

Downlands Trust Newsletter

AUTUMN 2023

From the Chairman

Peter Wakeham

It has been another active and enjoyable summer for the Trust and we again shared a stand with the Downlands Partnership at several events, including the Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair and the Carshalton EcoFair. Both provided an excellent opportunity to publicise our work and our funds benefited from the sale of chalk loving plants grown by the Partnership at the Old Lodge Farm nursery. In June, we once again took a stand at the Teddy Bear Picnic in Nonsuch Park sponsored by EezeSport and, with the assistance of some expert colleagues, ran bug hunts for young people. This venture proved to be remarkably popular and we have been invited to return next year! In July, a most enjoyable walk across Banstead Heath was kindly organised by Lucy Shea of the Banstead Commons Conservators, exclusively for Downlands Trust members and for volunteers with the Downlands Partnership.....a splendid site that many of us had not previously explored and which we will now doubtless visit again.

We continued to award grants for a variety of projects that will benefit the local countryside, including livestock for conservation grazing, hand and power tools, step and path repairs, and undergrowth removal in an area of ancient woodland that will reinvigorate the native plants. The support of Fidelity International in funding these awards is again gratefully acknowledged.

It was reported in the Spring newsletter that the new Hilux off-road vehicle purchased for the Downlands Partnership Task Team had been delivered and, since then, it has been providing invaluable support for conservation work undertaken throughout the area. Logos of major donors are now being applied to the exterior of the vehicle in recognition of their contribution towards this purchase, and a formal launch event with accompanying publicity will take place in early October.

Walking through the countryside, many of us may sometimes wonder about the identity of a wildflower, shrub or tree. Many years ago, help was to be found almost exclusively in printed guides and these remain important today. The advent of the internet made the task of identification much easier, providing a wide range of resources, including forums offering expert help.

The Trustees



(from left to right)

Elsbeth Pringle (Social Media), Pam Mascall (Grants),
Peter Wakeham (Chairman), Geof Haseler (Newsletter),
Sarah Milan (Membership),
Roger Findlay (Treasurer), Noreen Siba (Marketing)

More recently, a number of smartphone apps incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) have become available, many free to use. Machine learning has taught them to recognise plants on the basis of thousands of photographs, refined using geolocation information about where particular plants are likely to be found. By pointing a phone's camera at a subject in the field, the app will very quickly provide a best fit identification. I have found the results to be remarkably accurate in recognising a wide range of downland flowers, sometimes only on the basis of a leaf or a seed capsule. Aside from their main function of identifying wild flowers, such apps have an important role to play in making the natural world much more accessible.

Don't forget our Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 24th October at 7.45 pm
The Banstead Centre, The Horseshoe, Banstead SM7 2BQ.

For your diary

Tuesday 24th October 2023

- **Annual General Meeting** at our usual venue - The Banstead Centre, The Horseshoe, Banstead SM7 2BQ. You are all welcome!
The meeting will start at 7.45pm. There will be refreshments in the interval after which Lucy Shea, Clerk to the Banstead Commons Conservators, will give a talk on "**Banstead Commons Conservators: our history, habitats and wildlife**".

2024

- Sunday 9 June **EezeSport Teddy Bear Picnic**, Nonsuch Park (in aid of NCT and Downlands Trust)
- Saturday 6 July (TBC) **Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair**
- Monday 26 August **Carshalton EcoFair**, Carshalton Park, Ruskin Road SM5 3DD

Calling all members and volunteers

We already have the dates in 2024 when we want to advertise the work of the Downlands Trust and Downlands Partnership at local fairs. However, we cannot manage to man a stall all day as well as setting it up and dismantling it.

If you are willing or know of anyone who is willing to help us for a couple of hours, please contact **Noreen on 07770 417 796**

- Sunday 9 June 2024 **EezeSport Teddy Bear Picnic**
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If you are reading this newsletter and are not a member, please do consider joining us.

Our membership form is on the back page.

Fairs attended in 2023

Noreen Siba

The Trust was delighted to be invited to have a stall at the **Oaks Park Art and Downland Day** in June. Our stall was in the shade opposite the café - what could have been better! The Downlands Partnership Grazing Team brought Dibby and Dobby, two orphaned sheep, and three bullocks who impressed everyone by crashing through the copse where they were taking shelter from the heat. We were able to talk to many local people about the Trust and also sell some wonderful chalk grassland plants that had been grown at the Downlands Partnership plant nursery.

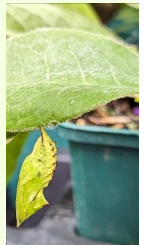


Our stall at Oaks Park



Valerie, Alex, Jamie, Damien and Linda at Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair

Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair was held on 1st July. Sean and volunteers from the plant nursery at Old Lodge Farm joined us, bringing with them a large number of flowering plants they had grown which attract insects and butterflies. As well as talking to visitors about the work of the Trust, we sold around 200 plants that not only look attractive in the garden but are a good source of pollen for insects. One lucky customer discovered a Peacock butterfly chrysalis dangling from a Saw-wort plant she had bought - an indication of how attractive Sean's flowering plants are to insects!



Carshalton Eco-Fair was held on August Bank Holiday Monday. This is a large event with over 100 stalls. It was a very successful day for us despite the event being not quite as busy as last year. We managed to sell over £700 of plants and merchandise. There were so many lovely comments about how the stall looked which was down in no small part to Jamie and Sean. We also owe a huge thank you to Valerie who was there all day ensuring that the plants looked their absolute best and being very persuasive when it came to sales!!



Our new display stand

Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis* subsp. *communis*) is one of our three native conifers, the others being Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). Juniper can be traced back 10,000 years in Britain and was one of the first tree species to colonise the country after the last Ice Age.

It is most often found as a low growing shrub or small tree and is notably long lived, typically between 100 and 120 years, but often much more. In lowland England it occurs chiefly on chalk downland or in limestone grassland, and in Surrey the majority of Juniper bushes are found scattered in small numbers along the scarp slope of the North Downs. Scotland remains the stronghold of Juniper in Britain and many plants here are of a prostrate sub-species (subsp. *nana*) which is better able to cope with the weather conditions in Highland areas.

There have been some introductions in the Trust's area, but there are also a small number of sites where Juniper can be considered to be genuinely native. These include Juniper Hill (Walton Downs), Banstead Downs and Riddlesdown Common.

Identifying Juniper is fairly straightforward. It is evergreen and has needle-like leaves that are arranged in threes round the stem. They have a single pale band on the upper surface and are grey-green beneath. Juniper is dioecious, meaning that there are male and female plants, female plants being readily identifiable by the presence of cones that look like blueberries. When young, the berries are green, but they mature over a period of up to two years and turn to purple-black. As shown in the photograph (right), this results in a mixture of green and black berries on the same bush.



Juniper has significant wildlife value, the berries and shoots providing food for birds and mammals, especially during the autumn and winter months. Juniper berries are a source of food for many species of birds, notably mistle thrushes, song thrushes and blackbirds, which are also the main agents of seed dispersal. It also supports over 40 species of insects, such as the juniper shield bug, juniper aphid and juniper carpet moth, and provides ideal habitat for spiders.

The distinctive flavour of gin is derived from Juniper berries and these are required by legal statute to be present and perceptible for a spirit to be called gin. Today, berries for the UK gin industry come largely from the Mediterranean, and countries such as Italy and North Macedonia provide a large percentage of the imports. Beckett's Gin is the only gin in the UK to use wild English juniper berries and these are picked from Box Hill with the permission of the National Trust and Natural England.

Records exist showing that the plant has been used for medicinal purposes since at least 1550 BC. The ancient Egyptians used it to cure tapeworms and over the centuries it has been used as a diuretic, an antiseptic and a cure for digestive problems. The Romans used it as a cheaper alternative to pepper and the beaked masks worn by plague doctors during the 17th century were filled with Juniper berries and other aromatic herbs in an attempt to prevent infection. In the following centuries, Juniper charcoal was a highly desirable ingredient of gunpowder because it provided a fast and predictable quality of explosion.



Juniper is now facing extinction across our Surrey downlands and in southern Britain generally. This iconic shrub has largely failed to regenerate for many decades and, as bushes reach the end of their lives, colonies will disappear and with them numerous specialist invertebrates and fungi. There are numerous reasons for this decline:

- berries require bare ground on which to germinate and this has diminished
- young plants require high light levels and are particularly vulnerable to scrub encroachment
- despite its prickly foliage, Juniper is browsed by livestock and deer. Seedlings are especially vulnerable to small rodents and many are lost in this way, rabbits being particularly fond of the berries
- seed dormancy is deep and exposure to two cold winters is generally required for successful germination. Juniper is declining in other parts of lowland Europe and its range appears to be contracting northwards as the climate warms, an effect that is likely to be experienced in the south of England, if not already the case
- progressively ageing stands in which male plants predominate and fragmentation of remaining stands. This leads to inbreeding and reduced production of viable seed
- seed viability is also reduced as a result of insect infestations and 'false pollination' resulting from dust and other atmospheric pollutants entering the berries

- an introduced fungus first recorded in 2011, *Phytophthora austrocedri*, is now present in southern England. This pathogen attacks the roots and root collars of Juniper, moving up into the trunk to cause the dieback and death of affected bushes.

The loss of native Juniper can be mitigated through the introduction of planted bushes, ideally grown from locally sourced seed. This approach has been undertaken successfully at Foxley Wood and Riddlesdown Quarry, and the native population on Walton Downs has been enhanced through introductions. Scrub management and fencing to eliminate browsing has been the key to success at these sites.

Bug Hunt at Teddy Bear Picnic Pam Mascall

It was a very hot afternoon on Sunday 11th June when the Trust held its first ever Bug Hunt.

This took place in Nonsuch Park where we had a stall at the Teddy Bear Picnic, an event with activities for young children that trustee Noreen Siba has organised for many years, albeit under a different hat.



The hunt was enjoyed by children aged between 3 and 10 together with their parents. They used butterfly nets to sweep through the long grass to collect bugs and spiders, and gathered round on their knees when logs were lifted to discover the insects that lived there. Caterpillars were seen on and under tree leaves whilst Speckled Wood and Holly Blue butterflies fluttered around, as did a dragonfly.

We were delighted to be joined by Grace Kempster and Nicola Hunt who were on hand to help identify the bugs found. A wide range of life was seen including a Watermelon Spider, Harvestmen, Bush crickets, Centipedes, Cream Spot Ladybirds and a moth chrysalis.

Peter Wakeham commented that it was wonderful to see both children and parents so engaged in exploring the natural world in the course of the bug hunt.

The event was sponsored by EzeeSport who donated £2,000 to the Trust. EzeeSport would like Downlands Trust to benefit again next year at their 2024 event on Sunday June 9th, where we would hope to organise a bug hunt again.



Pam, Grace and Nicola - armed with nets!

Fantastic Fidelity responds to Downlands Partnership's Ragwort SOS! Debbie Hescott

During July, the Downlands Partnership conservation crew spends a task week at Nork Park, pulling up Ragwort in the hay meadows prior to the fields being cut. Ragwort has to be removed from meadows being cut for hay as it is poisonous to livestock, and haymaking, where the grass is cut and removed, is important for maintaining a diverse range of plant species in traditional grassland meadows.



The crew were pleased to be welcoming corporate groups over the three scheduled days to help with the task in hand, but unfortunately the company that had booked had to cancel at short notice, so panic set in, as that Ragwort still had to go!

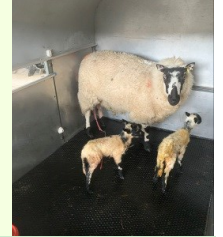
With just a week to get the situation resolved, a Ragwort SOS was sent to our (Downlands Trust & Downlands Partnership) fantastic local corporate partner Fidelity International in Kingswood, to see if any staff would be willing to come along at short notice to help our regular countryside volunteering crew get the work completed in time. Amazingly, ten wonderful employee volunteers quickly rose to the challenge and they all did such a tremendous job that all the Ragwort was successfully tackled in just two days! The Wednesday Fidelity helpers also went over to nearby Hooley Meadows with the crew on the afternoon of the second day to get started on the Ragwort there as well!



Our heartfelt thanks to Fidelity and all their great staff for their continued generous support of DT and DP, both practically and financially. The DP crews look forward to welcoming their staff along again soon for more countryside volunteering fun!

Stable mats

A grant was made to the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team to purchase four rubber stable mats to help with the management of the sheep. These were first used during lambing. They are soft for the animals to lay on in the pen and much more hygienic. At other times of the year the mats are used for sick or injured sheep to keep them comfortable and speed their recovery.



Restoration work at Addington Hills

A grant funded work by the Downlands Partnership at Addington Hills where they have repaired and replaced around 40 steps on this sensitive area of heathland. Many of the existing steps were starting to collapse and the area around was showing signs of erosion, resulting in walkers deviating from the path, thus creating wider paths and new routes across this fragile habitat.

PPE for Downlands Partnership and SWCA volunteers and groups

Volunteers need Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves, hard hats and stout boots when working in the countryside, and those using brushcutters need more specialised equipment. A grant enabled the purchase of a range of PPE for use by volunteers and a further grant was made to purchase gloves for cub and scout groups visiting Old Lodge Farm to help with tasks such as Ragwort pulling, weeding and scrub clearance.



Chipping and removal of brash and logs at the Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area (SWCA)

A large area of the Dobbin had been cleared by the Downlands Partnership volunteers to aid the regeneration of the chalk grassland flora and allow remnants of the ancient woodland flora to flourish. Unfortunately, due to fire issues whilst carrying out the task, the usual fires had to be limited resulting in overly large habitat piles being created. It was important that these were removed, not only for the ground flora but also to lower the risk of further fires during the summer months. A grant was awarded to enable a contractor to carry out the work.

Thinning of Trees and Scrub Clearance on the Chipstead Scout Group Site

Work will be carried out by the Downlands Partnership volunteers in the woodland to thin the trees and clear land so it can be used as a source of education in nature and conservation for use by the Chipstead Scouts and other visiting groups.

Skylark signs

A grant was awarded to the Downlands Partnership for permanent signs to be placed on sites where Skylarks nest on the ground. These signs should alert visitors to the presence of this declining species and help ensure they can nest successfully without disturbance from walkers or their dogs.



Scrub clearance at Happy Valley

A grant was awarded to Dominic North, the warden at Happy Valley, to fund workdays by the Downlands Partnership to remove scrub on part of this area which forms part of the South London Downs National Nature Reserve. There is no mains water on this site and the grant also covers the installation of a rainwater harvesting/storage system to allow the cattle troughs to be more easily replenished with water (more on page 7). This should also provide a supply of water for use in the event of a grass fire.



Nofence electric collars

Finally, in our last newsletter we mentioned that 'Nofence' electric collars had been purchased for the DP Grazing Team - four for pygmy goats and another four for sheep but we did not have a photo. The collars have now arrived. This is the first time that these collars have been used on sheep and are particularly useful as they allow the Grazing Team to target the areas where the sheep graze.

The Vanguard Way

Colin Saunders

The 107 km (66 miles) Vanguard Way goes from East Croydon Station to Newhaven, through the North Downs, the Weald, Ashdown Forest and the South Downs, finishing with a spectacular stretch along the Sussex coast. It was launched in 1981 and managed by members of the Vanguard Rambling Club until 2022, when the Vanguard Way Association took over to undertake maintenance of signage and other route issues. Two free route guides are published by the Association in both directions: a series of PDFs that can be downloaded from vanguardway.org.uk, and a photoguide app for smartphones from Google Play or Apple Store.

Walkers will come across two nature reserves at the start of their journey: Littleheath Woods and Selsdon Wood.

Littleheath Woods

Chris Hyde

Littleheath Woods is Selsdon's "Secret Wood" because it is bounded on all sides by houses so that only the tree tops can be seen. Even many local residents are unaware of the 25 hectare (61 acre) woodland.



Its charm lies in its diversity - woodland and grassland, soils from chalk to clay and from sand to Blackheath Pebbles as well as wet areas and seasonal ponds with a network of narrow paths and wide rides which meander through from the highest point at 161m above sea level to the lowest at only 125m. Both the Vanguard Way and London Loop cross the woodland.



Originally four woods (Foxearth, Littleheath, Gee and Queenhill Shaw), they became joined when the Gruttendens field ceased to be farmed and trees took over. Littleheath Woods was officially declared a public open space in 1932 and was managed by two woodsmen until 1945. The Friends of Littleheath Woods formed in 1995 and set about rejuvenating the area which had become dark and neglected.



An enthusiastic group of volunteers now work every Tuesday morning tackling a variety of tasks - planting trees, coppicing, control of invasive and non-native species, maintaining paths & ponds, constructing & installing seats, clearing fallen trees & branches and working to safeguard and increase the biodiversity of the area.



More information about the woods and the Friends group can be found on the website: www.folw.co.uk

Selsdon Wood

Heather Govier

Selsdon Wood, also known as The Bird Sanctuary, is a 200-acre nature reserve owned by the National Trust and managed by Croydon Council. The Friends of Selsdon Wood (FSW) are volunteers working with the Council to ensure that our wood is maintained for the benefit of the flora and fauna, as well as for the enjoyment of the public.



The confession seat

The Friends regularly hold informative walks, carry out sustainable conservation and restorative work and monitor wildlife. Our guided walks are open to all, and a full programme is advertised on posters at each entrance. On our work sessions we clear fallen trees, maintain pathways and benches and carry out other maintenance work. Our committee meetings are open to all and we hold our AGM in early March.



View from a drone

The Friends are pleased to welcome new members. Your £5 family subscription will help to pay for more bird boxes, native trees & plants, tools, leaflets, name boards etc. Membership of the Friends expresses your belief in, and support for, the work we do.

Find out much more about the FSW and our lovely wood by visiting our website www.friendsofselsdonwood.co.uk

Boundary changes to the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Geof Haseler

Since the Surrey Hills Area was first designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958, there have been repeated requests to reconsider the boundary to see whether adjacent areas should also be brought into the AONB designation in order to give the area better protection from encroaching urban development and to widen the area at its narrowest points by providing a better corridor for wildlife.

Following a sixteen month review initiated by Natural England in Summer 2021, a Consultation Document was issued on 7 March 2023 for public comment. The consultation period ended on 13 June 2023. Full details of the proposals can be obtained from the [DEFRA website](#).

The proposed boundary changes that affect the areas that we cover are (figures refer to the maps on the Defra site):

- Banstead/Chipstead (fig. 20) - from Park Downs south to just south of Mugswell;
- Happy Valley and Caterham Woods (fig. 21);
- Woldingham (fig. 22).

Natural England will now analyse the representations made on their proposals and amend them if necessary. They will then seek approval from their Board to submit an Order to the Secretary of State to vary the boundaries by mid 2024. If changes are made to include additional land, approval would be deferred to the end of 2024.

Downlands Partnership Plant Nursery

Sean Grufferty

It was an exciting venture to establish a chalk plant nursery at Old Lodge Farm. Thanks to being fully funded by the Downlands Trust, we constructed a suitable area complete with windbreaks and an irrigation system, under the guidance of Jamie, one of our grazing volunteers. The farm volunteers, in particular Valerie, have done wonders helping to grow the plants. Thanks to this team effort, it has been incredibly successful selling to the public and conservation projects which have helped build nature corridors in the urban environment.

The plants have also been a fantastic draw during the summer shows, enabling us to speak to people about the important work of the Downlands Trust and the Downlands Partnership. Add into this the educational aspect from visitors to the farm, summer groups and corporates, and it is a perfect example of Partnership working, conservation in action, with a myriad of wider reaching benefits!



Before the start of construction



First plants in May 2022



As it is today



Making up an order for the Sutton butterfly bank

Rainwater Harvester in Happy Valley

Elsbeth Pringle



If you are walking in Happy Valley do look out for the new rainwater harvester which was built by the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team and their volunteers. It will make life much easier for the grazing team and stock checkers to ensure that there is a plentiful supply of water for the sheep when grazing there.

The project has been funded by the Downlands Trust and the generosity of their many supporters.



Support us with membership, donation or a legacy

DOWNLANDS TRUST MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

If you are not a member or if you know anyone who would like to support our valuable work in the countryside, we would be delighted to receive the following application form and subscription. Alternatively, you can join via our website.

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP (please tick)

- Individual (**£10**)
 Senior /student /unwaged (**£5**) Please delete as applicable
 Family (**£15**)
 Group /company /school (**£15**) Please delete as applicable

Please note: Memberships are due for renewal annually on 1st January. However, any memberships taken out after 1st September in any year are covered for membership for the following calendar year.

PAYMENT OPTIONS (please tick as applicable)

- I enclose a cheque for £..... to cover the subscription. You may like to add an additional donation to aid our work.
 I have made an online payment of £..... to your bank account, Downlands Trust 40-09-04 31439820. Please use your name as the reference so that we can connect the payment to your membership.

GIFT AID Please tick the box below if you are in a position to do so.

- I agree to the Downlands Trust claiming tax under the Gift Aid Scheme on all my donations and subscriptions until I advise otherwise. I confirm that I am paying an amount of UK Income and/or Capital Gains Tax that at least equals the amount that the charity will reclaim.

YOUR DETAILS

Title:		Full name:	
Address:			
		Postcode:	
Email:			
Telephone:			
Signature:		Date:	

Please return completed membership application to:
Membership Secretary, Downlands Trust, 71 Warren Road, Banstead, SM7 1LG

Support Downlands Trust when shopping online

Use [easyfundraising](#) when shopping and the Downlands Trust will receive donations at no cost to you.

These donations help us fund projects to keep the countryside accessible to all.

Downlands Trust

Registered address: 46 Wilmot Way, Banstead, SM7 2PY

Registered Charity No. 1126535
Company No. 6661092

Email: info@downlandstrust.org.uk

Website: www.downlandstrust.org.uk



[downlandstrust](#)



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The Downlands Trust Facebook and Twitter pages include forthcoming events, funding initiatives, the most up-to-date news and views on the practical tasks run by our partners and a whole lot more. We are also on Instagram. Please share us amongst your online friends to help us spread the word about our valuable work.

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