

8 APPENDIX IV: PHOTOGRAPHS

PHOTO 1

In terms of biodiversity, Downley Common's greatest asset is its substantial area of unimproved grassland, particularly the acid and heathy swards of Cpt 4 (as designated in this new Plan), seen here towards the end of the summer of 1996. The well-informed and far-sighted approach of DCPS in refraining from the familiar temptation to mow every square metre once a week has resulted in the successful conservation of this species-rich sward which is also of very great value to invertebrates.

Photo Ref: 13604



PHOTO 2

A matrix of alternating short and taller swards is also of great ecological benefit, as seen here at the boundary between Cpts 4 and 3. The advancing bracken and scrub provide further habitat diversity as well as a sheltered sun-trap, though of course they also threaten to engulf the grassland and so need to be kept under constant control.

Photo Ref: 14087



PHOTO 3

The faithful twenty-year old David Brown tractor and its flail and topper mower attachments, with which the Common has been so effectively maintained by DCPS's John Willson.

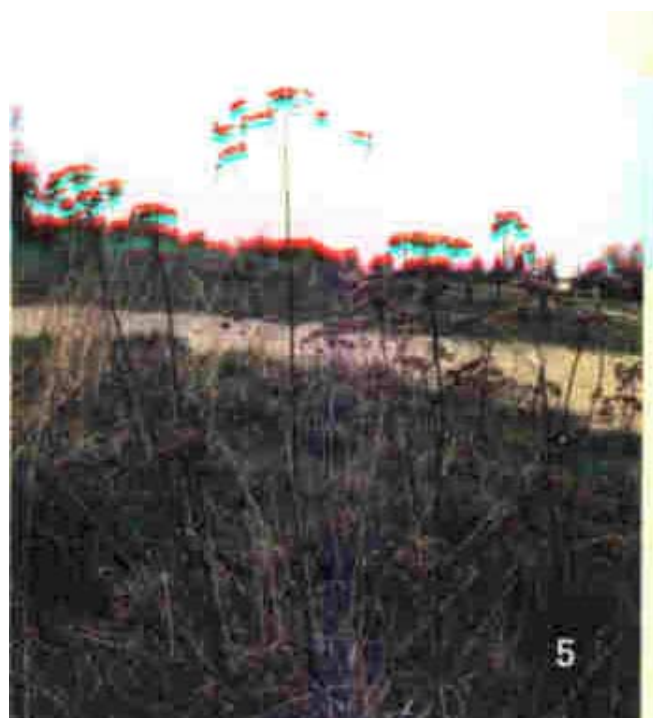
Photo Ref: 14106



PHOTOS 4 & 5

Yarrow is one of the most familiar and characteristic plant species of the Common's unimproved acid and neutral grasslands alike, and the benefits of allowing it to grow up and flower are plain enough here. Moreover, the flowering stems have been allowed to mature, ensuring that their seeds are set, with advantages both for continuing regeneration and for overwintering seed-eating birds. The seed-heads themselves also have further ecological benefits, aiding in the autumn dispersal of moneyspiders for example.

Photo Refs: 13602 14100



PHOTOS 6 & 7

Other grassland plants benefiting from the chance to flower are bird's-foot trefoil (Photo 6) and, typically appearing later in the year, harebell (Photo 7). Apart from their visual attraction, both are important sources of nectar for foraging insects, and the trefoil has the further advantage of being the preferred larval foodplant of the beautiful common blue butterfly.

Photo Ref: 13603 13601



PHOTO 8

One of Downley Common's most prized assets is its heather, a species which has drastically declined in the wild, and not least in the Chilterns. Also identifiable in the foreground from its tuft of tough, bleached leaves is moor mat-grass, common enough on upland moors, but now very local in the south.

Photo Ref: 13600



PHOTO 9

Coarser pastures occur where there is a richer supply of soil nutrients - conditions which favour the eutrophic or "greedyfeeding" species. Docks, nettles and couch-grass are typical components, though often in this situation garden escapes such as ground elder and horseradish occur as well. All these are to be found in this rough pasture opposite the Le De Spencers Arms in what is now Downley Common North's Cpt 6 in the narrower sense. Regular cutting can reduce the vigour of some of these species, though heavy infestation s may justify targetted herbicide treatment. Nettles

are, of course, a crucial element in the life cycle of tortoiseshell peacock and red admiral butterflies, so some patches need to be retained.

Photo Ref: 14073



PHOTO 10

Bracken is another powerful competitor with the grassland sward. It can be kept in check by mechanical means (rolling and bruising in high summer is the traditional treatment), but again the use of specific herbicides may be required in extreme cases.

Photo Ref: 13607



PHOTO 11

These daffodils probably arrived with a consignment of garden refuse. They provide a pleasing splash of colour (as will the oriental poppies later in the spring), but such plants are best kept in gardens rather than encroaching into the wild. Certainly, daffodils should not be deliberately planted into the Common's species-rich turf.

Photo Ref: 14102



PHOTO 12

Scrub is justifiably regarded as a threat to grassland habitats, but of course represents invaluable habitat in its own right. This dense blackthorn thicket in the dip near Vale Cottage was a mass of sloe berries when this photograph was taken in September 1996 - the crop following on from the spectacular display of blossom earlier in the year. Scrub such as this provides ideal cover, especially for breeding and overwintering birds, the latter also benefitting from the fruits and seeds.

Photo Ref: 13598



PHOTO 13

While people often appreciate the loss of heather, not everyone realises how scarce even gorse has now become, again especially in the Chilterns. These bushes are therefore all the more welcome, and should be accommodated and encouraged as a complementary feature alongside the heathy grasslands, though in time they will need coppicing to maintain vigorous growth. A number of bushes here, at the top end of Cpt 4, were deliberately propagated from seed collected by DCPS.

Photo Ref: 13606



PHOTO 14

Many of the denser areas of scrub on Downley Common conceal dells and old pits, typically the result of old clay workings, and even perhaps digging for chalk in the deeper examples . This one, again almost opposite the pub, gets down to the Upper Chalk at its base.

Photo Ref: 14074



PHOTO 15

A pleasing effect results from a scattering of mature and developing trees such as these oaks on the east side of Cpt 6. The goat-house can be seen in the background.

Photo Ref: 14071



PHOTO 16

These primroses, seen in flower on the eastern edge of the top part of Cpt 3, are all fairly young plants and look as though they are increasing in number - an encouraging sign.

Photo Ref: 14089



PHOTO 17

Beech is regenerating in this area of mixed beech, oak and cherry woodland (with abundant holly) on the lower slope of Cpt 1, opposite Vale Cottage's orchard. It would be a good idea to protect these young trees with mesh guards - though in due course they are still likely to be at the mercy of the grey squirrel, of which two were seen in the background while this photo was being taken.

Photo Ref: 14098



PHOTOS 18 & 19

Pussy willow - a name given to both sallow and goat willow, which can be very difficult to tell apart - was in full flower at the time of the spring survey for this Plan. In both species, the male trees, their catkins yellow with pollen (Photo 18), are readily discernible from the female trees, whose catkins remain a grey-green colour (Photo 19) before producing their fluffy seeds. Both these trees were on the edge of the glade in Cpt 1, now identified as feature 1B.

Photo Refs: 14094 14095



PHOTO 20

This wisened beech (occurring in Cpt 1 and "catalogued" as item 1G) is probably quite old, and represents an earlier phase of Downley Common's history when it was "wood-pasture" - mainly grassland but with scattered trees which would have been pollarded every so often. Apart from their visual appeal and historic interest, old trees such as this provide crucial microhabitats for fungi and invertebrates, as well as for the animals (including birds) which depend on these for food.

Photo Ref: 14096



PHOTOS 21 & 22

Oaks occur also among Downley Common's veteran tree element, the one in Photo 21 located in the "bulge" on the eastern edge of Cpt 3 (at 3E), and the pair in Photo 22 again on the lower slope of Cpt 1 (at 1E). The significance of the number painted on the nearest tree is not known. Wild gooseberry is quite abundant in this piece of woodland.

Photo Refs: 14088 14097



PHOTO 23

Wild cherry: the bad news and the good news. The bad news is that last year's leaves died before they senesced naturally and so didn't fall in the autumn - a symptom of one of the bacterial diseases currently afflicting this species. The good news is that a new crop of buds is nonetheless fattening up for a display of spring blossom. The worry is whether the tree can recover in the longer term. This tree is in the belt of scrub and young woodland (6Q) on the edge of the grassy glade (6W) in the extreme SE corner of Cpt 6.

Photo Ref: 14077



PHOTO 24

The celebrated Manning's Pond, following a second phase of woodland clearance, this time from around its eastern boundary (cf Photo 11 of the 1995 Plan) . It remains to be seen to what extent this further opening up of the pond's surroundings benefits the flora and fauna, and particularly the starfruit. First impressions are that the initial effect is to promote much greater growth of the dominant floating sweet-grass.

Photo Ref: 14069



PHOTO 25

The widening of the course of the bridleway, seen here looking southwards not far in from the Cookshall Lane end, can only enhance the grassland interest along the margins, and was a critical part of the original Woodland Grant Scheme agreement which ushered in this whole sequence of management initiatives on Naphill and Downley Commons. The substantial hedge bordering Cookshall Farm (8A in this compartment) can be seen to the right .

Photo Ref: 14066



PHOTO 26

What is not so clear is the extent to which the felling and thinning work recently undertaken in Cpt 8 between Hunts Hill Lane and Cookshall Lane will benefit the structure of the woodland here. This was not part of the original agreement as shown in Appendix III (Plan N) of the 1995 Management Plan, and reproduced here also in Appendix III.

Photo Ref: 14067



PHOTO 27

John Willson's magnificent holly hedge, which forms a significant part of the north-east boundary of Cpt 4 - where it is identified as feature 4M!

Photo Ref: 14104



PHOTO 28

This hedge (1C) bordering the paddock adjoining the Well Cottage orchard has recently been laid. There is a good example of nettle-dominated eutrophic valley-bottom grassland in the foreground.

Photo Ref: 14092



PHOTO 29

The turf of the cricket-cum-football ground shows by its even greenness its relatively "improved" status, consisting as it does primarily of perennial ryegrass, though also containing cocksfoot, creeping bent and rough-stalked meadow-grass, as well as herbs such as bulbous buttercup, common daisy, dandelion, red and white clovers, common mouse-ear and ribwort and hoary plantains. Here, too, were once further examples of Downley Common's many dells.

Photo Ref: 14079



PHOTO 30

The more heavily dog-walked areas are now provided with these doggy-poo facilities.

Photo Ref: 13610



PHOTO 31

Bucks County Council's then Chilterns Countryside Warden Chris Damant considers to what extent the excessive trampling of this path across Cpt 4 (now numbered 410) is a problem. In fact, provided pressures can be restricted purely to pedestrian traffic the path is unlikely to severely deteriorate in the long term. It was Chris's sharp ear that detected the presence of Downley's

rare grasshoppers during this walk round with members of the DCPS Committee in September 1996.

Photo Ref: 13605

PHOTO 31

Another aspect of public access on the Common is safety, which in a situation like this has to over-ride ecological considerations. This wind-damaged cherry hangs over the bridleway 15 mid-way down the northern edge of Cpt 1, and should be made safe. It might be worth trying to pollard the tree, though with its relatively short life-span cherry is not particularly amenable to this (and see Photo 23).

Photo Ref: 14091



PHOTOS 33 & 34

Another point of contention is the extent to which provision for access begins to spoil the very things people are visiting the place to enjoy. This junction of DBR 23 and DFP 20 at the southern end of Cpt 8 is marked by a post (Photo 33) which seems to have a surfeit of yellow (footpath) arrows. The painted-on reference to FP 6 is also spurious. In Photo 34, taken where Cookshall Lane meets the Common, a less garishly decorated wooden post has given way to this elegant metal replacement, which nonetheless, some may feel, is better suited to a more urban environment.

Photo Refs: 14068 14065



PHOTO 35

A tour of inspection by a quartet of DCPS's members (Sam France, Brian Knott, Christine Moss and Norman Belson) in September 1996, when the reward for leaving this grassy SE corner of Cpt 1 unmown had just been noted (by Chris Damant, out of the picture) in the form of two rare grasshoppers, both of which favour long grass. Photo Ref: 13597



A further selection of photographs of Downley Common (North) was included in the earlier Plan for Naphill and Downley Commons drawn up in 1995.