



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk

Issue 14 Free to members, non members 25p

Winter 2003

FOLK AGM Chairman's Address

Last year I spent a large part of the AGM presenting the Site Management Plan in some considerable detail. I make no apologies for that, but I probably took up too much of the meeting. I have no intention of taking up so much time this year, especially since we have an excellent Guest Speaker, Jenny Phelps, to look forward to.

Last year's AGM saw FOLK 'coming of age'.

We saw the adoption of the Site Management Plan after nearly a year of detailed consultation.

This year has been something of a 'baptism of fire' as the organisation has started to implement the Site Management Plan – almost too literally, as we shall see.

The Leckhampton Hill Consultative Group was established which is made up of representatives from:

- English Nature, who have to approve all work on the SSSI
- Cotswold AONB, because the site is within the Cotswold AONB
- Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), who own the land
- FOLK, who represent the users of the Site
- Geoconservationists, because of the Site's national geological significance
- County Archaeology Service, because of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and Industrial Archaeology.

Grants - These started unpromisingly:

Annual Small Grants for Voluntary Groups - Turned down by CBC

Wildspace Funding - To be used to fund a Project Officer as recommended by the Site Management Plan. Application by CBC submitted too late and after all the funds available had already been allocated.

Improved Dramatically:

Heritage Lottery Fund - Through the Cotswold AONB and with the support of CBC we secured a grant of around £10,000 to be spent on the Site.

Roughly a third of this was spent on a Roughcutter and Trailer – this is a heavy duty grasscutter that is capable of coping with small saplings, often buried within the sward. This piece of equipment is owned by FOLK.

A third was spent on Electric Fencing, Water Bowser and Trough to enable the Grazing Trials recommended by the Site Management Plan to commence.

The final third was spent on getting contractors in to clear burnt gorse after the devastating fire.

Environmentally Sensitive Area Grant - Applied for by CBC at the end of August, but not yet approved by DEFRA.

Conservation Work

During the winter Working Parties continued with conservation work, mostly clearing gorse and other scrub.

The Hill used to be managed from at least the 1920s until 1968 by regular burning and this helped keep the sward short and maintain the biodiversity. Unfortunately this method is no longer permitted.

In the absence of any other effective method the Site was largely neglected, although the Cotswold Volunteer Wardens did an invaluable job maintaining footpaths and Council Rangers and contractors did a certain amount of site maintenance on some areas of the site, but Charlton Kings Common was neglected because the terrain is so difficult.

As a result it had deteriorated very badly and even the Cotswold Way was becoming choked by gorse.

Furthermore, the views across the Severn Vale towards the Malvern Hills and across the Chelt valley towards Ham and Cleeve Hills, from the scarp slope were becoming increasingly obscured by scrub immediately below the scarp edge.

FOLK Working Parties had begun to clear gorse from the Cotswold Way and gorse and scrub from the top of Charlton Kings Common.

They had also cleared a number of 'windows' in the scrub below the scarp edge, to reveal the views that had been lost.

Removal of the scrub involved burning a large amount of the cut gorse and scrub in very localised bonfires.

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Fire!

Then at the end of April, after one of the driest Aprils for a long time, the tinder dry deep grass sward was set on fire.

We don't know whether this was deliberate arson, or the accidental discarding of a lighted cigarette butt, we can't say, but there had been other attempts to start fires that suggest that it was deliberate.

The devastation covered 40 of the 165 acres of the site - 25%!

Had it happened earlier in the season, it might have caused less damage to flora and fauna, but coming as late as it did, it may have caused some long term damage, not least to the Common's population of Roman Snails, thousands of which were toasted alive.

The fire also came within 50m of the first house on Daisybank Road. In fact, it was the areas that had already been cleared in preparation for grazing that helped to limit the spread of the fire.

Had the grazing trials been further advanced the amount of deep sward that there was to fuel the fire would have been far more limited and the fire less devastating.

In fact the grass recovered amazingly quickly. By the end of May, green shoots were covering the scarp slope, but some of the flora may take a lot longer to recover.

Grazing Trials

Grazing is recognised by English Nature as the most sustainable form of grassland maintenance and recommended in the Site Management Plan.

Suggestions to introduce permanent fences and 'extensive' grazing over a large part of the Site were rejected, in favour of rotational grazing using temporary electric fences enclosing relatively small paddocks.

As far as possible fencing avoided designated Public Rights of Way and even most of the other tracks that people use around the site.

In a few cases this is not possible, due to the terrain, but the fences are only temporary, for a relatively short part of the year.

It is similar to roads, roadworks are annoying and inconvenient, but they are necessary to maintain the roads and the inconvenience on any one track only lasts for a small proportion of the year.

The regime was copied from Cranham Common. The Parish Council Sub-Committee that manages Cranham Common has been in existence for over 15 years and has used a rotational grazing regime, supported by English Nature and the National Trust for years. The result has been the effective management of scrub over most of the common, the restoration of much of the grassland and, most importantly, increased biodiversity across the site.

Committee and ordinary members of FOLK were lucky enough to attend a Cotswold AONB

Partnership Volunteers' Seminar last month when we visited Cranham and had the opportunity to question the Cranham Common Committee and discuss site management with groups from across the Cotswolds: Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons, Cud Hill, Painswick and Stinchcombe Beacons etc.

Drystone Walling

Some of you may have noticed that the drystone wall in the vicinity of the East gate of the Iron Age Fort has started to be repaired.

Last month I was also fortunate enough to attend the second two day Drystone Walling course, run by the Cotswold AONB. These are open to the public and well worth going on, whether you want to use the skill for conservation work, or for building drystone walls in your own garden.

Thanks

The outgoing Executive Committee

Especially: The outgoing Secretary, Jack Shepherd, who is not re-standing for the Honorary Secretary's post. He has done a fantastic job of keeping a record of our proceedings and keeping people informed.

Also our Treasurer, Anne North, who has not only dealt with our own finances, but also, with Judith Frazer-Holland, taken on a key role in relation to our grant applications and insurance matters.

Judith Frazer-Holland for her co-ordination of the Site Management Sub-Committee and tremendous contribution to the Working Parties.

Allan Wood for co-ordinating our Working Parties and looking after our tools.

The Site Management Sub-Committee

Who have spent a lot of time translating the Site Management Plan into a workable programme of conservation work.

Annette North for 'stepping into the breach' and doing such a tremendous job on the Newsletter.

The whole North family for their collective contribution not only to the mowing on top of Charlton Kings Common, but also for the effort that they have put in to making a success of the grazing trials.

David Elsey of CBC. Although we haven't always seen eye-to-eye with him over what is done on the Hill, there is no doubt that his enthusiasm has helped to raise the profile of the Site within the Council.

Jenny Phelps, of Cotswold AONB Partnership, for her contribution to securing much of the grant funding that we have received.

Paul Hackman, for his role as Chairman of the Leckhampton Hill Consultative Group.

Steve Brayshaw, for his continuing role in advising the Consultative Group and drawing up the detailed Action Plan arising from it.

Julius Marstrand

FOLK Work Party Report - Autumn 2003

Our work parties during the autumn have concentrated on clearing small areas of scrub adjoining both sides of the Gallops below Charlton King's Common. This will enable further temporary paddocks to be created to continue the grazing trials in this area.

Site visits have been made with Cheltenham Borough Council to the eastern end of Daisybank Road to identify a small number of trees and some scrub that will either be removed or trimmed to enable access for emergency vehicles. This is being done at the request of the Fire Brigade after they had problems when attending the hill fire earlier this year. At the same time we also looked at some of the footpaths in Daisybank Fields prior to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) carrying out footpath clearance work early next year. This work will be funded by Cheltenham Borough Council.

BTCV have also asked us if we can find work for a group of about ten teenagers under a community scheme funded by BTCV for this age group. We have suggested a small area of scrub clearance along the slopes of the escarpment to the west of Salterley Quarry. This work will probably take place in December.

Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 8 January 2004
Thursday 12 February 2004
Thursday 11 March 2004
Thursday 8 April 2004

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 25 January 2004
Sunday 22 February 2004
Sunday 28 March 2004
Sunday 25 April 2004

All work parties meet in Tramway Cottage car park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. Do try and join us during the winter season as this is a very important time of the year for our conservation work.

We provide the tools – all you need to do is supply the labour!

Allan Wood

Provisional outline work programme February- October 2004.

- Scrub clearance and bramble control
- Liaise with industrial archaeology group over maintenance and clearance of some tramway routes
- Continue grazing using electric fencing on Hill/Common and in Daisy Bank Fields
- Encourage wildlife survey work and monitor effects of current management
- Public Rights of Way clearance
- Ragwort control
- Design, fund and install interpretive boards
- Organise interpretive walks & talks
- Hay mowing July to September
- Report any Health & Safety issues to CBC
- Litter picking

All the above adaptable according to circumstances.

Judy Frazer-Holland

BENEATH THE DEVILS CHIMNEY PART II

World War I, and the 'flu epidemic which followed it, gave employment enough to the purveyors of black-edged stationery and black crepe armbands. Fortunately there were others also, hale and hearty returned ex-service men, who were in need of work. The government of the day set up projects to help them: one such was a modernised and improved Quarry Company, to produce lime from Leckhampton Hill.

The quarries on the hill had long been in use providing building stone for Cheltenham's requirements. Indeed, Craigside Cottage, mentioned in the last issue (FOLK Newsletter no. 13), had started out as a pair of basic and minimal semi-detached quarrymen's cottages, conveniently close to the landmark of the scarp face above.

The original thick rough cottage walls were a contrast to the prosperous Victorian tradespeoples' houses, where stone carefully dressed and prepared proclaimed respectability and a certain status in life, with a pride in quality, honesty and integrity. These were hallmarks of shopkeepers in the Promenade, whose early closing day was Saturday – one up on the Wednesday early closing of the High Street or Bath Road, yet still one down compared to the professional classes of the town. These were permitted to send their daughters to the Ladies' College; "Trade" was not. Trade resided more on north-facing Leckhampton Hill; the sunnier, south-facing slopes of Cleeve gave out-of-town space to those further up the pecking order, and excluded Trade from the Cleeve Hill Golf Club. (There is some interesting material on the Leckhampton Golf Club among the publications of the Leckhampton Historical Society.)

Cheltenham's pre-war Edwardian attitudes, however, were beginning to crack, be it ever so slightly. Already, way back in the 1890's the ironmonger Charles Marshall's eldest daughter had been married to a solicitor. Granted, he was a Yorkshireman, and the son of a boilermaker – a newcomer to the elite of Cheltenham professionalism. Maybe in his younger, courting days he had travelled on behalf of Swindon Patent Ranges (trademark a top hat, for Hattersley, the family name). Now, at 60, John Hattersley was already to leave the colliery-laden grime of South Yorkshire. He moved into Ashmeade Lodge in 1923, on the corner of Daisybank Lane, and spent the next couple of decades and more developing its extensive garden. In spite of subsequent alterations there are still traces of his handiwork, notably the large arched glass conservatory behind Beech Cottage.

His expectations of genteel peace and quiet were rudely shattered. The transfer site from Middle Bottom Jenny lay just outside the garden's northern retaining wall. (Even today there is an irregularity indenting the wall, marking the spot where nosebag-munching carthorses awaited there next wagon to be drawn along the flat rail track linking the two inclines.) In itself this was no great inconvenience: the problem lay higher up, where fumes from the limekilns soared heavenwards and clanking gantries crashed and rattled freshly blasted limestone into their steel super structures. Ashmeade Lodge was disturbed by the noise.

Houses built further away from the main road, nearer to the quarries, were more seriously threatened. Both Coney Gree

and Bartlow, halfway along towards the Devil's Chimney suffered structural damage from bombardment by flying rocks blasted from the hillside. That there was no personal damage to life and limb was more a matter of good luck than good management. Mrs Nixon senior, so tradition has it, had just gone inside for lunch after sitting on Coney Gree garden seat when a hefty chunk of limestone landed on the spot. (Nixon's was a splendid china shop in the Promenade, just behind where the flower seller still operates.) It was very alarming.

The Quarry Company once again looked back to the recent war with the Kaiser's Germany. They acquired heavy iron nets which had been used in minesweeping, and erected them in a effort to catch the dynamited missiles – a fact which did not inspire the residents' confidence when they found it out!

Faced with this situation, Mr RCH Barnard of Bartlow (a nineteenth century house, later demolished and replaced by the present building of the same site), rallied his fellow-residents. He collected evidence. He made sheafs of notes. He acted as chairman. And he was no doubt delighted that his neighbour John Hattersley was both able and willing to undertake legal correspondence with the London solicitors who acted for the group. The short title for the action was "Hattersley and Others v. the Leckhampton Quarries Company Limited 1925 H.No.244." Nine households were involved, including Craigside Cottage under the Devil's Chimney. Fortunately this monument remained unscathed: too far from the lime kilns for convenience, or fear of satanic reprisals?

The company went bankrupt in October 1925, and a Receiver and manager were put in. A year later the quarries were closed, but the hill residents entered further action for trial in January

1927. To their relief, news came on February 3 that the quarries would not be re-opened. It was suggested that each side should pay its own costs to wind things up.

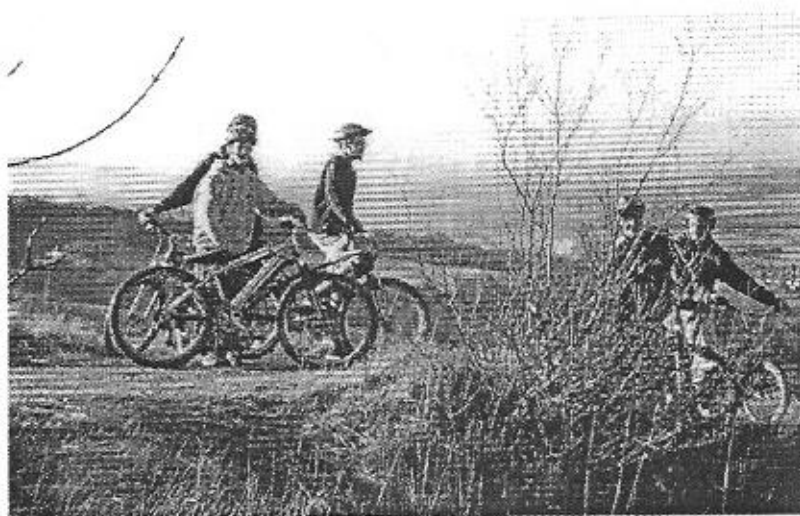
"Hattersley and Others" felt this to be less fair. Hill residents had been endangered and inconvenienced by unwanted nuisances, instigated by government action in setting up the company. Should they now have to pay? The first rough estimate was some £350, a sizeable sum. Great was the jubilation on March 1 when a government letter was received:

"... The Treasury are willing to allow the Receiver to undertake ... not hereafter to work the quarries or the lime kilns in any way so as to cause nuisances to your clients in respect of the matters complained of; to pay £5 to cover the damage done to Mr Nixon's roof, and to pay your clients' taxed costs of this action, together with the costs of the motion which preceded the same."

Costs out of the government! Nor was the Receiver able to recoup much on the sale of machinery and movables at the auction in August. The estate – including the Hill – failed to reach its reserve price of £100,000. Soon afterwards it was brought by the Corporation of Cheltenham: their accounts for the year ending March 31, 1928, give the cost as £6,640. A young Mr Richard Board, early on in his long career in the Municipal Offices, was the individual entrusted with effecting the payment. A little nervously, he hoped he had done the right thing. Subsequent generations of Cheltenham citizens would agree he certainly had.

Miss M. Paterson

Downhill Biking :



Working together to ensure it does not become an uphill struggle

My name is Roger, and I would like to help in the understanding, communication and co-operation between mountain bikers and all other users on and around our beautiful Leckhampton Hill. The issues raised in this article are my personal thoughts, although I have consulted with fellow local riders and members of Cheltenham and County CC.

I believe most controversy surrounds those involved in freeriding. The bike industry created this phrase to encompass those involved in downhill, dirt jumping and other extreme forms of mountain biking. Those who pursue cross-country biking occasionally use trails built by freeriders, but tend to stick to bridle ways. For the purpose of this article, I shall concentrate on the steep technical trails in existence on the Hill.

Only a couple of years ago I could not understand the fascination in this form of biking. Trudging up hills just for a few minutes of going down them! I had the impression that this downhill community consisted of aggressive and irresponsible individuals who gave no thought to other users on the hill. I am now in the middle of this community and have found this is not the situation at all.

Local riders are passionate about what they do. This is demonstrated by the time they spend on the trails and the money spent on their machinery. The visual impact *is* unusual. There are the full-face helmets, body armour, and bikes that look like someone has simply removed the engine. But the trails are very tricky, so the danger of crashing is ever present. The reward is the thrill of the descents, the jumps and the condition under your tyres. But when we come to a stop and the helmets come off, chit chat and banter ensues from normal, decent people. It is unfortunate that our protected and sometimes fragile area is so good for our past time.

There are issues that are known to riders that need addressing in the short term. These include:

- Where bike trails cross footpaths, there is potential for collision with those on foot.
- The erosion of some slopes onto the footpaths.
- The destruction of, or damage to, the local flora as bikes use their trails.
- The lack of understanding between local riders and other users of the hill.

The situation that usually occurs when I meet those on foot is one of amazement. "Blimey, you're not thinking of going down there are you?", usually sums up the conversation.

How do we, local bikers and other hill users, proceed? I strongly believe that good communication is essential. I would like to see a better way of airing both our views and suggestions. I think some representation of the local riders should be connected to FOLK. I appreciate Julius is a member of the CC-CC but perhaps someone closer to those riding the technical trails on a weekly basis would be in an even better position to assist here.

I do not envisage any formal club being formed by local freeriders, but several willing individuals could help through word of mouth and passing down relevant information.

As a starting point, I see no reason why representatives from FOLK, the Council and local riders (including CC-CC) could not get together and physically observe areas of concern and start to discuss solutions. As we have not yet arrived at this initial stage, discussing solutions to the issues raised above would be somewhat premature. However I wish to throw into the debate certain possible ideas that may be relevant.

- The official recognition by the Council (and FOLK) of some routes used by local riders. As put forward in the Site Management Plan.
- The use of signage to warn bikers and pedestrians where there are crossing points.
- The use and up keep of biking information boards at entry points onto Leckhampton Hill.
- The use of organised work parties to maintain and / or construct routes.
- The possible use of local bike retailers to promote the care of the Leckhampton Hill trails.
- Find methods of reducing the chances of bike/pedestrian collisions while also helping to prevent further erosion of the steep routes. Such as the sudden tightening up of the trail (switchback), for instance.
- Encourage riders to join FOLK. I have already sent in my family subscription!

We have the opportunity to make progress here. We need to take the opportunity and start the process of finding some harmony. I think the Leckhampton Hill area is very special. I also know it is superb for mountain biking. We can make a fresh start, get to know each other and find an amicable way of carrying out our chosen personal pursuits in a way that causes as little friction or bad feeling as possible. Life is too short, and our Hill is too precious.

Roger Smith.

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

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Andy Gilbert	Tony Meredith
John North	Wendy Twist
Allan Wood	

Co-opted Sue Barrett and Jack Shepherd
CBC Ex Officio TBA

Articles for the newsletter can be sent to the Editor, Annette North, Shackleton, Daisybank Road, Charlton Kings Common, CHELTENHAM, GL53 9QQ or email anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk

Cheltenham in Bloom

Cheltenham won a Silver-Gilt Award in this year's 'Britain in Bloom' competition. On 20th November FOLK representatives Julius Marstrand [Chairman] and Allan Wood [Working Party Co-ordinator] joined other Community Groups at a celebratory award and thank you ceremony in the Council Chambers.

The 'Britain in Bloom' competition doesn't only consider how good a town's floral displays are, but also Community involvement and the natural environment and Conservation. FOLK contributes in both of these dimensions and thus contributed to Cheltenham's success.

Hopefully, in future years, our work in restoring the grasslands, particularly on Charlton Kings Common, will see an even greater profusion of limestone grassland flowers on the Site.

FOLK helps with Cheltenham's Britain in Bloom award

Chris Ryder, Chair of Cheltenham in Bloom, writes -

Britain in Bloom is organised by the Royal Horticultural Society, the UK's leading gardening charity.

People usually associate Britain in Bloom with flowers, you may be surprised to learn that the judging criteria for competitions that Cheltenham in Bloom enters covers issues such as cleanliness, the absence of graffiti and fly posting, recycling facilities, tree and shrub planting, environment projects, community involvement and public awareness.

Britain in Bloom is the largest horticultural campaign in Europe and is focussed around four pillars.

- Horticultural good practice
- Community involvement
- Environmental friendliness
- Sustainability

Horticultural excellence is all about teamwork. 'In Bloom' links local communities, business and individuals through sustainable partnerships working together to enhance the local environment and character of our town.

Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common assist Cheltenham in Bloom with their conservation category,

demonstrating an increase in civic pride by allowing people to plan and manage their local environments, enhancing the public's enjoyment of the Hill, which in turn continues to raise the profile and understanding of the importance of this site of special scientific interest, stimulation of voluntary work and cooperation between community groups.

Cheltenham in Bloom committee plays an important role in promoting and coordinating the town's floral activities. The importance of economic investment through tourism and creating an attractive shopping environment, via sponsorship to maintain our town's beauty is key.

Being involved in Cheltenham in Bloom/Britain in Bloom promotes a tremendous sense of community and, above all, it's fun.

Cheltenham received a Silver Gilt award from R H S in the recent National in Bloom competitions and came first in our category, beating Bath and Guildford to name a few.

Success in Britain in Bloom brings benefit to everyone in our town by helping to sustain the town's economy as well as making it a beautiful place in which to live and work.

NEEDED – NEW MEMBERS

At the AGM Jack Shepherd explained that there is a need to increase the membership of FOLK in order to ensure that the Group remains financially strong and to increase its influence which it can bring to bear with the Borough Council and other parties concerned with the management of the Hill.

The committee feel that the necessary increase could easily be achieved if all of our existing members could sign up a friend, relative or neighbour as a new member over the coming months. Therefore we would suggest that, as their New Year's resolution every member should make an effort to sign up a new member in the first few months of 2004 and for this purpose a membership form is enclosed with this edition of the Newsletter.

If you are each able to sign up at least one new member, you will be helping to ensure the group can continue its essential work.

Vic Ellis Hon Sec FOLK

Report on cattle grazing

Those of you who use the hill regularly will have noticed that the cattle and fencing have now been removed. The cattle have returned to their home fields for the winter period, and are now running with a bull. The calves will be de-horned and male calves castrated.

Several people phoned to advise us of new arrivals in the herd and children were excited to see the calves. People commented on how nice it was to see the calves out with their mothers and have watched their progress with interest.

However, for several days more recently, someone was deliberately cutting the fence connections and we had several telephone calls advising us that a calf was outside the fenced area. This act of vandalism was very irresponsible and could have had far reaching consequences. Fortunately we were able to adequately contain the situation.

If someone has a genuine input regarding the use of electric fencing, then they should please contact us.

Annette North

POLITE REMINDER - To all members who have not paid their subscription, which was due on the 1st October 2003, this is your final reminder and no further copies of the Newsletter will be sent. Please send your remittance immediately to the Treasurer, Mrs. A. North at Shackleton, Daisybank Road, Charlton Kings Common, Cheltenham GL53 9QQ.

The views expressed in the articles are of those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee

Frequent Reports of Roe Deer on Hill

Several people have reported an increase in the number of Roe Deer visiting the Hill. There have also been reports of deer in gardens where they may or not be welcome.

The Roe Deer species (*Capreolus capreolus*) is one of the two indigenous deer in the British Isles the other being the Red Deer. Other deer now found in Gloucestershire include Fallow and Muntjac which are feral forms of escapes from enclosures and which now form breeding herds in the wild.

Until recently Roe deer have been limited to Scotland and the far northern and southern counties of England and Norfolk and Suffolk. They now seem to be more common in the Midlands where they like to live in areas providing grassland (lawns!) for feeding mostly at night and dense woodland for shelter during the daytime.

Appearance

They are not big animals the largest bucks reaching about 65 cms at the shoulders and having a mass of about 20-25 kilos. The bucks have rather short three-tined antlers which they lose each year by late autumn. They have grown new ones by the following spring.

The does are smaller and have no antlers. Both bucks and does are a warm red colour in the summer and change to a grey colour in the autumn. The fawns have white spots during their first year. They all have a very small tail with a little tuft of fur above a pale rump.

Feeding

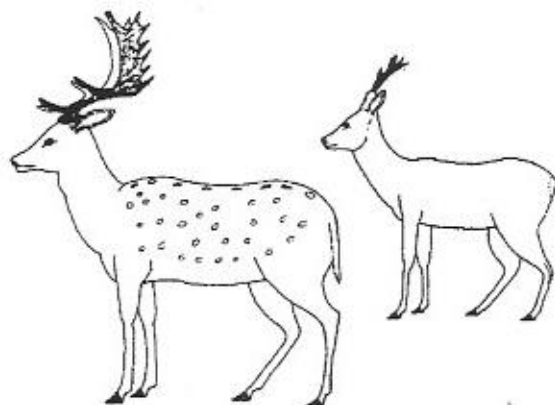
They ruminate during the daytime and re-chew the food such as grass, shoots, leaves and berries which they consumed during the previous night.

Enemies

Dogs and foxes may take fawns. The only other enemy is likely to be humans.

Behaviour

They do not form herds like other deer species but move around in small family groups. They mate during the summer during which the buck chases the doe round and round in circles or figures of eight. These so-called roe rings can be seen as trampled vegetation. One or two fawns are born in May and quickly follow the doe in their foraging behaviour. When disturbed Roe deer move off rapidly with a bounding action.



Drawings of the mature bucks of Fallow (left) and Roe Deer for comparison.

Jack Shepherd

And Finally....

The FOLK committee would like to wish all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.