

Chairman's Letter

Dear Friends

There is no question that the summer of 2020 has been unprecedented, not only nationally but also for the Hurtwood. We have experienced periods of extreme heat and with this an increased risk of spontaneous fires. The intense heat has been interspersed with heavy rain and wind when our attention has necessarily switched to the risk of falling trees and branches. All this in addition to the pressures brought about by Covid 19, including vastly increased visitor numbers, fly tipping of garden rubbish, litter, overnight camping, open fires and barbeques. Throughout this period our stalwart Ranger, Mark Beaumont, has continued to be on call and on the Hurtwood as usual. Mark recalls some of his experiences over the summer in his article later in this newsletter.

Garden fly tip can generally be burnt when it is safe to do so but household and other rubbish is more problematic. Fly tip can be costly to dispose of, either requiring special treatment or because the volume is such that it must be collected by lorry and properly disposed of in landfill. This year we have been particularly grateful to receive a significant sum of money for fly tip removal from a concerned donor. I would also like to extend a huge thank you to all those who have kindly donated to our charity over the last few months, perhaps as a result of visiting the Hurtwood for the first time.

A major issue for the communities around the Hurtwood has been the congestion caused by the number of new visitors. Many of these have been bikers, who discovered the Hurtwood for the first time because the major biking centres in the South East have all been closed. During the weekend before lockdown the impact of increased visitor numbers was profound, especially in Peaslake, being a location with a large car park, shop, pub and easy access to the hills.

This continued into lockdown; Peaslake was mobbed every weekend and able to offer only a limited service, Peaslake Stores became overwhelmed. Seeking a solution that might work for everyone, Peaslake Stores in conjunction with Coverwood Farm suggested they could organise a pop-up refreshment facility in Walking Bottom Car Park at weekends during the summer months. With the approval of the landowners and support from ourselves this became a reality during late May and from all accounts has been accepted as an enormous success.

In conclusion I thought it important to let everyone know that we intend to launch a review of our strategy for biking on the Hurtwood. Although we anticipate biking activity to diminish as bikers return to their normal riding centres, the increase in biking during lockdown has highlighted the need for an update. An update is also timely because of:

- Changes in the technology of biking, including electric bikes, both of which make mountain biking even more accessible
- The consequential impact on the environment of the Hurtwood, including an increase in illegal trail building
- The increased risk of conflict with other users.

The review will be undertaken jointly with our landowners and be led by David Clifford assisted by Alex MacKinnon (both directors of Foth Trustee Company Ltd) and our Ranger, Mark Beaumont. There will be ample opportunity for readers to provide input to the review after it gets under way later this year.

Peter Copping, Foth Chairman

Friends of the Hurtwood

Administrators to the public rights of access to 2,500 acres of land in the parishes of Albury, Cranleigh, Ewhurst and Shere
Registered Charity 2000053

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The Covid 19 effect

Some interesting, if not a little crazy, times in 2020! Vast visitor numbers have led to increased workloads, particularly after the first six weeks when the lockdown restrictions on outdoor exercise started to be relaxed. You may have noticed that it seemed everybody in the country had descended upon the hills. I know I certainly did.



There is no doubt our visitor numbers increased dramatically during the period of lockdown. I guess it was only to be expected that visitors looking for something to do, and as everything else was shut, the countryside and beaches were the spaces open. Many who previously may never have chosen to visit the area decided to do so.

Fire was one of my biggest concerns during the period with so many new visitors not understanding the rules about lighting fires or having barbecues or the potential for a major fire. I had to explain on many occasions the risks of fire burning underground in the peat soil we have here.

We did have one relatively small fire of about two acres on the western side of Holmbury Hill. It was not possible to ascertain the exact cause but in this instance my feeling was that it was started by a stray firework from the clapping for the NHS celebrations, as the time of ignition was directly after 8pm and fireworks were seen in the area at that time.

Fly tipping

Fly tipping has been a major problem, initially with large quantities of builders waste and now more latterly alongside large quantities of garden waste, smaller but more frequent sacks of garden waste, presumably as the household tips are shut.



Holmbury Hill Fort

We've managed to complete various tasks though, despite the high visitor numbers. New barriers have been erected on the eastern side of the Greensand Way on Holmbury Hill and significant cutting back of the main ride from car park no 13 has now been completed. We've also now just started again on continuing more work on the clearance of the ditches and banks on the Hill fort. Currently we are working our way around the east, to join up with the completed work on the north.



Managing bike trails

We have closed two bike trails on Winterfold as they both led riders onto private property and some riders were then causing problems for the landowner once they were there. We decided the best course of action was to remove the trails from our side, and this seems to have largely alleviated the problem.



We have also undertaken work to remove some dangerous jumps that had been added to an already existing bike trail on the south side of Pitch Hill.

As we already had the digger for these jobs, and with some spare time, we also cleared the main water runoff gullies above Peaslake cemetery to help reduce water running into the village. Unfortunately we can't do much about the water collected on the asphalt road and running into Peaslake as this is mostly due to the way the road was built with cambers in the wrong direction for the water to escape. The road wasn't built by Foth and isn't part of our responsibility.

Work on the tractor cutting the main rides and the fire breaks continues, though a bit slower than usual mostly due to the high visitor numbers, meaning I'm having to continually stop the mowers to allow people to go past. The mowers have a 50m safety zone around it as it can throw out stones from all directions at a considerable speed.

As I write visitor numbers are starting to decrease but still much higher than usual for this time of year, no doubt aided by the dry warm weather, maybe we'll see a change later in the year, but who knows?

It's been an unusual and incredibly challenging period in the Ranger's life, hopefully not to be repeated. It has been interesting to chat to new



visitors and explain about the Hurtwood and how it works. Sadly though there have been some very unpleasant characters who simply don't like being told that they can't do whatever they like in the countryside. Fortunately for me, I have a very thick skin!

Mark Beaumont

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New reflector stumps to protect Walking Bottom

Four separate rows of stumps with reflectors have been installed along Walking Bottom between St Mark's Church and the car park to deter cyclists from eroding the bank by doing wheelies.

Villagers upset by the expanding muddy scars had raised the matter with local councillors. Shere Parish Council initially tried to protect the bank by encouraging brambles to colonise it but this did not work and so councillors agreed to install the bollards.

Cllr Gerry Reffo said: "So like most things in Peaslake, concerns and improvements are discussed at the Community Council and where possible parish councillors seek support from the Parish Council to address concerns and implement improvements."

Car Park Blitz

Over the summer many people visited the Hurtwood to have some 'Dr Green' time which undoubtedly helped with physical health and mental well-being during the Lockdown. We are sooo lucky to have access to this special place in the Surrey Hills. To help raise awareness of the organisation of the Hurtwood (and the need for funding), two of the Foth management committee undertook what we call Car Park Blitzes on either a Saturday or Sunday morning during June, July and August.



Essentially we have informal conversations with visitors as they arrive at or prepare to leave the car parks. Dressed in our hi-viz vests, with the historical name of Hurtwood Control on them, we engaged with walkers, mountain-bikers and horse riders. Typically we asked whether they knew about Friends of the Hurtwood? were already supporters and donated? If not, then we made the case for helping to fund our charity with one-off or, preferably, regular donations. Our recently updated leaflet and the new website helped to make the case for financial support by the active users of the area.

During these conversations we also asked where the visitor had come from. We get many visitors from around Surrey, and those that travel out from London. Plus we had visitors from as far afield as Southend, Southampton, Milton Keynes and even Wales!

Everyone was positive that the Friends of the Hurtwood needed support. Several times folks have suggested that we charge for parking at the 14 car parks. We hesitate to do so, since this might induce visitors to avoid the charges by parking in the villages (where parking is always at a premium and traffic becomes congested). So if you engaged with one of us this summer, thanks for your donation. If your contribution still needs to be organised, just go to www.foth.co.uk and hit the Donate button!

Nancy Loates-Taylor

Forestry update

Readers who have known the Hurtwood for many years will be well aware of the changes to the forest over the past 15 years. The Shere Manor Estate owns approximately 750 acres running between Holmbury and Peaslake up to Holmbury Hill. The Estate is proud to provide a resource for the many visitors to enjoy and a home for wildlife that lives there, but it is also to a large extent a commercial forest producing timber, whilst also providing wider benefits.

When I started as agent for the Estate in 2004, the woodlands were just beginning to reach maturity having been brilliantly nurtured by my predecessor, Jonathan Wells. In many places the Estate was a largely homogenous blanket of scots pine. A plan was drawn up to ensure the harvestable timber was gradually collected without causing a radical change to the landscape, with wider benefits to the wildlife and amenity of the area. Inevitably the changes caused some concern but I do hope that by now even ardent critics of the plan can see what the aim was.

16 years later the plan is well underway and I believe the Estate is a more interesting place. It remains primarily a commercial woodland but the more varied landscape with cleared areas, mature trees and young plantations providing a more sustainable form of forestry for the Estate, together with better amenity for visitors and a diverse habitat for wildlife. I particularly enjoy the wider pathways and softer edges which have been created to provide a better habitat for invertebrates, birds and reptiles.

The ongoing programme to restructure the Shere Manor Estate's woodland continues with further felling planned in the future. However much of our attention is now turned to the young generation of trees which can be seen at various growth stages across the hill. Most are doing well, although some areas seem to take a while to get growing. I am convinced the reason is mostly climate related; we have had three very long dry springs in a row and on the sandy soils the trees, which are entirely self-sown, find it nearly impossible to germinate in such conditions, which is why the most recently felled areas have yet to flourish. No doubt the British weather will give us a wet cool spring in due course and it will be interesting to see whether there is a noticeable difference.



You may have noticed that small areas have been fenced off. These are deer exclosures.



Roe deer cause a lot of damage to young trees and as part of the Estate's agreement with the Forestry Commission, a deer management plan has to be put in place. Many forestry owners undertake this by controlling deer numbers, however with the number of visitors at all times of day and night the Estate is reluctant to allow shooting if at all possible. So to keep the forestry commission happy, the exclosures were put in to demonstrate the effect of deer browsing by monitoring what happens where there is none.

Clearly the deer do damage the pine trees but interestingly, they seem to prefer the silver birch, acting as a natural weed control in the plantations. Whilst some pines get nibbled, enough survive to make it to maturity. The roe deer are hard to spot but are spread across in some numbers, hiding in the thicker plantations and deeper parts of the wood during the day until most of the humans return to their burrows.

Alex Wilks, Batcheller Monkhouse

Bumblebees among the trees



As fungi force their way up through the leaf litter in the Hurtwood and the heather fades from a glowing purple to pale brown, we are reminded of the approaching shorter days of winter in Peaslake. The passing buzz and hum of insects is replaced by the flurry of falling leaves, the flowers by berries, nuts and fruit on the trees and the insects by migrating birds gathering to fly to warmer climes. As the food sources disappear so do the bumblebees as they dig

their holes in the soft ground ready for hibernation.

For the bumblebee, (of which there are 24 species in the UK) their busy summer cycle is over. The workers have done their job of pollinating the tasty hurtle berries, blackberries, crab apples and heather in the Hurtwood. The colony, which developed over the spring and summer months, has done its work and died as part of their natural cycle, leaving the young impregnated queens to feed up before their long winter's sleep.

When the queens emerge in spring, they make a new nest from dried grass or moss underground, in which to lay their eggs. A few weeks later the new colony of pollinators start to emerge, ready to go to work and continue the cycle.

However, bumblebees and many other pollinating species are often under threat by the actions of humans (two species of bumblebees in the UK have been lost since the second world war). As a result of changes in land use, increased use of chemicals and parasites and diseases their numbers are in decline. Yet their unsung service to us remains unchanged; pollinating a massive third of our food crops from soft fruit to rapeseed (valued at over £600 million a year in the UK). The managed Hurtwood heathland provides bumblebees with a huge habitat to nest and feed in and surprisingly, it plays another very important role in the health of the bumblebee population.

In 2019, Kew Gardens and Royal Holloway University studied the medicinal properties of nectar producing plants. Heather was discovered to have the highest level of medicinal protection for the bumblebees, and in particular against a parasite 'Crithidia bombi' which reduces the bumblebee's ability to distinguish between flowers which contain nectar and those which don't, leading to starvation.

So next spring when you are out in the managed environment of the Hurtwood enjoying yourselves, whether it be dog walking, wildlife watching, mountain biking, running (or in our household's case all of the above!), keep an eye out for the humble bumblebee and perhaps marvel at its work.

Becky Harris-Jones



The Walking Bottom Car Park Café

The Hurtwood was anything but locked down this summer, seen as one of the few places people could go to enjoy fresh air and exercise in socially-distanced safety. Peaslake thronged with cyclists, dog-walkers, joggers, picnic-ers, bikes and cars. But it was not business as usual.

Given the social distancing restrictions as a result of the Coronavirus, and the wish to reduce the footfall in the village, Peaslake Village Stores decided to reduce its usual takeaway service at the weekends. This

plus the increase in use of online grocery shopping meant that the shop balance sheet was severely impacted. "Our running costs outweighed our takings by some margin and so we knew we had to do something different if we were to safeguard the jobs of our amazing staff," said Gill Lucken.

Tim Metson who runs the Fillet and Bean events catering business was similarly impacted by covid, in that his events were all cancelled as the country went into lockdown, and so they came up with an idea to help everyone – the shop, the catering business, the cyclists, FotH and the village.

With the blessing of the owners of Walking Bottom Car Park, Jonathon Olsen and Alison Fortescue, Tim's mobile catering unit was set up in the open area beyond the parking and stocked with food and snacks prepared by the village shop. Under planning rules it was permissible to have the unit there for 28 days over the year, and it was set up each weekend with generator and supplies, and removed each night, up to August Bank Holiday.

"Everyone came up trumps," said Gill. "Our staff and families all did their bit to make this work, giving up their free time and often working long hours. When the chips were down everyone worked just that bit harder and I was so proud of the staff in the shop who were absolutely brilliant, doing extra cooking, packing, cleaning and acting as couriers to and from Walking Bottom car park, come rain or shine!"

Tim said: "I thought we could collaborate and do something that would also help with the crowding in the village. We added burgers to the fare on offer and it got very good traction. We also took the opportunity to repay the Friends of the Hurtwood by raising awareness of the work they do to all our customers and ask for a cheeky donation whenever possible. I know there was definitely an upturn in subscribing too.

"It was a big commitment for us bringing the kit in and out but it was a real success. We had 30 to 40 people queueing up at times – all socially distanced using our marked out and taped off queuing system! It was so important to support the shop. If you lose a shop like that, the village goes dead. It was a win win all round.

Tim had particular praise for Stephanie, Gill's daughter, who was a key driver in the fundraising for FotH. As a result, donations compensated for the loss of FotH income normally generated by Peaslake Fair, which of course was cancelled this year. All round a terrific community effort.

Gill and Tim finished by adding, "we just want to say a massive thank you to the landowners, the FotH, our amazing staff and families and of our course our customers. Thank you all for making this a success.



Membership – we want to increase it!

Here's how you can help.

- 1- If you have a neighbour, friend, relative or colleague who uses the Hurtwood and isn't yet a Friend, please ask them to join.
- 2- Help out at our regular Car Park Blitzes, see article on page 4.
- 3- Recruit businesses that directly benefit from visitors to the Hurtwood as sponsors.

Woodcock and 'Goatsuckers' in the Hurtwood

The Hurtwood in the summer months, as dusk approaches and most of the cyclists and walkers have gone, is the time to see Woodcock and Nightjars. Woodcock will normally be the first to appear. Plump, long-billed birds a little smaller than a Wood Pigeon, the males fly just above the tree tops with a direct but jerky flight known as "roding", displaying to females and uttering a curious low croak followed by a higher sneeze-like call.

They make a circuit of their territory so the same bird can be seen repeatedly. Cynthia James and I have been surveying Woodcock numbers for many years for the British Trust for Ornithology and have counted more than 20 birds in a 90 minute watch, which could indicate five or six active male birds. Numbers seem to be stable with a possible recent decline.

As darkness falls, the Nightjars begin to call, a strange churring sound, likened by some to a distant moped. Then the birds themselves will appear - rather like a small Kestrel or Cuckoo in shape but with a buoyant, swirling flight, occasionally clapping their wings with a surprisingly loud "crack".

They swoop and hover as they hunt for moths and other insects as small as mosquitoes. They have a very wide gape to help them catch their prey, which led to their old vernacular name of 'Goatsucker'. They favour the more open areas and wide rides with a few taller trees to use as churring perches.

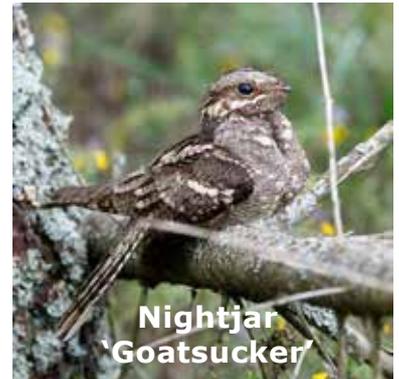
Both species are ground nesting, making them very vulnerable to disturbance from walkers, dogs and cyclists away from established tracks. They spend the day on the ground relying on their beautifully vermiculated brown or greyish plumage for camouflage. Woodcock prefer lightly wooded damper areas with leaf mould where they can probe for food. The new cleared areas have boosted Nightjar numbers. 2020 has been the best year I can remember, with sometimes half a dozen in sight or earshot at once!

Nightjars are summer visitors present from May to September; Woodcock are resident here and can be seen roding from April to the end of July. A walk down the wide track from the Millennium Pinetum to the area known as Fiveways on a warm still June evening should provide good sightings of both species and mosquitoes - you can't expect the Nightjars to catch them all!

Jeff Colombe Peaslake. October 2020



Woodcock



Nightjar
'Goatsucker'



Sunday 15th November 2020

Off-Road Duathlon and 10km Trail Run

Raising funds for Friends of the Hurtwood, the bike route takes in some of the best single track there is in Surrey!

At the moment, this is looking to be a socially distanced event with participants setting off over a rolling start window. There will not be a mass start

Events include a 10k Trail Run, 10k Canicross,

four Off-Road Duathlon classes involving run/bike/run, a Bike Only and a 20k Mountain Bike course. The duathlon events are chip-timed.

Parking is accessed through the Holmbury Hill Car Park (RH5 6NU), which is off Radnor Road. Marshals will be there to direct you. After parking, follow the signs to the Registration Tent.

Race packs are picked up on the day

Registration from 07:30am.

Rolling Starts from 09:00am.

Catering will be provided by the Heartwork Coffee trailer from Bulmer Farm, Holmbury St Mary.

Run with your dog. The November conditions will be ideal for our 4 legged friends.

Prizes will be provided by Vittoria Tyres and others to be confirmed.



<http://www.triadventure.co.uk/the-hurtleberry/>

Social Media update

You may have noticed we've recently had a shake up of our social media accounts. We've consolidated some and created others to make it easier for all to keep up to date with what we've been up to.

Our Instagram account **#friendsofthehurtwood** has been live for some time and we're getting great interactions from lots of you lovely people. We have updated our Facebook page and Twitter account also. Of course, a much bigger step was our new website which for the same reasons we have completely overhauled. The website is now much easier to use and has seen much, much more traffic than our previous version.

Our digital and social media is a very important platform for us to reach out to all those who use the Hurtwood. Amongst our followers are walkers, cyclists, runners, horse riders and many more! Following us means you'll be able to see our latest posts about what our ranger, Mark, has been working hard at to keep the Hurtwood accessible to all.

You will find stunning photos from many of our other followers and users of the Hurtwood that we re-share. Since we have been using Instagram for example, we have gained 811 followers! 65% of which are men. Girls, where are you!? And 24% of our follower's hail from Guildford vs only 9.8% from Dorking! All interesting facts and useful to help us look after you all as best we can.

In time we plan to run more specific fundraising campaigns, for example for your favourite trail or bench, all connected to our social media accounts for easy access!

If you haven't already, then please do follow us on whatever you prefer! We love to see your photos and tales from your experiences in the Hurtwood. Thanks for all your support present and future!

Alexander MacKinnon



- Provide a full time Ranger, **Mark Beaumont**
- Manage 30 miles of registered footpaths and bridleways, 30 miles of unofficial tracks, a network of firebreaks and 14 car parks, to provide unrivalled public access across the Hurtwood.
- Protect and conserve the natural environment.
- Create and preserve wildlife habitats.
- Maintain the panoramic views from the tops of the Hurtwood hills.
- Clear and prevent litter and fly tipping.
- Protect three scheduled monuments including Holmbury Hill Iron Age Hill Fort.
- Promote educational activities to encourage children to treasure the countryside.



**Please
support
FotH**

**Thank
you!**



THE BENEFIT OF LEGACIES

Over the years, the charity has been generously supported by a number of benefactors who have made bequests from their estates. These gifts have enabled us to meet some major commitments which would be out of reach if funded from membership donations alone.

Here are two recent examples of this:

- We have been able to upgrade our tractor so that the ranger can carry out a much greater variety of work on the Hurtwood without recourse to external contractors;
- We have carried out some restoration work on the Hill Fort at Holmbury Hill so that visitors can see its outlines more easily.

If we did not have the benefit of capital gifts we would soon find ourselves without the resources to enhance the Hurtwood for the enjoyment of all.

When you next come to write or update your will, do please consider including a bequest to Friends of the Hurtwood (Registered Charity no 200053), to help us keep the Hurtwood accessible for all to enjoy.