

Steyning Downland Scheme

Chalk Grassland Special!



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The Rifle Range

One of our biggest responsibilities is restoring the flower-rich chalk grassland on Steyning Rifle Range. It has all sorts of unusual plants and animals, like Wild Marjoram (*below*) and Large Skipper butterfly (*below that - with thanks to Paul Day for the photo!*).

Chalk grassland is also one of the UK's rarest habitats - roughly 80% of it has gone in the last 80 years. But Sussex remains a haven for it - there's about 2,600 hectares of chalk grassland left across the two counties, which is 5% of the world's total . . . and the Steyning Downland has a our very own bit of it!





Morphing...

The challenge with chalk grassland is stopping it from morphing into woodland. As plants grow, nutrients tend to build up in the soil, and this encourages scrub and then trees to move in. It doesn't take long for change to happen either; almost all the land which is now the Horseshoe Woods was open downland up until the 1950s!

(Below: a photo taken in the 1900s from Pepperscoombe, looking across what is now the Horseshoe Woods)



Return of the Native ...

The Steyning Downland Scheme has been battling morphing for years. Each winter the Conservation Volunteers are out in all weathers, cutting invading scrub and trees. About 10 years ago, we welcomed a small herd of Dexter cattle to graze down the grassland.

But despite all this, the relentless march of rough grass, scrub and trees has continued. That is, until now . . .

Today, for the first time in living memory, Sussex Cattle returned to the

Rifle Range. Sussex are the traditional breed of the county, and they are chalk grassland specialists par excellence!



Living Lawn Mowers

Sussex Cattle just love chalk grassland. Descended from the ancient red cattle that lived in the Weald prior to the Norman Conquest, they thrive on the sort of rough pasture that modern breeds turn up their noses at. With a thoroughly docile and placid temperament, they're just ideal for the dog walking paradise which is the Steyning Downland.

We're starting with 6, to see how they go over the summer, increasing the herd size in the autumn, when wildlife goes dormant.

Look out for the gate signs, which will tell you when the Sussex are in a particular field:



Thank You Tom and SWT!

A huge thank you to Tom Parry, Grazing Manager with the Sussex Wildlife Trust, for lending his cattle and grazing expertise ...

... and do remember to say 'hello' to our new arrivals!



Friends

Join the Friends of the Steyning Downland Scheme and for less than the price of a cup of coffee each month, you'll be supporting our conservation

work. Plus you get to enjoy special events, just for our Friends! Follow the link below for more info...

[Learn More About Our Friends Scheme Here](#)

Thanks for reading!



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