



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 9 - March 2010

NEW TREES FOR GENTLES COPSE

Several years ago a generous bequest in memory of the late Mrs Diana Rhoades, one of our enthusiastic supporters, enabled us to continue with an important conservation project in Gentles Copse (which adjoins Ludshott Common, to the west). Here, there are ancient Sessile Oaks which, over centuries, have been coppiced. The wood was used for fuel and to make charcoal for use in the kilns where iron was smelted. The bark was used as a source of tannin for curing hides in the leather industry, and the acorns as food for pigs. These trees have not been coppiced for many, many years and would not

survive the shock if this was attempted now. However, the acorns collected by the friends of Mrs Rhoades from under these trees, thus ensuring the continuation of the genetic stock, have been grown on by the Forestry Commission, at Alice Holt, and the little saplings are now being planted out to fill in gaps in the woodland. A new type of guard, around each tree, is being used so that they receive not only more light, but more air to prevent scorching as has happened in the past. Mr and Mrs Janson, who made the bequest, and their granddaughter helped to plant

some saplings, and we have also been fortunate in having the services of volunteers from a National Trust Working Holiday. Sessile Oak coppice used to be widespread but it is now an unusual feature in the landscape of South East England. The area of Gentles Copse we know today, less than 20 acres, is a small remnant of the original, about 100 acres, and this important conservation work will ensure the continuation of this rare stand of trees, and in the the years to come it may even be possible to begin again the woodland management of coppicing.



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

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENT

The National Trust takes its relationships with its neighbours very seriously and as you will read from the Head Warden's report, *Future Management of Ludshott's Common Land*, we have been visiting those who border Ludshott Common to discuss this heathland habitat. During these visits we have also discussed with neighbours at Headley Down, the risk to their properties, perceived by some of them, of fires on the Common, though it must be emphasised that it is by no means a universal concern. For some time, there had been considerable agitation in some quarters about this perceived risk, and we were pleased to have the opportunity to give reassurance and to explain the situation. However, there is still some information being disseminated which is misleading. I therefore take this opportunity to reiterate the facts.

1. There was a serious wildfire on Ludshott Common in 1980. This was the

last in a series that used to happen every 10-15 years on Ludshott, almost inevitably due to the cyclical growth pattern of the vegetation, and because there was no landscape-wide management structure in place. Since then, to ensure that a fire with such magnitude would not happen again, management has been undertaken to keep the gorse and scrub growth down. Although it must be understood that fire and heathland go hand-in-hand, and indeed, controlled burning is part of heathland management, the fire brigade is happy with access to be able to fight any fires, and the width and position of all fire breaks.

2. Contrary to some opinions which have been expressed, that pine trees were planted to screen houses being built post 1980, on the boundary of the Common no pine trees have ever been planted on Ludshott. All pine growth is natural regeneration i.e. the trees grow from seeds

produced from existing trees and dispersed naturally.

3. The stand of trees in question are all of an age because they all germinated at the same time in soil cleared by the 1980 fire. It has also been suggested that these were planted as a 'cash crop', they were not. Furthermore no woodsman would leave trees un-thinned or with undergrowth intact if he expected to be able to fell them later for sale as timber.

4. In order to demonstrate our goodwill towards all our neighbours, proposals have been formulated and presented to the various authorities to which the Trust must defer. These proposals, if approved, will provide an area to be restored to heathland, retaining mature trees of landscape quality, and a greatly thinned strip in which deciduous tree species will be encouraged. The amenity and wildlife value of this woodland will thus be enhanced for all to enjoy, visitors and residents alike.

FROM the WARDENS

Wildfires are always a possibility on heathland and in conifer woodland because of the flammable nature of the vegetation. In recent months a review of wildfire management on Ludshott has been undertaken. This is a regular task which involves updating our fire plans and liaising with the fire brigade to determine additional requirements for the control of wildfire across the heath. The committee and wardens were also approached by neighbouring residents at Headley Down concerned about the control of wildfires close to their properties. In the early 1990s a similar approach was made and this resulted in the creation of a new firebreak along part of the western boundary, adding to the network of rides and firebreaks created after the major fire in 1980.

Although there are good measures in place to check and fight wildfires, following discussions with the forestry and nature conservation authorities we have applied for permission to undertake some additional work on the western side of Ludshott. This involves reducing stands of gorse and scrub and the felling and thinning of some of the pine woodland.

Our routine mechanical work on the heathland creates vegetation with a mixture of structure, density and age. As well as being beneficial to wildlife this also helps in reducing the severity of fires. Controlled burning of blocks of heathland during the winter months is an old management technique, used for centuries by the commoners to remove dead leggy vegetation and encourage fresh growth for their livestock to graze on. Again beneficial to the heathland ecology, we have done some heather and gorse burning this winter, creating, for a few years, a block of vegetation with reduced flammability.



FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF LUDSHOTT'S COMMON LAND

by Chris Webb

From the previous two issues of Commons Link many will know that the National Trust is considering how best to manage Ludshott Common in the years and decades to come. The head warden along with the committee members and colleagues from regional office have been undertaking a series of meetings with neighbours, visitors and other stakeholders including those with common rights. This process is allowing us to understand the wide range of interests that many different people have in Ludshott Common and the patterns of usage.

Being able to walk the dog comes out as one of the most important benefits for many, while just being able to walk and exercise in an area of open countryside is also strongly represented. Horse riding is very popular. An extensive area where the conservation of wildlife is a priority and can be seen, gives particular enjoyment and is something many are proud to be close to. The heathland landscape with its surrounding woodland and views across to the Hangers and South Downs are also highly valued. The fact that such a large area has statutory protection from development is a major consideration and many acknowledge that the protected status afforded by NT ownership adds value to their adjacent properties. This

information gathering exercise is proving to be invaluable for us when looking ahead at how we manage the common.

In our discussions we are outlining the issues that the NT faces in the future management of the common and we have been discussing in very broad terms the options that are open to us. The future funding and desirability (on environmental grounds) of continuing intensive mechanical and manual management of the heathland habitat may not be sustainable. A reduction in our ability to continue at the scale that has been achieved since 1980 is predictable. Because of the site's conservation status in British and European law, there are legal obligations on the Trust to maintain Ludshott Common in a condition suitable and favourable for a range of endangered species. This is reinforced by the National Trust's own aims, outlined in its Acts of Parliament, which state that where we own places of historic interest and natural beauty we

have to protect and preserve them for the future.

Although (because of space) the list of interests, issues and obligations outlined above is not comprehensive, it forms a broad framework within which we have to try and plan the future management structure. Alongside the feasibility of trying to continue with a form of the current pattern of management we are also looking at whether or not we can reinstate some of the traditional practices that maintained the common for centuries up to the early 1900s. This would involve bringing back grazing to the common. Grazing is one of the fundamental components of these heathland landscapes which has been lost in recent times. The principle role of our current mechanical management is actually aimed at attempting to mimic, albeit crudely, some of the effects of grazing. The grazing option seems to appeal to many because there is a sense that it is more natural and traditional. At this very early stage we are continuing to explore its potential at Ludshott.

We are planning to undertake a series of mobile exhibitions on the common at different locations and entry points during the spring and summer to discuss with as many people as possible the management options and their feelings. We will advertise with posters around the site, and on the website, where and when these mini road-shows will be.

Please come and talk to us at these events or contact the wardens office for more information.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Wardens		
N.T. Warden's Office		01428 751563
Chris Webb		07768 830662
Jim Avenell		07768 830661
Mandy Phyyferoen		07789 926593
Committee		
Dr Susan Salter	Chairman	01428 751409
Janet Crossman	Hon. Treasurer	01428 751980
Colin Brash	Membership Secretary	01428 713256
David Knighton		01428 608036
Sylvia Gamble	Hon. Secretary	01420 475501
Steve Thames	Webmaster	01428 713096

THREE COUNTIES ASSOCIATION GUIDED WALK

In very inclement weather on 16th February, Chris led 30 hardy souls from the NT Three Counties Association on a walk along the lakes at Waggoners Wells.

Unfortunately, the heavy rain had made the conditions a little slippery so the walk could not be as long as had been expected, however they were able to visit the Wishing Well and cross the bridge which one of their previous donations had provided. We hope that they will arrange to visit us again soon, to see and hear more of the history and conservation work that goes on in our area.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

So that we can save postage costs, we would be very pleased to hear from anyone who would be willing to hand deliver Commons Link, however few that may be. The Committee already does this over some of our catchment area but would welcome any help, especially for 'blank' spots such as Grayshott.

Contact Susan on 01428 751409 or trustsusan@btinternet.com.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

STORM and SNOW-DAMAGED TREES

The Wardens had to deal with a significant number of storm damaged trees before Christmas, and snow damaged trees in the New Year. This has involved rechecking the trees along roadsides, especially at Passfield, and along footpaths, inspections which had already been completed for the winter season. Thus the snow and the work it caused has put the work programme back by about a month.

Over the whole winter period contractors have dealt with a number of trees, including one in Seymour Road brought to our attention by Admiral Sir Edward Ashmore, to whom we are grateful.



The bottom lake at Waggoners Wells

A3 ROADSIDE TREES

There has been liaison with the Highways Agency and A3 contractors over roadside trees at Bramshott Chase. Jim and Chris have met with the A3 team to determine the boundary and which trees required attention and felling. Contractors have been doing the work whilst the north-bound carriageway has been closed.



Jim meeting with Highways Agency and A3 contractors

OTHER EFFECTS of WINTER

Because of the severity of the winter weather one of our rare bird species, the Dartford Warbler, is almost certainly absent at the moment. It is always, on Ludshott at, almost, the most northerly extent of its range, and so suffers when the winter is especially hard and long and it will have retreated south to its more coastal habitats and the New Forest, where colleagues tell us that it is still to be found. Any remaining birds would have been affected by not being able to forage because of the frost, and having their roosts in the larger gorse clumps destroyed by the heavy snow falls. They will return to colonise our heathland but, in the meantime, if anyone sees the species over the coming months, please will they let the wardens know.

We would be pleased, also, to hear from anyone interested in taking on serious bird surveys. Speak to any of the wardens or leave a message at the office, 01428 751563.



Dartford warbler

NEW PROPERTY MANAGER

Following a restructure of the Hampshire National Trust Properties, Ludshott and Selborne have had a change of property manager. James Taylor has now taken over from Jonathan Ingram.

James is based at Hinton Ampner and also manages the City Mill in Winchester. He has been involved in the management of the countryside for over 20 years and is a chartered surveyor. He joined the Trust in 2001, initially as a land agent, before becoming a property manager for a countryside portfolio. Five years ago he moved to Hinton Ampner and is now looking forward to working with Chris, his team and everybody involved in the commons.

James' Springer Spaniel, Henry, invariably accompanies him and the chances are that if you should meet them on the common you will be greeted by Henry first.

CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

As we enter Spring, it seems strange to think back to our Christmas Tree sale last December. This time we were able to do our colleagues at Frensham a good turn, by taking away the trees from an area they wanted cleared. These were of excellent quality and being Scots Pine, not only do they not drop their needles over the festive season, but also, most importantly, the clearance of these self-seeded trees helps to keep the heathland open. The money raised was a record in recent years and it is going to be used for new signage in the car parks. So thank you everyone who supported us in buying a tree.

Ludshott Common
Guided Walks
Look out for notices around the Common of guided walks and keep up to date on the website.
<http://www.ntludshott.org.uk/>

