



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

# NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER 2006

## GRAZING BEGINS TO HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT

Leckhampton Hill and, particularly Charlton Kings Common was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest largely because of their unimproved limestone grassland. In fact the Site is one of the top twenty sites of unimproved limestone grassland in the whole Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. English Nature identifies the limestone grassland as the "most important and extensive feature of the site."

However, according to national criteria, it is still considered to be in '*unfavourable condition*'. The aim is to get all such areas into '*favourable*' condition by 2010, but it is not yet considered to even be in '*unfavourable recovering*' condition. There are very strict criteria applied to assess condition and it may be difficult, if not impossible, to get this Site, with its steep scarp slopes and mainly Northerly aspect, to a condition considered '*favourable*' for all lowland limestone grassland.

The current '*unfavourable*' condition is largely because it was neglected for so many years. Thick coarse grasses grew up over much of the open grassland and choked out typical, more delicate, limestone flowers on which indicative species of butterflies and other wildlife live. Other areas of grass were extensively encroached by scrub and gorse. Ash and eventually beech woods, which have much less biodiversity, also spread over large parts of the Hill.

### Site Management Plan

"Grazing management is considered to be the most effective method of achieving the conservation and restoration of the unimproved limestone grassland across the site and the regime should be extended across the site at the earliest possible opportunity, subject to the success of the trials."  
[Extract from the Site Management Plan 2002]

Previous Site visits by English Nature have been disappointing in reporting insufficient progress towards favourable condition and a possible need to increase stocking levels. However, the latest report, following a Site visit on 19 April 2006, reported that "the site was more tightly grazed than it had appeared on the last site visit in February".

"It was felt that the current stocking numbers (15 Dexter cattle and occasional sheep) may well be adequate to graze the Common based on the stock being on between April and November/December each year and the stock getting around the areas quicker in subsequent years. However, it may still take a few years before it can be considered as recovering."

Whilst not a glowing endorsement of the current regime, it is the most positive report to date and acknowledges that the grazing is at least beginning to improve and restore the limestone grassland on Charlton Kings Common.

Julius Marstrand

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## FOLK BIRD WALK – 6<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2006

As before (in Spring 2005) Tony and Frances Meredith led a Bird Observation Walk for members of the Public. This year a group of 20 assembled at 09.30 at the end of Highland Road before the usual route through both Daisybank Fields (East and West), along Daisybank Road to the Gallops, then returning via Windass Hill and the footpath down the slope of the Northern Escarpment and retracing the outward route.

A total of 32 species were seen and /or heard in birdsong, a slightly better total than last year (29) but not quite as good as 2004 (37) or 2003 (34). There were very good views of Whitethroat and Willow Warblers in Daisybank Field East and Song Thrushes were in fine voice. Marsh Tit and Nuthatch were notable sightings and Lesser Whitethroat was also co-operative this year. Four RED-listed species were observed – namely SONG THRUSH, MARSH TIT, LINNET and YELLOW HAMMER. Five AMBER-listed species were noted WILLOW WARBLER, MISTLE THRUSH, DUNNOCK, GREEN WOODPECKER and STOCK DOVE.

### SUMMARY

<b>WARBLERS</b>	CHIFFCHAFF, WILLOW WARBLER, BLACKCAP, WHITETHROAT, LESSER WHITETHROAT
<b>FINCHES</b>	GREENFINCH, CHAFFINCH, LINNET
<b>THRUSHES</b>	BLACKBIRD, SONGTHRUSH, MISTLE THRUSH, ROBIN
<b>TITS</b>	BLUE TIT, GREAT TIT, LONG TAILED TIT, MARSH TIT
<b>CORVIDS</b>	CROW, ROOK, MAGPIE, JACKDAW, JAY
<b>WOODPECKERS</b>	GREEN, GREAT-SPOTTED
<b>RAPTORS</b>	SPARROWHAWK, BUZZARD
<b>OTHER SPECIES</b>	WREN, DUNNOCK, WOOD PIGEON, STOCK DOVE, YELLOW HAMMER, NUTHATCH, PHEASANT.

### *James Blockley – Community Park Ranger*

James Blockley has been FOLK's main point of contact with Cheltenham Borough Council's Community Park Ranger service for a little over two and a half years, since October 2003.

Although Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common was only a small part of his responsibility, without his help and support and enthusiasm for the Site, FOLK would not have achieved as much as we have in recent years, particularly with regards to the grazing on Charlton Kings Common and building co-operation with mountainbikers using the Site. Together with Roger Smith, he has been instrumental in getting some of the most dangerous crossing points between bike tracks, footpaths and Daisybank Road, re-routed to make the Site safer for mountainbikers and other users alike.

Whilst James would probably have eventually moved on anyway, his departure was probably hastened by some of the frustrations of his job: the limited time that he had to devote to such a large Site; the problems in getting the Grazing

Agreement renewed every year; the way that grant funding awarded for management of the Site had to be protected from being absorbed into the Council's Parks Budget; and various other aspects of working within the Council.

James is moving on to become a Community Links Involvement Co-ordinator with the Cotswold Canals Partnership. We are very sorry to be losing him. Our loss is definitely their gain and we wish James every success in his new role. We also look forward to the appointment of his successor and hope that we will be able to build up as good a working relationship with them, as we had with James, because that is essential for the continuing improvement of the Site.

Fortunately, we are not losing James altogether – he has indicated that, now that his 'official role' has ended, he wants to join FOLK as an 'ordinary' member. FOLK is delighted that James is so committed to the Site and looks forward to his continuing involvement in its management.

## FOLK Work Party Report Spring 2006

We have completed a number of tasks in the last few months starting with clearance of cut scrub from the earlier winter work parties to general footpath work; and of course our never ending litter clearance. We installed fence posts on Charlton King's Common to attach the temporary electric fencing for this season's grazing project. The highlight of this was without doubt the Sunday morning sight of us leading a herd of very unwilling young Dexter cattle on halters from Anne North's farm to the first of the grazing paddocks.

Those of you who have walked on the hill recently will have seen the new information panels, mounted on Cotswold stone, in Tramway Cottage and Brownstone Car Parks, and a third panel adjoining the Cotswold Way above Salterly Quarry Car Park. These information panels were funded by a grant. The sites required preliminary work by FOLK, and we were given valuable assistance in this by Peter Jenner, our local farmer.

Signs have also been placed in all car parks and entry points to the site with a warning that motor vehicles, camping and fires are prohibited on the hill.

We will be taking the FOLK display to the Paws in the Park event in Burrows Field on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August between 12 and 5pm. If any of you might be thinking of joining our work parties but would like more information, then do come and talk to us. Experienced cattle herdsman especially welcome! Conservation work can be very varied and worthwhile.

### Dates of Future Work Parties

#### Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 13 July 2006  
Thursday 10 August 2006  
Thursday 14 September 2006  
Thursday 12 October 2006

#### Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 23 July 2006  
Sunday 27 August 2006  
Sunday 24 September 2006  
Sunday 22 October 2006

Meet at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. We provide the tools but wear stout footwear and bring your own gloves. If you require any further information please contact me on 01242 233116. Allan Wood

#### Your Executive Committee Members are:-

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Tony Clifford	Serena Meredith
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Allan Wood	

Co-opted  
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## Leckhampton Wonderland

It is well known that Lewis Carroll - the author of 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Alice through the Looking Glass' - was the pen-name of the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. He was a lecturer in mathematics at Oxford, before following his father into the clergy. While at Oxford, he became a close friend of Henry Liddell, the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford and his family.

Dodgson was a firm favourite with Henry Liddell's three daughters, Alice, Lorina and Edith, who he amused with his fantasy stories and Alice Liddell became the inspiration for his famous fantasy books.

In April 1863 Henry Liddell's wife was expecting another baby. The three daughters were sent, with their governess Miss Prickett, to stay with their grandparents, who lived in a house called 'Hetton Lawn' in Cudnall Street, Charlton Kings. While they were there, they were visited by the old family friend Charles Dodgson, who stayed at the Belle Vue Hotel in Cheltenham High Street.

Over the mantelpiece in the drawing room at 'Hetton Lawn' was a six foot high by five foot wide mirror, surrounded by an ornate, gilded frame, decorated with interwoven branches, foliage, birds, dogs and figures. The mirror captured a reflection of the garden and it is thought that this mirror became the inspiration for 'Alice through the Looking Glass.'

The house in Charlton Kings is now called 'Hetton House' and the mirror is still there, although it has been moved from the drawing room to the upstairs landing.

**On his first day in Cheltenham Charles Dodgson took the three Liddell girls for a walk on Leckhampton Hill.** Looking down across the Severn Vale, the neat fields of Gloucestershire must have looked as though they were 'Marked out just like a giant chess board.', as Dodgson described Wonderland.

So Leckhampton Hill almost certainly provided at least part of the inspiration for one of the most enduring and endearing children's classics of all time.

**Story courtesy of The News, This is Gloucestershire**

*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*