

Meet the Wardens

In the last issue we featured members of the Hedleyhope Fell Volunteer Task Force. This time, we meet the people who give up their time to patrol the Fell and generally keep an eye on what's going on: the Volunteer Wardens.

Our Volunteer Wardens help us to:

- Monitor the condition of footpaths, signs, seats and the general infrastructure of the Fell.

- Keep visitors informed about how we are managing the Fell for wildlife and the local community.

- Survey and record wildlife and their habitats.

- Discourage unwanted and illegal use of the Fell, by recording details of these activities and maintaining a site presence.

This role is ideal for those who work during the

week or have very busy lifestyles. There is very little commitment needed and visits to the Fell depend upon how much free time is available. Wardening tends to be an independent role. However, wardens are encouraged to pair up when on patrol and there is always the monthly get together in the local pub.

Wardens also have access to training events such as

bird identification and survey methods, throughout the year. None of the training events are compulsory and where possible, these events are tailored to the interests of the group.

If you are interested in joining this team, please contact Craig Best on 01388 488728 or cbest@durhamwt.co.uk.



Hedleyhope Fell Volunteer Wardens

Common Knowledge

It is a popular misconception that common land is land owned by the general public and to which everyone has an unrestricted right of access. All common land is private property, whether the owner is an individual or an organisation. Many commons are, in fact, owned by local authorities, the National Trust and other bodies, for the benefit of the public.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, there is a right of public access to open country and registered common land, subject to certain defined restrictions. Often referred to as the CROW Act, this Act has enabled people to walk more or less anywhere on common land.

Commons pre-date parliament, or even the monarchy, and are a legacy from the times when land was mainly 'wild' and ownerless. The manorial system appointed owners but the peasantry kept their customary rights. Commons are also rooted in the early mediaeval history of England and Wales: Parliament passed the first Commons Act in 1235.

Common land is subject to 'rights of common', for example, the right to graze certain stock, or the right to collect wood or turf. These rights belong to individuals (the 'commoners'), not to everyone. These individuals are often defined as living in certain properties, or in a certain area, such as a nearby village or parish. There are four local people with registered rights to graze sheep and goats on Hedleyhope Fell, one of which currently exercises his common right. (see box on right for other common rights).

Much of our common land is found in upland areas such as the North Pennines, Dartmoor and the Black Mountains in Wales. Approximately half of common land is within our National Parks and about a third is wholly or partially within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In these areas in particular, it remains an important part of agricultural and cultural life. There are also substantial areas of common in lowland England and Wales, valued for recreation, biodiversity, landscape and heritage.

Common land is an important nature conservation asset. Almost all of the commons in England and

Wales support semi-natural vegetation. Much of this is of high nature conservation value, which is reflected in the proportion of commons designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest and those covered by EU Directives.



Common Land in County Durham

Other Common Rights

Most of the remaining common rights these days are for pasture, the right to graze livestock. The animals permitted, whether sheep, horses, cattle, etc, need to be specified in each case. Other common rights which are still used today include:

- **Turbary:** the right to dig turf or peat for fuel.
- **In the soil:** the right to take sand, gravel, stone, coal, minerals, etc.
- **Piscary:** the right to take fish from ponds, streams, etc.
- **Pannage or Mast:** the right to graze pigs on beech mast or acorns, generally in the autumn.

Some of the more unusual rights which probably no longer exist today include:

- **Blacksmut:** the right to collect charred root mould for fuel.
- **Ploughbote:** the right to lop wood for making and repairing ploughs and other agricultural implements.
- **Whitestump:** the right to dig up roots for fuel.

Get fit on Hedleyhope Fell

The Hedleyhope Fell Volunteer Task Force is now working in partnership with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV).

BTCV's Green Gym, offers everyone the opportunity to improve their health in body and mind by 'working-out' in the open air on practical conservation activities. Experienced leaders provide training in practical skills and sustained exercise in a controlled and supported manner. Green Gym volunteers work with Durham Wildlife Trust on Wednesdays to help improve access and manage habitats on the Fell. It is much cheaper and far more entertaining than going to the local gym! Each session lasts for 3 hours and includes warm-up and cool down periods. Pick ups are available from Crook market place and Tow Law. For more information, contact Ceri at the Durham Dales Centre on 01388 529036 or cgibson@btcv.org.uk.



About 3% of the land area of England and 8% of Wales is common land, covering around 570,000 hectares (Source: DETR, 1997)

How to get involved

Don't forget that there are a number of ways in which you can help us manage Hedleyhope Fell. Simply contact me using the details over the page, for more information. We are also looking for people to help distribute this newsletter. At the moment we do not have many people delivering in Tow Law, Satley or Stanley Crook.

We are always looking for new members to join the Hedleyhope Fell Volunteer Task Force. The Task Force works on the Fell most Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year and there are also some Saturdays available. We meet on the Fell (Hedley Hill junction, off the B6301) at 10am and work until 3pm.



Tree and scrub management on Hedleyhope Fell

Wildlife update

We have discovered that Hedleyhope Fell is an important site for reptiles. In a recent survey many common lizard and even some slowworms were found. A slowworm is actually a legless lizard, which looks like a snake. We have not found any adders so far, although several local people have seen them in the past. Hopefully we will find them this year.

An interesting species of insect has been discovered on the Fell. Despite their popular name, velvet ants are not true ants but in fact belong to a family of parasitic wasps. *Mutilla europaea* (pictured) is a distinctive and relatively widespread species in Britain and the rest of Europe, although it is rarely seen and very little is known about the species. There are several species of velvet ant found throughout Europe of which *Mutilla europaea* is the largest.

Female velvet ants are wingless and equipped with a very efficient and powerful sting. Tropical species have been nicknamed 'cow-killer' and 'mule-killer', although extremely painful the sting is certainly not life threatening.

Males are winged and lack stinging apparatus. *Mutilla europaea* parasitise bumblebee nests using bee larvae to feed their young. The egg is inserted into the bee grub body by the female and after eating its host the larvae pupates inside the bumble bees nest. On emergence the males leave the nest immediately but the females stay and steal the bees honey reserves before leaving.



Slow Worm, Photo: Gemma Jane Fairchild

Velvet Ant, Photo: Alan Bare



Craig Best, Hedleyhope Fell Wildlife and Community Officer
Durham Wildlife Trust, Low Barns, Witton-le-Wear,
Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham DL14 0AG.
TEL: 01388 488728
EMAIL: cbest@durhamwt.co.uk

Durham Wildlife Trust aims to conserve wildlife and to promote conservation within the County of Durham, City of Sunderland and the Boroughs of Gateshead, South Tyneside and Darlington. For further information visit www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/durham



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