

## Chairman's Letter

### Dear Friends

It has been a busy summer as the rest of this newsletter will attest. From the corporate and management side of the Charity, much has been achieved including work on a new investment policy. Our new directors have really got to grips with their respective roles and I am particularly grateful for the contribution Assheton has made, enabling us to have monthly management account information in a timely manner.

We have refreshed and updated the website, which I think now looks fresher and more modern. In this the first full summer since the pandemic, visitor numbers appear to have dropped back a little from the frenetic level we saw in lockdown and the level of fly-tipping has also abated a bit.

I would like to pass on my thanks to Mark the Hurtwood ranger for his continued hard work and to the whole of the management team, who have achieved a great deal and have been very tolerant of my working arrangements as I have been working in Yorkshire most of the year.

**Antony Collins, Foth Chairman**



### Hurtwood Finance Activity

We have had a busy six months changing a number of our financial processes. We have this year adopted a monthly reporting cycle so that the ranger and management committee can regularly keep an eye on receipts and payments and make sure we have enough money in our bank account to meet all our obligations. It also means that completing our annual report will be made more straightforward since much of the year's activity is already logged.

Regular reviews have thrown up interesting questions around the right level of reserves for a charity such as ours and do we have an appropriate balance between donations and spending. When costs are rising for many of our inputs – fuel, contractors, materials – keeping income and expense in line is a challenge. We are lucky to have reserves available, but we still need our generous donors and supporters to keep the charity going and have to monitor carefully when we apply reserves to budgets.

It has prompted us to look at the reserve policy, to decide whether or not some can be made available for projects, and then how best to invest until the money is needed.

**Assheton Don, Foth Treasurer**

### 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

#### Foth

The Parish Office  
St Mark's Churchyard  
Peaslake GU5 9RR

01306 730100 (office answerphone)  
07920 705070 (Ranger mobile)

[www.foth.co.uk](http://www.foth.co.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/hurtwood.ranger>

#### Contacts:

ranger@foth.co.uk  
chairman@foth.co.uk  
administration@foth.co.uk  
communications@foth.co.uk

## Ranger's Report

**Fire Risk:** As I write this, the rain is lashing down, but it wasn't like that a few months ago when we were desperate for some rain. The summer has been so dry, which draws up its own challenges, and none too surprisingly, fire is at the top of the list. We were very fortunate to have escaped largely unscathed with only a minor fire on Holmbury Hill beside a track. I'm not sure of the cause, but most likely it was a discarded cigarette or possibly a glass bottle. Fortunately it was spotted by someone and they alerted the Fire Service who were very quickly on site hosing down the area. As is often the case with these fires, they have the ability to burn underground and remain undetected until they break to the surface again, often some distance from the original fire too. This was the case with this fire, as I came back the following day to see a considerable amount of smoke, much further down the hill. So I spent most the day and into the evening trying to ensure that it was well and truly extinguished. It was fortuitous that the very next day the long dry spell broke, and we could all take a breather and relax that the fire risk, that had plagued so many other areas of countryside in Surrey, was hopefully over.



**Drought:** It was unfortunate that the start of the dry spell coincided with the planting of the trees for the Queen's Green Canopy on Shere Heath and Holmbury Hill.

You may remember I'd managed to get some water containers to transport water to the sites, but I hadn't bargained on quite how often I was going to be doing that. So a large part of the summer was spent with weekly trips to water the trees, in fact we used just over 15,000 litres of water. Even in spite of this, I'm not convinced that the trees on Shere Heath will survive, but we will have to wait until next spring and see what emerges.

You may have noticed that as the dry spell continued, the leaves on some of the smaller trees turned quite brown, far more so than the brown of Autumn: these looked completely dead. It's quite possible that the trees may survive, but again we'll have to wait until next spring to see what appears. I'd also noticed whole limbs on some of the larger trees appeared to have died, which I've certainly never seen before. It certainly was a very dry summer.

**Waterworks:** The work being carried out by Thames Water around the reservoir to put in a new pressure relief valve and sort long term pipe leakage problems on Holmbury Hill continues. I'd love to be able to say when it will finish, but currently no end date in site. The only advantage I can think of at the moment is that earlier in the year we regraded the slope up to No1 car park, and as the Thames water lorries have been using it to gain access, it appears to have helped press the surface in much better than we could have done, and is currently showing no signs of wear!



**Walking Bottom Pond:** We are in the process of applying for a grant to reinstate the pond and hopefully with a solution that won't lead to the water leaking out of it. I can't remember when it was last repaired, but it has to be over 15 years ago I'd think. Its lined with clay to hold the water in but suffers from erosion especially as so many dogs like to paddle in it which eventually wears away the clay and we end up with a leak. When we repair this time around the plan is to use a giant rubber liner which has a much longer life span and will hopefully ensure the pond retains water for much longer. I should also mention that we will not incur any labour cost for the work as we've received a very kind offer from members of the local mountain bike community to provide all the manual labour (which will be fairly extensive on a job like this). I'm hoping by the next newsletter I'll be able to report it's finished. We will also be planting the remaining group of trees for the Queens Green Canopy later this year, in Walking Bottom, in the valley just south of the pond.

As you can imagine, the glorious summer attracted a high number of visitors, many visiting the area for the first time. I never quite sure of the psychology behind it, but whenever I see someone looking quizzically at a map, I can be fairly certain that they're going to come over and ask for directions. Obviously, I don't mind at all, it's part of my job, but none the less an intriguing situation.

Throughout the summer you may have come across the odd tree that's been felled, seemingly in a rather random fashion. This is all part of our ongoing maintenance schedule of spotting and felling trees that are either diseased, dead or dangerous. This is a continuous process carried out on all the main access paths throughout the Hurtwood. Summer is the ideal time to do this work as the condition of the tree is far easier to spot when all the healthy trees are in full leaf.

We continue to manage Bookhurst Wood on the outskirts of Cranleigh, and I was tasked with the rather unusual job of removing a camp that had been constructed deep in the woodland. In most cases this wouldn't be an issue except that rather than using natural materials, it was mostly constructed with plastic and nylon rope, holding the wood structure together, but more sadly it was then all nailed into the living trees. The whole area was covered in litter and other unsavoury debris, so it had to be removed. The biggest problem was getting to the site as it was so far into the woods, but fortunately I managed to make contact with the neighbouring farmer who kindly gave us access through his fields. Unfortunately this wasn't entirely straightforward as the access had been blocked with large concrete blocks



to prevent illegal access by off road vehicles. Thankfully having our tractor with the grab loader I could temporarily move the blocks which enabled us to get within 50m of the site.

**Fly-tip:** I'm afraid I can't let a Rangers report go by without my now obligatory mention of fly-tipping, but at least I can say it was generally less than usual through the summer for some reason. Unfortunately Autumn seems to have woken them up, with a large pile of asbestos roofing sheets dumped in the Roman Temple car park last week.

**Memorial for Peter:** We will be planting a memorial tree for Peter Haynes, my predecessor, who was the Ranger 1991 – 2006. This will be at Holmbury Cricket pitch, an area he loved.

**Mark Beaumont, Hurtwood Ranger**

## Engaging with schools on the Hurtwood

The Friends of the Hurtwood is committed to engaging with schools and children in the area. It is important that we foster learning and love of the local natural world, and we are fortunate in having several schools close by.

In June, one of the Foth Directors met with a group of Year 7 from the Duke of Kent School on Pitch Hill. The aim was to highlight the importance of the forests and trees. It was interesting to hear how much they already knew – a reflection that the Duke of Kent School undertakes activities in the woods as appropriate by year group. Plans are afoot to involve students from the school in Foth activities as part of their participation in the Duke of Kent Awards.



Peaslake Free School has a strong focus on physical and emotional development through activities in the forests. They have classes in the woods every Friday with seasonally appropriate activities and free play. Plus there is a periodic Hurtwood Hike and even music lessons in the woods! The school emphasises respect for the woodlands and the importance of nurturing the insects, birds and wildlife.

If you know of a school that would like to engage with the Friends of the Hurtwood, please contact us at [communications@foth.co.uk](mailto:communications@foth.co.uk).

## Here's a perfect Christmas present for that awkward person who has everything!

Forget wine, socks and hankies. Give them membership of Friends of the Hurtwood. You can set up membership in someone's name and it makes an unusual present and also helps support the woodland. Definitely a win win! Contact [membership@foth.co.uk](mailto:membership@foth.co.uk)



## Bumblebees in the heat

As the nights draw in and the leaves start to fall in the Hurtwood, we should be experiencing chilly mornings, a gentle frost and lighting the first log fire to stave off the chill of the autumn evenings. But this year has been different. The summer was extraordinary and protracted with many midsummer days reaching well above 30C and whilst many of us enjoyed these balmy days, the increased temperatures impacted quite significantly on many of our wildlife species, including bumblebees.



Bumblebees are particularly adapted for the cooler climate of the northern hemisphere; their large hairy bodies insulate them from the cold and they are able to separate their flight muscles from their wings, enabling them to shudder (vibrate) these muscles to create metabolic (body) heat. These adaptations mean that bumblebees are able to fly at lower temperatures than most other insects, suggesting bumblebees are unprepared for life in our new warmer climate.

Recent studies by Imperial College of London found that bumblebees have an optimum flying temperature of between 27-30C. Above 30C their flying decreased, and above 32C their flight stopped; eventually resulting in death - the larger the bee, the less well they coped.

So rather than buzzing around their habitats on these super hot days, bumblebees, like many of us, seek the relief of the shade in the middle of the day, and forage mainly in the morning and evening when the temperatures are cooler. Life in the nest also alters as the temperature soars, with many workers changing their role from caring for the brood, to fanning the nest with their wings, to keep it cool.

So if we have another heatwave next summer, and you are walking in the Hurtwood, keep an eye out for one of the champions of pollination, the humble bumblebee; out and about on their early morning or late evening forage.



**Becky Harris-Jones**

## Peaslake Fair was a great success

As in previous years, Foth managed the car parking in both Walking Bottom and Peaslake Farm fields with a team of 20 volunteers. We collected £991 selling programmes at £3 per vehicle. We get to keep £2 of each sale = £660.

Directors Nancy, David and Alex also manned the Foth stall and sold booklets and cards plus donations collecting £49.45 which was very good work, engaging passing bikers and dog walkers. We even had a committee member providing some of the musical entertainment with the Shere String Quartet!



Each stall then contributes 20% of their takings to the Fair pot which is then divided between the three beneficiaries: Peaslake School, Village Hall and Foth. I don't have a final figure yet but it seems all the stalls did well and the Fair was considered very successful.

This photo of the car park with nicely organised parking was posted on Facebook! What some people put on Facebook!



## Fungi, the mysterious third kingdom beneath the soil

Fabulous crops of field mushrooms in the pastures fringing the Hurtwood should have signalled a bonanza of fungi in the woods but I have been a bit worried this year, as the only one I have seen in any profusion is the witch's toadstool Fly Agaric *Amanita Muscaria*, bright red with white spots, which is thoroughly poisonous.

I have been looking out for Shaggy Ink Caps or Lawyer's Wigs, Shaggy Parasols, Penny Bun boletus and Amethyst Deceivers which are all edible, (though when I cooked a Lawyer's Wig it tasted of boiled sock) but I have not seen very many. I have seen foragers armed with baskets of trophies though, so I am hoping that it was just a generally poor year for fungi and not that they have been completely picked out.

The unwritten code of foraging is that you should only pick a small percentage of finds, leaving the rest to shed their spores and make increase. It would be a great shame if over-picking disrupted the fragile Hurtwood ecosystem.

Fungi are neither animal nor vegetable. They are a third kingdom about which humans know very little. I thoroughly recommend *Entangled Life* by Merlin Sheldrake which provides a window into the mind-boggling biology and fascinating cultures surrounding fungal life. You will never see the woods in the same light again.

Foraging is fun and rewarding and completely safe if you stick to harts and blackberries, but you need to have a very well-illustrated manual of fungi to hand before you touch, let alone pick and eat a wild mushroom, and if in any doubt, leave out! Good fungi guides will describe in detail how to check species accurately. It might mean waiting till next day to see the colour of the spore print but caution is advisable as the really nasty fungi have no known antidotes!

A guide will show that the luminous purple of Amethyst Deceivers gives quite the wrong impression of danger as they are very tasty and safely edible. And it will give reliable illustrations to help you to identify accurately the great fat edible members of the Boletus family, though I don't think they look so appetising with their brown spongy bottoms. It will show the difference between the elegant orange bouquets of False Chanterelles that look so pretty in the Hurtwood pine glades, but which are not for eating, and genuine Chanterelles, which are.



### A tasty Penny Bun boletus? Or is it....?

Shaggy Ink Caps or Lawyer's Wigs look positively evil but they are edible when young when the gills are still white. At least they are relatively straightforward to identify. But the huge family of *Russula* fungi includes members that range from edible and good to poisonous, so foragers need to be very confident of what varieties they are popping into the frying pan. There is simply no antidote for the really deadly fungi with horror-movie names – Death Cap and Destroying Angel. So beware!



## Social Media update

Our friends and followers on social media continue to grow. Over the previous year's it's been a useful tool to let people know about our activities including tree planting, award winning, forest bathing and unfortunately less positively lost pets & fly tipping! Particularly a memorable year for the heat, many people got in touch with concerns and sightings of wildfires. And we hope many more were reached with our warnings of the increased risk of fire. Our audience includes visitors from the US, Finland, Australia, Sweden, Italy & Switzerland. Interestingly the audience has a 66% majority of men! Where are the ladies?

If you don't yet follow us on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. Please do! #FotH

## Please don't ride on a sand scrape – you may squash a sand lizard

That bit of bare sand in the heather on Holmbury Hill is not a bike path - it's an endangered habitat. The Hurtwood is rare lowland dry heath: Britain has lost 80% of its lowland heath over the last 150 years yet it is an important habitat not just for groundnesting birds but also for amphibians and reptiles. It is so valuable that the Hurtwood has SSSI designation and a 12 hectare section of the open heather heath on Holmbury Hill is licensed from the Bray Estate by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation which manages it for rare sand lizards and smooth snakes. Unfortunately at least one wild bike trail has been created across the conservation area.

Rob Free is the ARC Weald Reserves manager: "We are part way through a reintroduction for the sand lizards as the population, after doing so well on site since the 1980s, dwindled in the last few years until we had just one confirmed male left," he said. "The reintroduction began in 2021 and the photo shows my daughter with one of the young captive-reared sand lizards raised at our vivarium in Shalford.



"We were not certain of the exact causes of the decline; one theory (aside from climate-related over which we have no control) is that there was insufficient bare ground of a suitable quality for the females to lay their eggs in. To this end (as we are not ones to give up easily) you may have noticed the large number of bare ground scrapes that have appeared in the ARC managed area. These should provide plenty of choice for the female sand lizards. Indeed, while we were surveying on site this summer a sand lizard test burrow was seen, the first for many years.

"This was not the actual egg chamber burrow which the female will carefully cover over until it is near impossible to detect but an abandoned attempt where she may have come up against a stone or sand that was too dry or too wet or too full of roots. The test burrow does confirm that a female had laid a clutch of eggs somewhere on site this summer. We are not sure what exact conditions they look for and a research project is underway looking into this. It can be rather baffling to find several test burrows all congregated at the end of a 20m long scrape that looks entirely identical throughout its length to the human eye.



"We would ask that people refrain from walking or cycling on the sand scrapes in summer to minimise disturbance to the females as they go about egg laying and to give any eggs buried in the warm sand the best chance of incubating successfully.

"There will be a further release of young sand lizards programmed for spring 2023. The other rare reptile species present on the Hurtwood is the smooth snake. This was re-introduced by us in 2000 and has done well. The non-venomous smooth snake on the Hurtwood has been the subject of a study by volunteers to track their movements. Each animal has a unique dark pattern on the back of its head (its Latin binomial is *Coronella austriaca* referring to a 'crown' pattern) and can be easily identified. It has shown that some animals roam widely over the heathland we manage at Hurtwood while others are quite sedentary.

Please don't go looking for sand lizards or smooth snakes on your own as, aside from them being legally protected species, it would involve entering habitat where adders may also be present. For those interested, we do train volunteers in reptile survey techniques and also run regular volunteer practical tasks on our reserves (though admittedly not often on Hurtwood).

### 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.

We are most grateful to our recent benefactors David Seligman and J R Huntingford for their bequests received in February and March 2022.

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.

## Pine-poppers need to keep popping those pesky pines in perpetuity

Around 50 acres of Blackheath Common SSSI on the Albury Estate is managed as open heather heath. Historically scrub was kept at bay by goats but now it's the job of a team of pine-poppers who spend days every year pulling up naturally seeded pine seedlings.

Albury Estate Manager Michael Baxter said the project to restore the open heath began in 1991 with the support of Natural England. "It is more rare than the Brazilian Rain Forest! We cleared the mature trees and scraped the tree litter to get back to bare soil and allow the heather to regrow as heather seed is viable in the soil for up to 80 years."

It wasn't just heather that grew back, however. Birch and pine germinated too and if left alone the area would have rapidly turned into forest. "We tried flailing to manage the birch and pine seedlings," he said,

"But flailing doesn't kill them, it just makes them grow more vigorously. We also did weed wiping with herbicide. But pine popping is the most effective method of control."

"The pine-popping team, led by Alan Martin, first came in May 2017 and in 2019 they spent a total of 53 man days clearing the saplings. This last summer they spent 13 man days clearing 4.5 acres. It will have to be managed for ever. I originally thought that once we had pulled up the first load of new pine and got rid of the birch that would have been it but now we realise that the seedlings just

keep coming and coming every year.

"So the pine-poppers will have to come back too."



### Autumn in the Hurtwood

Through the lens of photographer Peter Chamberlain



## Forestry update

Regular readers will know that the Estate has harvested areas of the woodland allowing the next generation of trees to grow. All of these are self-seeded, but some areas have done less well, therefore the decision was made to plant some trees for the first time in 50 years.

The existing pine trees are almost all Scots Pine (*Pinus Sylvestris*), but to increase diversity the trees planted last winter were Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga Menziesii*) which should grow equally well on the sandy soil, and once mature are beautiful trees.

Despite this year's record hot and dry summer many of the trees have survived their first year and are growing well, much to my surprise.

The recent dry springs have made it difficult for the self-seeded trees to grow, but the Estate's success helped it win the Silviculture award this year from the Royal Forestry Society, which is a national award for the management of the woodland.



A large amount of thinning was done last winter to encourage the next generation of trees to grow and the current crop to improve before they are ready to harvest in the future. Following this work, the woodlands have settled over the summer. So far the Estate's objectives of producing a sustainable timber crop, whilst enhancing biodiversity and providing amenity for human visitors all seem to be working well presently.

When covid lockdowns eased, the Estate was as busy as I have ever seen it. Visitor numbers have remained high and the pressure on the environment from the many walkers, riders and cyclists seems to grow each year. This winter I will be helping the owners review the plans for the next five years, continuing to focus on this mix of priorities to give space for people, wildlife and timber production. The Estate is a very special place and maintaining the right balance between these needs will continue to make it a very interesting challenge.

### Alex Wilks MRICS FAAV, Batcheller Monkhouse

The award also highlighted the work done to conserve and create new open habitats for native smooth snakes and sand lizards. The judges were impressed by the way 'a closed landscape was transformed into an open one, and the character of the woodland improved for both visitors and biodiversity.'



- 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!



## You never know what you will find on the top of Pitch Hill!

From a distance this looked like a particularly gruesome discovery in the bushes at the edge of the Pitch Hill viewpoint.

On closer inspection, however, it turned out to be just one of the more bizarre items that get dumped on the Hurtwood.

A dismembered torso with arm and gloved hand. Seriously weird.

