



## NEWSLETTER

### AUTUMN 2021

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Registered Charity No. 1003110

### Welcome to the Autumn 2021

#### From the Chairman.

I hope all friends of Headley Heath are well. Life for all of us has changed dramatically since the onset of Covid-19 but, hopefully, access to the Heath again is a sign of things beginning to return to something near normality.

As you might expect, the onset of the virus curtailed the activities of the Friends; committee meetings could not be held and the closing of public access to the Heath stopped the walks we were planning for the spring/summer months. Notwithstanding this, there are some matters to report on.

First, however, it is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the passing away in July of Malcom Davies who was a founder member of the original volunteers group. Our sympathies have been sent to his wife, Sue and we are hoping to place a new bench on the Heath to mark his many years of contribution.

Your Committee is concerned at the interruption to its work of representing the users of the Heath to the National Trust and to its own programme of events and newsletters and that there has been little contact with you the members. Therefore, we are relaunching the Committee at the AGM and as well as resuming our quarterly newsletter with this Autumn 2021 edition, we are planning new walks in 2022 and to include a report in the new Headley and Boxhill Voice communication which is published monthly.

After long and meritorious services, our Treasurer, Paul Curtis has retired from that position and our representative of the Volunteers has retired from the Committee. Anyone who would like to join the Committee, especially if you are interested in becoming Treasurer (not an arduous responsibility), please contact Will McKee (email [William.mckee@btclick.com](mailto:William.mckee@btclick.com))

#### Summer on the Heath

As we are all aware it has been a difficult year for us humans but the Flora and Fauna on the Heath has carried on regardless of our problems. After the lifting of the lockdown the

visitor numbers increased dramatically and caused a few problems with the number of cars arriving and many of the main paths became heavily overused and damaged but now visitor numbers have dropped again they are recovering well.

Because of staffing problems and the volunteer groups not being allowed to work parts of the Heath have become more overgrown than usual but this has benefited the wildlife in some ways.

Those of you that visit the Heath will have noticed earlier in the year that the gorse had died back significantly, this was not restricted to Headley but had affected a large area of Southern England and the Midlands. Everyone was mystified about the cause and whether it would recover or not. It seems once scientists had carried out some research the damage was caused by the very cold winds in February which coincided with the plants putting on new growth and caused the damage, unusual as gorse is tough but at least it was not some new disease causing the problem. The gorse has now mostly recovered.

It was a good year for our native orchids with a good display of Bee Orchids but maybe less Common Spotted than usual. The later flowering Broad Leaved Helleborines have also put on a good show in their usual band along Jubilee Track.

In the spring there were at least two male cuckoos in the heath area which was lovely to hear. None of your Committee heard a nightjar and we are not sure if they bred this year or not - maybe the disturbance from the large numbers of dogs off leads disturbed them too much.

One of the ponds on the heath which was cleared of tree cover round it has produced good amounts of a rare plant which only survives in 3 or 4 ponds in the UK in a truly wild state not having been introduced.

## **National Trust Report**

As you will have no doubt noticed there has been little general maintenance or conservation work carried out on the Heath since early 2020, apart from essential work, due to the COVID pandemic.

During the past 18 months there has been a considerable increase in footfall and although it is pleasing to see that new people have discovered this lovely area it has brought its problems such as increased litter.

During the past few weeks a small team of volunteers and rangers have started some conservation work on the chalk grassland, ie the Terraces and Chalk Spur, removing unwanted vegetation on the open grassland such as hawthorn and dogwood. Cattle wont graze near thorn or woody vegetation so this important but slow work of removing scrub by hand promotes a better grazing coverage. The Chalk grassland areas (Area C) will be grazed in the Autumn/Winter. This is important for the Heath to retain its 'recovering

condition' status as a SSSI (Special Site of Scientific Interest). Failing to do this vital conservation work could push back the status to 'unfavourable'.

The unseasonal wet weather has resulted in a prolific growth of vegetation and some of the footpaths and bridleways are becoming quite overgrown. A plan has been put in place to clear these as soon as possible but with the small team of volunteers which are available this is likely to take some time.

The National Trust rangers are somewhat stretched at present due to a restructuring and the inability to recruit a replacement ranger for Headley. Despite a concerted effort they have been unable to find a suitable candidate. The previous ranger Fede has moved to Box Hill and with some assistants is doing his best to cover both areas. This together with COVID restrictions is impacting on their ability to bring back as many volunteers as they would wish to complete all the planned work.

### **Bits and Pieces**

If any friend has not yet paid their subscription, please send a cheque for £5.00 to our Chairman William McKee at Fraser Heath House, Boxhill Road, Tadworth, Surrey, KT20 7PD.

New members are always welcome so why not ask a friend who uses the Heath to join us,

### **Annual General Meeting 2021**

The Annual General Meeting of The Friends Of Headley Heath Association will be held at 2pm on Saturday November 20<sup>th</sup> 2021 in Headley Village Hall, Church Lane, Headley, KT18 6LD.

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