



What a Wonderful Weald

Help us keep it that way



Wealden Wildlife: threats & protection

Historically WKPS has focused mainly upon building and planning issues, although we have very often included wildlife preservation and protection in our campaigning.

For this issue of Watch on the Weald, closely following on Chris Packham's national campaign, our front-page focus

is on wildlife. Nationally, Packham has recently written, the UK is ranked 189th out of 218 countries recently assessed for 'biodiversity intactness'. 'We are among the most nature-depleted countries in the world'. His People's Manifesto for Wildlife seeks government initiatives including outdoor learning in every primary school,

bird boxes on all new-builds and even NHS 'eco-prescribing', but above all he asks us to 'wean ourselves off the damaging farming that has fed us cheaply, but at an appalling price to nature'. Headed by a ban on glyphosate, this will not appeal to some of our readers, but it deserves the modest publicity we can give it.

Nature Notes

The green agenda is being taken seriously by Government in preparing environmental policy post-Brexit. This is vitally important



Silver-washed fritillary

in the context of more and more bad news relating to species decline, marine pollution from plastics, and other stories of doom and gloom.

On a positive note the remarkable summer from early June onwards did quite a lot to right some of the wrongs perpetrated by the Beast from the East. Spring bird migration was late and early butterfly numbers were disappointing but, once the summer took hold, we began to see a number of breeding bird successes in fledged second and third broods. There were also some exceptional woodland butterfly numbers with White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries to the fore.

However, the highlight at Moat Farm was three separate fledged broods of Barn Owls.

At the last count six adult birds appear to have successfully produced 14 youngsters which are hopefully establishing new territory around the county.

We must never forget that the success of any species depends on adequate food. In the case of Swallows, Nightingales and Warblers the food supply tends to be in the form of insects and other invertebrates. In the case of Barn Owls we need an explosion of short tailed field voles. The Barn Owl successes indicate that the Voles had a particularly good year.

It is all about food chains and the predation of one species on another. That is the way of the world!

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman

Kent's Wildlife is Wonderful!

Local Wildlife Sites

Kent and Medway hold some wonderful wildlife habitats. When thinking of the best areas, our internationally designated wetlands or nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), such as Hothfield Heathlands and Marden Meadows, may spring to mind. However, there are other areas, often just as rich, which receive no legal protection. Many of these are recognised as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).

The current suite of over 460 Local Wildlife Sites includes threatened habitats, such as chalk grassland or ancient woodland, and sites important for certain rare plants or animals.

In the landscape of Kent, Local Wildlife Sites also form stepping stones and corridors, providing links through the countryside so wildlife can move between the nationally important (for example SSSIs and National Nature Reserves) and the internationally important sites (such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Ramsar Sites) and official nature reserves, which otherwise could be isolated islands. Therefore Local Wildlife Sites, although non-statutory,

should also be valued and protected. They currently cover a total area of over 27,500 hectares, which equates to roughly 7% of the county. They range from tiny churchyards important for their diversity of lichens, to large grazing marsh sites of over 1,000 hectares which are important for plants and birds. As they are not legally protected, they rely on landowners and managers looking after them through their own goodwill. Fortunately many people do enjoy the wildlife on their land and are keen to care for it.

Although most Local Wildlife Sites are on private land, there are some for which access for visitors is allowed, often areas owned by parish councils or public bodies. In the Weald area you could visit one of the woodland Local Wildlife Sites such as Hemsted Forest, with its damp, flower-rich rides, or Bedgebury Forest with its wide rides and interesting wetland areas. The Pinetum is considered to support one of the richest fungal floras in Kent!

A little further afield, you could also admire a wildlife-rich churchyard such as Boughton Monchelsea or Frittenden Cemetery with their species-rich

grasslands. Churchyards are also often important due to a wide variety of lichens and mosses found on gravestones, walls and trees or uncommon grassland fungi. From the far side of Boughton Monchelsea churchyard, behind the church, there is a beautiful view over the private deer park, another Local Wildlife Site, and the Weald of Kent.

Kent Wildlife Trust oversees the Local Wildlife Site monitoring programme on behalf of the Kent Nature Partnership. The Trust can offer land management advice, and, if you are an owner of part of a Local Wildlife Site, we will be particularly pleased to hear from you.

Information on Local Wildlife Sites and a webmap showing their boundaries can be viewed on our KWT website: www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-wild-spaces/local-wildlife-sites.

Alison Riggs

Kent Wildlife Trust



Louisa Lake, Bedgebury Forest

Wildlife in the AONB: new discoveries

The High Weald AONB is one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in North West Europe. Many of its small, irregular shaped fields are managed as meadow or pasture, containing small pockets of wildlife-rich grassland; these habitats are extremely rare, but recent surveys have suggested that there is a significant number of valuable 'undiscovered' grassland sites.

In June of this year, a team of specialists from the High Weald AONB Partnership and Natural England surveyed some 63 fields in the Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster area, just in Sussex, on the Kent border, where landowners are working together to achieve landscape-scale environmental benefits. Traditional management of these habitats is costly, and the survey results, with their finding of species-rich grassland 'with a wide range of habitats', can, it is hoped, help the local Farm Cluster members to secure financial support for their management through the current Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

It could be a model to follow elsewhere in the Weald.



Watch on the Weald recommends readers to consult the excellent highwealdwalks.org for its advice on over 30 High Weald walks. Their High Weald Walking Festival, designed to help walkers of all abilities, was celebrated in September of this year.



Nightingales within 5 miles of Ashford Town Centre

On the evening of 24 May WKPS chairman Mike Bax entertained about 20 members to an evening of wildlife experiences at Moat Farm, Shadoxhurst.

Immediately adjoining the farm to the north is Orlestone Forest, one of the remaining hotspots for the iconic Nightingale. Ringing there is organised every year by the British Trust for Ornithology, who are seeing reasonably consistent numbers being maintained at between 40 and 50 breeding pairs.

One of the fascinating features of the ringing operation is that the Orlestone ringer has also devoted time to ringing nightingales in their winter quarters on the west coast of Africa (Gambia and Sierra Leone). Believe it or not, he has ringed nightingales from Orlestone on his African visits, and vice versa. These remarkable birds travel over 3000 miles on their spring and late summer migrations, and have been found to return to the same 100 metre grid square in order to breed.

Moat Farm hosts between five and ten breeding pairs each year and we went out in vehicles to listen to the evocative song. The nightingales did not let us down, nor did a pair of tawny owls who put in a fly-past.

On the way in, we visited the Harp Meadows. These are traditional hay meadows where we saw the first flowering of Common Spotted Orchids and would have liked to spend longer if the light had not been beginning to turn to dusk.

Housing in the 'WKPS' Wealden countryside

Our much loved Wealden countryside envelops a remarkably large area, and includes parts of the three Planning Authorities of Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone, all being within reasonable distance from Biddenden, where the original WKPS stalwarts of the 1960s hatched the Society's foundation plans.

In the present climate of ceaseless government requirement for more houses, WKPS's task has become ever harder, but spearheaded by our indefatigable Planning Secretary, Peta Grant, we manage, not entirely to stem the suburbanisation and countryside loss, but at least to play a role in checking, amending and mitigating it.

Since the spring issue of Watch on the Weald, our area, despite the protection which AONB designation should afford most of it, has inevitably suffered. Rightly, nothing angers our members more than greenfield loss to substantial housing applications which provide very little that is 'affordable', but many sizeable dwellings, each occupying considerable space. To these, we invariably object, but they may be permitted under central government policy when the local Planning Authority has fallen behind the nightmarish increases of allocated dwellings demanded by central government. Keeping up with those requirements, when so much of the green countryside is precious, has at times proved too

difficult, so that developers have been able to induce Inspectors to accede to controversial applications. Ashford seems at last to be up to latest figures demanded, Tunbridge Wells is still on the way, and Maidstone's position is not clear to us.

Of the bigger housing applications over the last few months, we have been glad when we have been able to support, and perhaps helped to modify, some: these include the 45 houses (35% affordable) in Biddenden itself, 28 in High Halden and 17 replacing existing buildings in Shadoxhurst. Some other substantial applications we have objected to in vain; of current ones, not yet determined, we share our local members' distress about yet further damaging, polluting and traffic-jamming ones for poor Hawkhurst, we think the Sandhurst application for 27 houses on an unallocated greenfield site is intolerable, and we similarly oppose the 30 'residential properties' sought south of Ashford Road in St Michael's. We opposed a separate Shadoxhurst application, mercifully refused, for 'up to 40'.

Utterly sympathetic as we are to the great need of modestly paid Wealden people for housing that they can afford, we shall continue to fight applications which do nothing for them but which make fat profits for fortunate landowners and for developers building expensive greenfield properties for the better off.

National Parks and AONBs need your feedback

As part of The Government's 25 year Environment Plan, an independent review of England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are being undertaken.

The review, led by writer Julian Glover, will explore how these iconic landscapes meet the public's needs in the 21st century – including whether there is scope for the current network of 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks to expand – and explore how access to these beloved landscapes can be improved, how those who live and work in them can be better supported, and their role in growing the rural economy.

It is a unique opportunity for anyone to share their thoughts and opinions; you do not need to answer every question in the

survey if you do not want to, and you can also save your progress and complete it at a later date if you're pushed for time.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/landscapes-review-call-for-evidence>

The last day to give feedback is 18th December.



WKPS has always considered AONB designation of the High Weald alone as anomalous. Much of the Low Weald is worthy of AONB status particularly with the unsustainable development pressure around Ashford and villages to the West.

Please make your own views known.

Housing pressure: The view from Ashford

The gleeful shouts of Villagers could be heard throughout the land. The Ashford Borough Council Plan is sound. The Gladman developers have recently withdrawn from Biddenden and Brabourne – a fairy tale end to their interference with Ashford Borough Council (ABC) intentions to control development ascendant. Yes, to houses but where we and residents agree and in the numbers that are absorbable within each location....

But of course we do not live in a fairy tale. As the Grimm brothers regularly point out there is invariably a sting in the tail. 'If you want to be in control then why not talk with the developers and agree number and locations?', I hear you ask. But past experience of seeking agreement with developers has sometimes been bruising: offers for land carry telephone number salaries at the top of the Developer world. In other words the stakes are high.

In the recent past ABC tried in conjunction with Smarden village to put forward 25 as an acceptable number. Well, the inspector interpreted that as the village says Yes to more housing, so imposed 50. Not dissimilar to the way in which Tenterden came to have 500 figure imposed on it whereas ABC had offered 250. The Government (HMG) is still demanding c.1000 houses in Ashford Borough per year. Some will recall that figure from Prescott days when we fought off higher numbers put forward by Professor Crow. The current base requirement for new houses in Ashford is approximately 450 for the needs of our children from partner breakups .

Recently life appeared to change when the inspector examining ABC Plan proposals was judging whether we were on board with the NPPF (aka The Framework) He listened to those residents who spoke so eloquently during his hearing and he turned down some sites which attempted

to distribute housing close to some of our main roads.

However, we have now discovered why: not because he was Cuddly but because the ABC housing numbers were not large enough. He seems to have been seeking a new village with town potential starting with 1000 houses and then ...?? Although we have a breathing space by 2020, the new Framework has laid down new improved (actually very much worse) methods of assessing demand. Naturally ABC will tread very cautiously with much research. We have a breathing space, and for the meantime we will concentrate on bringing forward areas which have been in the pipeline for many years but are not in the current plan.

**Paul Clokie
Ashford BC
Portfolio Holder for Planning**

Saving a Village Pub



For many well-known reasons, the number of village pubs has much fallen nationally since the early 1970s: from 75,000 to the present 47,000. happily the rate of decline has slowed recently, thanks in part to innovations including good restaurants, a wider range of drinks, and more attractive interiors

and grounds. Here in the Weald, many smaller pubs have closed, but others have survived and flourished, generally on account of successful entrepreneurial management and the essential investment.

Sutton Valence's Swan Inn, a Wealden hall house built in 1413, had been a pub for two hundred years, and our 'local', for the last fourteen of them, but latterly, with adjacent parking very difficult, and competing against three other pubs in the small village, had become unprofitable. Its pub chain owners had sold it, and the buyer obtained Change of Use permission, to domestic use. We bought it from him four years ago.

The Swan was in a terrible condition: it is incomprehensible what commercial

owners are allowed to do to a Listed building which private owners are not. We had experience, however, having already lived in and restored three Listed hall houses. Now this was a similar project, but a very big one. Exhaustive and exhausting, it took us three years.

The house is beautiful now. This is an iconic village building. It has memories for many people. As such we welcome visitors (usually by arrangement), although The Swan no longer has a dartboard and no longer sells beer!

But if you want to save your local pub (or your village shop, or your post office) the message is always the same: use it, invest in it, or lose it.

David Northcroft

Wonders of the Weald

We are lucky to live in the Weald, for it is an area remarkably rich in literary associations, history and architectural gems. All around us every day we see, and probably take for granted, the many delightful examples of English vernacular architecture that are scattered all over the Weald in villages and hamlets.

Perhaps most impressive are the ecclesiastical buildings we have inherited from the past, many of which contain treasures that demand to be admired alongside the greatest examples to be found in the country at large. These include some outstanding funerary memorial effigies.

At St Mary's in Goudhurst are two of the most magnificent memorials in the area. These are to the Culpeper family of Bedgebury. The earlier one, to Sir Alexander Culpeper (died 1537), is extremely rare because it is carved in wood. Husband and wife lie side by side with their feet resting demurely on their couchant dogs' backs. The carving is remarkable, a simulacrum of stiff brocade, for the folds of the drapery are so deep and true that you feel the need to touch to verify the reality of wood. Though the bodies are held in a rigid, traditionally stylised posture with hands in prayerful state over their bosoms, the faces are clearly differentiated and bear an uncanny resemblance to contemporary faces in the area!

In the Lady Chapel we find the 1608 alabaster memorial to Alexander's son, Thomas, his armour-clad grandson Alexander (d.1599) his still living great-grandson Anthony, and to Anthony's wife and offspring. Kneeling on tasselled cushions beneath a canopy decked with classical columns, Alexander and his wife Mary face each other, hands aloft in prayer. Below



their deeply sculpted figures, in regimented single file, kneel Anthony, his wife and their enormous family of twelve sons and four daughters. Among the boys are two babies still in their swaddling clothes, a touching code indicating these died as babies. The crisp and elegant sculpture is so realistic you cannot believe that each little neck ruff is not regularly removed and washed by the incumbent.

In the chancel is a smaller, Jacobean memorial to the Champion family, similarly adorned with kneeling parents and children, several of whom carry a grisly, Catholic memento mori of a skull, indicating that they predeceased their parents. There is also an impressive bust of a later, heavily bewigged Champion, whose sculpted hands and knuckles are so true to life you are tempted to shake them.

As a record of English sculptural styles (and masterpieces!) over nearly two hundred years, St. Mary's, Goudhurst is hard to beat.

Linda Hall
TWBC Councillor

Benenden's gift to WKPS

Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society (BACS) was convened 30 years ago at a time when groups needed to come together in a structured and organised way to oppose developments in our village which sits in the High Weald AONB. At its peak the Society boasted some 200 members. More recently individuals have gained access to planning via online portals and can easily make their own objections from the comfort of their own homes. Coupled with an increasing level of apathy about the 'general good' and more interest in one's own 'back yard', this has meant a decline in interest in Society membership and management. While many of the village enjoy its walking

and social side, its original purpose, being superseded by technology, was no longer needed and so we decided to close the Society down.

BACS made some lasting contributions to the village. They included the siting of a kissing gate on a popular walkers' route which had been inaccessible to many elderly and less mobile villagers because of a stile, as well as supporting the purchase and placement of a defibrillator in the village.

Following a meeting of the members and a vote, we are pleased to pass £1,245.63 of the disbursement monies



The Kissing Gate

over to WKPS in the certain knowledge it will be used to continue to protect some of the glorious Wealden scenery the members of BACS so enjoy.

Peter Ellis
BACS

Legacies & Wills

WKPS have received a generous legacy of £25,000 from one of our members. We are still awaiting permission from the family to name the generous lady.

Not that we want to lose any of our members, but please remember that WKPS is a worthwhile cause to leave money to in your will.

The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution

Registered Charity No. 208858

R.A.B.I.
Supporting Farming Families

R.A.B.I request the pleasure of your company at
The R.A.B.I Raceday & Lunch

Monday 25th February 2019
Gates open 11:45am with lunch served at 12:45pm prompt

Plumpton Racecourse, Plumpton, East Sussex BN7 3AL

Tickets cost £67.50 each (tables of 8, 10 or 12) ~ Tickets are limited!
Includes: Entrance badge, welcome drink of Bluebell Sparkling wine, 2 course lunch with tea and coffee, Afternoon tea and cake, complimentary car parking, full colour race card

New for 2019: talk by Jockey Tipster, Dave Cross

For further information please contact
Sally Field - R.A.B.I Regional Manager: 01903 882741 or sally.field@rabi.org.uk

Watch on the Weald is glad to publicise farming's oldest and largest welfare charity, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (R.A.B.I.). Founded in 1860, R.I.B.A. makes grants or single payments to needy working or retired farmers, farm workers and their dependants who have spent ten years or more in the industry. Scrupulously organised, with a strong Kent branch, R.A.B.I. helps, not to pay business bills, but, for example, to pay for needed items of equipment including disability equipment, and to give advice and make grants under other circumstances of hardship. Such needs are as great now as they have been since R.I.B.A.'s foundation. Readers who know of farming people in need should certainly urge them to contact R.A.B.I. for help through the bad times.

WKPS Fundraising lunch

On 31st October, 50 of our members enjoyed a superb lunch at the London Beach Hotel, Tenterden. The guest speaker was The Rt Hon The Lord Clarke of Stone-cum-Ebony.

The event raised over £1,000 for WKPS charitable funds. We do hope that you will be able to join us at the next lunch Wednesday 27th February.



Baron Clarke of Stone-cum-Ebony was formerly Master of the Rolls and Head of Civil Justice in England and Wales

what a wonderful weald help us keep it that way



wkps
weald of kent protection society

The aim of our dedicated team of volunteers is to protect our unique Wealden towns, villages and countryside from the effects of damaging and unsuitable development, preserving its charm and character for future generations to enjoy. We welcome active members to help us with a range of activities, from scrutinising planning applications to organising events. If, like us, you care about the Weald, please get in touch and get involved.

find out more: www.wkps.org.uk
secretary@wkps.org.uk 07919 871543

Dates for your 2019 diary

Wednesday 27th February

3 course subsidised lunch at London Beach Hotel, Tenterden with guest speaker, to be announced shortly (£25)

Friday 26th April

Late afternoon a tour of the beautiful Boldshaves Gardens at Woodchurch, Kent, home of our President, Peregrine Massey (£8.50)

Followed early evening by a wine tasting in the Barn at Boldshaves with John Brownsdon, Master of Wines (£10). The subject of which will be the benefits of the French Boozecruze! **Going to Calais to buy wine really saves money as the French don't have any "Excise Duty"**. Everyone attending will be offered the chance to order wine through John and enjoy his magnificent tasting

These events can be booked together or booked separately

May

A Nightingale Evening

An informative evening at Shadoxhurst where our Chairman Michael Bax will enlighten us with amazing facts about Nightingales and conservation issues. A tour follows which culminates in a trip into the woods to hear the Nightingales sing. A very popular and amazing evening, tickets will be limited.

Thursday 13th June

Annual General Meeting at Tenterden Town Hall

As always a nice social gathering to conduct a short business meeting followed by an interesting guest speaker

Please come and contribute, WKPS need proactive members to grow Merchandise will be on sale

To reserve a place on any of the above please contact secretary@wkps.org.uk or call 01580 861246

Subscriptions were due on 1st April, to save us sending out reminders please BACS to account no 01754514, sort code 30-90-28 or send a cheque to the Secretary.

WKPS also now offer Group subscriptions for Parish Councils and other similar organisations for only £25 and Corporate subscriptions for £95. Annual membership is only £15 individual and £20 per couple, to join please fill in the form on our website www.wkps.org.uk or email secretary@wkps.org.uk

WKPS are looking for volunteers for the following roles:

Press & PR
Editorial Committee for Watch on the Weald
Event Coordinator
Membership secretary

Please let the Society Secretary know if you are able to find an hour or two a week to help with any of the above. We have a vibrant and growing team of volunteers who all want to have fun and help WKPS grow. Come and join us.

WKPS out & about this summer



Volunteers manned the new WKPS branded Exhibition stand at both the Wealden Times Midsummer Fair at Hole Park Rolvenden and the Wealden Literary Festival at Boldshaves Garden, Woodchurch. We had all of our new merchandise for sale, which will soon be for sale on our website. We met some great people who were very interested in the work that WKPS do and happily signed up a few new members. My favourites have to be the amazing team from Canterbury Oast Trust displaying their Art at the Farm, all beautifully made by adults with learning difficulties who were on the stand next to us. We started off by thoroughly amusing them all as we struggled to put up the Exhibition stand for the first time. Once Peta and I realised we were trying to erect it upside down things improved, a few coffees later we had it all under control. A very tiring few days, and a big thank you to everyone who turned up and helped.

**Fay Merrick
Society Secretary**



wkps

The Weald of Kent Protection Society

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Chairman: Michael Bax

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Article submissions & letters please send to Society Secretary