



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

# NEWSLETTER

[www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk)

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March 2003

## Grazing Trials Commence

As reported in the last newsletter, preparations for grazing trials on Charlton Kings Common have continued and grazing is now due to start in April 2003.

Many conservationists consider grazing as the most 'ecofriendly' and sustainable form of grassland management. However, when it was first proposed for Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, FOLK was very concerned about the implications.

The site has a large number of visitors, many with dogs. We did not want to see any of the public rights of way, or other regularly used tracks, obstructed by fences and stiles. Nor did we want to see the 'wild' character of the Site spoiled by extensive fencing, and we did not want dogs to have to be kept on leads, although we would hope that responsible owners would keep their dogs under control, thus eliminating harm to wildlife (and cows).

As a result, FOLK opposed the creation of large, permanently fenced areas, within which smaller grazing areas would be established. Whilst we might have been prepared to accept fencing around the edge of the Site, even this went against the history of opposition to fencing of the Site, and would have required Secretary of State approval.

Instead we advocated a grazing regime similar to that used on Cranham Common, in which a small number of native cattle is

used in small, temporary, electrically fenced paddocks. These would be used in less heavily visited areas of the Site, in small paddocks that are sited between rights of way and other major tracks and would be moved around to cover different areas, taking care to use them when it is most beneficial to the biodiversity of the grassland. Native cattle are used as they tend to be less flighty in the presence of dogs.

### HLF Grant

The electrical fencing, water-bowser and drinking trough have been purchased out of a grant from the Cotswold AONB Grassland Project, supported by the Countryside Agency and paid for by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Three small areas alongside the RUPP Daisybank Road and one near Five Ways, above Mountain Knoll Wood have been cleared of scrub to make way for the grazing paddocks.

If the trials are extended, grazing may be extended to other parts of the Site, but the principles outlined above will still be maintained i.e. small, temporary areas, avoiding rights of way and other well used tracks.

**Julius Marstrand**  
Chairman FOLK

#### Contents:

Front Page- Grazing Trials Commence Page 2- Work Party Report Page 3- Daisybank Fields Page 4- Letter - Live and Let Live Page 5- Orchids Page 6- Adders Awaken

## Work Party Report Winter 2002/3

Since my last report our winter work parties have been very successful with a steady increase in attendance at both the Thursday and Sunday sessions. We have concentrated our efforts on keeping several small areas of grassland scattered across the hill from being overwhelmed by encroaching scrub. We have also recently completed some limited clearance work in preparation for the grazing trial on the lower slopes of the hill above Daisybank Road. We are fortunate in that the nature of the hill allows us to select an appropriate site to work, sheltered from the worst cold winter winds. So to all those fit and active members out there who have not yet joined us, you can rest assured that we have not yet had any cases of frostbite.

At long last we have taken delivery of our DR All-Terrain Brush Mower and this is already in action. The cost of this, together with other equipment for the trial grazing project, was mainly covered by our successful bid under the Grassland Management Project. This project has also funded twelve days work by Glebe Contractors, to control the spread of scrub along the lower slopes of Charlton Kings Common.

Perhaps this would be an ideal opportunity to comment on a letter in the last newsletter from a correspondent who wrote that the hill has remained largely unchanged over the last forty years, and that FOLK are clearing large swathes of cover to create viewpoints without thought for the flora and fauna. I have recently seen an aerial photograph of Charlton Kings Common taken about fifty years ago. Hardly a tree or patch of scrub is to be seen. This would probably have been typical of most of the hill at that time and would have provided a much less diverse habitat than now. In the intervening years scrub has taken over large parts of the hill and to allow this to continue for another fifty years will result in almost complete coverage of the hill by scrub. Abandoned scrub results in a very much poorer habitat. Managed scrub is beneficial as cover for both birds and invertebrates.

Before FOLK work parties start any clearance of scrub, or rank grassland, we are guided by our Management Plan. We also consult those of our members who are expert conservationists and have studied the flora and fauna over many years.

We are inviting applications from work party members to attend a day course on First Aid and Health and Safety later this year. If you are interested please contact me, as we do need more trained members.

### Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 10 April 2003  
Thursday 8 May 2003  
Thursday 12 June 2003

### Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 27 April 2003  
Sunday 25 May 2003  
Sunday 22 June 2003

All work parties meet in Tramway Cottage car park at 9.30am.

Allan Wood

### **Your Executive Committee Members are:-**

CHAIRMAN - Julius Marstrand (01242 518846)  
E-mail [julius@marstrand.co.uk](mailto:julius@marstrand.co.uk)

SECRETARY - Jack Shepherd (01242 515902)  
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Pam Brookes	Tony Clifford
Vic Ellis	Judy Frazer-Holland
Shelagh Hallaway	Tony Meredith
John North	Allan Wood
	Co-opted Sue Barrett

### **Dates For Your Diary**

#### Sun 4th May

#### ***Birds of the Limestone Grassland and Scrub***

A guided walk starting at the Hill end of Highland Road, Charlton Kings. Meet 09.15 for a prompt 09.30 start.

#### Sun 8th June

#### ***Limestone Geology - the rocks beneath the grass.***

A guided walk starting in Daisybank Road car park (adjacent to Tramway Cottage). Meet 09.45 for a prompt 10.00 start.

#### Sun 3rd August

#### ***Limestone Grassland Flora***

A guided walk starting in Brownstone Quarry car park, off Hartley Lane. Meet 09.45 for a prompt 10.00 start.

# Daisybank Fields

Recent press reports that suggest that the Council has designated the whole of Daisybank Fields as a 'recreation' or 'play area' are quite simply misleading.

In fact, a very small area, away from any of the public footpaths and set amongst the brambles that now cover so much of the Fields, has been designated a 'play area', for use as a jumps course for local mountain bikers.

The Chairman of FOLK was kept informed about some of the Council's discussions with the parent of two of the mountain bikers involved, but FOLK was not advised of the Council's intention to designate it as a 'play area', nor consulted on the proposal.

As a result FOLK's Executive did not have a policy of support, or objection to the designation.

The Council claimed that they had only received one complaint about the jumps, but FOLK had also received several others. These were passed on to the Council on 1<sup>st</sup> December and related to the following issues:

- 1 Health & Safety
- 2 Damage to the ridge & furrow system in the Fields
- 3 Aesthetic Damage
- 4 Unauthorised Work

Of these FOLK feels that the last is the most serious. One of the principles that FOLK has established with the Council is that *no* work is done on the Site without consultation between the Council (as owners of the land) and FOLK, (representing the users).

Despite this the Council has reached agreement with the mountain bikers that the existing area of the jumps course would be designated as a 'play area' and the jumps could remain, on condition that the jumps course would not be extended any further.

## Healthy Outdoor Pursuits

FOLK's Executive accepts that it is preferable for young people to engage in healthy outdoor pursuits, rather than some of the other activities that youths can get involved in. This requires that facilities need to be provided to allow them to do so and it is unreasonable to take a 'not in my back yard' approach to the siting of these facilities.

Despite not being consulted, FOLK has, therefore, now accepted the Council's decision to allow the jumps course to remain. However, we agree that the course should not be allowed to be extended – as also agreed by the mountain bikers.

To ensure that this agreement is adhered to FOLK's Executive has suggested that short posts be sited to indicate the extent of the 'play area' [in positions where they will not create a hazard to young bikers]. If the mountain bikers do not keep to their agreement with the Council, the future of the 'play area' may have to be reconsidered.

Incidentally, although there are no officially designated bridleways through Daisybank Fields, the Council has adopted the Site Management Plan which recommended that 'permissive access' be granted over the whole Site including Daisybank Fields, recognising that the Council doesn't have the resources to police any restrictions anyway.

One of the reasons for doing so, is that it is preferable to encourage mountain bikers to use Daisybank Fields than some of the more environmentally sensitive areas of the SSSI. Consequently it is not true that mountain bikes are not permitted in Daisybank Fields.

**Julius Marstrand**  
Chairman FOLK

## Live & Let Live

A mountain bike comes hurtling down Daisybank Road. Ahead of him he sees a Rambler on the track, so he slows down. Despite this, on the rough track, he wobbles slightly as he goes past the Rambler and catches his pedal in the Rambler's expensive waterproof trousers, tearing them.

What's your reaction to the above scenario? Should the mountain biker offer to pay to replace the Rambler's waterproofs? Are mountain bikes a danger to other users and should they be banned from the Site?

The scenario is imaginary, but not untypical of some of the feelings that mountain bikes provoke amongst some users of the Site.

In fact what actually happened was that a mountain biker coming down Daisybank Road slowed down behind a couple with two dogs, in case either of the dogs ran out in front of him. Dogs are notoriously unpredictable and running into one at speed can cause a cyclist to go head-over-heels over the handlebars.

When the dog owners realised that the cyclist was going at less than walking speed right alongside them, they called the two dogs to heel and the mountain biker cycled slowly past them.

Unfortunately one of the two dogs then tried to attack the mountain biker, by biting his hand. Fortunately he only managed to grip the handlebar end, but nearly pulled the cyclist off in the process.

The mountain biker told the owners that he would stop while they brought the dog under control, which they did. The cyclist then cycled slowly past them, but before he'd gone about 10m one of the dogs chased after him and caught hold of his calf. Fortunately he didn't break the skin, but he did manage to tear a very expensive pair of thermal cycling leggings.

Perhaps it is worth pointing out that Daisybank Road is not a designated

footpath, that cyclists are not supposed to use - it is in fact designated as a 'Road Used as a Public Path' [RUPP], so not only bicycles, but cars and other motor-vehicles are also permitted to use it.

How do I know about the above incident? Because I was that mountain biker!

If your reaction to the initial scenario was that mountain bikes should be banned from the Site, on the grounds that they sometimes pose a threat to other users, are you consistent in believing that dogs should also be banned from the Site because they sometimes pose a danger to other users?

You might approve of dogs attacking mountain bikers, but dogs have also been known to attack pedestrians and especially children. Should dogs be banned on the grounds that some irresponsible owners fail to keep them under proper control? Or because, occasionally, even responsible dog owners aren't able to fully control them?

Of course not! Anymore than it is reasonable to ban mountain bikes because an irresponsible minority of cyclists occasionally ride in a way that endangers other users.

In reality, despite a number of alleged near misses, there has been no evidence of actual injuries to pedestrians caused by mountain bikes on the Site, though fast moving bikes coming too close have alarmed some people. It is more often the mountain bikers who come to harm as a result of irresponsible actions by pedestrians, including the deliberate obstruction of tracks, intended to cause accidents!

In an ideal world all users would be considerate of one another, but despite the irresponsible minority, I say be tolerant - 'Live & Let Live!'

Julius Marstrand

## Orchids to look out for

Many of the British wild orchids are found on limestone or chalk grasslands, and our site has a good selection of these, along with some woodland species. The flowers of these orchids are small compared to the large and colourful tropical species and the cultivated forms you see in florists. In some cases the plant is not immediately recognisable as an orchid, unless you are familiar with the species.

Orchids tend to be restricted to particular types of habitat, needing a mutually beneficial relationship with a fungus in the soil which develops at a very early stage in the plant's life. They produce masses of tiny seeds which can get distributed over a wide area in the wind, so they are good at spreading naturally to suitable places.

The easiest to find are the pink or purple-flowered species, of which we have three: *Early Purple*, *Common Spotted* and *Pyramidal*. The *Pyramidal's* spike of small flowers is conical, or rounded, whilst the other two have more cylindrical spikes - the *Early Purple* has dark flowers, the *Common Spotted's* are pale pink with darker markings. Each of these can be more than 30cm high, but most specimens are shorter than this. Another purple species which has been found within our boundary, or just outside, on at least two occasions, is the *Southern Marsh Orchid*. As its name implies it really belongs in damp habitat, but it is found occasionally, in dry grassland, quite often as a hybrid with the *Common Spotted* but sometimes as the pure marsh form.

The *Bee Orchid* is small but quite eye-catching, with the large brown "lip" petal to its flower looking like a bumble-bee. It has two other very small petals, backed by three bright pink sepals. It is one of a group of insect mimics, which attract males, of one or more species, which attempt to mate with what they mistake as a female. Instead they pollinate the orchids as they fly from flower to flower carrying pollen in quite large "blobs" on stalks which get stuck to their body. This also happens to insects which just visit orchid flowers for their nectar. In Britain, the *Bee Orchid* flowers are usually self-pollinated by the pollen dropping onto the receptive part of the flower, but the other mimic on the hill - the *Fly Orchid* - is pollinated by a species of solitary wasp. *Fly Orchid* flowers are less conspicuous with a smaller, narrow brown lip and green sepals. They grow in at least two areas of the site, in scrubby grassland and in deep shade under shrubs.

The *Greater Butterfly Orchid* is quite tall with white flowers giving the impression of open wings, and a very long almost horizontal "spur" behind containing nectar. This is out of reach of most insects, but some moths are able to feed on it. Most years there are usually a few of these orchids on one of the steep slopes.

Most easily overlooked is the tiny *Musk Orchid* - sometimes the whole plant is only about 5cm high, and its flowers are minute and yellowish-green. This grows in few places in the Cotswolds, mostly along the scarp. Usually we do not have many but in a good year there can be dozens. One year a single specimen of *Frog Orchid* was found amongst these. It is almost as small, with slightly larger flowers which are often tinged red, but it is also easily missed.

The *Common Twayblade* can be recognised easily by its large pair of leaves opposite each other near the bottom of the flower spike, which can be quite tall. The flowers are small and green.

In the woodland on the hill, we have good numbers of *White Helleborine*, whose creamy-white flowers do not open very far. We also have *Broad-leaved Helleborine*, with large rounded leaves and a tall spike of many small, usually reddish, flowers. Under deep shade just outside our boundary is the *Birds-nest Orchid*, a strange-looking yellowish-brown plant which feeds on decaying plant matter through a tangle of roots after which it is named. On close inspection, its flowers clearly have the orchid structure including a pair of bright yellow pollen masses.

Usually found in short turf, one plant of *Autumn Lady's-tresses* was found last year in a garden lawn close to the hill. It has a greyish green spike with a spiral of small white flowers. It would not be surprising to find this species here in future, particularly now that some of the grassland is to be grazed.

Guy Meredith

## ADDERS AWAKEN AFTER HIBERNATION

Many people have never seen an adder on Leckhampton Hill. A few may have seen the sloughed off skin or even a dead one. But most people know that adders frequent the Hill and notices warn people about their presence.

There is a minimal risk to humans compared with all the other things that can happen to you when out for a walk in the country. It is your dog which is more likely to be bitten as they sniff their way through undergrowth. Judy Frazer-Holland's dog 'Izzy' was bitten on the nose last year. Fortunately, although there was great swelling and discomfort, she got better after a few days. Had 'Izzy' been a smaller dog further veterinary assistance may have been needed.

If you see an adder (*Vipera berus*) by all means have a good look and move quietly away. Do not disturb it or, as some thoughtless people may try to do, attempt to kill it. It is a protected species and it is illegal to intentionally kill or injure it. If you are bitten seek medical help immediately.

Adders are extremely variable in colour but characteristically have a dark zig-zag marking along their back. Females are light brown in colour, the males being more olive/brown. A few melanic or completely dark forms are known, in which case the zig-zag pattern is not seen. They may grow up to about 60 cms in length.

Over the next month or so, when daytime air temperatures reach about eight degrees Celsius, adders will begin to stir and leave their underground winter quarters to find suitable locations for basking and feeding. At this time adders migrate up to two kilometres to establish their summer home range. Adders are 'cold-blooded' and need to absorb energy from the sun's rays to get their body temperature to about 30 degrees Celsius before they can feed and breed properly.

After mating, the female nurtures about a dozen young in thin membranes which she retains in her body until they are ready to hatch and be born 'alive' (*ovo-viviparous*). If summer temperatures remain low (not unusual), she may retain the slowly growing young in her body until the following summer. Once born, the young move away and do not seem to receive any parental care.

The young feed on small insects and slugs. As they mature over the next four years, they widen their diet to include amphibians, lizards, nestlings and small mammals. They may continue to live for another six years. Their main natural enemies are foxes and badgers; hedgehogs and larger birds of prey have been known to attack them. At the end of the summer, they seek winter quarters and may hibernate together in small groups in crevices underground.

Adders are widespread throughout England, Wales and Scotland being one of the few snakes to extend their distribution so far north. Their presence as a carnivore in the food web in an area of mixed woodland, scrub and grassland, is a good sign that the living community is in good shape and is supporting the kind of biodiversity we might wish to foster on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

Jack Shepherd March 2003

*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive Committee of F.O.L.K. News, views and general comments are always welcomed and should be addressed to:-  
The Hon. Secretary, Mr Jack Shepherd, Rainbow Cottage, Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham, GL53 9QJ.*