



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 National Trust

Issue 23 - March 2017

Ground Nesting Birds by David Ball

Nightjar

This species visits our heathlands from May to September. The male's loud 'churring' can be heard on summer evenings just as it gets towards dusk and they continue into the night. Males also fly around their territories displaying the white patches on their tails and wings to the females. Most of their food, in the form of large moths, is probably caught away from the heathlands within broad-leaved woodland, mixed farmland or wet meadows. They nest on the ground with minimal nesting material, relying on their cryptic plumage and eggs to avoid predators. About half the UK population nest on heathlands, the rest choose recently felled forestry plantations where there is good cover from scrub, heather or bracken. Little is known regarding their migration routes, however the birds winter in sub-Saharan Africa and are not decreasing like many other African migrants.

Woodcock

Whilst you are listening to the nightjars churring you may also notice large plump birds with long bills also circling the open heathland, these are male woodcocks displaying to their females. This display is called 'roding' where the males fly around calling with croaks and loud squeaks and the females on the ground reply with fanned tails to attract them down to the ground. Males do not have territories and many males can fly over the same area. Again they nest on the ground within woodland hidden by their cryptic coloration and using dense ground cover to hide the nest. Woodcock are polygamous, the males having nothing to do with raising their young. The UK population is decreasing fast, however they are joined in the winter by large numbers of migrant woodcock from Fennoscandia and Russia. If the winter is especially hard the migrants will move west to Cornwall or Ireland, but the native birds stay put searching out any damp or unfrozen areas to feed on soil invertebrates. Most birds use woodland to shelter during the day but feed at night on pastures and arable fields.

Woodlark

Another ground nesting bird on heathlands is the woodlark, a darker coloured bird than the skylark with a short tail that can be seen displaying over Ludshott Common in the spring. They fly up from a perch ascending to about 100 metres then looping around before



GROUND NESTING BIRDS

Ludshott Common is managed and legally protected as an open space because it provides much needed habitat for a range of rare bird species which depend on heathland landscapes. The Trust's conservation work means this site remains a key habitat for Woodlark (below left), Nightjar (below right) along with Dartford & Wood Warbler and many other kinds of wildlife.



KEEPING THIS LANDSCAPE SPECIAL FOR ITS WILDLIFE NEEDS YOUR HELP.

PLEASE
KEEP DOGS UNDER CLOSE
CONTROL AND ON THE
TRACKS AT ALL TIMES

AND AVOID CROSSING AREAS OF BARE GROUND AND SHORT VEGETATION.

For more information contact the Rangers on 01428 751338

spiralling down again, all the time singing. They nest in low cover of heather or grass amongst fallen branches or twigs and need bare ground on which to feed. They especially like areas recently cleared of trees or scrub. They are not found on heathland during the winter but form flocks that feed on open farmland. The population seems to be increasing after falling last century.

All these species are ground nesters and are easily disturbed by dogs. This can easily cause desertion by the parent birds or allow other predators to destroy the nest.

Rangers Report by Chris Webb

Over the winter months the ranger team, along with volunteers and contractors have been undertaking a large amount of scrub clearance work across the Ludshott and Passfield sites. This work is necessary to keep the common land in its traditional open state which benefits a range of wildlife that depends on these heathland nature reserves. Both Ludshott and

larger and denser stands of gorse which have developed on Ludshott in recent years have been flailed and the litter and thatchy layers have been removed using a mechanical excavator. This exposes the soil layer and the dormant heather seeds and provides the best opportunity for germination.

permission to re-instate grazing at Ludshott. We are getting to the final stages of the consultation with neighbours, stakeholders and visitors. The target is to send an application to the Planning Inspectorate by the end of July. This will be publicized on the Common and in the local press at the beginning of the application period.



Work to widen firebreak next to Furze Hill Road boundary

In addition there has been work to enhance the firebreak close to the Furze Hill Road boundary; laurel, which is an invasive species on heathland, has been cut ready for chemical treatment later this summer along the Seymour Road boundary and the felling of unstable trees was undertaken along the Grayshott Road. At Passfield, along the Hollywater Road, a major exercise in clearing back encroaching



Contractor clearing mulch and litter where we have cleared gorse etc to encourage heather

Passfield Commons are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and there are targets for maintaining ecological condition set by Natural England. We are obliged to make sure that the heather and other shrubby species are managed at different heights ranging from very short to mature blocks that stand at a metre high. The shorter areas are used by species such as the Silver-Studded Blue butterfly and Woodlark while longer vegetation is used by Dartford Warblers for nesting and feeding. Some of the



Removal of grass with forager

vegetation was carried out in conjunction with Hampshire Highways. Many have been asking about how we are progressing with our application for

During the coming summer we will be hosting a South Downs National Park event at Ludshott where a variety of conservation organisations will be present, and will be promoting the Heathland Reunited Partnership project of which we are a member. The National Trust team will also be at the 'Nature Festival' at Gilbert White's House, Selborne on Saturday 27th May. Please keep an eye on our notice boards and on the local press for details.

Superior Camp walk 13th November 2016

A goodly number gathered on Remembrance Sunday last autumn, to hear about the post-war use of the camp after the Canadian soldiers had left, providing local families with much needed accommodation. This walk was a sequel to the previous year when the focus was on the wartime occupation.



**If you enjoy reading this newsletter,
please pass it on!
Become a Friend**

You will receive your own personal copy of the newsletter, and you will be helping valuable conservation work to ensure the survival of our precious landscape and habitat - 'Forever for Everyone'. Becoming a Friend costs only £5.00 for a year.
Contact the Membership Secretary,
Colin Brash on 01428 713256.

A plea for ***distributors in Grayshott*** – we've lost one who has moved, and started volunteering in Co. Durham!

If you can help

Please contact Susan at trustsusan@btinternet.com

Quiz Night by Kelly Inward

On the evening of Friday 3rd March, the National Trust hosted the 2017 Quiz Night at Headley Village Hall! After an initial worry that the quiz might be a bit thin on the ground, the night arrived and 12 tables were full of willing participants – phew! A great time was had by all throughout all the rounds put together by quiz master David Knighton, ably assisted by his wife Ann. An interim breather saw a great spread of cheese, bread and fruit – just what was needed to soak up all the alcohol!!! Games, raffles and lots of prizes filled the time between rounds, ending with the winning team winning a bottle of Prosecco each.

The quiz was a huge success raising £482, which all goes to aid the nature conservation on Ludshott and Passfield Commons. I am definitely looking forward to the next one – hoping to see some of you there again next time.

Big thanks to all the committee members for all the organising and preparation and generally making the evening a huge success!



WINTER AT WAGGONERS WELLS by Barbara Williams



Frost Flower 1 by M. & G. Long

The recent cold spell during January, with sub-zero temperatures overnight, crisped up the muddy paths and iced over the major part of the two lower ponds. It's always fun to see the mallard ducks skidding uncertainly on the ice as they land. They were joined this winter by a dozen or so mandarin males and a few females. They look rather like cardboard cut-outs with their dramatic orange brown plumage and white crested heads as they progress serenely across the water.

Also brightening up the dull winter days was the pure white of the little egret, which has occasionally been spotted in the last two or three winters, foraging or fishing beside the ponds. Its colour and elegant stork-like shape make it easy to identify.

But a real rarity was spotted on January 3rd - the Frost Flowers. These are formed in specific freezing weather conditions when the sap in the stems of certain plants, and as here at the ends of broken twigs of wood, expands as it freezes. The cell walls rupture through which the almost frozen sap



Frost Flower 2 by M. & G. Long

exudes only to freeze completely on contact with the air. More sap pushes up only to be frozen into the most beautiful 'flowers'. The 'petals' of these frost flowers are very delicate and will break when touched. They melt when exposed to sunlight and are usually visible in the early morning or in shaded areas. You have to be very lucky to spot them!



*Christmas tree sale, see page 4 for the report.
Photos by Kathleen Bird*



DATES for your DIARIES

For further details of any of the events please see:- www.ntludshott.org.uk and Posters on the Commons
Or Contact:- Rangers 01428 751338 selborneandludshott@nationaltrust.org.uk

'Heathland at Dusk' Saturday 1st July 8.30pm

The annual 1½ - 2 hour **walk** on Ludshott Common for glimpses and sounds of wildlife and birds, hopefully including the nocturnal Nightjar.

Meet at Ludshott Common main (Dunelm) car park on B3002 between Headley Down and Grayshott (map ref SU853358).

Please wear stout footwear and bring a torch. £2.00 per person.

Secrets of YOUR heath - Ludshott Common Thursday 3rd August 10am – 4pm

JUST TURN UP! We are hosting this free community South Downs National Park event.

Proposed **Tree Identification walk in Summer at Waggoners Wells** To follow on from the Winter Tree identification walk. Date and details to be publicised later.

Christmas Tree Sale Saturday 2nd December 9.00am – 12.00 noon Dunelm carpark

Proceeds from all events will be used locally towards the nature conservation of Ludshott Common, and Passfield Common & Conford Moor.

Annual sale of Christmas trees December 2016 by Caroline Gorton

As in previous years, the Ludshott Commons Committee and National Trust rangers held their sale of Christmas trees at Ludshott Common car park on 3rd December 2016. About 200 Scot's and Corsican pine trees had been cut in the days before the sale by the National Trust wardens and their regular volunteers. The cutting of the trees facilitates the management of the heath by preventing the succession of the heather into woodland. Rotation of cutting sites also ensures that there is a good selection of tree sizes every year.

The first Saturday of the month was bright and milder than the previous days that week, weather that was appreciated by everyone present so early in the morning! Customers were already waiting as the stall was erected and Susan's delicious mince pies and mulled wine were set out on the table – all free and greatly appreciated! The first trailer of trees arrived behind the tractor driven by the newest ranger, Paul, and the trees were put on display around the periphery of the sale area. The initial rush of families gave way to a steady flow, with the stock of trees being replenished regularly throughout the morning. There were lovely examples of pine trees, some being particularly bushy whilst others were more open. Certainly there were trees to appeal to every taste. The trees were still priced at £3 per foot, enabling truly magnificent trees to be bought most reasonably. Unfortunately no mistletoe was available to sell on this occasion, but hopefully it will return come the sale in 2017. As always it was a pleasure to see both new faces, and families who are regulars! It has become an event that signifies the start of the festive season for many, so why not join this tradition and attend our Christmas tree sale on 2nd December 2017? All the proceeds from the sale are used by the Ludshott Commons National Trust committee to assist the wardens in their work locally for the benefit of the commons.

'Waggoners Wells Woodland and Identifying Trees in Winter' by David Salter

Guided Walk 12th March - A wet Sunday morning – enough to put off any but those to whom the subject particularly appealed. But a dozen assembled in the Waggoners Wells car park and they were very glad that they did. The team leading the walk were (from the Forestry Commission) Dr Daegan Inwood and Dr Caroline Gorton (who is also a member of the Ludshott Commons Committee), and our Head Ranger, Chris Webb.

Guidance was given through the variations in tree structure and bud formation, so that a tree could be identified even when there were no distinctive leaves present, by which they would normally be recognized.

There were several bonuses: the amazing displays of lichen – the site is one of the best in Hampshire with over a hundred varieties – and the historical indications which the relative ages and density of trees gave to areas around the lakes which have been in use for centuries, before abandonment to the scenic enjoyment we know today.

And the final touch was that the rain soon eased: English weather ain't all bad!



Above: Dr Inwood

