



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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March 2002

www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk

Conservation Work article by Julius Marstrand

Leckhampton Hill, Charlton Kings Common & Daisy Bank Fields are owned by Cheltenham Borough Council on behalf of the people.

As the owners and custodians of the site, No work is allowed to be carried out on the site without Council consent.

This applies to all work carried out on the site by, or on behalf of, anyone. This includes work done recently or currently planned by Council sub-contractors, FOLK Working Parties, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Cotswold Volunteer Wardens, Cheltenham & County Cycling Club, English Nature sub-contractors and a party of youths on Community Service.

Site of Special Scientific Interest

Most of the Site is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI]. As such English Nature is responsible for ensuring that any work carried out is in accordance with the latest Site Management Plan.

The current Site Management Plan was drawn up to cover work that should have been done between 1992 and 1996, but most of it was never

implemented. We are still working to that Plan until the new Site Management Plan is produced around the middle of this year.

The Council has authorised FOLK to carry out conservation work that is consistent with the Site Management Plan, without having to refer the details of all proposed work back to them, but FOLK is the only group that has this authority.

This is because FOLK are monitoring all the conservation work that is being carried out on the site, whoever does it.

Consultation

The Council encouraged the formation of FOLK to facilitate its consultation with users of the Hill and Common, and we take this responsibility very seriously.

In accordance with this consultation process, even the Council Parks Department, Cotswold Volunteer Wardens and English Nature are supposed to agree any work with FOLK in advance of it taking place.

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 Shenherd, Rainbow Cottage, Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham, GL53 9QJ.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DATE?

- FOLK interest talk on bats 18th January.
- Executive committee continues to meet monthly.
- The Council have appointed Nortoft as the Management Consultants for preparing the new Site Management Plan.

WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

- Public meeting with site management consultants Nortoft, March 18th 2002.
- A walk for spring bird song Saturday 4th May
- Work Parties continue on a regular basis.
Second Thursday each month – 9.30am
Fourth Sunday each month – 9.30am
Meet Tramway Cottage Car Park
See Work Party Review for specific dates.

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KEEP THE HILL OPEN – CONTINUING THE DEBATE

I read Judy Frazer-Holland's letter in the last issue of FOLK Newsletter with interest. I agree with her, that it is important to keep the "hill open", but

- **What does "OPEN" mean?**

How is openness defined? Is it lack of fencing? Or lack of restriction of areas to public access? Nowhere is this clear in her letter, or indeed in any of the FOLK proposals.

- **Are open-ness and grazing mutually exclusive?**

Fencing and corrals are mentioned as being necessary pre-requisites for livestock grazing and by inference loss of openness. But you only have to travel a bit further afield in Gloucestershire to find commons where grazing take place comfortably alongside many other activities without any obvious loss of openness and need for intrusive fencing. Selsley, Minchinhampton and Cleeve are all good examples. I believe that these areas have boundary fences, gates and cattle-grids. As farmers appear happy to graze their livestock on these commons, by inference, it would appear that this system is workable.

- **Does grazing lead to loss of open-ness and fencing?**

Barrow Wake and Crickley Hill are cited as examples where openness has been lost. I am not sure that it was the introduction of grazing at these two sites that lead to the loss of openness. Is it not more to do with the Visitor Centre, Hill Fort, tree planting and Car Parks?

Perhaps FOLK could have a look at all these above areas and see if any lessons could be brought to bear on Leckhampton before ruling out grazing. I am sure that an "open" common and grazing are not mutually exclusive.

- **The case for grazing:**

Judy mentions the excellent scrub clearance programme that is already underway on Leckhampton. FOLK should be looking for the best and most cost-effective way to keep control of the scrub once it has been initially managed. Gorse, shrub, brambles and other growth will rapidly re-grow if the management programme is not sustainable. The great advantage to the introduction of grazing would be the reduction in the need for hours of chopping, cutting and disposing of scrub etc. in the future.

- **Are dogs a bar to grazing sheep?**

It appears that this is not the case on the commons mentioned above. Why is Leckhampton any different? Perhaps it says something about the dog owners and their lack of control, rather than the dogs themselves? What is wrong with a lead?

- **What is the danger of toxoplasmosis to pregnant ladies and children?**

The simple answer must be infinitesimal. If there were a serious risk there would have to be warnings about this on the commons mentioned above. There are none. You need fairly intimate contact with the animal to be at risk of toxoplasmosis. Most grazing sheep do not hang around to be stroked by walkers.

- **What is the danger from sheep tapeworm?**

One could argue that it is the sheep that are at risk of tapeworm from the dog. It is the dog that is the definitive host of the echinococcus parasite (sheep tapeworm). The dog needs to eat infected sheep meat to complete the parasitic cycle. I would be surprised if infected sheep carcasses were left littered around Leckhampton Hill, if grazing were allowed.

- **Conflicts of interest:**

Although there is a general disclaimer that "The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive Committee of FOLK", if a member of the Committee makes a contribution, it should be made clearer whether their views are their own, or reflect the opinion of the Committee.

I am a paraglider pilot and have been involved in a submission to the Site Management Consultants from the Malvern Hang Gliding Club. The opinions in this letter are solely attributable to me.

Like a lot of FOLK members, I would like to see the hill returned to, and maintained as, an "open" area as possible. Every avenue should be explored for viability, sustainability and cost-effectiveness. The arguments should be based upon accurate facts and fully reasoned. If objections are to be raised against grazing, then I think that they should carry real weight and not just be possible, in infinitesimally rare circumstances. Only then will the right decision be reached.

Yours sincerely,

Robert W. Davis.

(Paraglider pilot and walker.)

Checklist of birds seen regularly on Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

by Tony and Frances Meredith

Present all year

<i>Family</i>	<i>Species</i>
Raptors	Buzzard, Sparrow Hawk, Kestrel
Pigeons	Collard Dove, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon
Owls	Tawny Owl, Little Owl
Woodpeckers	Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker
Pipits	Meadow Pipit
Accentors	Dunnock (Hedge Accentor)
Wrens	Wren
Warblers	Blackcap, Goldcrest
Corvids	Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay
Thrushes	Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush
Tits	Marsh Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Long-Tailed Tit
Nuthatchers	Nuthatch (Wood Nuthatch)
Treecreepers	Eurasian Treecreeper
Finches	Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet
Buntings	Yellowhammer

Spring/Summer Visitors

Cuckoos	Common Cuckoo
Hirundines	Swallow (Barn Swallow), House Martin
Swifts	Common Swift
Pipits	Tree Pipit
Warblers	Grasshopper Warbler, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat
Flycatchers	Spotted Flycatcher
Thrushes	Redstart

N.B. Names in brackets are the new official names for the species.

Autumn/Winter Visitors

Thrushes	Redwings, Fieldfares
Finches	Siskins, Redpolls

Please note that this is not a comprehensive list of birds to be seen on the Hill and Charlton Kings Common. This list is intended only as a guide to the birds most likely to be seen by a visitor possessing a pair of binoculars, walking quietly and waiting patiently in the appropriate kind of habitat. Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common are fortunately able to provide a variety of such habitats and FOLK policy is to ensure the continuance of this biodiversity. All the above bird species are regularly sighted and/or heard on our walks in Daisybank Fields, Daisybank Road and the footpaths on the northern and eastern slopes of the Hill and Common. (See Newsletter Issue 2 for details of a favourite walk). Of the birds listed, the hardest to see are the Grasshopper Warblers, because they give their very distinctive song from the centre of thick scrub or undergrowth, and seem to have the ability to throw their voices so one is never sure from which angle the call is coming. Treecreepers can also be difficult to find as they don't seem to have any one favourite area and they climb up the trunks rapidly, and silently, for the most part. Redstarts are not seen that often and we would be interested to know if anyone sees them regularly. They were certainly noted in the deciduous woodland around the old Lime Kilns at the top of the railway incline in 1993 and 1994, but we have had only scattered sightings since then.

A walk for Spring Birdsong will take place on Saturday 4th May. Meet at the West End of Highland Road at 9.15am. Stout walking shoes/boots are recommended, and please bring binoculars if you have them.

Work Party Review

We have been working on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common since September 2000 with an enforced break last year of four months due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. For those who like statistics, I thought it would be interesting to record a few facts and figures for that period, which give an indication of time spent and the type of work done.

Scrub Clearance	16 work parties	have completed	346 hours	work	
Grassland Conservation	8	~	100	~	
Footpath Maintenance	5	~	84	~	
Litter Picking	2	~	15	~	
Erection of Notice Boards	2	~	18	~	
Hill walkovers with English Nature/Contractors etc.	3	~	39	~	
Work supporting contractors	6	~	<u>219</u>	~	
TOTAL	42		821		

In addition we have been supported by 4 Cotswold Warden work parties who completed 250 hours work of scrub clearance and grassland conservation. A further contribution has been made by a Community Service Project which cleared scrub under the direction of the Park Ranger Service. There have been 6 site visits by Glebe Contractors who have completed a further 80 hours of work during October and December 2001 and January 2002. This has consisted of scrub clearance, cutting of rank grassland and removal of some tree and scrub growth along the top edge of the escarpment. This work was funded by Cheltenham Borough Council, The Countryside Fund and FOLK. Glebe Contractors were supported by FOLK work parties.

During this period there have been over 1071 hours of conservation work. This is an excellent achievement for the period reviewed, and we thank all those members who have supported us in all weather conditions.

At the end of March 2002, our scrub clearance programme will stop to avoid disturbing the wildlife during the spring and summer. We will then turn our attention to footpath maintenance and repairs to stiles, gates and fencing. If any members notice anything which they think requires attention would they bring it to the notice of myself or any member of the committee.

FOLK have now completed the purchase of a full range of hand tools and 2 brushcutters. This should enable us to be self sufficient on our work parties but we do of course continue to need your help in putting them to good use. The dates for the work parties are set out below. Any queries please ring me on 01242 233116.

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday March 14th 2002
 Thursday April 11th 2002
 Thursday May 9th 2002
 Thursday June 13th 2002
 Thursday July 11th 2002

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday March 24th 2002
 Sunday April 28th 2002
 Sunday May 26th 2002 (Work Party replaced by Hill & Common walk)
 Sunday June 23rd 2002
 Sunday July 28th 2002

All work parties meet at Tramway Cottage car park at 9.30am. Please note that after March there will be **NO** Sunday afternoon sessions due to limited support over the past few months. There will also be no work party on Sunday 26th May, but instead there will be a walk around the hill giving people the chance to see the places work has been carried out.
 by Allan Wood



Discussing scrub clearance for proposed Geological Exposures

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

CHAIRMAN - Julius Marstrand (01242 518846)
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Robin Andrews	Judy Frazer-Holland
Tony Clifford	Shelagh Hallaway
Vic Ellis	Tony Meredith
Allan Wood	

Draft Access, Rights of Way and Tracks Policy

The following Draft Policy has been drawn up by FOLK's Site Management Sub-Committee and will be considered by the full Executive Committee on 12th March, before being submitted to the Site Management Consultants.

VISION

Public Access to the Hill and Common was hard won by the people of Cheltenham and should not be restricted any more than is *absolutely* necessary to conserve the environment and archaeology, and maintain the area's status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Wherever possible, public access, for non-motorised traffic, should be as open and free as possible, commensurate with protecting the environment.

The existing nature of the Hill and Common are not "natural habitats", but the result of the interaction between nature and management of the land over thousands of years. The "wild" nature of the site is one of its principal attractions and it should not be "over managed", or turned into a "country park". As far as possible it should be maintained as a "managed wild place".

Any restrictions on access imposed for the purpose of conserving, restoring, or maintaining tracks or habitats, for example to allow re-growth of habitat, or to reduce traffic erosion, or for track maintenance and repair, should as far as possible only be temporary.

POLICY

General

As far as possible, designated RsoW should provide routes directly through the Site and circular routes around it.

Where existing access points to the site are not connected by existing RsoW, consideration should be given to upgrading existing tracks to appropriate RsoW.

RsoW should be maintained or restored to a suitable condition for the use expected. The County Highways Authority is responsible for maintaining the surfaces of RsoW and ensuring that the RsoW meet the specified standards; the Landowner is responsible for controlling any encroachment onto the RoW from either side.

Some tracks on the site are not designated RsoW. There is no statutory responsibility on the County Highways Authority, or the Landowners to maintain them.

Apart from the Cotswold Way and principal routes of interest (e.g. to "The Devils chimney") other tracks may not generally be way marked. Designated RsoW and other established routes may be shown on maps at some of the access points to the site, but need not be otherwise way marked.

Erosion

Erosion of tracks and geological exposures is only a significant problem in some places. Some erosion is natural and inevitable, if it becomes a problem from time to time, measures may be needed to reduce it.

Cotswold Way

The Cotswold Way is a designated National Trail. Part of its route, primarily across Charlton Kings Common, is a designated bridleway and part of it, primarily along the top of Leckhampton Hill, is designated as a footpath. Once the National Trail has been formally opened, the Highway Authority will be responsible for maintaining it to higher standards and will receive grant aid for this purpose, to reflect its use by long distance walkers.

Footpaths

Some existing designated footpaths and other non-designated tracks are also suitable for use by horses and cyclists. Where horses and cyclists already use designated footpaths and non-designated tracks, consideration should be given to upgrading them to bridleways, and the provision of a circular route around the site. Other, non-designated tracks can be shared.

In some areas, especially when it is wet, pedestrians are concerned that footpaths can be made muddier by horses and mountain bikes. For example the section of the Cotswold Way linking the top of Charlton Kings Common to the meadowland (known as Cowslip Field), which is at present closed to horse-riders. A parallel track could be considered to enable horses and bikes to take a circular route around the Common. This solution might be considered elsewhere for safety or other reasons.

Bridleways

To provide through routes and circular routes across and around the site additional bridleways should be considered. Upgrading some designated footpaths and non-designated tracks to bridleways, as suggested above might help to achieve this objective.

Where possible and appropriate, all existing access points, commonly used by horses and bicycles, should be connected by designated bridleways. In some instances this may require existing footpaths being up graded to bridleways.

Former White Roads and RUPPs

Former White Roads i.e. historical traffic route between Sandy Lane and Hartley Lane, and RUPPs i.e. Daisybank Road, should be re-designated, with appropriate restrictions being applied to them in the form of Bylaws. Bearing in mind the provisions of the CROW Act, we would like to restrict access to motorised vehicles on these routes but not horse drawn vehicles, horses, cyclists and pedestrians. Exceptions would include individuals who can demonstrate that they have historically used these tracks, including neighbouring landowners, tenants and their guests.

Motorised access would still be permitted to other areas of the site for maintenance or emergency purposes, or with the Landowners' permission (e.g. for events in the Iron Age Fort).

Lizards emerge in warm Spring sunshine

If you look carefully at dry sunny banks and rocky areas on the Hill on a warm, sunny day over the next few weeks you may be lucky and see basking common lizards, *Lacerta vivipara* (viviparous lizard). They are between 10 and 15 cms in total length and brown to green in colour. Lizards are reptiles and have a dry, scaly skin unlike newts (Amphibia) which have a moist, smooth skin. Being cold-blooded, lizards need to raise their body temperature to about 30 degrees Celsius before they can be in a fit state to hunt for food and escape from their enemies.

During the summer months they build up their fat reserves in their abdomen and tail. In the autumn they enter a state of hibernation underground where they can gain protection against harmful freezing temperatures and predation by warm-blooded animals that remain active throughout the year. Throughout the cold winter months they draw slowly upon their energy reserves, and exist in a state of torpor, with a body temperature just above that of their surroundings.

About nine or ten o'clock in the morning on warm, sunny days between about April and October they emerge slowly from their sleeping quarters and move to their favourite basking spots which are usually a dry, sloping surfaces facing the sun. If they get too hot they will seek the shade.

Having obtained the right temperature they will scamper over their home range (which normally extends for about 10 metres or so) hunting for spiders and small insects. If they get a bit cold they will resume basking to restore their body temperature and then resume hunting. If they cannot get their temperature high enough, they will return to one of their sleeping quarters underground to conserve energy.

In late July the females lay between four and ten eggs in a moist place underground. The eggs have thin membranous shells and the young emerge almost immediately as fully formed small lizards ready to hunt. The word 'viviparous' is a bit misleading as the common lizard produces 'shelled' eggs but retains them in the oviducts until they are almost ready to hatch. This affords better control over the temperature of the developing eggs and has allowed the common lizard to inhabit parts of northern Britain, which are otherwise too cold for reptiles.

The main predators of the common lizard are snakes and birds. An anti-predator strategy used by the common lizard is the trick of shedding its tail if it cannot escape in time. The predator is attracted to the wriggling tail, whilst the lizard beats a hasty retreat. The surviving lizard re-grows a more stumpy tail over the next few weeks, which can be used again for the same purpose!

Common lizards are a protected species and fortunately are quite common on various parts of the Hill. You will have to be very quiet, and move slowly, if they are not to dart out of sight into a crevice for safety. A good place to observe them is on the warm, sunny slopes of the Hill and in Brownstone Quarry (top quarry).

Jack Shepherd March 2002

AND FINALLY...

Don't forget the public meeting with the site management consultants Nortoft, at Leckhampton Primary School, Hall Road, on Monday, March 18th 2002, 7-9p.m..

