

# Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 15. March 2001  
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## FOOT AND MOUTH

As you are all aware we are now learning to live with the restriction imposed to control the spread of foot and mouth disease. There has been considerable confusion caused by the "No entry" signs put up on footpath posts around the Common. Not all footpaths have indicator posts and these footpaths have not been restricted. Also some footpath posts exist (eg. at the bottom of Moor Lane) that have also not been restricted. So, are we allowed to walk on the Common?

A phone call to Mr Heirons at Bucks County Council (01296 383212 – the number on the signs) clarified the situation (sort of). The intention of the County Council was to restrict access to the wooded parts of the Common on the basis that deer are more likely to be found there than on the grassland areas. There is no restriction on walking on the grassland areas of the Common as there is no livestock grazing there and has not been for some time. If the situation changes and access to the whole Common is restricted, the Council will erect posts and tape around the

perimeter, similar to that around Hughenden Park.

So, in the meantime, so long as we keep out of the woods and away from farmland such as Cookshall Farm (even though there is no stock there) and Manor Farm, and avoid the woods, people can still exercise themselves and their dogs on the Common.

## HUNG UP AT HAWRIDGE

A crisp, crunchy January morning with access by iced up skid pan roads heralded the start of our "Tree felling with hand tools" workshop at Hawridge and Cholesbury common. Participants were mainly from Woodcote, Downley and Hawridge and Cholesbury commons groups. Many with considerable experience of felling and various chain saw certificates between them.

Marion Lyon, the County Manager for B.T.C.V. in Bucks, preceded the practical activities with a short talk covering the why, when and how of tree felling. From the very beginning of the workshop, Marion's information was interjected with comments

	<b>Diary</b>	
1 April 2001, 10.00am	Working Party – clearing dells (foot and mouth permitting)	Dairy
4 April 2001, 8.00pm	Quarterly Meeting	Village Hall
5 May 2001, 10.00am	Butterfly Walk around Common with John Kemp	Village Hall
6 May 2001, 10.00am	Working Party - replacing posts	Dairy
20 May 2001, 2.00pm	Downley Walk	Village Hall
3 June 2001, 10.00am	Working Party – litter clear	Dairy
1 July 2001	Environmental Family Day	Village Hall

from the group along the lines of “I’ve always wondered about that!”.

After a thorough tool talk, emphasising the health and safety aspects, we set off to try our hand at practical felling, in this case to thin out self-set oaks to give the stronger trees a better chance of growth. Following a demonstration on one tree for the whole party, we split into small groups and assessed the challenges of our very own tree! Everyone was very positive about this expertly managed event. Don Murray from Downley said afterwards, “I’ve been felling trees for decades, but I never knew how to properly tackle hung up trees before. I got a real buzz out of the day, I felt great when I got home.”

Kristina Frydberg and John Willson

### RED KITES

As the red kites walk organised by the Chiltern Commons Network had to be cancelled last month, I thought it would be nice to include a short article about the bird in preparation for the revised date of 24<sup>th</sup> May, to start at the Fox pub in Ibstone.

Red kites are a chestnut red with striking white patches under the wings and a whitish head. Viewed from above, a broad white crescent curves across the inner part of the wings, but it is the underside that produces the most startling image.

The pale grey head is equipped with hooded amber eyes ringed with lemon yellow. The beak, wickedly hooked and very sharp, is designed for tearing meat and killing small prey animals.



It has a wingspan of nearly two metres, but a relatively small body weight of 2 - 3 lbs. This means the bird is incredibly agile, and can

stay in the air for many hours with hardly a beat of its wings.

The Kite has excellent eye sight and uses this when over flying the countryside in search of food. The long fingered primary feathers are white with black tips and being bordered by chestnut coverts and dark grey secondaries give the dazzling patches of contrast seen in every kite.



The legs and feet are bright yellow and can often be seen when the bird is in flight. Unlike the buzzard, it is usually silent while hunting, but it can be noisy when fighting for scraps of food with carrion crows and other kites.

The kite is however relatively weak for a bird of its size and is unable to open the carcass of a sheep but has to wait for the bill of the powerful raven or the jaws of a fox to do this first.

Its voice is an insistent, thin piping raised in complaint. The call is quite distinctive once recognised.

Red kites are abundant in open wooded habitats where they soar above the tree tops. They are predominantly found in Wales, but may be very occasionally seen flying over fields in eastern England. Red kites prefer to fly over lower valleys during winter, and may be seen gliding gracefully over fields and marshes as they scan the ground for prey such as rodents, small birds and carcasses (e.g. sheep). Red kites often gather in groups at good food sources and roosts. A record number of 27 red kites has been observed gathered together at one location. There are

currently estimated to be some 160 breeding  
pairs of red kites in Britain.

(Acknowledgements to the BBC Web site)