



Steyning Downland Scheme Newsletter

HOP: Help Our Pond

The Upper Millpond, next to the Big Picnic Field has received quite a lot of local social media attention recently - not all of it entirely positive! The pond is certainly in a bit of a sorry state, despite being a really important wildlife habitat. Watch the video to find out more (*with huge thanks to Pete Varkala*):



Readers will be relieved to know we're planning some big improvements:

1. Fix the dam, so we can keep clean water topped up all year round.
2. Put up an information board to explain the special historical and wildlife value of the pond and why 'dog washing' and dropping rubbish in it are not great ideas.
3. Build a dipping platform so that we can work with local school children to discover more about the pond's wildlife importance.

Unfortunately all this takes cash, so we've set up a special appeal if you'd like to see this rather worn out old friend

looking its best again, [please go here to make a donation](#) - thank you!



WE'VE REACHED THE TON!



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Last month we excitedly announced the discovery of the 98th species of bird to be spotted on the Steyning Downland Scheme. But it turns out we overlooked the crucial sighting of an

overflying Common Gull earlier in the year, by ultra-expert SDS birder, Colin Holter. That means that last month's discovery of a Nightjar was in fact our 99th bird species. . . .

And then on 1st August, we hit the big 100 - yes, a Pied Flycatcher no less (see pic) on the Rifle Range, probably en route back to its winter quarters in West Africa.

Of course the sighting had to be by Colin and Janet Holter, this time accompanied by SDS Trustee, Andrew Armitage, attending the first (socially distanced) birding session since lockdown. Big congratulations to them! Is the next target 200??

If you'd like to join our birding group, whether already an expert or keen to learn, [just complete our volunteer form](#) and we'll be in touch.

The Conservation Volunteers are BACK



After several months rest, our Conservation Volunteers started meeting again at the end of July. Please note that the photo above was taken before the lockdown began - we're now strictly 'Covid-19 secure' and suitably socially distanced!

The Conservation Volunteers are a great way to get fit, meet new friends AND conserve our local biodiversity, all at the same time. If you're interested in joining in, please read the latest version of our [Covid-19 guidance](#), then [just complete our volunteer form](#) and we'll be in touch.

The Conservation Volunteers go ELECTRIC



Image: Stihl

We're hugely grateful to a mystery donor who's funded the purchase a brand new, all-electric hedge trimmer! It's a massive boost for our Conservation Volunteers, as they clear back scrub

and brambles from our species-rich chalk grassland. Charged via our very own solar panels, (donated a couple of years back by [Bright Spark Energy](#)), the hedge trimmer is much 'greener' than its petrol alternative, as well as being quieter, safer and lighter too.

Ragwort: Friend or Foe?



Last month's newsletter featured research which flags up a dramatic collapse in the amount of buzzing insects in our countryside. It seems this has much to do with the loss of their wild flower food plants. Embarrassingly, it turns out that for years, the SDS Conservation Volunteers have been diligently pulling up one of our best native wild flowers for bees, and lots of other buzzers too . . .

Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) has issues. It is officially a 'weed', being listed in the Weeds Act 1959. This allows the Government to tell a

landowner to control it. It also contains alkaloids which can kill horses and cattle, if eaten in large enough quantities. But it's also a native wild flower and loads of other animals love it! [According to Butterfly Conservation](#), 27 moths, 22 thrips, 13 bugs, 9 flies and 6 beetles all eat it and it's a valuable nectar source for hundreds of other insects.

The SDS has been pulling and cutting Ragwort for years, to stop its seeds from blowing into nearby pastures, but it turns out that [only a tiny proportion of Ragwort seed](#) disperses more than 25 metres from source and then it will only germinate, if it can land in bare soil.

What are your experiences of Ragwort? Do you think we should carry on pulling it up? [Please let us know your thoughts!](#)

Updates from the PEG and LMG



'Well, Geoff gave his opinion the loudest, so let's go with his idea'

All the big decisions about how we manage the Steyning Downland Scheme are taken by two groups of incredibly dedicated and highly astute volunteers, the Land Management Group and the People Engagement Group. In future issues we'll be introducing our readers to some of these illustrious individuals. In the mean time, here's a brief summary of the salient discussions from their most recent meetings:

LMG:

1. Grazing - agreed to bring goats to Steyning Coombe (this has since fallen through - if anyone knows a grazier with goats who may be interested, please put us in touch).
2. Horseshoe Woods - various options about what to do ref. Ash

Dieback - discussions ongoing.

3. Restarting Conservation Volunteers ref. lockdown.

4. Working with the National Park Authority to deter anti-social behaviour.

PEG:

1. Upper Millpond - what to do about misuse and its poor condition - fundraising appeal.

2. Working with dog owners to improve dog walker's behaviour ref dog poo, chasing Dexters, damage to ponds, etc., etc.

3. Engaging young people - starting a Junior Management Board

4. Promotional videos.

If you volunteer with us and would like to give feedback or ideas on how we look after the Steyning Downland Scheme, one way is to join our Volunteer WhatsApp Group. Just [download WhatsApp](#) to your phone and then [follow this link](#) - thank you!

SDS at the Movies



We're so grateful to Neil Pringle of [Neil Pringle Productions](#) for producing this promotional video for us. It now features on the [home page of our website](#) - thank you Neil!



Our most astute readers may have noticed the entire absence of your venerable editor in Neil's video, but never fear - you can still watch his stellar performance in a double act with 'The Bald Explorer' above . . . oh and nearly forgot to mention, Rifle Range expert and PEG member, Justin Russell also makes a special guest appearance!

Would like to help out but too busy? No problem!



You can make a real difference to our work,
simply by clicking here to join the Friends -
it's just £2 per month

Thanks for reading!



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