

Autumn Newsletter 2016



New Signage for GDT

This summer you may have noticed a number of new signs for Graffham Down. The result of a lot of time and collaboration.

← At the base of the downs at the old clay pit behind Ladywell Cottage there is an Orientation Board with a leaflet dispenser that help people find their way up to the reserves. Then on the site of the reserves, two interpretation boards, one for wildlife and one for archaeology each with leaflet dispensers.

At the base of the downs next to Ladywell Cottage and within the woods on 'Bishop's



Walk' there are new signs for the public rights of way now also identifying the route to Graffham Down.

In addition to the above, "windows" have been opened up in a few locations either side of the South Downs Way to both provide routes for insects to cross between reserves and to give passers by a glimpse of what is inside the reserves.

Why all this effort?

Well the committee were concerned about a number of things including stalling Membership, a key funding activity of the Trust; a lack of awareness of the reserves and their treasures by passers-by when travelling along the South Downs Way; falling numbers of volunteers at the Trust's work parties and on the management committee; difficulties for visitors (and locals) in finding the reserves if they wanted to visit them.

It was felt that raising the profile of the reserves with locals and visitors would help to stimulate more interest and hopefully support for Graffham Down Trust, not to mention the Graffham Village itself, thinking of the shop and pub(s).

The Collaborators

A wide range of people and organisations have been involved and the Trust would like to thank them all.

- The South Downs National Park Authority helped across the board, with advice on design and content, funding and installation.
- Ali Becket design had the patience of saints to help us through the differing opinions and ideas.
- Arun and Rother Connections helped with enthusiasm and funding.
- The White Horse Pub and Graffham Village Shop helped with funding.

The Price Tag

The process required planning permission and much work resulting in a total price tag of circa £5,000 which was covered as follows: SDNPA £2, 000, ARC £1,000, Financial Donations £500, Donated Volunteer time including Ali Becket £1,500.

Impact

There has been a major increase in the number of passers by stopping to have a look at the reserves and literally hundreds of leaflets have been picked up from the dispensers on the downs and near the clay pit. There has also been a significant increase in people contacting the Trust through the website. The committee is hopeful that over time these efforts will also materialise in an ability to fill some of the vacant roles and to encourage more volunteers from further afield to help out with the work parties.

Working Party Dates

- **Saturday October 15**
- **Sunday November 20**
- **Saturday December 10**
- **Sunday January 29**
- **Saturday February 25**
- **Sunday March 18**
- **Saturday April 1**

Return of the Duke of Burgundy

On the 8th of May this year at nearly midnight Neil Hulme mailed the Graffham Down Trust. *'Some exciting news in brief – this afternoon I found a female Duke of Burgundy laying eggs on the Scott's Corner reserve.'*



So what was the excitement all about? Well the Duke is a butterfly species in trouble. In the British Isles it was only ever known from England with most colonies in the south, where it occurred mainly in woodland, its caterpillars feeding on Primrose. The species vanished from woodland when Primroses became less common. The butterfly also occurred on downland, with Cowslips as the larval food plant. The Duke's population in England peaked during the early twentieth century but then declined steadily. The reason for the decline is not known for certain, but changes in land management aggravated by the decimation of the rabbit population by myxomatosis have been suggested. Graffham Down was one of the few sites where it remained present until 1992.

The butterfly is most particular about its habitat requirements, egg laying only on large Cowslips in sheltered often scrubby places. This may reflect a need for warmth and sufficient food plant to sustain caterpillars. It may therefore require a large areas of apparently suitable habitat so that some small areas within meet these criteria. The spread of the butterfly is also limited in its ability to recolonise. The females travel only a few miles to find new habitat while the males don't travel at all, spending their lives guarding the territory they already possess. Neil subsequently discovered a male on the site, the significance of this being that this individual must have been laid as an egg at Graffham in 2015, so the recolonization took place unnoticed in 2015.

Most colonies of this species are very small, perhaps a dozen or so adults. The colonies are often short lived in one locality as it becomes unsuitable. To survive the colony has to find another area of suitable habitat.

Much of the management of the site has been to open up the woodland allowing pockets of downland grass to develop and then connecting these with rides. In 2013 a grant from Butterfly conservation enabled the removal of woodland in Dimmer so that three large grassland scallops could be formed. The openness that resulted may have facilitated the movement of the butterfly from Heyshott Down where a colony persists to Scott's corner which has the highest density of cowslips on Graffham Down.

It is still too early to say whether the recolonization will be successful, but it shows it is possible.

Graffham Down Trust's Collaboration with MIND Coastal West Sussex and The South Downs National Park

As a result of a combination of difficulties in getting enough volunteers to do the work required in the reserves and a conversation at a VAAC (Voluntary Action Arundel and Chichester) networking event, collaboration has been set up between MIND Coastal West Sussex, Graffham Down Trust and the South Downs National Park.

Since December 2015 monthly work parties have taken place on our reserves, including the summer months, with anywhere between 3 and 7 volunteers coming along each time. The work parties have done a tremendous job in clearing brush, opening up the window at the western end of Bowleys and Long Meadow, ragwort pulling, thinning copses and tackling overhanging branches that inhibit the progress of our new tractor and its driver.

The volunteers meet up in Cocking car park and the local South Downs Ranger drives the volunteers up the South Downs Way to the reserves, helps out with the work and gives everyone a lift back.

The MIND organisation is extremely grateful and enthusiastic for the opportunity and is keen to keep this collaboration going for as long as possible. For more information on MIND.

<http://www.coastalwestsussexmind.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Midhurst-July-to-Sept-2016.pdf>

A Win, Win, Win!!!!

On Wednesday the 21st of September the Lord Lieutenant of West Sussex, Susan Pyper, visited our reserves together with Margaret Paren, Chair, SDNPA and Nick Heasman, Countryside, Policy and Management. The collaboration was represented by Rhiannon Leyson, Mind Coastal West Sussex, Sam Buckland, Acting Ranger for our area and Jim Kirke, Graffham Down Trust. Lots of positives all round.



A-G - ARC and Graffham Volunteers Unite

The ARC Project is a community and landscape scale project covering most of West Sussex. It is lottery funded and aims to connect the countryside, people and wildlife. The project was developed with 7 partners and one of the project's strengths has been to work together with many different groups of people. This has been one of the best highlights of my role as Volunteer Co-ordinator; contacting groups throughout the project area and working together to achieve conservation harmony! This is how I first got involved at Graffham Down. Fran Southgate from Sussex Wildlife Trust suggested I get in touch to see if our volunteers could work together so we did just that and planned a day in February to carry out some scrub and tree clearance to encourage native flora and their associated butterflies.

The ARC Project has delivered many activities including conservation work parties to tackle a variety of practical tasks, habitat and access improvements and wildlife surveys. Within our project area we offer volunteer support so it was a real pleasure to be able to help on Graffham Down reserve. Many hands made light work and the camaraderie, teamwork (and cake) made this day very memorable. Cross-working has certainly got my vote in making conservation goals achievable!

Kate Whitton – Volunteer Co-ordinator – Arun and Rother Connections (ARC) Project

Annual Picnic – A Wet Affair

This year, was the worst weather for a picnic in the history of the Trust.

Biddy and I went up to the Church in the pouring rain hoping to come straight home not expecting to find anyone else, but to our surprise there was a little group waiting. Bruce was in his Land Rover. Shortly after, Michael Blecowe arrived and we all decided to proceed up the Downs hoping that the weather would clear up.

After a wet climb we decided to amalgamate the two planned talks and tours of the Reserves. Unfortunately, all the butterflies were staying in bed although Michael uncovered some. I think it was three. Meanwhile Bruce did his very interesting talk on the plants and their many uses in medicine and old folktales. His popular hugging a yew tree trunk in a grave yard will bring you closer to your lost family as the roots reach into each grave and you can hope to ask where they hid the lost silver spoons!

We finally reached the picnic area soaking wet and sat down as the rain eased a little. We had our sandwiches very quickly and we all came down to dry out.

We must thank all who attended that damp day, particularly Michael and Bruce.

Paul Dimmer

PLANS TO IMPROVE THE DORMICE HABITAT



About 10 years ago, 50 Dormice nesting boxes were installed in the woodland to provide extra nesting places. Dormice make nests in the Spring in hedges or holes in trees and hibernate in the winter on the ground buried in a heap of leaves under the hedges or trees.

The number of Dormice using the nesting boxes has gone down over the last few years:

- **2011** - 20 Dormice nests were recorded during a winter clean out of boxes.
- **2012** - 13 nests were recorded.
- **2013** - 10 nests were found. Since 2013, the method used to monitor boxes has changed and we have been very lucky to have help from Thyone Outram and Dan Fagan of the Sussex Dormouse Network who checked the boxes during the year.
- **2014/2015** only 4 nests were recorded

This downward trend may be due to the sparse habitat under the overgrown coppiced Hazel trees. Alternatively, there is competition from wood and yellow-necked mice and small birds who also like to take up residence in the boxes. The presence of deer who are particularly fond of the Hazel and Spindle trees or maybe climate change is a factor.

Dormice prefer deciduous woodlands connected by hedgerows and dense scrub. They rarely come to the ground preferring to whizz along the stalks of wild honeysuckle and branches of trees in the tree canopy. They eat buds, berries and hazelnuts and thrive when Hazel trees are regularly coppiced. They seldom venture more than 70 metres from their nests. Coppicing has to be planned carefully as the Hazel trees take 7 years to fruit again and areas where the Dormice live must not become isolated.

Plans are being discussed to start a coppice rotation of some of the previously coppiced trees and provide deer fencing to protect these trees. This should create a rich woodland floor which will benefit not only Dormice but butterflies, insects and birds.

We thank Thyone and Dan from the Sussex Dormouse Network for their great support and for monitoring the Dormouse boxes.

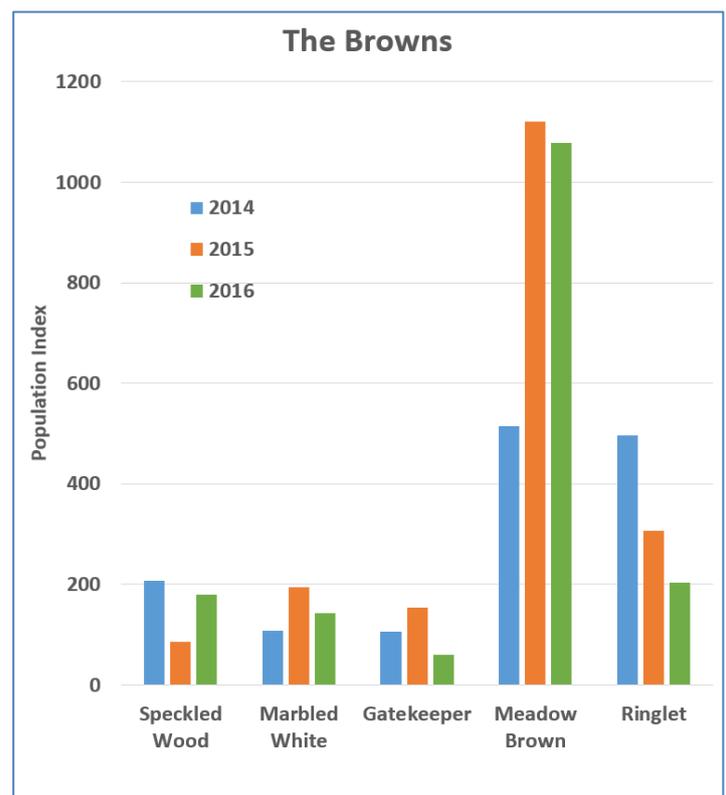
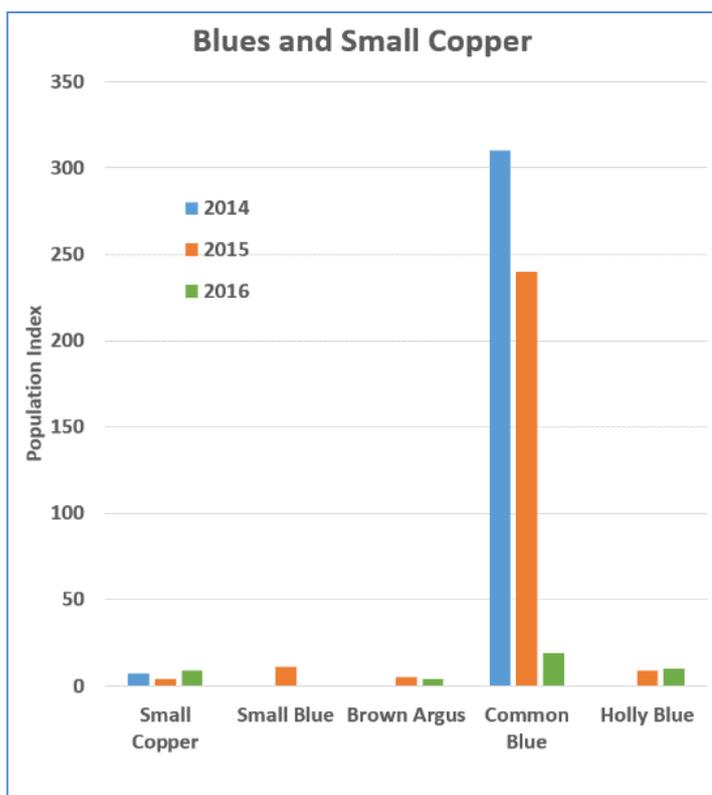
Monitoring Graffham Down's Butterflies.

One of the joys of Graffham Down is the sheer number of butterflies that can be seen there on a sunny summer day, so monitoring how the population of each species is doing is something we take seriously. Each of the reserves is surveyed annually using a method devised by Butterfly Conservation, an activity that is carried out by numerous surveyors throughout the UK. Each surveyor is supposed to walk a fixed route at a fixed pace once every week from March to October noting each and every butterfly seen.

Needless to say, this doesn't happen exactly, as the weather, holidays and life in general often gets in the way. Butterflies need sun and warmth to fly, so cold overcast days are useless. Despite this the Butterfly Conservation gets sufficient data over the whole country to get a very good idea of the success of each species each year. This data can then be used to fill in all the missed weeks surveys and can then give a figure for the number of butterflies of any one species that would have been counted had they been counted on a sunny day every week. We have called that the Population Index.



We have four surveyors monitoring six reserves and we have used the resulting data to see whether we can also get an idea of how each species on Graffham Down is doing. The population index varies enormously between different species depending on the colony size.



From the two graphs above it can be seen that the Meadow Brown is the most numerous butterfly, while Small Copper, Small Blue and Brown Argus have very small populations and struggle to put in an appearance on survey days every year. The numbers of most of these species has fluctuated between the years shown and show no discernible trend. However, Ringlet and particularly Common Blue show a decrease over the three years shown. When results are available for the whole country we will be able to see whether our results differ from the national picture.

Michael Blencowe's May walk on Graffham Down

Michael Blencowe couldn't have asked for more when he was joined by 24 others for his annual May walk around the Graffham Down Reserves. With little sun on a cool day no one was expecting to see much in the way of butterflies and in truth there were very few visible. Unphased, Michael explained what we might hope to see and prayed for the sun to show more often.



Sadly his prayer was unanswered, but with every cloud and there were many of them comes a silver lining. Cold butterflies often spend time with open wings trying to warm up and are easier to photograph. Silver turned to gold when Paul Dimmer was asked 'does the Duke of Burgundy look anything like that butterfly there', the answer rolled the clouds away and turned the sky blue, but only metaphorically. It was indeed the, recently discovered on Graffham Down, Duke of Burgundy and it allowed everyone good views and photographs.

Watching the Duke



There was a profusion of Cowslips in Scott's Corner. Perfect for the fussy female or Duchess who egg-lays only on large succulent cowslips with upright leaves in short scrub. These exacting requirements give the developing caterpillars plenty of food in a warm position. The male guards the area diligently.

After this incredible start to the walk everything else

was a bonus. The day flying moth, the Speckled Yellow, appeared frequently, but was difficult to view well. A red admiral showed itself briefly before perching high in a yew tree and a couple of male Orange-tip butterflies showed themselves off while warming in the long grass. A Speckled Wood made a brief appearance and a roosting female



Orange-tip displayed the beautiful lacework pattern on her underwings.



To keep us amused Michael went hunting for the creatures of the log pile. These included a leopard slug, a devil's coach horse, a pill bug and an enormous earthworm. Who wants butterflies?



Finally, the larva of a glow-worm was found.



Thank you to all who came on the walk and to Michael and of course to the Duke.



Watch out for Big Blue

Tractor and Cutting Equipment Report

The Trust applied last year for funding from two organisations to help buy a larger tractor and cutter-collector as our existing equipment was having difficulties coping with the ever increasing size of our Reserves, as we open areas and thin out trees. This allows more light and sunshine to improve the habitat for birds and butterflies and new plant species to thrive. We have used contractors from time to time but this has proved to be very expensive. Unfortunately these first applications were turned down.

So the Trust decided to try again, this time with a reduced sum of money as we had found a cheaper tractor from a different supplier with the same lift capacity that would be required to lift the new cutter-collector.

This time we have been successful, so we part-exchanged the old tractor and have been delighted with the delivery in July of a new equipment, which allows us to cover a lot more ground without having to get off and unblock the cutter at every empty. It can cut wet grass too! This will make our lives a lot easier with a lot less man hours needed.

The GDT wishes to thank the Klienwort Benson Charitable Trust for their generous grant which enabled the purchase of this new equipment and to Jim Kirke for his work on the grant application.

Work Parties 2016/17 - Do You Need a Lift Up the Downs?

While the sun shines and we hang on to our lovely end of summer days, our first work party will be on **October 15th**. This season we are aiming for monthly 'mega' work parties calling on people from far and wide to help.

The plan is to meet at **St Giles Church at 9.45am**. We aim to have transport available to take people to the reserves and for cake to be provided.

Please can you bring along gardening gloves, strong shoes/boots and your own refreshments. The aim will be to stay in the reserves till around 15.30 (of course people are free to leave earlier if they wish).

Could you please email me at jimkirke@hotmail.com if you plan to come along so I can get a feel for numbers and therefore, the transport needs.