



FOLKtalk

Issue 63
Summer 2020

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



Message of hope

Very early on in the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) this optimistic message appeared on the floor of Dead Man's Quarry. Nobody knows who decided to write it, but it is an uplifting and defiant cry for us to work together for the good of all. Inside this edition of FOLKtalk there is plenty of news about what all sorts of people, FOLK included, have been doing up on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common because of, and often in spite of, the situation in which we find ourselves.

FOLK AGM

Our Annual General Meeting is usually held in Leckhampton during November.

The FOLK Executive Committee is mindful of the changeable situation in the country regarding Covid-19 and is unable at this time to be sure whether a physical AGM will be legally possible in November.

The Executive is currently drawing up a list of options available to us and we would like to invite any views from the membership on this matter.

If you have any views or suggestions about how FOLK might run its AGM this November, please contact the Secretary, Ken Brennan on 01242 528067 or email us on leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

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Ash Dieback: our Chairman, John Harvey, explores its effects See page 7

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WORK PARTY REPORT

Half Year Summary

The volunteers who make up our regular work parties, and of course the occasional individuals or groups who come along to help, are usually busy all year round. As many of you will know, on 20 March all work party sessions were suspended for the foreseeable future. However, in the three months or so between the AGM and the introduction of the Coronavirus lockdown, the work parties achieved a very great deal – and not always in the best of weather.

Tackling gorse and scrub is a continual challenge aimed at preserving and enlarging the area of open grassland on the Hill and Common so that wildlife can flourish. Just before lockdown began, the work parties cleared and treated



a large patch of the gorse both on the north-west corner of Charlton Kings Common and on the slopes above The Gallops, as well as creating a number of firebreaks in the large areas of mature gorse at the top of the hill near the Cotswold Way.

New firebreak - with dying embers of the work party's bonfire

Similarly a large number of hawthorn saplings were removed from Charlton Kings Common and the East end of Daisy Bank Road. Again this prevents the

development of a new area of woodland where healthy grass may be able to thrive. All excessive growth near the Cotswold stone walls next to Hopkins Field and close to the Barrow was also cleared.

In work directly designed to enable diverse species of butterflies to expand their range, a number of “butterfly motorways” have been cut, including those between Cowslip Meadow and the south-east corner of Charlton Kings Common. This project was prompted by the growing



New “motorway” for butterflies, including the endangered Duke of Burgundy

realisation, both nationally and internationally, that creating easy links between suitable patches of land encourages specific species of butterflies to colonise new areas which they might otherwise not have found. This in turn supports larger and more sustainable populations to become established.

Finally, to enhance everyone’s enjoyment of their walks on the Hill, the work parties completed their annual mowing of the ancient burial Barrow and of the Sidings where quarry trucks used to be parked.

Lockdown Session

On the last Wednesday of May we were given special permission by Cheltenham Borough Council to undertake one important work party session.



Controlled burning of previously cut gorse

This was to burn, in a safe and tightly-controlled location, a large volume of gorse cuttings which had been collected during several routine work parties in February and early March. The application for the session was fully risk-assessed to keep the volunteers, wildlife and passers-by safe, and it was approved after scrutiny by very senior council officers.

Just six carefully-chosen volunteers met with Wayne Sedgwick, the Senior Ranger, and his assistant Alli and set about the task in the area of the hill known as The Gallops. Here we tackled each pile of gorse cuttings in turn, bringing the gorse closer to the fire site, carefully cutting each piece down to a safe size to burn and . . . and there's still more to burn before we go home! maintaining strict surveillance of the fire to prevent too great a burn and to ensure that it was totally contained at all times.



On an already baking hot day it was a long and pretty energetic session, with regular breaks for each volunteer to take their drinks and lunch. However, by 2:30 the last gorse had been burnt and we could sit and keep a close eye on the dying fire until it was safe for us to leave.

The Council officers were obviously pleased with the way the work party operated and we now have permission to re-start regular sessions, though only with a total of six volunteers at any one time. Still at least it has enabled us to start to make some progress with the summer tasks.

* * * * *

As ever, we are hugely grateful for the efforts of all who volunteer on our work parties – and on this occasion a special thank you is due to the “lucky” ones chosen for the long gorse-burning session during the lockdown.

Geoff Holt
Work Party Leader

COTSWOLD WARDENS IN LOCKDOWN

Like so many other organisations, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have had to suspend all their organised activities for the time being. This includes not only their popular guided walks but, sadly, their work on the new Cotswold stone wall leading up from Hartley Lane. The publication of paper copies of the “Cotswold Lion” will also not now resume until next year.

This does not, of course, mean that our Cotswold Wardens have stopped working. Far from it. They have been busy planning the next programme of guided walks and details will be published on the Cotswold AONB website and the Cotswold Conservation Board website as soon as rules are sufficiently relaxed to allow guided walks to take place.

In the meantime, individual Wardens have been allowed to patrol all the footpaths in the areas where they are appointed as “Parish Wardens”. So, for example, one couple have already walked all the footpaths in Colesbourne, Elkstone and Winstone and are now starting on the Duntisbournes. On top of this, a separate group is patrolling the Cotswold Way. These patrols involve walking all the public Rights of Way, fixing signposting where necessary, doing minor clearance works and reporting any other major works that might be required.

When country walks are such an important part of coping with lockdown, it is comforting to know that the footpaths we love are in such capable hands.



Local sheep breed, the Cotswold Lion, stars in the AONB logo

ASH DIEBACK IS NOT THE END?

FOLK Chairman, John Harvey, describes the spread of this disease, its impact and the many challenges it presents for wildlife management.

Those of us who remember the spread of Dutch Elm Disease through the UK in the early 1970s can recall the massive effect that the loss of this once abundant species had on rural landscapes. Two examples from very different parts of the UK illustrate this impact. In the flat land on the western edge of the Cambridgeshire Fens, thinly wooded views were replaced by virtually featureless distant landscapes. In West Cornwall narrow valleys abandoned by agriculture over the previous half century lost all their trees. This “new normal” still persists east of Cambridge, but in Cornwall scrub, Ash and other species of tree have now colonised the vacant habitats.

I had been told in 2018 that Ash Dieback was having similar impacts in West Wales, but I was not prepared for what I saw on two visits to the west of our county in June of 2019. On the wooded slope of a broad dry valley near Wotton-under-Edge several large Elms, at least 25 metres high and almost as broad, stood as large brown hulks amongst the green of other species of tree. The majority of the scattered trees in the valley floor, and on the opposite slope, appeared to be Ash showing symptoms of the disease. The impact was even greater near Birdlip, where a valley side at least 500 metres long and 100 metres across had been occupied by a dense monoculture of relatively young Ash. All were dead.

What was happening last year on the Hill and the Common? I first saw early signs of Ash Dieback (black shoots at the top of a plant) on waist-high saplings near the eastern edge of the Hill Fort in May. By the middle of July most of these saplings were dead or dying. In late July I systematically surveyed the Hill Fort area and the Common for incidence of the disease. There was even more infestation around the Fort, with the large tree near its western entrance now affected. On the Common, most of the trees in the thin stand in the area of scree above Daisy Bank Road were either heavily infected or dead. The disease was present in the wooded area between the eastern end of Daisy Bank Road and The Gallops, whilst most of the veteran pollard Ash on the boundary with the Golf Course – trees which were probably of high value to wildlife - appeared



Ash tree with diseased leaves

to be dead or dying. Further east, there were signs of the disease in both the tall Ash at that end of the Common and in those lining the track leading to Hartley Lane. So the disease was well established.

Lockdown has prevented me from visiting the Hill or Common this year. However, of the eight large Ash visible from my home near the Cox's Meadow

Flood Reservoir, one has severe dieback, five have some dead shoots, and only two seem clear of the disease. Only the worst affected trees showed any signs of the disease in 2019. So I would expect to see that same increase in the severity of the disease to become apparent on the Hill and the Common.

So there will be major changes in the visual and biological aspects on our site.

Will we consider these changes as good or bad? As with Dutch Elm Disease in Cornwall, what is bad for one species may be good for others. For example, in the 1970s the numbers of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker increased along with the increase in the amount of dead wood, but the abundance of species dependent on Elm probably declined and the forty-five animal species that appear to rely entirely on Ash are particularly at risk. Similarly, some would see benefits in the loss of screening Ash opening up views over the Severn Vale, but this might come at the cost of the greater visibility of roads and housing. Fewer Ash seedlings in future, however, will certainly remove one threat to the survival of our species-rich grassland.

What might be the more immediate impacts of the disease, especially on what management is needed? Public safety is likely to be the main concern.

The wood of trees that have died from the disease becomes fragile, so that branches are more frequently shed – sometimes quite unexpectedly. This may require some trees in heavily visited areas to be felled. But such felling may itself present a problem. The weakened wood may cause branches to fall

during the felling process or may cause the felled tree to fall in an unexpected direction, both putting the fellers at risk. It has even been suggested that in extreme cases it may be necessary to use machines to help in felling, perhaps using “cherry-pickers” to remove some upper branches or resorting to completely mechanical felling, as used in large forestry operations. Whichever approach is used, it will be expensive. Hopefully it will be possible to follow the recommendations of organisations such as The Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust that the presumption should be not to fell trees.

This is particularly the case for unaffected trees, as some of these may be resistant to the disease. The Commission is running a trial in the New Forest in which plants sourced from trees that seem to show some resistance are being grown to see if they will survive. But seed from any survivors to re-establish Ash elsewhere will not be available for at least 15 years.

For FOLK and the Borough Council the crunch area may be the narrow track to Hartley Lane. This is lined on both sides by tall Ash. The safety risk could be high, whilst complete felling would be very expensive.

Should we plant other tree species to replace lost Ash? My view is not. I think that we can rely on natural recolonization by other species to fill any gaps, if we want them filled, or filled by the species which arrive naturally. Moreover, planting would be demanding of labour and materials, for example, digging planting holes, using stakes and protective netting, needing to weed and probably to water, especially in dry periods such the present. In addition, where trees have been planted on the site in the past, then in retrospect this has often been seen as a mistake, especially when conifers were introduced.

Are there analogies here between the uncertainties as to what will, or should, happen on the Hill and the Common and the responses of individuals, societies and nations to Covid19? It certainly seems probable that things on the site will not be the same in future, and certain that any restoration of Ash into the landscape will be far into the distance, if at all. ***But being different is not necessarily the same as being worse. Whatever habitats we have in years to come will have their wildlife and there will still be views. Habitats and views will still need to be managed if we wish to preserve them. So there will still be a role for organisations such as FOLK.***

FOLK GOES HIGH-TECH

Drone images support gorse management

FOLK is using technology as well as old-fashioned work on the ground to tackle the spread of scrub across the Hill and Common. In 2018 FOLK and Cheltenham Borough Council commissioned a drone survey of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, an innovative and ambitious decision for a conservation project by a local voluntary group.

Since then a great deal of work has been done to make use of the information and the images. Projects include, for example, the mapping of all the commemorative benches, linked to photographs of each one.

On a more practical note, dozens of individual patches of gorse were surveyed and mapped, using GIS to overlay them onto the aerial map created by the drone.

First of all, each patch was also assessed in terms of three key criteria:

- **age**
- **density**
- and*
- any **underlying grass** which might flourish if the gorse were cut.

At that stage we also recorded the **slope** of the terrain on which it is growing.

That detailed profile of each patch not only offered a comprehensive and updateable birds-eye view of the spread and condition of gorse on the Hill, but also provided vital information to help FOLK prioritise and plan the work parties' efforts to control its spread.

Now the work of tackling invasion by gorse has moved on again.

This time we have been marking individual patches of gorse to show whether any action has already been taken and exactly what was done.

The image below shows a small section of this new map:



Here the shape of each individual area of gorse is shown by a red line:

- A simple red line shows each area of gorse we have not yet touched
- Black cross-hatching indicates where we have removed and herbicide-treated the gorse
- Black diagonal lines indicate where the gorse has been rotationally cut
- Black dots show where the gorse was set alight in-situ by persons unknown

We are hugely indebted to committee members Geoff Holt and Ken Brennan for the hours of skilled work which has gone into creating this ground-breaking survey.

FRIENDS RE-UNITED BY FOLKtalk

We were delighted to hear that, through a combination of diligent searching and the availability of back copies of FOLKtalk on our website, two of Leckhampton's childhood friends have been re-united.

Our Membership Secretary, Tony Duffin, took a call from 83 year-old Keith Noyes who lives in Staffordshire. Keith had been using the internet to search for his long-lost friend Major Trevor Smith and stumbled across an article about him in the Autumn 2017 edition of FOLKtalk. Keith felt that it might be possible that this Trevor Smith really was his old friend and asked Tony to get in touch with him. Trevor got back to Tony very quickly and confirmed that this was indeed true and they are now in touch once more. As Keith explained to Tony, it was quite a complicated story.

"I grew up in Leckhampton less than 200 yards from where Trevor lived and we were friends in our schooldays. As adults we were both living away from Cheltenham and gradually lost touch. Recently, though, my wife and I were sorting and labelling old photographs for our sons and grandchildren. Out of the blue I came across one picture of me taken in about 1946 by Trevor's great aunt in her garden, and another of both our fathers in Salvation Army uniform in the mid 1920s. My grandfather was bandmaster at the time and he had a market garden in Kidnappers Lane.

"Some years ago I was contacted by someone from Leckhampton whose name I have forgotten who was interested in the market gardens in that area. I had mapped the land use in the parish (together with Shurdington, Witcombe, Coberley and Cowley) as part of my final year dissertation in geography at Manchester in 1956. I spent all my career teaching or lecturing. For 60 years I have lived in Staffordshire, and I know that, for a while, Trevor was in London. Throughout all that time I have kept a keen interest in Cheltenham and until recently we visited regularly, though my eyesight has now deteriorated and my wife only drives locally."

In the end then, it was stumbling across the two photos that were the stimulus for Keith to try to get in touch with Trevor again and, thanks to one article in FOLKtalk, they are in contact once more. They have already enjoyed one really long phone call . . . but then these two good friends really did have a lot of catching up to do!

SMILES IN THE SKY

The late May Bank Holiday Monday was marked in a very unusual way by former RAF pilot Rich Goodwin (of Rich Goodwin Airshows). His specialist display aircraft, a bi-plane in brilliant union jack colours, is based at Gloucestershire Airport. When the ban which had grounded his planes was lifted, he decided to do something to cheer us all up.



Flying high above Leckhampton and Shurdington, he skilfully creating an enormous smiley face, to the delight of hundreds across Cheltenham who saw it take shape. It was marvellous to watch his obvious expertise and it put a big smile on the face of all of us on the ground who were lucky enough to see it.

IN THE NEWS

Citizens' Army to tackle invasive species?

A call has been made for a large network of volunteers who would be trained to spot invasive species and report them to the Environment Agency. There are judged to be as many as 48 invasive species which threaten to take hold over the next twenty years. The proposal is currently being considered by the Government, which is also evaluating an associated proposal for a dedicated inspectorate.

PARAGLIDING FROM THE HILL

FOLK is always happy to welcome groups of volunteers to help the work parties. Early last year we were contacted by FOLK member and experienced paraglider pilot Rob Davis.

Those of us who live near Leckhampton Hill or Charlton Kings Common sometimes find ourselves gazing up at a small knot of brightly-coloured parachutes wheeling around in the sky. Indeed they were spotted in late May enjoying a flight soon after the temporary ban on flying was lifted. For most of us, though, paragliding is a sport about which we know very little.

Rob's paragliding friends not only wanted to support our regular work but also had an idea to improve an area of the hill used for their sport. A year or so later, I caught up with Rob to find out more about this truly exhilarating sport.

Rob explained that the canopy itself is approximately 28 square metres and is made of two elliptical sheets of cloth stitched together, but left open at the front.



Separators shaped like slices of an aircraft wing are added every 20-40 cm joining the top and bottom layers. So when the front opening faces the wind the air flows in and pressurises the sewn cloth into a wing shape.

The North face of Leckhampton Hill is not only steep, but also slightly cup-shaped, creating great “dynamic lift” and making it the perfect soaring shape when the wind is blowing from the North. Indeed so good is it that pilots from across the country make their way here when the wind is right. Paragliders will

use other hills, such as The Malverns, when the wind is from either the east or the west.

Once in the air, Rob went on to say, paraglider pilots want to stay up for a good long time. They do this by finding “thermals” - parcels of air which have been heated by the sun and are rising towards the clouds. Glider pilots and indeed soaring raptors like buzzards both use exactly the same technique. Some areas generate thermals better than others and towns, with lots of concrete and bricks tend to be good generators.

Cheltenham, sitting at the foot of Leckhampton Hill, acts as an excellent thermal generator for the first stage of a long flight. Then by picking up one thermal after another, the flight can be repeatedly extended. When looking for their next lift, pilots will often try to spot buzzards or red kites soaring, or even swifts and swallows feeding: all sure-fire signs of a good thermal. The raptors, by the way, are totally untroubled by this and are even happy to share the thermal with the pilots.

Chatting with the paraglider volunteers during last year’s work party it was amazing to learn that experienced pilots leaving Leckhampton can make it as far as Weymouth. Similarly, after taking off from The Malverns, a good easterly wind might carry them to Aberystwyth or St David’s on the Welsh coast, and a westerly all the way to Cambridgeshire or even the Norfolk coast.

So when you next glance up and see paragliders over Leckhampton Hill, just admire the skill of the pilots and maybe ponder where they might find themselves at the end of their flight.

If you want to know more about paragliding have a look at these websites

<http://www.malvern-hang.org.uk/>

<http://www.avonhgpg.co.uk/>

If you have any questions please feel free to contact Rob Davis at robert@treborsivad.freeserve.co.uk

2019 BUTTERFLY REPORT – FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Since the preliminary report from the 2019 butterfly survey on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (See FOLKtalk February 2020.) the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme - led by *Butterfly Conservation* and three other organisations - has published the national results. This allows us to compare our findings with those seen nationally.

Below I have picked out some particularly relevant headlines from the national report and compared them with local observations.

- **Nationally, just over half of UK butterfly species showed higher population levels in 2019 compared with 2018.** Locally a similar picture emerges, with 18 species (56%) recorded at higher numbers, 11 (34%) lower and 3 (10%) unchanged.
- **The summer flying species which benefited most across the country included the Marbled White, Ringlet, Dark Green Fritillary and Meadow Brown.** Again this echoes what we found locally.
- **Three spring-flying species were found to be doing well nationally – Brimstone, Duke of Burgundy and Orange Tip.** The first two species also appeared in larger numbers locally.



Orange Tip butterfly

However, in contrast to the national picture, the Orange Tip declined here by 33%, against a national increase of 63%.

This local decline, though, must be set against strong numbers seen in 2018 and, in fact, the number observed here in 2019 was at the local 7-year average. So this one-year fall does not give cause for concern at present.

- **The Common Blue fell sharply in the national data with numbers down by 54%.** By contrast, in our local survey the Common Blue suffered a less

dramatic reduction in numbers: down 32%. Despite this drop, however, numbers of Common Blue here remained well above the local 7-year average.

- **The Dingy Skipper is no longer in long-term population decline on the national scale.** This is encouraging as it is one of the priority species which has been the focus of intensive conservation efforts in recent years by Butterfly Conservation and its partners. The Dingy Skipper is still present on the hill, but locally its population is not thriving, with numbers falling from a high of 95 in 2014 to 27 in 2019.

Preferred territory is extremely variable

Many butterflies have very specific needs, which can make the job of designing measures to help them flourish particularly challenging. The principal needs include having the right food sources available to them and the aspect of the land.



Dingy Skipper butterfly

Two locally-seen butterflies illustrate this perfectly. The Dingy Skipper has a distinct preference for the more sheltered and/or warmer parts of the site, and is most commonly seen on the Leckhampton Hill scarp slope above Hartley Lane (38% of sightings), Brownstone Quarry (19%), the lower slope of the eastern side of Charlton Kings Common between Windass Hill and the golf course (10%) and the Cowslip Meadow (9%). In marked contrast, the Common Blue is generally much more widely and evenly distributed across the whole site, appearing in 32 out of the 34 survey sections of the hill.

2020 Early beginnings

Despite (or perhaps because of) the Covid-19 lockdown, surveying ‘during exercise’, started earlier than usual (25 March) and, perhaps because of the unseasonably warm and settled weather in April and May, it has been undertaken on a more regular basis. It is encouraging that there seems to have been a good survival rate of the hibernators (Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell,

Brimstone, Comma and perhaps more surprisingly Red Admiral) despite the dismally wet winter, which used to be considered even more detrimental to survival than the cold.

By the time of writing (mid May) most of these early-emergers had gone, to be replaced by species such as Small Heath, Common Blue, Dingy Skipper and Speckled Wood. Duke of Burgundy – a priority species for local conservation - was first seen on 23 April, a full two weeks earlier than normal here. Three of the others mentioned were also anything up to a week earlier than usual. Generally, though, the overall impression is that numbers are currently low, though so far, all the species we expect to see here have been sighted somewhere on site, with the exception of Wall. All that is needed now is some gentle rain to re-vitalise the plants and refresh the nectar sources.

Finally, thanks must go to all those who helped with the recording, despite the frustrations inherent in the process due to weather and ground conditions. Surveying will continue in 2020 so if you would like to add your records or help in any way, please get in touch.

Serena Meredith

Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator

01242 524138 (Please leave a message if no reply.)

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IN THE NEWS

Moths are on the move

The latest edition of the Atlas of Britain and Ireland's Larger Moths highlighted marked variation in fortunes for different species. The rise in temperatures recorded during the period studied (1970-2016) were helping some species to settle in areas which used to be too cool, but species which prefer a cooler climate were at increased risk. Overall 31% of larger moths have decreased significantly in their distribution, but 38% of the others have become more widespread.

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

Strange times

Lockdown and the tragic devastation of COVID-19 has changed everyone's routines and Wayne's working life is certainly no exception. At this time of year he would normally expect to be working flat out organising key events like the Midsummer Fiesta. Instead he is out and about with the rest of his team touring the town's many urban green spaces and its popular wild areas like Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. The main work here has been checking that people are staying safe and sticking to the current regulations on social distancing.

As we might all hope, most people are behaving responsibly and are genuinely embarrassed about any unintended breaches of the rules. Sadly, though, it is not always like this. While the car parks on the Hill were closed off, the Council frequently found the tape across their entrances had been removed to allow cars in – and on one occasion even heavy logs placed across the gateway had been dragged away!

More recently, as lockdown has begun to be eased and the car parks on the hill have all re-opened, the main challenge is with high numbers of people making social distancing difficult. On top of that some (both young and old) are blatantly flouting the rules and meeting in large groups: on one evening as many as 30-40 people were found partying together.

In between these patrols the team has been helping out with urgent tasks such as food distribution. So this certainly going to be a summer that Wayne, like the rest of us, will remember for years to come.

Dexter cattle

In the middle of May a good number of the cattle were turned out onto the Hill and are now regularly spotted either grazing the grass high up on the slopes or resting in the cool shade of the trees. These are the cows which did not have calves late last year and are, as ever, very comfortable with the presence of humans. The cows with young calves, however, are still safely held in farmer Anne North's fields near to her farm.

Area 16

This pleasant open area - just through the trees from the Daisybank and Bridge car parks - is easy to access, and the work done by the Council and FOLK to improve it is certainly paying off. The area offers space to walk, run about and enjoy the wonderful view across Cheltenham.

A couple of years ago a large area of wildflower seed was scattered there and this year's show was especially vibrant.



Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)

Our current ten-year HLS agreement runs out this year. The HLS is part of the national system to provide funding for farming and land management/conservation in return for agreed maintenance and improvement measures to be achieved. Because of the current situation, the government has introduced the availability of a one-year extension to agreements which are due to expire. So thankfully, until a new ten-year agreement can be negotiated, the work and the funding roll on.

Separate from this, but closely related, Cheltenham Borough Council has a ten-year agreement with the national Planning Inspectorate for its installation of fences on otherwise open common land. The fences in question are those erected to contain the cattle which graze the slopes and are a key part of the management of this site. That agreement runs out in the autumn of 2021 and work is already underway to help ensure the continued presence of these vital fences.

and finally . . .

Life is full of surprises, but for Wayne this one takes some beating. Out on one of his patrols near a small area of woodland he was suddenly aware of a tiny furry creature running towards him. The animal in question not only ran right up to his feet, but then scampered up his leg, dived into his hoodie jacket and snuggled down in the sleeve.

Once he'd had a moment to think, Wayne gently reached inside and lifted out a very small baby grey squirrel. These youngsters are not normally seen out of

the drey before they are more fully grown. However, rather than panicking, this one seemed very relaxed and stayed cupped in Wayne's hand.

Knowing how important it is to return foundlings quickly to their natural habitat, Wayne made a couple of attempts to leave the squirrel in the woods, but each time it raced after him. Realising that it was not confident enough to be on its own, Wayne took the squirrel home. There he turfed out his two cats and let the squirrel sleep off the excitement before providing it with a healthy supper. Before the cats returned, Wayne then placed the squirrel in a carry-cage and took it up to his own bedroom so that he could be near it overnight. The squirrel slept like a log.

With a full-time job and two inquisitive cats at home, this could not be a long-term arrangement. So the next morning after breakfast, Wayne took the squirrel to a wildlife expert he knew who works with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and is used to dealing with rescued animals.

So, all in all, it was far from "a normal day at the office" but this tale ended happily and the young squirrel is being very well looked after.

IN THE NEWS

Millions more enjoy outdoor spaces

A recent study, the *Monitor of engagement with the Natural environment* (Natural England & DEFRA) revealed that visits to green spaces have jumped by approximately one third in the past decade, from 2.9 billion in 2009-10 to 4 billion in 2018-19. The rise in urban areas was even sharper. Predictably, there were found to be inequalities with those from poor households and from black and minority ethnic backgrounds 20-25% less likely to spend time outdoors than most other groups. Overall, however, not only did the population make more visits than ten years ago, but also, on average, spent more time outdoors each time they visited a green space.

WRITERS' CORNER

A story by FOLK member, Mary Paterson

"Millions of years ago, Leckhampton Hill was under the sea," said the kindly grown-up, taking the visiting youngster for a scrambling walk up the scarp. Their path was well-worn, and recent rain had washed off some of the loose soil, partially exposing edges of fossils.

There were smooth shapes of *terebratula*, ridged shapes of *rhynchonella*, bullet-like *belemnites*, and perhaps even a very small *ammonite* - a miniature of the dinner-plate size monsters found in the distant clay of the Severn Vale.



Belemnite



Terebratula

Perhaps the most delicate and beautiful of the Leckhampton fossils were the tiny star-shaped *crinoids*, sometimes separate, sometimes in a little conjoined stem of several together.

"What about these?" asked nephew Max. He had found a boulder whose greyish-yellow surface was studded with random white shell shapes.

"We call those Devil's Toenails!" came the reply.

"So the Devil was busy on our hill, with toenails and a chimney!" wondered Max.

"Those are just stories," said his aunt.

"What is true is that years and years ago – centuries and centuries and more – these strong, shell-shaped fossils were once sea creatures, living



Gryphaea - Devil's Toenails

in their shells on the sea bed, deep down under the water. They lived and died, and laid eggs for the next generation too – pinhead-sized eggs, which fell around them in ever-deepening layers of yellowish mud.”

“The stone is a bit yellow,” observed Max.

“Geologists call this kind of egg-built stone “inferior oolite of the Jurassic era”, and ‘oolite’ means ‘made of eggs’.”

But Max had moved on. “Jurassic!” he exclaimed. “Isn’t that dinosaurs?”

“Sorry, no dinosaur fossils on Leckhampton Hill,” his aunt replied. “Our little sea only ran to shellfish. But now that they have become fossils, aren’t they fun to collect?”

“Thank you, auntie,” said Max, who was a polite child. “But I don’t think my mother would believe all that.”

“Well, go and ask Cousin Ida, and see what she says.”

* * *

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR, Mary Paterson

“And what about you? Do you delight in Leckhampton fossils, as well as the flora and fauna? They are another reason for the Special Scientific Interest of our wonderful hill which people come a long way to enjoy.”

Calling all writers

If you have a short piece of creative prose or poetry inspired by Leckhampton Hill or Charlton Kings Common and would like to submit it for Writers’ Corner, we would love to hear from you.

Entries (no more than 700 words) to the Editor, Martin Wood, by email at martinwood360@gmail.com or ring 01242 231230.

ABOUT FOLK

FOLK is an organisation set up to work with landowners to promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. We support sustainable recreational and agricultural use of the land. We welcome new members to support and help us in this important work. If you wish to join (either as an individual or as a family) please contact any of the people listed below. ***There is currently no fee for membership.***

Why not have a look at what is new on the FOLK website <http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/> and look us up on Facebook Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

Contributions to the FOLK Website are always gratefully received.

Contact: webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

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If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition please contact **Martin Wood** on **01242 231230** or email to: martinwood360@gmail.com. Articles of around 500 words, plus a photo if you have one, would be most welcome at any time.

Contact FOLK

John Harvey, Chairman:	01242 520053
Geoff Holt, Work Parties:	01242 244165
Malcolm Geddes, Treasurer:	01242 514602
Tony Duffin, Membership:	01242 529240
Martin Wood, Newsletter:	01242 231230

Find the ***Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common*** on www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk and on Facebook

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