



# NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2018

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## Welcome to the Winter 2018 Newsletter

We have continued with our chalk grassland and heathland restoration work this winter by clearing the 60 year old secondary woodland. Contractors and volunteers have been very busy on the Heath during the past winter months. You may have seen contractors working on the terraces and at the bottom of Sixth Valley track with heavy machinery earlier this winter. The fantastic work carried out by the contractors involves using a 13.5 tonne digger to pull all the smaller trees out of the soil including the roots. The digger then carefully scrapes off the top soil layer that contains unwanted organic matter such as leaf litter from the colonising tree species as well as removing the seed bank of these. This approach shows to be more effective at regenerating chalk grassland as by removing the organic nutrients left by the colonising



*Contractors working at the bottom of the Terraces.*

woodland, the grassland species will be able to grow more effectively and flourish at a faster rate as they get a head start to slowly start to establish before the fight on the three B's starts (Birch, Bramble, and Bracken).

The bigger trees were felled by hand and the stumps treated. This is our second year of five, so we have three more years of clearance work to go. The work carried out to restore these habitats is funded by the Higher Level Stewardship that was agreed and obtained by the National Trust back in 2013.

We also continued doing clearance work on Canada Heath to restore lowland heathland. The 2017/18 section was entirely cleared by our fantastic volunteer teams with hard work, perseverance and sweat. They are such an incredible asset to the National Trust and in these cold months you can really appreciate it, as they come out in all weathers and give 100%. I organised a felling week/scrub bash on



*Volunteers stopping for a deserved tea break.*

the third week of February with a call of help to other NT properties across Surrey. We were graced with the help of rangers and volunteer teams from the following sites: Leith Hill, Box Hill, Bookham Commons, Landbarn Farm and Polesden Lacey. The scale of this gathering did not go unnoticed in the NT offices, as our General Manager and Countryside Manager got involved and joined our conservation work "getting their hands dirty". Overall it was a great success and we will repeat next year. We had over 80 volunteers helping us with our cause during the week, which comes to show the power that conservation has at joining people together as well as highlighting the great connection our National Trust teams have across Surrey. Together we are stronger!

One thing to mention is that the cleared areas might look a bit rough at the moment; this is normal and please be patient as it will take time to allow the native species of these habitats to establish. We are arranging work to clear the stumps that have been left on the cleared areas to remove as much nutrients from the soil and to allow us to use machinery safely without the risk of damaging it by 'hitting' the many stumps currently visible.

On another note spring on its way! We are starting to see the first signs on the heath and hearing the early birds such as the Chiffchaffs. Orchid florets will start to peak through on our grassland areas and the native bluebell will push



*Witch Hazel in Flower.*

through the woodland floor. Our trees are also showing signs of spring as sap and nutrients rush up their xylem and phloem reaching their branches. Early bloomers like the willow are opening up their buds.

The cattle will be back in May and will be on our lowland heathland area delivering our conservation grazing during the spring and summer months. Keep an eye out for signs displayed on the notice boards and gates stating where the cattle will be. They will be in either *Area A* or *Area B*.

*Federico Ghittoni – Area Ranger Headley Heath*

## **New Assistant Ranger LTV**

I started as the Assistant Ranger to Headley Heath in October 2017, having recently decided on a career change and studying for a Diploma in Countryside Management at Merrist Wood College. I loved this course which helped me decide that looking after the countryside was something I really wanted to do. I now look forward to putting what I have learned into practice!

I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and working with our enthusiastic team of volunteers who come out in all weathers to tackle the job at hand. As most of you know, we have begun a huge felling project, so were working on Middle Hill until December and are now tackling Canada Heath, clearing the areas of secondary woodland. There is a lot to get done before we stop at the end of February so as not to disturb wildlife, specifically, nesting birds.

*Sarah Henson – Assistant Ranger Headley Heath*

## **News from the Volunteers**

Work to date has involved a huge amount of staying out of the way of trees being felled, dragging the resulting logs, branches and brash to the fire site and raking up the brambles, bracken and other scrub that has been brush cut. This is hard work but you do get a great sense of satisfaction as you open up the vistas and start to connect the cleared areas with either the chalk grassland or the lowland heathland. I can't wait to see Headley in 10 years' time, once the restored areas that we cleared are more established with native species that belong to the specific habitats. On our felling week/scrub bash we had the chance to meet and work with many volunteers and rangers from across the Surrey Hills. We got an impressive amount of work done as well as having the chance to socialise and eat cake. In quieter moments we have built up the bird haven barriers - these are wonderful places and I really look forward to the summer months to see / hear which birds make these their sanctuaries, as well as seeing Headley Heath come into bloom. *Jon - HH Volunteer*