



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 2 - October 2006

PASSFIELD AND HOLLYWATER

Part 2 in a series concerning the history of our Open Space Properties

Two hundred and thirty one acres of land around Passfield and Conford were given to The National Trust in 1948, as a bequest from Dr Arnold Lyndon. He had been the treasurer for the original preservation committee formed in 1906 to acquire Ludshott Common.

Passfield Common was beginning to lose its characteristic landscape, of open heathland and forest pasture, due to the changes in farming methods, so that by the 1980's the area had become very overgrown with trees (mainly birch), scrub species like gorse, and bracken.

Concern grew that this was happening but with the help of commoners' cattle, including some Highlands, a traditional type of management was planned. In 1990, with financial help from the Hampshire Heathlands Project, 60 acres were fenced, a small herd was turned out and the results



Hollywater pond

of the grazing have been monitored ever since. These have been excellent with the development of small open glades, which have been enlarged by cutting back trees, particularly in 1995, when some were also experimentally pollarded. Temporary fences have been erected when needed in the summer months to keep the cattle out of the moor area at the Hollywater end of the common. The importance of this habitat and the success in its restoration resulted in the whole of Passfield Common being included in the Woolmer Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1994 and in the Wealden Heaths Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) in 1998.

Passfield Green is also included in the SSSI area. Harebells, bistort and black knapweed grow there, which limit the extent of any grass cutting that can be carried out.

Hollywater Pond lies at the western end of Passfield Common and was probably originally created as a fishpond or for breeding ducks and wildfowl. It was drained during World War II, as happened at the Frensham Ponds, possibly because it was thought to be a marker for enemy planes. By 1986 the Pond was totally overgrown with alder trees, which were felled that year. The dam, sluice and inlet leat were repaired in the following year and the whole pond was dredged in 1989, after which it took about 12 months to re-fill. The dam and sluice have sprung leaks several times since then, requiring fairly major repairs, but the pond provides a successful habitat for water plants and birds.

THANK YOU

We were pleased to see so many at the Coffee Morning in May, and hope to repeat the event next year. The raffle was a great success, and we thank the following local businesses for donating prizes:- Blue Hairworks: Grayshott Books: Grayshott Pharmacy: Grayshott Pottery: Tanchoux Ironmongers: Wine Rack.

If you enjoy reading this newsletter, please pass it on!

Become a Friend

You will receive your own personal copy of the newsletter, and you will be helping valuable conservation work to ensure the survival of our precious landscape and habitat - 'Forever for Everyone'.

Becoming a Friend costs only £5.00 for a year. Contact the Membership Secretary, Colin Brash on 01428 713256.

NEW TREES FOR GENTLES COPSE

A generous bequest in memory of the late Mrs Rhoades is helping the National Trust to carry out important conservation work in the ancient coppice area of Gentles Copse next to Ludshott Common. Mrs Rhoades was an enthusiastic supporter of the Ludshott landscape and the work of the Trust. The money will go towards the cost of propagation of acorns collected from beneath the ancient Sessile Oaks which have been growing in Gentles Copse for hundreds of years. This will ensure the continuation of the genetic stock of a stand of trees which is now reduced to less than a fifth of its former extent - Gentles Copse was approximately 100 acres for many centuries, today it is less than 20 acres. This type of woodland is now an unusual feature in the landscape of South East England. Gaps in the woodland will be planted with trees grown from these acorns in two or three years time.



Right: Friends of the late Mrs Diana Rhoades collecting Sessile acorns

SELBORNE

Our Wardens are also responsible for nature conservation on the N.T. property at Selborne, about 8 miles west of Ludshott, from where the hill above Selborne village can be seen. They spend about a third of their time there. Consequently, the administration, resources and work programmes for each property are closely linked, and liaison takes place between the two local committees. In terms of habitat, the Selborne property is very different from the lowland heath which predominates at Ludshott and Passfield, and within its approx 270 acres several can be found.



Gilbert White's house from Selborne Hill

From the Chairman of Selborne NT Committee

There is the tree-clad Selborne Hill and Common on one side of The Street, which is the main road through the centre of the village, and meadows, which run along the valley on the other. Selborne Hill or Selborne Hanger as it is sometimes known, rises some 300ft above the village, and includes the Zig Zag path cut by the

18th century naturalist Gilbert White and his brother, to make it easier to climb.

Gilbert White's book, 'The Natural History of Selborne', is world famous and hence the village attracts a lot of visitors.

The Hill itself is mostly chalk with a "clay with flint cap". In the open area, at the very top, there is flower-rich chalk grassland and a small pond. Over the rest, beech woodland predominates with some oak where the soil becomes more acid. It is criss-crossed with footpaths, and for riders there is a statutory bridleway and a permissive route.

The other part of the property consists of several meadows below the church, leading into the valley where further lower lying meadows run alongside a small stream flanked with beech covered slopes. These are the Long and Short Lythes (rhymes with myth) and there is a lovely walk here with no evidence of the 21st century, just peace and quiet

Suzie Storey

USEFUL CONTACTS

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The Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

are people who may, or may not, be National Trust members, but who have a direct interest in the local National Trust properties and are therefore willing to help maintain the conservation work on these important areas, much of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Areas for birds (SPA), by subscribing annually to support the cost of essential work on the Commons.

HEATHLAND HISTORY

For modern managers of heathland nature reserves, understanding how ancient land-use practices and natural processes affect habitats and species is crucial for doing the job properly, i.e. protecting the historic landscape and developing the right nature conservation management. Like many countryside sites of great antiquity, steady, relatively unchanging patterns of use provided the stability for wildlife to establish and thrive over long timescales. The test at the beginning of the twenty-first century is to maintain that stability and natural diversity.

Until recently, the survival and conservation of our local heathlands (and its wildlife) had depended on a long succession of commoners exercising their rights over many centuries. The commons were of direct importance to the economy of adjacent communities, and for many generations of inhabitants, being able to turn out their livestock to graze and browse the heaths, fens and woods was vital. This was a sensible, sustainable way of exploiting the poor, hungry Lower Greensand soils of the west Weald. For fuel, animal forage and bedding, thatch and many other domestic needs, heather, turf, gorse and bracken was collected to support what was, principally, a subsistence living. Even the dung from

livestock on the heath was used for fertilizer and fuel. Although by modern standards this was a poor and hard way of life, it was highly tuned to the naturally low productivity of the landscape. Attempts to improve the land for farming were usually short-lived or small-scale because it was very hard work maintaining the fertility of the free draining sandy soils. The astonishing thing is that these basic lessons of how to use and work with heathland were developed in prehistoric times and were still practiced until a few decades ago.

Chris is the Area Warden for the East Hampshire National Trust properties

To understand the true heritage of heathland however, we need to go back further. It is now recognised that heathland was present in the post-glacial, pre-farming landscape where it formed natural glades or perhaps more extensive openings within the wildwood. After the Ice Age ended c10,000 years ago and before Neolithic/Bronze Age farmers began clearing the natural woodland around 4000BC, heathland is likely to have existed where there was a combination of poorer acidic soils, a natural tree clearing factor like fire,

disease or storms and sufficient grazing pressure by native wild herbivores. Aurocks (the extinct wild ancestor of domestic cattle) elk, deer, wild boar and beaver would have controlled tree regeneration and maintained, in places, a heath/pasture-woodland landscape. The flush of fresh vegetation stimulated by burning will have attracted these herbivores and prehistoric hunting parties. Indeed, early hunter-gatherers probably set fire to areas to create richer hunting grounds, a technique which continued to be used (and still is in places like the New Forest) by commoners to encourage fresh growth for their livestock.

Although not as obvious, like historic buildings or archaeological sites, we should think of these old landscapes - the surviving heaths, woods and commons - as important monuments to the past. They are a rare, perhaps unbroken link back to Bronze Age forebears and earlier Stone Age environments. With 90% of east Hampshire's heathland lost since 1850 and the disappearance of active commoners, the Trust with its duty to protect and preserve places of 'historic interest and natural beauty', faces a considerable, yet exciting, challenge conserving this ancient landscape and its wildlife.

Chris Webb

PLANTS OF THE COMMONS

A series on their flora and fauna

Heather

This name describes several species with similar characteristics and our area is home to the three most common. They are low growing shrubby plants with short, almost needle-like, leaves and pink bell-shaped flowers. On the dry heathland, as at Ludshott and Passfield Commons, Heather or Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) can be seen along with Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) but where the soils are able to hold their moisture longer as at Conford, the Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) can be found.

These plants are encouraged to give not only the glorious pink haze in summer and early autumn to delight our eyes, but because they are important habitat plants as they provide food and shelter for animals, be it rabbits, birds, snakes, bees, butterflies or spiders. You will see, especially on Ludshott, that the management has encouraged the growth of old and young plants, and the ones in between, which all have their role to play in the complex ecology which exists on our commons.



Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*)



Heather or Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*)

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Currently, the Ludshott and Selborne properties enjoy funding for two six-month contract wardens who are employed over the winter months to help with habitat management. Mitch and Spike, who worked with us last season, left in April. Amanda and Luke have joined us for the coming season.



As many of you will have seen, major tree felling work has taken place on Ludshott Common. 5 hectares (13 acres) of young Scots Pine was cleared from two areas, one adjacent to Cathedral Pines and the other lying between Superior Camp and Waggoners Wells. Both areas have long been earmarked as places where heathland restoration would be undertaken. The block of woodland just to the south of the Superior Camp (concrete road) was removed to provide an open corridor to link the smaller established heathland blocks above the Waggoners Wells valley with the main heathland area of Ludshott. During the next couple of years heather should recolonise these areas from dormant and windblown seed. As well as enlarging the heathland area, it will help some species move from their isolated enclaves to establish a stronger population across the

whole site. The sand lizard, which lives above Waggoners Wells, but is not found on the main heathland area, is an important species which will benefit from this work.

Heathland management by traditional grazing with cattle has continued on the Hollywater Green area at Passfield Common, and on Bramshott Chase. It is a particular pleasure, this year, to have Bramshott Chase grazed by Tony Ashton's cattle. He has common rights there and this is the first time for about 50 or 60 years that a commoner is exercising a traditional 'right of common' to graze cattle on this area. Marion Warren (also a commoner) continues to have her High-land Cattle grazing at Hollywater Green.

We were able to employ a contractor to renew the fencing around this area earlier this year with the assistance of funding through the Hampshire Heathland Project. Taking advantage of the opportunity offered during the fencing work, we replaced the old stiles with oak kissing gates to improve ease of access. Having consulted local people, we repositioned one of these gates to improve sight lines along the busy road to make it easier for walkers (and their dogs) to cross.

There has been a continuing programme of work to maintain access around the lakes at Waggoners Wells and the foot-bridge on the lower lake was replaced in July. The bridge was built using wind-thrown oak taken from the N.T. Passfield/Thornhill woodland and prepared by a local saw mill. The project was funded by a grant from the Three Counties Association of N.T. members, and the bridge was ceremonially opened by their Chairman, Mr Michael West.

During the Working Holiday Biological Survey Camp in July the dozen volunteers, with the advice and guidance of



*The bridge builders
Jim (right) and Keith, with Chris in the background*



Michael West opening the new bridge

local experts, conducted an evening of moth trapping at two sites around Conford. This enabled the sampling of moth species to be found in areas of differing habitat. Nearly forty species were identified at each site and one friendly (or dazed) Poplar Hawkmoth stayed, resting on the clothing of one of the volunteers, from dusk until the exercise finished shortly after midnight. Another Working Holiday at the end of August focused on the continuing need for scrub clearing on Ludshott.

The Wardens

- ❑ As an 'extra' in our series of guided walks, we plan to have an Autumn Colour and Fungus Finding tour around Waggoners Wells and up on to Ludshott.
- ❑ We are also planning a winter walk, to show the work in progress and explain its importance for nature conservation.

Look out for posters around the Commons, and check the notice boards in the main car parks for dates and times.

- ❑ We are again calling for volunteers to come and help with the important and continuing effort on Ludshott, and also on Bramshott, to keep on top of scrub encroachment. If you can spare a few hours, to clear small trees in the company of the Wardens and fellow lovers of the Common, we would be delighted to see you.
- ❑ On Saturday 2 December we plan to cut Christmas trees to be sold on Saturday 9 December at Dunelm car park between 9:30 and 12:30.

Phone Jim or Keith on 01428 751563 if you can join us.