



Steyning Downland Scheme Newsletter

Welcome to our
Springtime Special!



Welcome to Spring on the Steyning Downland Scheme!
It's been a while since our last newsletter but there's
certainly been plenty going on . . .



Stating the obvious? A notice on the The Link in the Horseshoe Woods

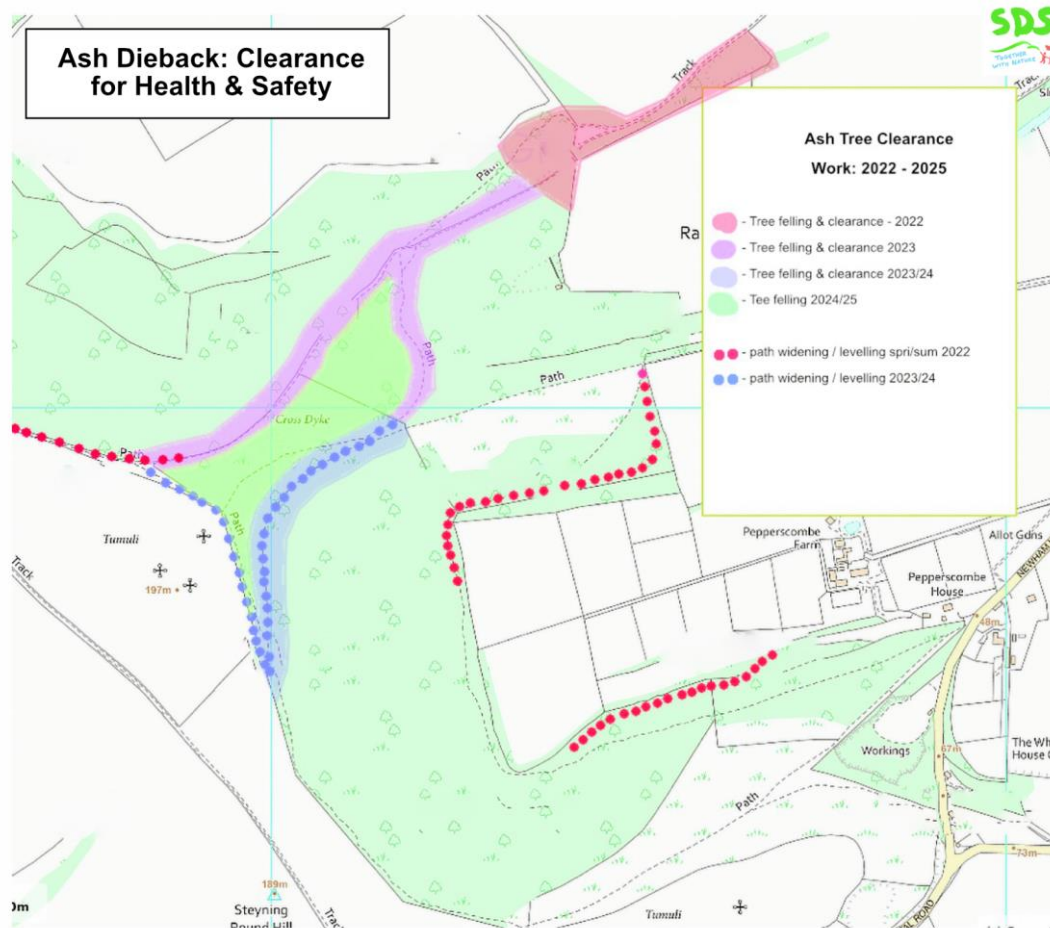
Eunice + Ash = Problem

Storm Eunice barrelled into the South Downs over 18th-19th February. Our Ash trees on the sidehill were already decidedly wobbly on their feet due to Ash Dieback Disease - all they needed was a good shove from Eunice, and gravity did the rest....

The Bridleway connecting Steyning Coombe to the Upper Horseshoe is completely blocked with fallen trees, plus several more hanging precariously over it. Thanks to the Wiston forestry team, we hope to have it navigable again soon - please [check our Facebook page](#) for

updates.

Over the next three years we're planning to remove more dead Ash trees along other footpaths in the Horseshoe Woods (see map for more details). The work will involve widening some lengths of footpath (see dotted lines), so please don't be alarmed if you see some big, yellow machines trundling around in these places!





Collapsed Ash at the top of Steyning Coombe, with roots rotted off as a result of Ash Dieback Disease

Eunice + Pond = Problem #2



Storm Eunice had fun at the Upper Pond too, where a huge Poplar came down, narrowly avoiding a dramatic demolition of the pond dam. A mini tsunami was miraculously avoided, and we're planning some tree work and pond restorations the summer, to make sure it can never happen! Meanwhile the path next to the pond is blocked until [John Burgess](#), our friendly local woodsman, can clear it.

February Happenings



The ancient art of hedge laying returned to the SDS on 9th February. The Downland Orchard hedge was planted in 2011 by the Cub Scouts, with a generous grant from the Women's Institute, and 11 years later, it was ready for its first serious haircut. This was completed with great aplomb by the Conservation Volunteers, directed under the watchful eye of [CPRE Hedgerow Champion, Derek Crush](#). The newly laid hedge will create dense cover for feeding and nesting birds in years to come, as well as creating a stock-proof barrier, without the need for barbed wire fencing.



Derek Crush



On 16th Feb we put up a rustic memorial bench at the Lower Horseshoe footpath, with very many thanks to [Ben Goldsmith](#) for building it, Barry

Evans for helping to put it in the ground (in rapidly worsening weather conditions) and to Roger Greene and family for sponsoring it.



We put 15 Dexters back on the Rifle Range, from Steyning Coombe. They do a great job, breaking up thick clumps of dead grass and nibbling back invading scrub. Their constant chewing also helps to keep the soil fertility low, by converting Nitrogen in the plant leaves to best quality Dexter beef. This time-honoured method conserves our rare chalk wild flowers. Soon the Dexters will be heading off to a Sussex Wildlife Trust Reserve for the summer, before we begin the grazing cycle again this autumn.

Photo of the Month



[Bertie Harding](#) has done it again with this hard-to-get shot of a Buzzard! Bertie is awarded with a hearty slap on the back, and if anyone out there would like to sponsor our 'Photo of the Month' (so the winner gets a bit more than a slap on the back), [please do let us know!](#)

To enter our photo competition, just join our [SDS Volunteers WhatsApp Group](#) and post up your best images, taken on the Steyning Downland Scheme.

STEYNING
DOWNLAND
SCHEME

SDS

TOGETHER
WITH
NATURE



Adders

Are Basking in this Field



Please keep your dog under close control

Adders are most vulnerable to dog attack in spring, when they emerge from hibernation. They are also most likely to bite at this time. Adders are now rare and legally protected. Please help our Adders by keeping your dog under close control - thank you!



Steyning Downland Scheme
www.steyningdownland.org



Our all-important Adder population is just emerging from hibernation

now. Please look out for these signs on the Rifle Range and keep your dog on the lead. Adders are protected by law - it's illegal to intentionally kill or injure them, but widespread declines are still being reported. Adders typically live to 5-10 years but their life expectancy can be dramatically cut short by feeding crows, buzzards (sorry, Bertie) and inquisitive dogs (most bites to dogs happen around this time of year too).



Adder Amble: If you'd like to learn more about Adders, we're running a guided walk on Saturday 14th May with expert herpetologist, Paul Stevens from Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group. Adults £6, children under 16 go FREE - [please book here.](#)

(with thanks to Pete Varkala for this shot of a rare Black Adder on the Rifle Range)



WOODLAND SINGING:

Rebecca Askew is back on Sunday, 3rd April from 2pm for her next, ever increasingly popular outdoor singing session. Price: £6 adults, £3 16s and under. [Please book here.](#)

**Time on your hands?
Look here for the latest
volunteer opportunities!**



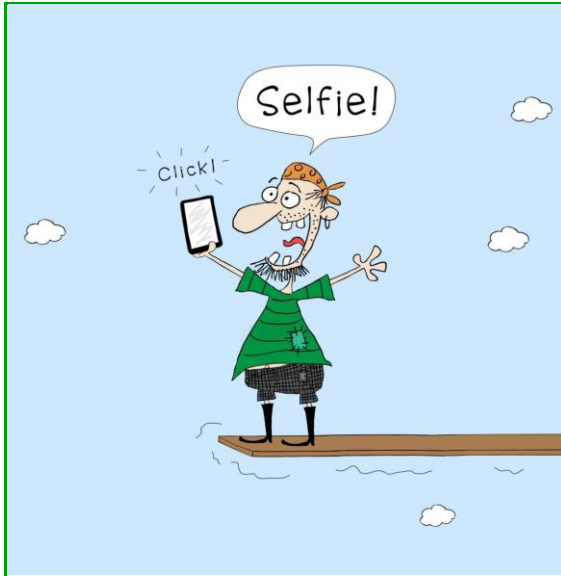
The Steyning Festival is back in 2022! We're joining around dozen other local groups for a celebration of all things green on **Saturday 28th May, 11am - 4.45pm**. We're planning a shiny, new display for it BUT **WE NEED YOUR HELP** to make it happen. If you can spare one hour as part of a rota to look after our stall, please [drop us a line](#) - full training given!

Greening Steyning

Biodiversity Action Group

are looking for a walks leader for an event they're planning in July. [Contact Ronnie Read](#) if you think you can help

Biodiversity
Action Group



Social Media Aficionado:

If you actually enjoy using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the SDS Public Engagement Group would really like to hear from you! Interested? Please [drop us a line](#) and we'll be in touch.

Odd Jobber: If you enjoy fixing things, particularly if they are public information boards and benches, we would really like to hear from you! Interested? Please [drop us a line](#) and we'll be in touch.



Video of the Month:
A Thought for the Day



Way back in March 2007, the founding motivation behind the Steyning Downland Scheme was actually spiritual: A desire by the Goring family to help better connect people to nature, and to the Creator, through the land. This month's video (actually filmed way back on a frosty day in January), was put together by recently retired Trustee, Nigel Hartley and features Richard Goring and none other than your Venerable Editor, sharing their thoughts about the Christian values of the SDS. See if you can count how many (unintentionally) misleading facts the latter manages to quote during his short interview ...

The Long Read: DOGS!



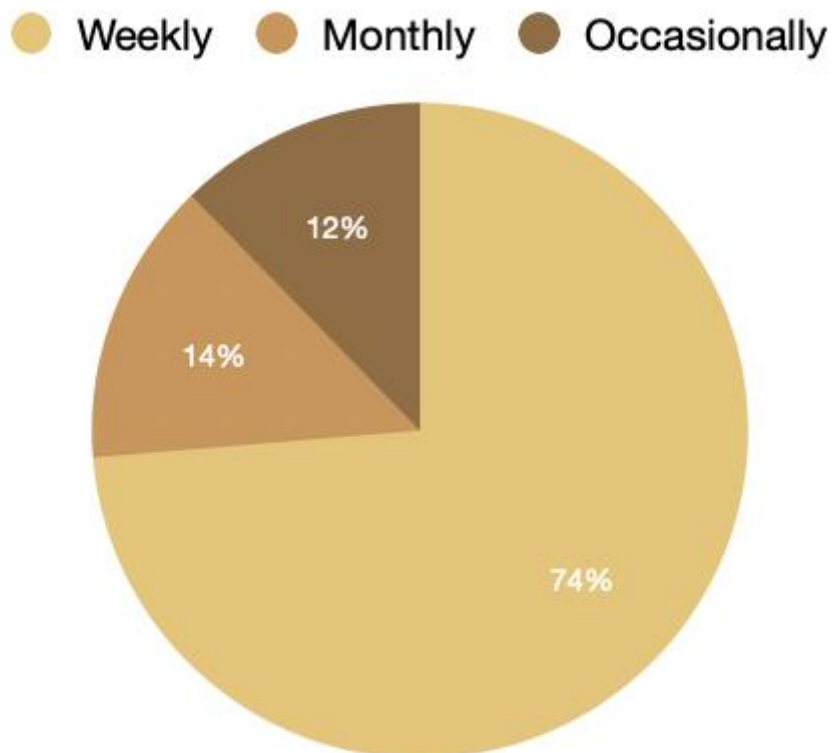
Dogs, we are told, are 'a man's best friend' but when they turn up in the countryside, they can be about as welcome as a rowdy bunch of drunken gate crashers at an afternoon tea party. . . . Here's just some of the antisocial antics that badly behaved dogs get up to:

- Harass grazing animals (sheep are particularly vulnerable at this time of year),
- Chase ground nesting birds, deer, in fact just about anything,
- Splash through wildlife ponds, leaving a trail of silt and upturned water plants in their wake,

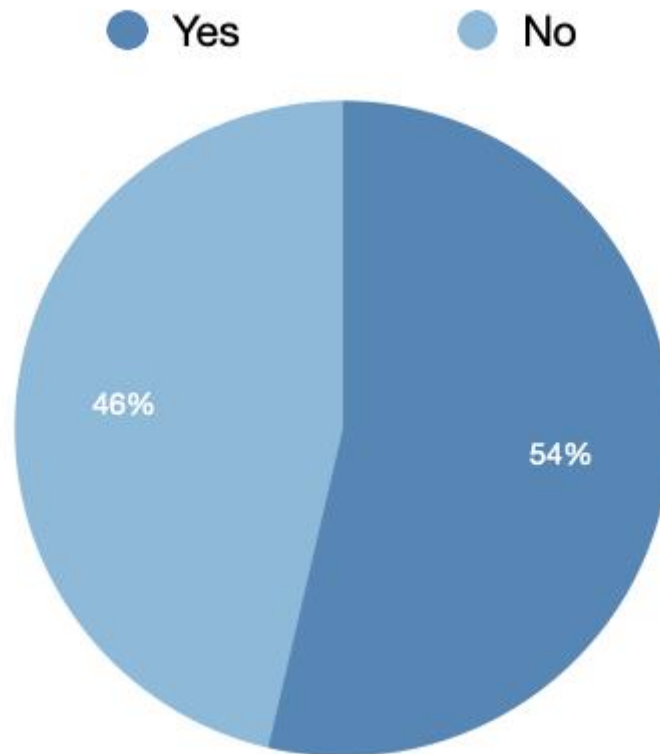
- Pounce, in a slobbery, playful sort of way on unsuspecting nationally rare species, such as our resident and very special Adders.

Even doggy deposits can cause serious problems - [a recent study](#) has found that dog poo harms nature reserves by enriching the soil.

Last year SDS volunteer, Christine Supiot took some time out to ask our visitors about their attitudes to dogs on the Steyning Downland Scheme. She interviewed a total of 59 people and here are her (sometimes surprising) results:

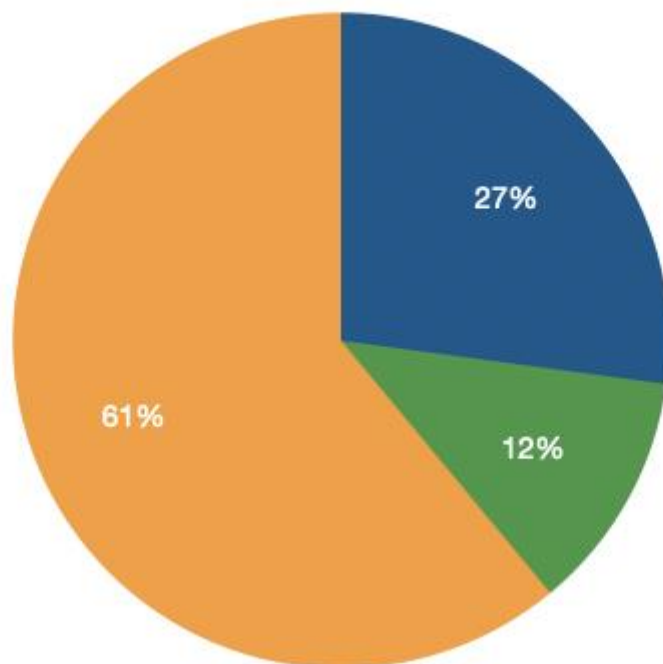


How often to do you come here? Nearly three quarters of respondents said they visit at least once a week.



Do you know the area is privately owned land managed by the Steyning Downland Scheme? Almost half of respondents said they didn't!

● Agree ● Not Sure ● Disagree



How do you feel about the possibility of having to keep dogs on a lead while visiting the SDS? Almost two thirds of respondents thought keeping a dog on the lead was a bad idea.

This was a small sample of people but it's surprising just how few realised they were walking on Steyning Downland Scheme land, despite the information boards and signs! Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised then, that most people want dogs to be able to run free on the SDS: Perhaps the message about the big problems dogs cause to wildlife hasn't been getting through. That's why we've started an **SDS Public Engagement Group** to work on getting information out there more effectively. If you're interested in helping us with this, [please get in touch](#).

An Update from the SDS Birders



(Above: Eurasian Starling by Bertie Harding)

The SDS Bird Group continues to flourish, with a group of anything upto 20 people meeting each second Sunday of the month to walk part of the site and record birds and other wildlife.

In January this year, on a surprisingly bright and sunny morning, 10 members, including newcomer Nicola, met at 08.00 for our first walk of the New Year. I t wasn't long before yet another shiny, new species for

the SDS was recorded: A Woodcock, seen by John and Pete. Less common birds seen included Water Rail, Hobby and Lesser Whitethroat. The total number of bird species recorded now stands at 101!

The birders are a mix of those less experienced with some more experienced observers - individuals of all ages and experience are welcome to join - contact Bob Platt at or Andrew Armitage if you'd like to join in!

If you're too busy for a monthly commitment and you'd just like to dabble your toe in the birdie water, we have three **Songs of the Dawn walks** planned for this year. Just click on the links below for more information and to book:

[Songs of the Dawn #1 - Saturday 7th May](#)

[Songs of the Dawn 'Light', Thursday 19th May](#)

[Songs of the Dawn #2 - Saturday 28th May](#)

Friends



Like to help, but just too
busy? No problem! You
can make a real
difference, just by joining
the Friends of the
Steyning Downland
Scheme - it's only £2 per
month!

*Join the
Friends
here!*

Thanks for reading - enjoy the sunshine!



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