

Steypning Downland Scheme

Newsletter

Stay at Home Special!



Yes, after around four months of semi-continuous rain, spring has arrived and right on cue, everyone has to stay at home for the foreseeable future . . . but never mind! You can still have a virtual experience of the

Steining Downland Scheme from the comfort of your living room, just by reading this newsletter . . .

Elm Planting



Above: Craig, Karen and Richard from the South Downs National Park build the tree shelters while Greta and Astrid, with Justin their dad, plant the trees!

One of the last things we did before the lockdown began, was plant some disease-resistant Elm trees. There's no need to be concerned though - Elms do not carry human diseases! These Elms are resistant to the fungus *Ophiostoma novo-ulmi* which causes Dutch Elm Disease.

Back in the 1960s and '70s, Dutch Elm Disease devastated our English Elms, which were at the time one of our commonest lowland trees. The English Elm has never returned to our landscape because as soon as the young saplings reach about 20ft high, they are revisited by the beetle and succumb once more.



*English Elm saplings growing behind our Gateway building last summer.
Most of these trees have since succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease.*

On 15th March, a crack team of tree planters began to turn the tide by planting seven disease-resistant Elms on the Rifle Range. We used two varieties: *Ulmus* 'Rebona' and *Ulmus* 'New Horizon' which are both hybrids of the Japanese Elm (*U.japonica*) and the Siberian Elm (*U. pumila*). A big thank you to the South Downs National Park for donating these trees!

Our more astute readership (of which there are a great many) may be wondering why we were planting non-native hybrid trees in the countryside. Well, things aren't as clear-cut as they may seem....

For a start, it turns out that our so-called English Elm (*Ulmus procera* 'Atinia') isn't an English native tree at all! The genetics of *Ulmus* are very complex but a survey of the English Elm trees in Spain, Italy and the UK found them all to be identical clones of a single tree, 'the Atinian Elm', which was probably brought to the UK by the Romans. Secondly, both Rebona and New Horizon are known to support more than 40 different kinds of insects which would otherwise be dependent on the English Elm as part of their lifecycle.

..... So we're very much hoping our new trees will give a real boost to local biodiversity, as well as being magnificent additions to the landscape!



Back in February we enlisted the help of the 'Roboflail', an automated scrub bashing machine, to clear back invasive scrub from the Rifle Range. Otherwise known as a Kilworth Green Climber LV500, the Roboflail is a fresh acquisition by the South Downs National Park Authority, with a voracious appetite for scrub. It munched its way through a terrific amount of the stuff, although we made sure there was plenty left over for our farmland birds, reptiles and other scrub-loving downland wildlife. It will be interesting to see what effect it's had when things really start to grow, later in the year. . .



Not to be outdone, founding member of the Conservation Volunteers, Pete V took his mini tractor and flail up onto Steyning Coombe. A good chunk of the brambles that had begun to reinvade the lower slope of the Coombe were successfully beaten back. We're hoping these will now be replaced by some chalk grassland plants, such as Milkwort and Common Spotted Orchid, with the help of some grazing Dexter cattle later in the year . . .



Squatters: A couple of weeks back we started getting mysterious reports of some large, white cattle which had moved, uninvited onto Pepperscoombe. A bit of forensic investigation revealed that they are British Whites belonging to the Sussex Wildlife Trust - they had pushed down the fence from Steyning Roundhill to sneak onto our backyard!

We're not sure about their squatters rights, but it looks like they will be with us for a few weeks yet. They're now in the lower compartment, so they won't affect people getting their hour of exercise while walking the adjacent Bridleway (*with thanks to Roger B for the snap*).



If you're struggling to keep up with your admin. at the moment and could do with a bit of help during the current lockdown, look no further! Friend of the Steyning Downland Scheme, Sue Peters,

who lives in Steyning is very happy to help you during this time, on a completely voluntary basis! Sue loves typing, data entry, and anything to do with photos. Sue is set up to receive and send items electronically from home, and has the internet, email, Microsoft Word and Excel, and a printer and scanner. If you're interested, please contact Sue at: smfarndellp@btinternet.com



Some of our visitors have turned to the pen - more specifically our poetry tins, to express their creative side during the current health crisis. Here's just one recent example . . .

There was family in self isolation
who stocked up on tins for the
duration
they felt all alone
stuck in there home
but were joined by the
rest of the nation.
Phoebe 3/21/20

. . . and (almost) finally: At significant risk to our future
career and our personal mental well-being, we've
delved into the nether regions of the Internet to bring
you this creative and unusual instruction on how to
spend your time while in self-isolation (*if you weren't in
self-isolation before, you certainly will be after watching
this - Ed*) . . .



[Click on the photo above to watch the video](#)

A final note from your venerable Editor: So far we've had to cancel all our events to the end of April and recent Government announcements are suggesting we'll be cancelling most, if not all our events this year. Apart from anything else, this would create quite a cash flow issue for us. If you'd like to help us continue with our conservation work, one of the best

ways is to join our Friends scheme. It costs a mere
£2 a month - just click on the button below - many
thanks!

Join the Friends here!

**Wishing everyone a healthy and safe next
few months - and many thanks for
reading!**