



Spring 2010 Newsletter

Chalking one up for biodiversity in Sussex *Fran Southgate, Sussex Otters and Rivers Partnership*



Photo: Nigel Holmes

In August 2009 a partnership between South Downs Joint Committee, Sussex Otters and Rivers Project, the Environment Agency and Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre commissioned a survey by UK chalk rivers expert, Nigel Holmes. At the time we were aware Sussex might have some of the rarest and most unique chalk streams in the world, but little was known about their whereabouts or quality. Little did we know Sussex held so many hidden gems.

Chalk is formed from the skeletons of minute algae, which fell to the sea floor between 100 and 65 million years ago. In Sussex, we rely on chalk springs and natural reservoirs under the South Downs for over 70% of our drinking water. Chalk is porous and acts to clean the water that passes through it, making the water flowing out of the chalk some of the most clear and pure you can find.

Globally, chalk is quite rare and this particular age of chalk is only found in the UK, northwest Europe and parts of America. The locations where springs emerge from the chalk are even rarer. Some of these springs flow all year round and others, known as winterbournes, only flow for part of the year. Each of these stream types has unique wetland wildlife associated with them, including characteristic species such as River Water-crowfoot, Lesser Water-parsnip and White-clawed Crayfish, and rich dragonfly and damselfly populations.



Photo: Nigel Holmes

The survey findings were extraordinary. Over the years many of our chalk streams have been modified for industry, agriculture, and water abstraction, with many damaged to the point of no return. However, we discovered some unique gems have survived and Sussex has in fact, re-written the book on what exactly is a good chalk stream and a rare one.

Most chalk streams and rivers in the UK are known for their low gradient and relatively open vegetation. In Sussex however, many of our chalk streams run straight from the South Downs, with fast running water, down steep slopes, through small wooded valleys, challenging the perceptions of what an English chalk stream should look like. One



Photo: Nigel Holmes

important example of this rare steep gradient, wooded headwater chalk stream in West Sussex was quoted as deserving *recognition as an illustration of natural characteristics better than many of the highly prized and legally designated larger chalk rivers in the UK*. Whilst an example in East Sussex was defined as *some of the best, if not the best and most natural examples of a chalk spring source in the whole of the UK*.

Sussex Biodiversity Partnership

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So while they may not be large, these chalk streams in Sussex probably harbour some of the most unique communities of plants, insects and other wildlife in the UK. The chalk streams report recommended protection of some the rarer examples of chalk streams is essential - and that for some a matter of urgency. Over 100km of streams which run through the chalk in the South Downs have been surveyed or mapped, and we have recorded rare plants, mosses and lichens. Over the next few months we will be working with landowners and others to try and enhance and restore these freshwater gems. Our chalk streams are sources of some of the purest of water, and a great source of inspiration too!

If you own land with a chalk stream on it and would like to receive advice on how to manage it, please contact Fran Southgate fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk 01273 497555.

Shoresearch Intertidal Surveys *Tim Smith, East Sussex County Council*



Photo: Sarah Atherton

In 2009 the East Sussex Shoresearch project formerly began. With help from East Sussex County Council, South Downs Joint Committee, The National Trust, and The Booth Museum of Natural History a partnership was formed. Each of these organisations provided a core member of the Shoresearch team, assisted by a range of volunteer groups and individuals from across the county.

The response to Shoresearch events has been extremely positive, with a variety of people, young and old, coming along for a taste of intertidal surveying, including over 80 attendees at the Cuckmere Haven event. Several dedicated individuals have come back on a regular basis, and their enthusiasm for, and knowledge of our coastal environment has been invaluable.

Since the project began, a wide variety of species have been recorded. More frequently recorded species included Sand Mason, Sea Lettuce, Common Prawn, Shore Crab, Sugar Kelp, Beadlet Anemone, Broad-clawed Porcelain Crab, Velvet Swimming Crab, Purple Topshell and Grey Topshell. Other interesting finds include the eggs of sea slugs and cuttlefish, and both Strawberry and Snakelocks anemones.



Photo: Paul Naylor

So if you're passionate about our natural environment and would like an opportunity to help protect it, and maybe learn a little more about it, you would be welcome to come along to any of our monthly events. For further information please contact Tim Smith tim.smith@eastsussex.gov.uk 01273 482015/07500 123607.

International Year of Biodiversity *Laurie Jackson, Sussex Biodiversity Partnership*

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2010 International Year of Biodiversity. The aim of this declaration is to celebrate the diversity of life and raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity. Safeguarding biodiversity requires effort from everyone, and International Year of Biodiversity encourages the global community - individuals, organisations and governments - to work together and take the immediate action needed to ensure a sustainable future for us all.

Events will be taking place across the UK throughout 2010 to

- Increase awareness of the importance of biodiversity to our lives
- Highlight the continuing pressure faced by species
- Celebrate the successes achieved so far in conservation



Visit the Sussex Biodiversity Partnership website <http://www.biodiversitysussex.org/> to find out about events in Sussex. If you are planning an event in Sussex to celebrate International Year of Biodiversity please contact Laurie using the information below.

News

The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) is currently undertaking a survey of woodland sites across the UK to look for the presence of the plant pathogens *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Phytophthora kernoviae*. These two species are capable of infecting a number of plants, and in the UK have been recorded from oaks, Beech, Sweet Chestnut, Western Hemlock, Rhododendron and Bilberry, amongst others. Symptoms differ in severity between species, from dieback of affected parts to rapid death, and infections with *Phytophthora* species led to widespread death of oaks in parts of the USA during the 1990s. Suspected cases of *Phytophthora ramorum* or *Phytophthora kernoviae* should be reported to your local FERA Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate office.

To celebrate International Year of Biodiversity, Royal Mail will launch a special edition of stamps featuring endangered UK mammals in April. So pick up a pen and help raise awareness of environmental conservation.

Funding Deadlines

- Diversity Small Grant Fund (grants up to £500) **mid-March 2010**
- Bio-energy Capital Grants Scheme (grants up to £500000) **31 March 2010**
- UK Waterways Grants Programme (grants up to £2000) **31 March 2010**
- BES Small Ecological Project Grant (grants up to £2500) **1 April 2010**
- SITA Small Grants Scheme (grants of £250 - £5000) **1 April 2010**
- Sussex Community Foundation Grant (grants up to £5000) **30 April 2010**
- Veolia Environmental Trust (grants of £25000 - £40000) **30 April 2010**
- OPAL Grants Scheme (grants of £1000 - £4000) **4 May 2010**
- SITA Enriching Nature Programme (grants of £25000 - £175000) **25 June 2010**
- Ecominds (grants up to £20000) **30 June 2010**
- Cemex Community Fund (grants of £1000 - £15000) **12 July 2010**

Look out for

- The new **Non-native Species Secretariat** website has been launched. The site contains a database of non-native species projects, a photo gallery of non-native species, and identification sheets www.nonnativespecies.org
- The **British Dragonfly Society** - Sussex Branch have launched their new website <http://webjam.com/bdssx>

- The **GreenSpace South East** discussion forum is now online www.green-space.org.uk/southeast/online_forum

Upcoming Events

March 2-4: *Ecobuild* - the biggest event in the world for sustainable design, construction and the built environment is held at London's Earls Court <http://www.ecobuild.co.uk/>

March 5: Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management conference *Great Crested Newts - an approach for the future* is held in Brighton <http://www.ieem.net/ieemsoutheastconference2010.asp>

March 24: Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management conference *Ecosystem Services* is held in London <http://www.ieem.net/ieemspringconference2010.asp>

March 25: Butterfly Conservation Conference *The Future of Wildlife in British Woodlands* takes place in Reading http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/form/3462/Woodland_Conference_Tickets.html

March 26-28: Butterfly Conservation International Symposium - *The 2010 target and beyond for Lepidoptera* takes place in Reading http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/text/2751/international_symposia.html

March 26-28: The Mammal Society Easter conference and AGM takes place in Bangor <http://www.mammal.org.uk/>

April 21: The first Floodplain Meadows Partnership Conference will be held in Milton Keynes http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/p6_1.shtml

April 27-29: Association of Applied Biologists Conference - *Agri-environment schemes - what have they achieved and where do we go from here?* Is held at the University of Leicester <http://www.aab.org.uk/contentok.php?id=91&basket=wwsshowconfdets>

May 3-7: The 5th Global Conference on Oceans, Coasts and Islands takes place in Paris <http://www.globaloceans.org/>

September 13-16: International Association for Landscape Ecology conference *Future Landscape Ecology* is held in Brighton <http://www.iale.org.uk/conference2010>

Is there something we should know about? Got an article you would like us to include?

Email Laurie with the details if you would like something included in a future newsletter. The deadline for submissions for the next edition is 24 May 2010.

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