Common species like goldfinches, rabbits and kestrels are easy enough to find with a little observation, but if you look closely at the wildlife around us, more unusual species will start to stand out. The cliffs at Seaford host an incredible summer colony of kittiwakes, while an early autumn trip to Cuckmere Haven will almost guarantee whinchat or wheatear sightings.

Discovering rarer species takes time and patience though. I take long hikes mapping out where I'm most likely to find the species I want to see; from foxes and adders to purple sandpipers. I'll head to coastal cliffs for peregrines or woodland glades for cuckoo, then listen for their calls. For complete beginners, I'd recommend visiting a nature reserve where staff and volunteers are on hand to help you get started, like RSPB Pulborough Brooks in West Sussex.

My method of working as I walk through the countryside has taught me a lot about the role visitors play in protecting our landscape too. Until learning about species and habitats, I hadn't realised that a fragile patch of kidney vetch could sustain a colony of rare small blue butterflies, that birds

like skylark nest right on the ground, or that people, dogs and drones repeatedly disturbing roosting birds can really put them at risk.

By sticking to the paths, taking your litter home and taking care not to disturb wildlife, you can help protect the incredible biodiversity on our doorstep while you discover it for yourself.

SARA HUMPHREY,
WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER
AND NATURALIST

@sussex_sara

All images
© Sara Humphrey



Pied flycatcher



Nightingale



Fox



Adder



Lining up to cut the grass.
© Chris Barbara

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Not all farms can be managed in the same manner as the Knepp Estate, the ReWilding project in Sussex, but it is encouraging that more farmers are interested in promoting regenerative agriculture.

I have yet to find a succinct definition of the term but the Regeneration International website has the following definition:-

"Regenerative Agriculture" describes farming and grazing practices that, among other benefits, reverse climate change by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity – resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle."

As soil health improves through this method, input requirements may decrease, and crop yields may increase as soils are more resilient against extreme weather. I have been looking through various farming magazines to try to understand how the farming community is approaching this subject. It is instructive to find the different ways that farmers are setting about enhancing soil health and increasing biodiversity.

One Sussex farmer grows stubble turnips for winter sheep grazing. This both sequesters carbon and adds organic material to the soil. Two-year grass 'leys' are often used on difficult soil and topped. A ley is an area of land put down to grass, clover or herbs, typically used for

forage and replaced on a regular basis. Organic material from local sources such as stables is also used. The farmer aims to not disturb the soil too much but to use appropriate tilling methods to suit the crops he plants.

In Cambridge a farmer plants three metre wide tree strips of mixed apple and timber producing trees between 24 metre wide arable strips. The trees give protection to the arable crop and do not compete with them for nutrients and water as they root much deeper. Carbon capture and biodiversity is enhanced and natural pest control takes over from the use of pesticides.

Together with the Woodland Trust, another farmer, close to York, has underplanted 74 acres of trees with wildflowers. By ploughing up to one metre deep, the weed seeds and fertile top soil are buried and then wildflower seeds are spread over the ground creating, what is known as "forests of flowers".

It was enlightening to find so many ways that the farming community is trying to respond to the wenvironmental challenges that we are facing. Let us hope that the Government's plans to replace the current farming subsidies will help to accelerate a positive change in farming practices to the benefit of soil health and biodiversity.

TERRY DOYLE
VOLUNTEER RANGER, WESTERN DOWNS

NATURE RECOVERY

5 TOP TIPS

for renaturing your garden

We recently asked the National Park staff to offer their top tips for making their garden (or shared green space) more attractive to wildlife. We summarised the results in a short film hopefully inspiring others to have a go...

▶ Watch the film here

1. DON'T MOW.

Let your grass grow. Particularly over the summer months, try to leave at least some of your lawn unmown and see what flowers for the bees and butterflies.



© K Dzuibinska

2. GIVE WILDLIFE A HOME

Even a compost heap or log pile will do. Bee hotels are popular, put it somewhere sunny and see who moves in. Add nesting boxes for garden birds and second broods may take up residence this year. Don't forget hedgehog houses too!



© T Squire

3. JUST ADD WATER


Ponds can be any shape or size. Any pond is better than no pond, even an old sink with aquatic plants for cover will bring in dragonflies, birds, insects and mammals to drink and bathe. Try to use rainwater as tap water has added chlorine.



© T Squire

4. PLANT POLLINATORS OR HEDGING FOR SUSTENANCE AND COVER

Try to keep butterflies and bees in mind when you plant anything in your garden. Will there be food for them throughout the year? Rather than a fence try to plant a hedge.



© J Nicholls

5. FEED THEM

The easiest thing you can do to encourage wildlife to your garden is to feed them



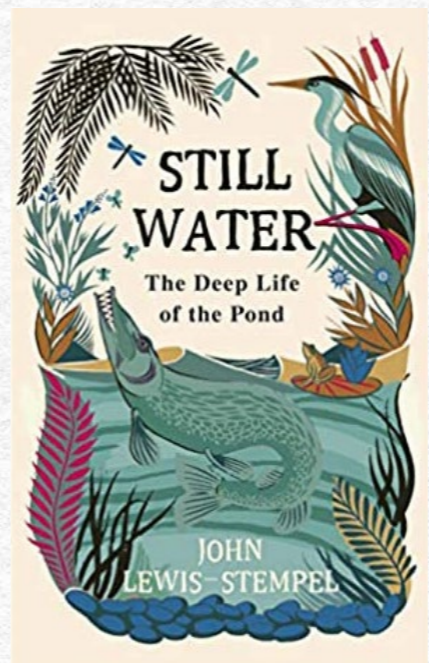


© K Dzuibinska

WHAT'S YOUR SECRET?

Let us know your top tips for bringing the birds, bees and bats to your garden? If you have images of your achievements, we'd love to see them. Send to: dt@southdowns.gov.uk

BOOK REVIEW



STILL WATER – THE DEEP LIFE OF THE POND

BY JOHN LEWIS-STEMPEL

This is a lovely book to 'dip into' for anyone who has a pond of any shape or size. John Lewis-Stempel is regarded as one of our finest living nature writers and you can see why. He paints a picture so effectively with words and is clearly an advocate for keeping things wild in the garden.

In his own words "ponds are a magnet for wildlife". He says "any pond is better than no pond, and even a sunken bucket will make a difference to the number and types of animals that visit a garden." The book is set out in easy-to-read seasonal sections giving observations about the wildlife you might encounter and advice on water levels and aquatic plant selections. All this, interspersed with

nature poems and observations from his own pond in Herefordshire, and a mill pond he visits in western France. If you have a pond, or even a large puddle in your garden I certainly recommend this book.

CHARLIE HELLEWELL, EDITOR



? DID YOU KNOW?

...the difference between frogs and toads?

Both are found throughout mainland Britain and Ireland.

COMMON FROGS

- Live in or near water
- Have smooth, moist skin
- Spring and leap to move
- Lay spawn in clumps
- Can 'breathe' through special glands in skin
- Usually mottled green, yellow or brown

COMMON TOADS

- Only breed in water, can survive in drier places
- Dry warty skin
- Crawl rather than hop
- Lay long double strings of spawn
- Usually grey-brown



Frog
© D. Middleton



Toads
© K. Dzuibinska



South Downs Youth Action (SDYA)
All images © Daniel Greenwood

SOUTH DOWNS YOUTH ACTION GRANT IS LAUNCHED

We are delighted to announce the launch of an exciting new grant scheme tailored specifically to young people aged 12-25 in and around the South Downs.

The South Downs Youth Action Grant is managed by the South Downs National Park Trust on behalf of the National Park Authority and Clarion Housing and is supported by the #iwill Fund. The #iwill Fund is an England wide joint investment initiated by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and The National Lottery Community Fund.

We will allocate grants of between £100 and £2,500 to organisations that want to carry out projects that will empower and support young people to engage with the National Park through activities that support the National Park's Partnership Management

Plan. This fund is targeted at youth groups and other youth support organisations rather than schools, for which we have an extensive alternative **schools grant package** this summer term.

Applications for the first round of applications closed at the end of May, but if you missed it, keep an eye out for a second round, planned for later in the year. More details are available here: southdownstrust.org.uk/youth-action-fund/

Please do pass this on to any organisations that may like to apply.



MICRO-VOLUNTEERING GET INVOLVED!

Connect with nature. Explore and share your observations using iNaturalist.

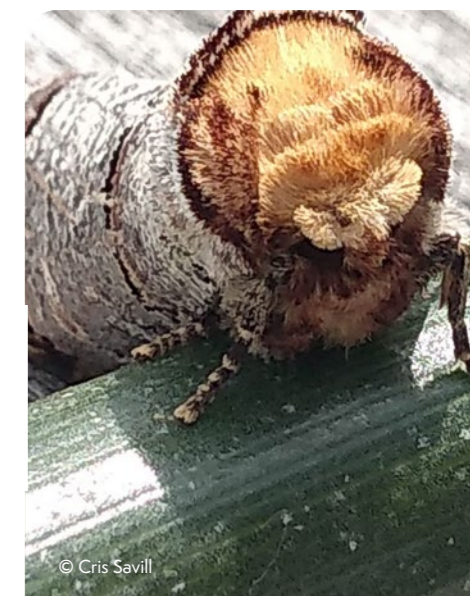


"INATURALIST IS AN ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK OF PEOPLE SHARING BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION TO HELP EACH OTHER LEARN ABOUT NATURE."

You can use it to record your own observations, get help with identifications, collaborate with others to collect this kind of information for a common purpose, or access the observational data collected by iNaturalist users." Click here to find out more inaturalist.org

As volunteer groups return to the outdoors once more, please take this chance to download iNaturalist and register an account at inaturalist.org. A guide to using iNaturalist **will be available on the volunteer pages** with more information on how to get started.

DANIEL GREENWOOD, SDNPA VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



© Cris Savill

BUFF TIP MOTH

I took this image with a mobile phone in my garden in West Wittering. I was very excited as I had never seen anything like this before. At first glance it looked like a stick of birch but then it moved. I thought I had come across something rare but when I looked it up...

... it was a buff tip moth (*Phalera bucephala*) and it only flies at night from May to July. They said it's not rare and is widespread throughout Europe. Well, I haven't seen one before, so I was very pleased to see it.

CRIS SAVILL, VOLUNTEER RANGER, CENTRAL AND WEALDEN AREA



THE YELLOW & THE BLUES

Two of the most interesting and colourful of Downland summer flowers are horseshoe vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) and kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*). Vetches are leguminous plants related to peas and beans so they all have the typical 'pea' flowers.

Horseshoe vetch a variable, spreading perennial, generally prostrate, 5-20 cm tall, is the earliest to flower from May to July. The flowers form a ring at the end of lax stems and en masse give a distinct impression of mustardy yellow. Its name derives from the elongated wavy seed pods which resemble a row of horseshoes. It's a plant of short dry turf on chalk and limestone and can form large colonies. It's pollinated by bumblebees but its major importance lies in the fact that it is the sole food plant for the caterpillars of the beautiful **chalkhill blue** and **Adonis blue** butterflies both of which lay their eggs only on this plant.

Kidney vetch, another rather variable perennial is a plant of coastal grassland and flowers rather later from June to September. Generally ground-hugging but up to 30cm tall with silky leaves. Lax stems produce dense heads of soft yellow flowers. The calyces at the base of the flowers have

a distinct white woolly down and this is where the small blue butterfly chooses to lay its eggs. Somewhat misnamed, the tiny **Small blue** is generally brown with only a smattering of blue on the male.

The eggs hatch in about a week and the little caterpillars will burrow in to feed on the developing seeds. Unfortunately, like so many, this smallest of all our butterflies is in decline, so naturally, both of these attractive plants are of important conservation concern.

KATE FRANKLAND, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
EASTERN DOWNS



Horseshoe vetch © Nigel Symington



Chalkhill blue © Jan Knowlson/SDNPA



DID YOU KNOW?

KIDNEY VETCH (*ANTHYLLIS VULNERARIA*)

The latter part of its Latin name means 'wound healer' and the plant was also known as 'woundwort'. Traditional herbalists used kidney vetch to promote wound healing and also to treat kidney and stomach problems.