

SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY

Reg Charity No 1046124



April 2017



Message from the Chairman

Welcome to the spring edition of the newsletter. In the Countryside, Spring is the most dangerous time of the year, as the "Hedges are shooting" and "the Bull Rushes" out. (I will leave you to work it out). 2016 - 2017 has been a great season, with a good range of new cutters appearing throughout the year and in the Annual competition where we had a record entry. It has been great to see new people coming along bringing new energy and enthusiasm.

Thank you to the members that have helped out this season with the coppicing & training. A big thank you to Frank Wright for sourcing the hedge laying venues especially those with the food attached. It was fantastic to see the results of the Tool Sharpening course being put to good use on the following training event with trainees making leaps & bounds in their cutting. With all the events this season we have laid nearly a mile of hedge together, a fantastic effort.

As we go into the summer we embark on the program of summer shows that we attend, we are always looking for volunteers to help out on the stand and with the demonstrations. Have a look at the video on our website with show team in action at Woodfair last year. Please see the dates of the shows & contact Chris Burchell Collins if you would like to help out.

I wish you a good summer & look forward to seeing you at some of the events plus the Ploughing match hedge laying competitions in the Autumn. These are an excellent place for new trainees to get your eye in watching the experienced cutters conquer some challenging hedges at the Laughton, West Grinstead & Hurspierpoint Ploughing matches. Best Wishes, Kind regards, Phil Hart.

Editor's Notes

'Some eke prepare by warrs their foes to spoyle'

It's spot the Billhooks on the front piece. A delightful picture I found from 'A booke of diverse devices and sorts of pictures with the alphabets of letters' ... by Thomas Fella from somewhere between 1585 and 1622. It's from the Folgar Digital Image Collection. Can anyone have a go at the verse at the top with its disturbing punch line. More on page 10

Ian Runcie

Tools of the trade 3: Chainsaws follow up



Remember this pic from the last newsletter. I asked if anyone had seen one. Well apparently they are not uncommon, having been Army issue for a while. Phill Piddell has written to say that they are still available! Used by survival and "prepper" types.' He offers a You Tube link of a modern one in use <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8YzROT4Rp0> .

Also Gary Moore has one! The modern saw appears to have teeth similar to a power chainsaw but Gary's and the one above have teeth similar to those of a large toothed bowsaw and it must be hard work to make it cut; Gary confirms this and reckons that it was mainly used to cut off branches rather than to fell trees.

It folds neatly away in the pouch, which also contains a file. Gary's sample has a name in the pouch: one Arthur Cadman OBE. Mr Cadman was Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest: a post which dates back to Tudor times. He was responsible for the first controlled culling of deer in The New Forest and the re-introduction of a number of rare and endangered species. He was also a writer and wrote three books, including "Tales of a Wildflower", illustrated by Peter Scott and "A guide to rough Shooting" (1974). His full obituary may be seen at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1318041/Arthur-Cadman.html>

South of England Hedge Laying Society

Reg. Charity N0 1046124

Promoting the craft of hedge laying, training, competitions and countryside management

Training in Hedge Laying



The following training days for Coppicing & Hedge Laying are planned for the 17/18 season.

	Event	Venue	date
	Coppicing		23rd September 2017
Day 1	Hedge Laying	Scotney Castle, Kent	14th October 2017
Day 2	Hedge Laying	Magham Down, Sussex	11th November 2017
	Coppicing		18th November 2017
	Tool Sharpening	Plumpton College, Sussex	2nd December 2017
Day 3	Hedge Laying	Magham Down, Sussex	9th December 2017
Day 4	Hedge Laying Improvers Day	Magham Down, Sussex	6th January 2018
	Coppicing day		20th January 2018
	Presidents verses Chairman'		27th January 2018
	Annual Competition		SUNDAY 18th February 2018
	Fun Day	Tenterden, Kent	17th March 2018

Note that dates and locations may be subject to change

Coppicing days are FREE to all Members

Fees

Hedge Laying the course (days 1 to 4 below) is £150. 1 "taster day" is £60

Tool Sharpening is £10

Coppicing days are FREE to all Members

If you are unable to attend a training event please let us know, re-booking fees apply as follows

Over 1 week – no fee

Between 2 days and 1 week - £10

Less than 2 days – £20

No show / the night before / on the day - £30

Experienced current members

A section of hedge will be allocated for experienced current members wishing to lay hedge, please contact The Training Co-ordinator Phill Piddell for more details.

More details for all events will be published nearer the time.

Please note to take part in any of these events you need to join the society so you are covered by the Society's insurance. Membership is £15 per annum. Please bring your membership cards to all events.

To get booking information for these events, send a completed membership application form to Phill Piddell.

The Membership Secretary, Phill Piddell.

1 Hope House Farm Cottage, Crouch Lane, Sandhurst, Cranbrook, TN18 5PD 01580 850768 phill.piddell@bt.com

South of England Hedge-Laying Society



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (or RENEWAL) April 2017 to March 2018

PRESIDENT:

Peter Tunks
The Coach House
Waltersville Way
Horley
RH6 9EP

Tel: 01293 784826 / 07836 757570

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:

Phill Piddell
1 Hope House Farm Cottage
Crouch Lane
Sandhurst
Cranbrook
Kent TN18 5PD
Tel: 01580 850768

Annual membership of the Society	£15 per person	
Lapel Badge	£5 per badge	
Total		
Please treat my membership as a Gift Aid donation (YES / NO)		

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for the current tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for the current tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I have given.

PLEASE USE CLEAR BLOCK CAPITALS

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Post Code: _____

Tel: _____ Mobile: _____

Emergency Contact (Name and Number) _____

Email: _____

Age (if under 18): _____ Occupation: _____

It is your responsibility to ensure that the Society is informed of any changes in your communication details.

Please return the completed form to Phill Piddell You will receive a Membership Card in the post.
Alternatively please email the above details to phill.piddell@bt.com and transfer the money directly to our bank account: SORT CODE **20-49-76** Account **90867381** (South of England Hedge Laying Soc)
Renew on online - www.sehls.co.uk

COMPETITION RESULTS

Class	1 st		2 nd	3 rd
Champion	The Society Cup +	£50	£25	£15
	Gary Moore		Bob Whitaker	Nigel Adams
Senior	Westward Plaque +	£50	£25	£15
	Stephen Mockford		Darren Hulbert	David Dunk
Novice	Westward Plaque +	£50	£25	£15
	Stephen Thorns		Graham West	Roberto Grilli
Novice Pairs		£50	£25	£15
	Natasha Stonestreet / Andrew Bigwood			0
Veteran	The Society Trophy +	£50	£25	£15
	Clive Gilligan		Mick Friend	Frank Wright
Best 1 st Year re-growth	The Whittington Shield +	£25	£15	£10
	Clive Gilligan		Joe Moulard	David Dunk
Best Veteran re-growth	The Fred Moulard Memorial Trophy			£25 Clive Gilligan
Best length of bindings (Novices only)	Presidents Prize - kindly donated by the Society President			£20 Graham West
Most improved Novice	The Bill Truran Memorial Trophy			£25 Roberto Grilli
Best work on a poor length	The Joan Streete Memorial Shield			£25 Geoff Pitt
Best staking & binding	The Jim Vantassel Tankard			£25 Steve Mockford
Best work with hand tools - Novice			£50	Stephen Thorns
Best work with hand tools - Novice Pairs			£50	Natasha Stonestreet / Andrew Bigwood
Best work with hand tools - Veteran			£50	Roger Taylor
Best work with hand tools - Senior			£50	Joe Moulard
Best work with hand tools - Champion			£50	Nigel Adams
Points Trophy	Gary Moore		Clive Gilligan	Bob Whitaker

Entries	
Novice	9
Novice Pair	2
Veteran	11
Senior	10
Champion	7
Total	39

Competition Director	Phill Piddell
Competition Secretary	Phill Piddell
Chief Steward	Bob Hunt
Weather	Sunny and dry

The 33rd Annual society competition at Nodes Farm Magham Down. With a record 41 cutters and sunny weather we knew we were in for a good day. The majority of the cutters were on the main drive to the farm, working on Beech, with the novices further away working on thorn. \

The draw went off with the usual theatre and we started on time.

The judges and stewards did a sterling job of keeping order, our photographers recorded the details, and tea (and cake) makers kept everyone going. \

Thanks to the spectators, it's good to see people showing an interest. if you're reading this: we do offer training courses and it could be you competing and winning a cash prize next year. \

The sections were pretty consistent, other than the grotty length assigned to Geoff Pitt. Des was impressed with his work, and all agreed that it was the best work on a poor length. Most people had plenty of time, although a few of the seniors went right up to the wire. When the final horn sounded we had some winners and a full set of complete sections. Very well done to all the competitors: superb work by all. Phill P

Cant	Competitor	Class	Cut and Pleach	Stakes and Binders	General Appea nce	Total	Position	Steward	Judge
			35	35	30	100			
29	Phill Piddell	Novice	20	21	20	61		Roger Ferrand	Alan Ashby + Peter Tunks
35	Graham West	Novice	23	23	21	67	2		
33	Stephen Thorns	Novice	26	21	22	69	1		
34	Matthew Beard	Novice	22	19	20	61			
31	Luke Schippers	Novice	22	17	18	57			
30	Roberto Grilli	Novice	22	18	24	64	3		
28	Alan Miller	Novice	19	19	19	57			
36	Mike Mason	Novice	21	22	20	63			
32	Chris Burchell Collins	Novice	25	18	20	63			
	Natasha Stonestreet /	Novice						Mike Parrott	Des Whittington
37	Andrew Bigwood	Pair	23	16	15	54	1		
	Gwyn Alford / Janita van	Novice							
38	Rhijn	Pair	20	18	15	53	2	Mike Parrott	Des Whittington
3	Roger Taylor	Veteran	31	29	26	86			
7	Geoff Pitt	Veteran	29	31	25	85			
8	Frank Wright	Veteran	31	30	27	88	3		
9	Dave Truran	Veteran	28	30	26	84			
1	Clive Gilligan	Veteran	33	31	29	93	1		
6	Mick Friend	Veteran	32	29	28	89	2		
2	Ian Runcie	Veteran	29	28	26	83			
4	John French	Veteran	30	26	26	82			
	Mark Moore	Veteran				0		Mike Parrott	Neale Sands
5	David Crouch	Veteran	30	27	27	84			
10	Lex Roeleveld	Veteran	28	26	27	81			
14	David Droscher	Senior	26	30	15	71			
12	Darren Hulbert	Senior	31	30	25	86	2		
17	Stephen Mockford	Senior	31	30	26	87	1		
15	Phil Hart	Senior	25	25	18	68			
19	Hans Taylor	Senior	24	26	19	69			
20	David Dunk	Senior	25	27	28	80	3		
16	Joe Moulard	Senior	25	25	18	68		Bob Hunt	Dave Sands
18	Martyn Schippers	Senior	27	22	20	69			
11	Russell Woodham	Senior	30	25	15	70			
13	Tom Standen	Senior	27	26	10	63			
22	Mike Bentley	Champion	29	28	26	83			
27	Tony Gallow	Champion	30	30	24	84			
21	Terry Standen	Champion	30	30	26	86			
24	Paul Matthews	Champion	30	31	24	85			
23	Gary Moore	Champion	32	30	28	90	1		
26	Nigel Adams	Champion	30	30	28	88	3		
25	Bob Whitaker	Champion	31	30	28	89	2		

Keeping You Informed.

Everyone gets regular newsletters which are packed full of useful information, please do let us know if you are happy to receive them by email (you get them about a week earlier than the post!), however things change.

It's really useful for the society to update you with event information during the year by email – it's fast and free. We will never sell your email, and will not junk-mail you with adverts. So if you do have an email please let me know, it's a great way to get the latest information.

If you really don't have email but want to be kept up-to-date please let me know your mobile phone number and I will send you details by text.

We also have a website www.sehls.co.uk which has a blog (a sort of on-line diary) which contains event reports, and pictures, along with useful information. You can access this by using the computers at the local library, and you don't need to sign up to anything.

Phill Piddell



Sharpening Course Review

What options there are for creating high degrees of sharpness.

To demonstrate the required profile of a billhook blade, Phil brought along 2 wooden billhooks, which, although they showed the principle marvelously, would not be much good out in the field.

Health and safety aspects of tool sharpening was dealt with, along with risk awareness and risk management.

Various natural stones, diamond stones and metal files were used along with an angle grinder equipped with a flappy disc. Outside there was a pedal powered stone water wheel, which some used to good effect.

Attendees bought along a range of billhooks, short and long handled axes and other gardening equipment that required a sharp blade. Both modern and old equipment was worked on.

Phil also gave instruction to those who wanted it on how to sharpen chainsaws.

All who attended learnt a lot, under the knowledgeable eye of Phil, whose lecture style was calmness personified. This must be something to do with having to be a lecturer at an agricultural college.

Darren lovingly created a super edge to his axe and was last seen with no hairs on the back of his hand.

Thanks must go to Phil for giving up his time and for being so patient with us and to the College, who put on an excellent breakfast and allowed us to use their facilities.

A course to highly recommend to others.

Mathew Beard.

Finished your training? Wondering what's next? Well done completing your training, now the learning really starts!

You have the basic skills under your belt, but there is still much more to learn. This is where your membership of the South of England Hedge Laying Society comes in handy as you can now attend all our events (for free) and work in pairs or individually, and when you encounter a tricky section, or want to know how to improve your technique we have experts on hand who can give hints and tips.

Each year the season kicks off with four training events, we then run a number of additional events you might be interested in attending:

President Vs. Chairman competition

This is a team event, with two teams headed by the Chairman and President. We split the attendees between teams, with an equal number of experts and novices in each team. Yes it's a competition, but mostly it's a fun day out., and is a great chance to work closely with some of the best hedge layers in the country. At the end of the event the finished hedge is judged by the landowner.

Fun day

An annual event, which sometimes runs as a charity event, just turn up and get more practice in. You can work individually or in pairs

SEHLS annual Competition

Our premier event of the year, time to showcase your skills. It sounds more daunting than it is, we have a number of classes, so again you can enter in pairs or individually. You might even win a cash prize!

Everyone who enters gets a meal at the local pub

And yet more events

Once you feel confident you can flex your skills at a local ploughing match, these are held in September/October each year but are not for the faint hearted, the hedges tend to be on the "tough" side.

There are also a number of regional competitions which you can enter, including the National Hedge Laying competition (you have to be a member of the National society (www.hedgelaying.org.uk) to enter) the event moves around the country each year.

And finally

We're learning all the time, and the only way to learn is to participate, and critique your own work. I don't know many really good hedge layers who know it all!

When you lay a hedge or enter a competition, ask someone else what you could have done better, look at your scores, speak to the judge.

Take on board the advice and before long you could be winning competitions. Also don't forget that your society needs YOU. Stakes and Binders need to be coppiced, so please do try and attend a coppicing day or two each season.

This newsletter needs filling – could you write a short article or provide some pictures?

Could you join the committee? Most jobs don't require a massive time commitment.

Love hedge laying? Like to talk about it? Then you are the ideal person to attend some shows over the summer, and help spread the word. Phil P.

NOTICES

NLS

Nick Lanaway Services

GARDEN and GROUND CARE MACHINERY

Golf Buggy and ATV

Service & Repair

Collection & delivery available.

Unit 2 Banff Farm, Upper Clayhill,

Ringmer, East Sussex BN8 5RR

07503 891335

Nicklanawayservices@yahoo.com



Front piece

My modern translation, with a little help from the online Gutenberg Dictionary of Middle English reads:

Now windy March witnesses winter spent,
And blooming buds encourage men to toil,
Some graft their trees, some sew their barleycorn,
Some also prepare for war, their foes to spoil.

I can make out five billhooks, all with different styles, one may be a sickle. The chap with the long handled billhook may be referenced to in the last line and could be a “Billman”: massed ranks of which were utilised in the army to face off cavalry. Anyone else got any thoughts?

Ian Runcie (ed)



Trainers wanted

Are you willing to help the Society train the next generation of hedge layers? We are looking for volunteers who can come along to the training days and pass on your skills? If you can help with one event per season it would make a big difference.

Please let Phill Piddell know which event(s) you can help with.



Letters

Yes we've received one! From Dick Morley who says he like the newsletter. He also send his congratulations to Alan Ashby on being Grand Champion. He couldn't resist mentioning that he was Allan's original mentor but does say “Well done young Allan. You were wise to change mentors after week one.”

Some more old Billhooks



Claesen Sir George: The Hedger Cookham Dean



John Brett 'The Hedger 1860



Master Ermengaut.
13C. French

FOR YOUR DIARY

South of England Hedge Laying Society Summer Programme 2017

As the 16/17 hedge laying season draws to an end, thoughts turn to the summer shows.

Most of the paperwork for the show entries thankfully has been completed and posted; I haven't yet got around to booking the weather, guess that's my next job.

The purpose of the shows is to educate the public about our craft, encourage people to come along and take up the training days.

Another function and probably the most important one is to advertise for hedges to lay and woodlands to coppice, because without either of these, there wouldn't be any training days or competitions.

It would be good to see some new faces on the stand helping out the old hands. We need a minimum of 3 volunteers per day to ensure coverage during the day and then it allows one of you a chance to walk around the show, however 4 or 5 makes the day easier for everyone. There is no need to attend every event or every day of an event if you put your name down.

At some events we will do a demo hedge, whereby we "plant" some brash and then do a few yards of hedge laying and then at Bentley and The Autumn Show & Game Fair, there is a live hedge to work on. An early chance for a few of us to get back into hedge laying before the season really gets going. Chris Burchell-Collins.

The events are in blue below.

13 th May	Plumpton College Open day. BN7 3AE
27 th May	Heathfield Show Broad Oak, Heathfield, Sussex
8, 9, 10 th June	South of England Agricultural Show, Ardingly
13 th July	Connect with the countryside, Ardingly
9 th Sept	Laughton & District Competition, Gote Farm, Ringmer
16 th Sept	West Grinstead competition, Itchingfield, W Sussex
15, 16, 17 th Sept	Weald Woodfair, Bentley
23 rd Sept.	Coppicing
TBA	Hurstpierpoint Competition
30 th Sept, 1 st Oct	Autumn Show and Game Fair, Ardingly Show Ground
14 th Oct	Hedge Laying 1, Scotney Castle, Kent
11 th Nov	Hedge Laying 2, Magham Down, Sussex
18 th Nov	Coppicing
2nd Dec	Tool Sharpening, Plumpton College, Sussex
9th Dec.	Hedge Laying 3, Magham Down, Sussex
6th Jan 2018	Hedge Laying Improvers Day 4, Magham Down, Sussex
20 th Jan	Coppicing
27th Jan	President's verses Chairman
18 th Feb SUNDAY	ANNUAL COMPETITION
17 th March	Fun Day Hope Farm, Peening Quarter, Wittersham, Tenterden, Kent, TN30 7NP

NOTICES

SEHLS Christmas party at Scotney Castle and Crowborough 10 December 2016

For **Training Day 3** we split into two groups, the trainees went to Scotney Castle to complete the hedge we started last season, and the more experienced cutters went to Crowborough to continue working our way down their hedge. Each group had around 18 people on what was a grey, mild and predominantly dry day.

The Crowborough hedge was very overgrown and gappy, a row of twisted gnarly holly and over grown hazel. Fortunately we had plenty of chainsaws on hand, and plenty of newly qualified chainsaw users keen to get some experience in this different way of working. Luckily David Dunk had the foresight to bring his pole chainsaw.

Because of the size of the hedge we decided to work in pairs and kept David busy thinning out the tops of pretty much every cant. By mid-morning the hedge was starting to take shape, and the frith pile was building up nicely. Bob Hunt arrived with a trailer load of stakes and binders and Alan Ashby was kept busy distributing them to all the cants. Early afternoon the Christmas meal was ready in the shape of home reared Tamworth pork sausages and home-made cake. After filling up on such good food it was hard getting started again, but we still had plenty of cutting to do.

Finally we popped in the stakes and binders and the end result was an amazing transformation, hopefully the local Deer population will leave some of the re-growth rather than eating it all.

Thanks to our hosts David and Heather for the superb lunch, and to David Dunk for helping out on each cant with his pole saw

Over at Scotney Caste (Training Day 3) the trainees and trainers gathered to finish off the last section of hedge at the Scotney Castle estate down by the stables.

The hedge was mainly hazel and densely grown, so there were plenty of stems to cut and we had our work cut out. As luck would have it this event followed the very popular tool sharpening course a week earlier and clearly the sharp tools made a difference and some excellent pleaching was done by the group.

Unfortunately a small number of participants did not turn up, which meant that a cant had to be left to the end and was not completed, as being mid-December it got dark early. The remainder of the hedge was downed and completed but in the rush to get all done, the finished article was not quite up to usual standards. Not turning up / not letting organisers you are not coming in good time is not fair on the organisers and trainers and is poor form.

Thanks must go to Gary Moore, Phil Hart, Terry Standen, John French and Mike Bentley for organising and training.

As Scotney is on my doorstep I got the job of finishing the last section and doing a general tidy up. I have to say that the quality of the cutting from the trainees is superb. All the sections were very good, and I look forward to seeing how you all get on at the improver's day, and hope to see some entries in the annual competition as Novice Pairs.

Both our customers are very happy with the work, and are keen to see us return as both have a few more miles of hedging.

If you fancy some superb pork do get in touch with the David or Heather at little Lotmans Farm on 01892 665350 or edzine@btinternet.com not only is this really mouth-watering food but it is helping keep this rare breed alive.

Reporting Scotney: Matthew Beard

Crowborough: Phill Piddell



NOTICES

Our **annual Improver's Day competition** was held Forest Hill deep in the rolling Surrey Hills. need to have more events which include food.

Our hedge contained lots of very small stems and with all the suckers incredibly wide, and bordered a very old hedge / row of trees, behind (and sometimes in) the hedge were the remains of some hay bales. There were even a few sections which looked more like lakes. As the experts finished off their stakes and binders Des and Dick appeared and asked everyone to critique their own section, by standing back and taking a critical look. This was very useful as a few moments of an expert eye can improve your skills hugely.

Our seven plucky trainees volunteered to take on a cant each. At least one commented that he had not realised that it was a competition and would have spent more time in the shed sharpening his billhook :-). We explained the format of the day and off they went. The bonus being that the experts were also judged, with the results as follows

3rd Phill Piddell - "Made the best of available hedge"

2nd Darren Hulbert - "General appearance needs attention"

1st David Dunk - "Consistent workmanship, best of a poor cant"

All other competitors "made a good job of available hedge"

The more experienced cutters kicked off with an even more variable length of hedge, some of it pretty thin.

No sooner had we started than it was Bacon roll and tea time provided by the landowner and his family. Thus with a full belly we returned to the hedge, and I noticed Frank had been allocated the pond section, but he wasn't grumbling (much).

At this point I had time to inspect all the other sections, Frank had put a gentle curve in his section around his lake.

The trainees were doing really well, and finished not long after everyone else and within the available time.

What seemed like a simple hedge took a lot of time to clear out behind and above, it was at that point we realised how little material we had to play with.

The judges only managed to separate the trainees by 10 points, which was superb. The final results were as follows:

3rd Grace Clements (and best work on a poor length)

2nd Marcus Broome

1st Roberto Grilli

Our judges for the day were Dick Foulgar and Des Whittington two very experienced layers who decided to keep everyone on their toes not just the trainees.

All in all a great dry day and some really good hedge laying, which the landowner was very happy with.

All too soon it was lunch time and we settled down to sausages and jacket potatoes. We

Phill P.



Birds and Modern Farming

It is interesting to reflect on the changes in the birdlife locally over more than half a century that have been significant and dramatic. Most have come from changes in land use, particularly farming. During and just after World War 2, by government directives, many miles of hedgerows had to be removed to enlarge fields to accommodate heavy machinery to deal with the increased cropping that had to be grown to sustain a population of people who had been almost starved out of existence as a great deal of the food we needed came from abroad and much had been sunk during the “Battle of the Atlantic”. Those old enough to remember rationing will appreciate this.

The decision was made to be more self-reliant. Any farmer not complying with this edict could be replaced by a manager who would. The old chestnut we keep hearing about recent hedge removal isn't true hereabouts and in the last decade is largely false as many new hedges have been planted and can be seen locally. Now any hedgerows removed are often beside gardens where newcomers to the countryside consider an ancient mixed species hedge to be unsightly and have it out to make way for a parking

It wasn't until this century that dramatic declines in farmland species became significant. Right through the 1980's and 90's Linnets bred in large numbers in hedges, shrubs and I even found one in a cottage garden Gooseberry bush. Alas they are now less frequently seen in wintering flocks foraging stubbles as was common previously. They do use game cover seed crops that are now established to feed Pheasants and wild birds. I received an

enjoyable phone call today from a local resident who had been watching a mixed flock of finches, mainly Linnets, close to his home. This must be a life-saving source of food during the cold weather. There are far fewer fields in stubble over winter now where fallen weed seeds would have sustained these small finches.

The reason that there are fewer stubbles is simply that now more wheat is sown in the autumn and therefore no weed seeds. In days gone by our climate could not grow high protein wheat necessary for bread making. This had to be imported, mostly from North America. By selection and cross pollination, the plant breeders produced strong wheats that could grow in this climate but needed longer root establishment so sown in autumn. With crop protection against broad-leaved weeds and aphids, much food for wildlife was no longer available and several species became scarce. These are usually small birds

There is no such decline in other farmland birds though. Wood Pigeons have increased to huge numbers and their flat twig nests can be seen now the leaves have fallen, along most hedges and trees even in towns. A flock of several hundred Jackdaws roost in Brock's Wood each night and vast numbers of Gulls get a living on the moist soil of the winter fields. I was pleased to see a flock of about forty Lapwings, a species that was once regular, on the field opposite during the cold weather of late December. There are plenty of Redwings and Fieldfares, the wintering thrushes from the north that having consumed the berry crop are now probing the grassland for worms and seem to be doing well. There is still plenty to see but some species more difficult to find.



Bird Watch

On the first weekend of February three of us went for a very successful birding trip to north Norfolk where so much area is given over conservation. There was no doubt that the bright calm weather, although it was an overcoat colder up there, and the good company made the whole time so enjoyable. Because of the variety of habitats that could fulfill the needs of different birds, between us one hundred and nine species were found and identified. One spectacle remains in mind was the rising from the sea of thousands of Pink-footed Geese as they flew inland at dawn, just as they did when shown on Countryfile that Sunday night. The vast numbers of waders that flew around the mud flats of the Wash were incredible, looking like clouds of smoke as they circled in the sky.

We noted how friendly and helpful everyone seemed to be, assisting one another with sightings across the shore, areas of water and reedbeds. At Titchwell, a large RSPB Reserve where good information sheets and boards gave explanations of what was about, it was good to see many families with quite young children enjoying the day. Interest in wildlife and conservation is with the generations to come so encouragement at an early age is critical. We actually met a couple from Hassocks and four people we knew from our regular trips to Portland which should not be so surprising as the birding fraternity does get about these special places and paths cross all the time. The accommodation and

places to eat and drink were first class and very reasonable priced so a good time was had by all.

By the beginning of March there will be signs of the breeding season's approach. Some species will have laid eggs by now, Raven, Tawny Owl and Mallard among the first. A bird I like to see at this time of year is the Kestrel that should by now have claimed territory and decided where to nest. Where they have accepted nest boxes this makes it easy as the female sits close to the site waiting for the male to provide food, usually voles, for her. This ensures that the female puts on body weight as the number of eggs she will lay is in proportion to how heavy she is. Therefore in a good vole year up to six eggs are regular whereas when prey is scarce only three may be the full clutch and of course there would be less food to feed a large family.

In the same way if the male is not a skilful hunter or is lazy, fewer of his genes will be passed on to produce more of the same. Only about half of a year's hatch of Kestrel nestlings survive their first winter in a normal year and once adults they often exceed a ten life span. The young do disperse quickly once independent from their parents and I have ringed several in June or early July in the nest that have been found in Essex, Kent and Hampshire in August and September the same season.

Reg Lanaway

Pink Footed Goose



Kestrel Nest



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Committee Dates, 24th May, 26th July, 27th Sept. 22nd Nov

Items for next Newsletter to Ian by mid July please

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