



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons



Issue 26 - October 2018

Ghostly lights on Conford Moor

By Dr Daegan Inward

In June and July it doesn't get dark until quite late in the evening, so you have to be out late to see them. But if you time it right and are fortunate, you may see one of the most magical events of the natural world. Small green lights softly glowing in the undergrowth. These are glow worms, which most of us have heard of, but may not have seen.

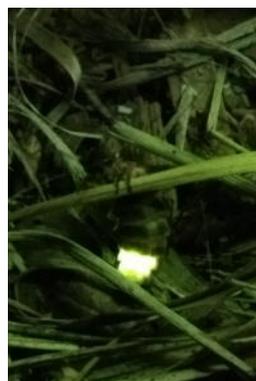
Glow worms actually are beetles, of the species *Lampyris noctiluca*. The males are fairly unremarkable, looking like typical brown or black beetles, about 15-20mm long. The females however are really rather special. Firstly, they don't look like beetles, but instead remain more like the larvae – wingless and elongate, the segments along their body like jointed armour plates. As they cannot fly, they attract males by moving into the open or climbing a plant stalk, and producing the yellowish-green light from the last three segments of their abdomen. This is 'bioluminescence', where light is produced by a highly efficient chemical reaction, which emits no heat. The glow-worm twists her abdomen to present her light to the sky, and to the flying males who see it with large light-sensitive eyes. Once mated, the glow worms' lights go out, and eggs are laid to continue the next generation. The new larvae are active predators, and specialise in feeding on small snails, which they kill by delivering a toxin through a series of bites.

Glow worms are quite widespread in the UK, particularly in the south, and favour open, grassland-type vegetation away from strong artificial lights. Populations are often quite small, and may not be seen from one year to the next due to the two to three year life cycle of the species in Britain. Characteristically, the population on Conford Moor appears to be small, and I hadn't seen them for several years until this summer. So it was a welcome sight to find green-glowing females along the grassy verges of some small trails, one night in early July. Unfortunately, the area of available habitat there seems precarious and limited due to the density and dominance of the bracken which towered over the insects. This really does highlight the great value of the management by the National Trust in keeping such areas open and available for habitat specialists such as this fascinating insect.

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.



Glow worms (which are actually beetles)

Headley Society Visit

After hearing a talk at one of their meetings, by Chris Webb (our Lead Ranger), the Headley Society expressed an interest in seeing Cooper's Field, the rangers' workbase.

So on 2nd August, a beautiful evening after one of the hottest days in the year, we were delighted to welcome the Headley Society. Being a working environment and not a visitor centre, much had to be 'out of bounds' for health and safety reasons but despite these limitations it was a very enjoyable occasion.



The Society members were able to sit in the wildflower meadow outside the office to hear more from Chris and Jim about their work on Ludshott Common, after which there was a good question and answer session.

Following on from this the members enjoyed their picnics, and viewed the open areas of the base and workshop. The display in the office produced lively discussions as there were maps of the Common and surrounding area, photographs of the management techniques used on the heathland, and the wildlife which is so special. Also there were some historical shots - of which one was of sheep being herded in the middle of Headley!



Reintroduction of grazing to Ludshott Common - Update By Chris Webb

Many will be aware that we are exploring the possibility of reintroducing grazing to Ludshott Common (previous editions of this newsletter have outlined the reasons for this thinking, and these can be seen online at www.ntludshott.org.uk).

The proposal has been the subject of ongoing consultation and research to determine its feasibility. But the complexity of the legal and administrative issues with regard to its status as common land, and the wide variety of interests at Ludshott Common, means there has been, and still is, a considerable amount of work that needs to be done.

Of course, since this process has to sit alongside the routine work of looking after the NT sites across east Hampshire, we have therefore appointed a consultant to work with us on the wide range of technical issues. The consultant's principal task is to progress the necessary consultations and we are aiming to complete as much of this procedure as we can over the winter.

Please look out for notices that will explain where and when consultation events will take place. The outcome of these meetings will determine whether an application can go forward to the Planning Inspectorate for their consideration. Any application will be advertised widely and there will be a further opportunity for comments to be made at that stage.

As always, we are happy to hear from anyone who would like more information, or who has comments about the proposal. Please contact Chris on 01428 751388 or at selborneandludshott@nationaltrust.org.uk

Kretzschmaria deusta

By Caroline Gorton

This decay fungus is most commonly observed on beech and lime but can also affect species of oak and maple. This year may well prove to have been a good one for *Kretzschmaria* to thrive as it has been noticed on several trees in the Bramshott area. It was previously known as *Ustulina deusta* and is an ascomycete, as is *Daldinia concentrica* or 'King Alfred's cakes'. It often goes unnoticed as the black fruiting bodies typically appear at the base of trees and may be hidden by leaf litter or are tucked away between buttress roots. These fruiting bodies commonly merge to form an extensive black crust, as illustrated, although prior to turning black they exist as blueish-grey, thin discs which have a whitish margin. Colonised trees may have evidence of thinning canopies or dead branches.



The fungus most commonly enters through wounds, usually at the stem base, and can extend up the main stem as well as into the roots. It can also enter via the roots and in these cases windthrow of the tree often results. *Kretzschmaria* preferentially degrades cellulose, only degrading the lignin once the decay is extensive and this leads to a brittle, ceramic-like fracture. In fact, fracture often occurs before an advanced

white-rot has developed, so the fractured surface can still be quite hard. Colonised wood has a pale straw or grey colour and often contains fine, black zone lines.

Kretzschmaria is a dangerous decay fungus as it is easily overlooked, but also because it is fairly common and can affect a broad host range. It causes a brittle fracture of the wood which can occur without warning and its presence is not accompanied by changes in the shape of the trunk, unlike fungi which cause selective delignification. Furthermore, the decay can be difficult to detect using some decay detection equipment.



Sights and Sounds of the Common at Dusk

Way back in mid-summer on the lovely evening of 30th June we gathered in Dunelm carpark (the main one for Ludshott Common) to join Chris Webb, our Lead Ranger, for our annual 'Nightjar Walk'.

Between 25 and 30 supporters, some of whom were 'regulars', enjoyed Chris's descriptions and stories of the Common, together with details of the management necessary to maintain this rare lowland-heath habitat, with its specialist birds and animals.

The walk began at 8.30pm and as the light faded and dusk fell, the views across the Common, and also the Common itself, developed a different feeling as the sun set. Into this atmosphere the nightjar and woodcock, which breed on the Common, made their appearance. (These are known as crepuscular species, which are active primarily during twilight - the periods of dawn and dusk.)

The first indication that a scarce, migrant nightjar was near was hearing the male's churring song, rising and falling with a ventriloquial quality. But then we saw several, one or two quite interested in us, 'hawking' over the open heath, for their food of insects, moths and beetles. With pointed wings and long tails their shape is similar to a kestrel or cuckoo, and their grey-brown, mottled, streaked and barred plumage which makes them look like bark or dried leaves, provides ideal camouflage in the daytime. They have an almost supernatural reputation with their silent flight and their mythical ability to steal milk from goats - hence their old name of goatsucker.

The woodcock, in comparison, is a large, bulky wading bird with short legs and a very long straight tapering bill, and is related to sandpipers and snipes. Most of these birds on the Common are resident, although some do come in from Finland in the autumn to winter here. Due to habitat loss nationally however, the numbers of breeding birds in the UK is decreasing. But we were fortunate to see at least two individuals flying between their daytime resting sites in thick scrubby undergrowth, to their feeding areas to find worms, beetles, spiders, caterpillars, fly larvae and small snails.

The walk, a most enjoyable and instructive evening, ended around 11pm. Torches were needed to enable a safe return to the car park!

WHAT'S HAPPENING

NATIONAL TRUST CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

SATURDAY 8th DECEMBER 9.00am until 12.00 noon
Dunelm car park, (the main one for Ludshott Common) on B3002

The price is the same as last year - **£3/foot**. There will be trees of all sizes and shapes to choose from, and complimentary mince pies and mulled wine will be served.. Once again there will be wooden Christmas Tree decorations for sale.

Start your Christmas activities by buying a freshly cut National Trust tree which doesn't lose its needles over the festive season. These are sapling Scot's Pine which seed themselves all over the common and need to be removed so that the open heathland is maintained. By buying one you will be helping the conservation management of the site.

Details on posters across the Common, and on the website, or phone the Wardens.



Quiz Night Ludshott Commons Committee of the National Trust May 11th 2018

The annual National Trust Quiz was held a little later in the year this time, which, with hindsight, was a good decision, as we suffered the Beast from the East when we would normally have held it, so it would have been cancelled, as the weather was appalling.

We also changed venue to Headley Village Hall to accommodate the additional people we have attracted from previous years.

The National Trust wardens took the brave step of becoming the quiz masters this year and took it in turns to conduct the different rounds. The evening was split into two halves, with an ample Ploughman's being served during the interval. There was a popular selection of cheeses served, with French bread, apples, grapes and chutney, and everyone brought their own drinks.

Before the second half the National Trust raffle was drawn, with all prizes coming from the National Trust shop and included cream teas for two at both Hinton Ampner and Uppark. There was also the ever-popular heads and tails game.

In all, an excellent evening's enjoyment, with over 100 people attending. Great fun, raising over £550 for the work of the wardens.

Don't miss out, look out for next year's quiz. Go to the website for details.

Dunelm car park resurfacing



USEFUL CONTACTS

Rangers

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Ludshott Commons committee -
Visit our website

www.ntludshott.org.uk