

Spring 2009

Newsletter 41



The Magog Trust
for people and their countryside

Editor

After editing the Newsletter since Spring 1993, Michael Nurse is now retiring. Our grateful thanks to Michael for all the work he has done over the last 16 years; at times he was pushed very close to deadline dates!

As we move towards our 20th Anniversary year, we introduce a new logo, thanks to Nick Kotschy. This logo is intended to represent the Magog Down. It will be used for information leaflets, posters and so on, relating to the Magog Down. We hope you like it.



Ranger Service

We welcomed Claire Scott, Frances Cooper and Nick Beale who, along with Jon Gibbs, Head Ranger of Cambridge Preservation Society and a Magog Trust Governor, act as our contracted Ranger Service. They will provide regular daily patrols of the Down, to ensure the safety and security of visitors. We are very happy to have them on site. Not only are we close neighbours with CPS at Wandlebury, but the aims of our two organisations overlap in many ways: providing, for posterity, green space for informal recreation; conserving areas for wildlife – birds, flowers, small mammals, butterflies etc that are also special to the habitats of chalkland landscape; contributing to the environment and landscape setting of Cambridge and its surrounding villages. By using the same Ranger Service, the Magog Trust and CPS can invoke a common set of values to the Down and Wandlebury, based on the Countryside Code, and enable all our visitors to cherish the special landscape of the Gog Magog Hills. [CPS www.cpswandlebury.org]

People and Dogs on the Magog Down – Towards a better understanding

A small group of dog walkers has been meeting to discuss the issues which have arisen following the results of our survey last year, which shows that of the daily visitors to the Down (around 200) 80% are dog walkers. This highlights the fact that the Magog Down faces a much higher pressure from dogs than would normally be expected. There is no reason to expect this to diminish in the future. It is therefore a great imperative that the rules are followed in order to minimise the impact of dogs on the site, and other users, now and in the future. A further finding from the Trust's survey is that a relatively high proportion of dog users within the 'on-lead' designated areas do not obey the 'on-lead' rule, possibly as high as 55%.



A leafleting campaign took place towards the end of March, instigated by this group, to encourage membership amongst dog walkers and to inform them of the cost of the maintenance and upkeep of the Down. With the help of the Ranger Service, we are trying hard to see that our basic 'on-lead' site rules are followed, for the enjoyment of all users of the Magog Down.

Do contact us if you would like to get involved in this positive interaction between responsible dog walkers. We would also like to know just how many members are dog walkers.



Whoopsy Daisy

Many of you will have had a cheery encounter with Steve Gunn, otherwise known as Mr WhoopsyDaisy. We contract Steve to empty our 8 dog bins on site twice a week. This costs the Magog Trust around £4,000 per year. The majority of dog walkers are very conscientious about picking up after their dogs, and most appreciate this service.

Volunteers Wanted

The first of our monthly working parties saw ten volunteers, on a lovely spring afternoon, planting a new hedgerow along Fair Field. We hope that this trend will continue with monthly working parties undertaking routine maintenance tasks on the Down under the supervision of a Ranger or other leader. These will be on the first Wednesday of the month. Other tasks on the list include ivy clearance on the Bowl Barrow, grass raking, thistle and ragwort pulling. If you enjoy a bit of not too arduous physical labour, in sociable company for a couple of hours at most, please do contact us.



Wild Service Trees

As we reported in the last issue, a small coppice of trees were planted in celebration of the work of Eric Winterflood on the Down. This was done over the winter months, and we look forward to a glorious show from them, especially in the autumn months of the years ahead.



Wine and Cheese Evening

On 4 September 2008, members and their guests were treated to an informative evening made all the more palatable by three enthusiastic speakers followed by an excellent selection of cheese and a glass of wine.

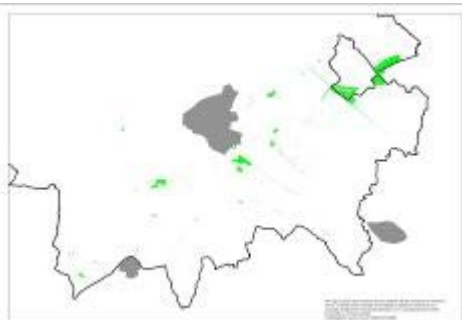
Iain Webb

Kathleen Foreman

David Kenny

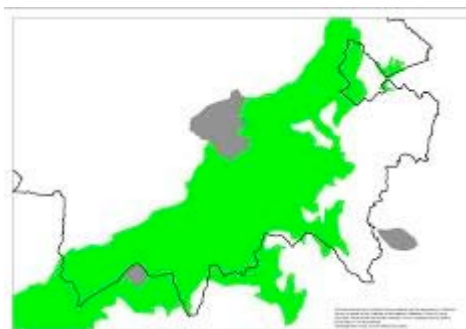


Iain Webb from the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust put the value of the Magog Down into context by showing us how little chalk downland now remains in East Anglia. The



Cambridgeshire Distribution of Chalk Grassland

Down is a vital habitat for a wide range of birds, plants and insects. He showed examples of species now returning to this important site, 20 years later.



Cambridgeshire Distribution of Chalk Soils

The value of the archaeology on the Down, in relation to other ancient sites on the Gog Magog Hills, was explained by David Kenny from English Heritage. The recent removal of the trees from Little Trees Hill had revealed the Bronze Age Bowl Barrow which an addition to the Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure. The site is regarded as nationally important archaeologically along with other sites, such as the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke.

Kathleen Foreman, Chairman of Magog Trust, presented an overview of the work of the Trust and the value of the Down to many different visitors and interested groups.

Recent surveys have shown that there are in excess of 73,000 visits to the Down during the year and a daily minimum of 200 visitors of which more than 80% are dog walkers. Less than 20% of regular users are Trust members but around 90% of visitors say they would like to contribute.

Conservation

A representative of the Trust will be attending the Lowland Calcareous Grassland Summit - a seminar to consider what blockages there are to the restoration of calcareous grasslands to their historic sites and what might be done collectively and cooperatively to overcome those



On the Bowl Barrow

Finance

Some people have got hold of the idea that the Magog Trust has plenty of money. Like all ideas there is some truth in it as we were the beneficiary of a substantial legacy a few years ago which has been invested to provide a steady income stream to support the Trust's work. Trouble is if we spend the capital we lose the income just as our spending commitments are increasing very rapidly after a fairly economical period.

So the need for regular income continues if we are to continue to restore Magog Down to chalk downland and ensure its availability as an accessible open space for future generations. Now the warning: All the following figures are likely to change as we close the accounts for the year end but the Treasurer does not expect his report to the AGM to be very different in tone.

Our membership is key to what we are trying to achieve. Not just as a source of income but as a source of help and inspiration to support what we do. Investment Income comes from cash on deposit and a portfolio of stocks and shares to provide a balance of income and capital growth in normal times.

The third leg of our income is the land itself where we have income from arable farming and payments in respect of Countryside Stewardship. Our provisional figures for this year show:

income £72,207	
£ 9,872	Membership subscriptions, Donations, Refunded income tax and member activities
£17,835	Investment Income
£44,500	Income from Farming & Countryside Stewardship

On the down side our spending so far totals £71,647	
£49,424	Farm costs, maintenance of hedges, paths& facilitating public access
£10,182	Admin and Support costs
£ 5,354	Other work directly related to Magog Down
£ 3,662	Ranger Costs (with the last quarter bill still due)
£ 2,920	Emptying of Dog Bins
£ 105	Fundraising and Events

So, at the moment a small surplus of £560 to add to the balance sheet this year. Looking ahead the picture looks bleak with the prospect of our Investment Income being halved due to the reduction in interest rates and the fact that many companies are either reducing or not paying any dividends to cope with the impact of the recession. In common with everyone holding stock market investments the market value of our holding has been slashed. Fortunately the Trust had a lot of its endowment in cash before the real crash so we will not be forced to sell at knock-down values.

Recreation

Snow in February saw the North Down a hive of activity with toboggans and sledges of all shapes and sizes making best use of the few days of fun down the slopes. The short days were well used, right until last light.



Dates for your diary

1st Saturday of month Stapleford Bird Club on the Down
12th -14th June 2009 Cambridge Natural History Society Conversazione
Michaelmas 2009 Downland Walks around - dates to be announced
10th October 2009 AGM Johnson Hall, Stapleford
4th April 2010 Easter Day Service on Down with Breakfast
June 2010 Display at Stapleford Village Show
29th September 2010 Member's 21st Birthday Occasion

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