



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 14 - October 2012

FAMILY RAMBLE on LUDSHOTT COMMON

On Wednesday 22nd August several families joined our ramble across Ludshott Common where the children (and adults!) learned something of the wildlife that lives there. Jim Avenell led the walk through different habitats and the specialist heathland birds found there were described with photographs and recordings of bird song. Then the children had fun deciding which silhouetted drawing in their activity pack fitted the bird being described.

The afternoon ended with a Mini-beast hunt. The bugs that live in different trees were shaken on to sheets, caught by the children using special ‘sucking-up’ pots and then looked at through hand lenses before returning them to their habitat. The various spiders caused great excitement!

We didn’t have time to look at leaves or do tree-hugging - that will have to wait for next year.



Hearing about the Woodlark

COFFEE MORNING

10th November
Grayshott Village Hall
10.00am - 12.00 noon.

Do come and join us at our annual Coffee Morning. All proceeds go towards maintaining the nature conservation work on the Commons.

There will be an exhibition by the Wardens, who will also be there to answer any questions.

The entries for the Junior Art Competition will be on display and the prizes distributed by a representative of Coomers, its sponsor.

As well as the usual NT Goods stall there will be Ludshott and Passfield ‘branded’ gifts - a new venture for the local committee.

The raffle prizes will have been kindly donated by local businesses.

Entrance is free. We look forward to welcoming you.



Hunting for Mini-beasts with Craig



The boys, especially, enjoyed exploring the Bracken Tunnel



Hunting for Mini-beasts with Chris

The Green Woodpecker

By Craig Vincer (former warden on Ludshott)

Wherever it is found, the Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridus*) seldom moves far from its habitat. It shows great site fidelity and in severe weather may fail to survive.

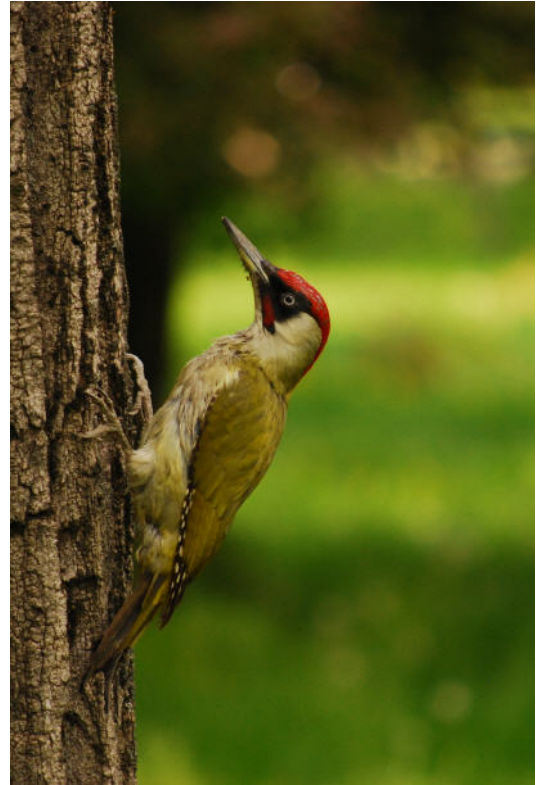
It is a secretive bird, often only seen when it suddenly rises from the heather with a loud "Yaffle" cry. Then the crimson crown and mosaic of green, yellow, black and bronzed flecked plumage are revealed. So too is the wonderful pattern of its undulating flight, low over the heath. After every 3 or 4 wing beats the bird will rise, then with wings closed against its body, make a long shallow dive ---- repeating the sequence, until it drops down amongst the gorse and heather to find another place to feed. Since it prefers to forage on the ground for its favourite food, ants.

This our largest woodpecker, often selects a partially decayed tree trunk to hollow out a nest hole, where they also roost each night. The long clawed toes of its feet are arranged in opposite pairs for grip, and with short stiff tail feathers pressed against the trunk for support, it climbs in jerky movements tapping and searching for insects beneath the bark. It seldom drums.

At the woodland edge in summer, the wood ant, (*Formica rufa*) constructs an enormous nest mound of pine needles and twigs, as a warm shelter to raise their young. But as days shorten they move deeper to hibernate safe from frost. At this time the Green Woodpecker switches from feeding on small ants, to plunder their nests as they are our largest species of ant. The heavy pointed bill is thrust deep in to the nest, and held there, whilst its long sticky barbed tongue actively searches the subterranean galleries for prey.

In 1850, the Rev. F.O.Morris observed woodpeckers taking ants from the ground: " the rapidity with which the tongue is protruded and withdrawn is so great that the eye is dazzled in trying to follow its motions it is flexible in the highest degree and moves like a stream of molten glass".

On our heathlands the wooded parts provide important habitats that support the conservation of this beautiful bird.



Staffing and Management Restructuring

By Chris Webb, Head Warden

Having undergone a southeast region-wide review of staffing arrangements and responsibilities, new management structures and reporting lines are being put in place at a wider property level. I and the Ludshott and Selborne team are indebted to James Taylor, Property Manager, my boss, (whose post has been made redundant) for his enthusiastic support for our work over the last three years. We wish him all the best for the future.

The Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

are people who may, or may not, be National Trust members, but who have a direct interest in the local National Trust properties and are therefore willing to help maintain the conservation work on these important areas, much of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Areas for birds (SPA), by subscribing annually to support the cost of essential work on the Commons.



Dartford Warbler

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

Become a Friend

You will receive your own personal 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
Or visit www.ntludshott.org.uk

An update on recent and forthcoming work at Ludshott and Passfield

By Chris Webb, Head Warden

Workbase

At the time of writing the move to our new base at Bramshott is virtually complete. We now have a proper office from which we can manage the Ludshott and Selborne sites and suitable welfare facilities for the staff and volunteers. Storage of records can now be brought into one location and likewise, materials and equipment for our day to day practical work will also be at hand and be better maintained.

To get the first phase of building the new warden’s base completed there has been a lot of practical input from the local team and volunteers under Jim Avenell’s supervision. This has included forestry work at the Vyne, Basingstoke, with several members of the team being deployed there to prepare timber for the next phase.

Conservation Work

Across the Ludshott and Passfield sites (and at the Vyne) some of our work has been affected by the weather, although a dry spell at the end of the summer has allowed us to catch up a little. Major tree clearance on Ludshott, by the electricity company, gave us an opportunity to clear scrub at the edge of blocks of heathland whilst the power was turned off. More clearance of this kind is scheduled for the winter.



Working at Conford

At Conford, manual and mechanical work is underway to restore areas of wetland, fen, heath and wood-pasture which routinely scrub over. An agreement with Natural England – the government agency which regulates nature conservation sites (SSSI’s and SPA’s) – obliges the Trust to undertake work to keep this and our other

sites in favourable condition for the wildlife they support. Similarly on Ludshott, mechanical work will be undertaken to keep areas of the open common from disappearing under regenerating scrub.

Under the NT’s working holiday scheme, three week-long camps came to the east Hampshire properties. This year a total of nearly fifty volunteers have cleared scrub at Conford, and finished surveying the veteran trees at Passfield (see Chris’ article about veteran trees in issue 12 of Commons Link) amongst many other tasks across our sites.

General tree safety work will take place on every part of the property over the winter.



Waggoners Wells

Dam restoration at Waggoners Wells

Currently we are planning work at Waggoners Wells required under the revised Reservoirs Act. This will include repairs to the upper and middle dams, which have been eroding significantly, along with tree work to ensure that they remain stable for years to come. Some dredging of silt will take place and we will need to formalise where



Damage to Dam and Spillway at Waggoners Wells

dogs are allowed to go in and out of the lakes so that erosion of the edges of the lakes is minimised. While machinery is operating, various parts of Waggoners Wells will be closed temporarily, along with part of the car park, so look out for notices explaining the timing of this work which will probably be before Christmas.

Wildlife update

After two severe winters the population of Dartford Warblers on Ludshott had dropped from around 50 pairs in 2008 to 2 in 2011, recovering to 7 pairs in 2012. The Common has been a crucial site amongst the east Hampshire and west Surrey/Sussex heaths for maintaining a population of these birds through the last two harsh winters. Woolmer Forest, Kingsley, Broxhead and Hindhead all had a complete loss of Dartford Warblers, a total of around 150 pairs. The cold, wet summer will probably have limited breeding success and providing we have a mild winter, next year’s bird survey will show if this is the case or not.



Silver-studded blue

Our butterfly recording on Ludshott over the summer was thwarted by the weather. However, we did take the opportunity during a few sunny days, to survey the distribution of silver-studded blues across the Common and found that this heathland specialist had spread out from the small pockets previously recorded.

Other activities

Guided walks and events - included an ‘introduction to fishing day’ at Waggoners Wells in partnership with the Grayshott Angling Club.

'HEATHLAND at DUSK' GUIDED WALK

On Saturday 30th June more than 20 people gathered for our annual evening walk on Ludshott, to experience the sights and sounds of the heathland at dusk. Unfortunately Chris could not be present but our good friend Craig Vincer, who was Warden here before Chris, was available to lead the walk. It was much enjoyed by all, although this year only the churring noise made by the elusive, nocturnal Nightjar could be heard, until one finally made an appearance, flying over the heads of the last of the walkers.



GUIDED WALK on PASSFIELD COMMON

On a damp Sunday afternoon in June, Chris led a very interesting walk looking at the history and ecology of the ancient common land. It was well attended, many remarking that even though they had lived locally for years, they were unaware of the common's history and especially of the existence of the veteran trees (see Chris' article in issue 12).



COMMITTEE STALL

On 15th September we were grateful to accept the invitation of the Headley Village Fete Committee to have a stall at their event. We were pleased that there was a lot of interest shown in the Wardens' display which Chris manned with many indicating that they would be willing to become one of the Friends. The committee had a stall with NT Goods and 'in house' produced gifts which did very well, all the proceeds going to support the Wardens' work.



At the time of going to print we are busy getting ready to attend the Blackmoor Apple Day on October 14th.

USEFUL CONTACTS

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Janet Crossman	Hon. Treasurer	01428 751980
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David Knighton	Publicity	01420 473637
Sylvia Gamble	Hon. Secretary	01420 475501
Steve Thames	Webmaster	01428 713096

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DATES for your DIARIES

10 November 2012

Coffee Morning, Grayshott Village Hall, 10am to 12 noon. Exhibition of entries to the Junior Art Competition; Meet the Wardens; NT goods; Raffle.

8 December 2012

Christmas Tree Sale. Dunelm car park, 9am - 12 noon.

Further details for these events will be available nearer the time from posters on the Commons and from the website.