

ESA Open Day 2002–Bignor

By Rosie Holmes-Henderson

Our latest ESA technical open day was held on October 24th at Bignor Hill, by kind permission of The National Trust and the farmer, Tom Tupper. The day concentrated



Eileen Moss (4th from right) describes the importance of, and management issues for historic features on the South Downs

Tom's ESA agreement land. We were very grateful to Eileen Moss of English Heritage and Malcolm Emery and Roger Matthews of English Nature for giving informative talks at various points along the route.



Contractor Gerald Sercombe, who's based at Slindon, demonstrates some heavy duty scrub-removing equipment.

Gerald Sercombe, a local contractor, brought out several machines he uses for scrub control and it was enlightening to see them in action! Agrifactors, who regularly harvest seed from flower rich sites in the Downs, brought along one of their seed harvesters - our thanks to them.

About thirty farmers came to the event, together with another twenty or so partners from other organisations, and all contributed to lively discussions during the farm walk. Defra were extremely pleased with the way the day went, and we hope to run another event, possibly in the autumn. If anyone has any ideas for a topic or site for an event, please contact us in Guildford.



Agrifactors brought one of their seed harvesters on the day and gave a working demonstration, typical of operations on SSSIs

Restoration of a Historic Lake at Warnford Park

by Andrew Sellick

The South Downs has relatively few significant water features and one notable body of water is in Warnford Park at the western end of this Environmentally Sensitive Area.

Distinguished Designers

The designed landscape in Warnford Park was laid out by Earl Clanricarde in the 1780's following a survey by Capability Brown's surveyor and assistant Spyers in 1773. Many of Brown's ideas were reflected in the new designed landscape, including group planting of trees, a perimeter belt of planting and eye-catching architectural features. Clanricarde also enlarged the existing millpond at the southern end of the Park to create a fairly substantial body of water extending to some six acres.

Siltation leads to loss of habitat

The lake is fed by the River Meon, a small but exquisite chalk stream, which flows through the Park. As is inevitable with large and virtually stationary bodies of water fed by small rivers, siltation is a major management problem. The lake was last dredged in the 1950's, and over the last 40 years had refilled with silt



to such a degree that in places the water was barely an inch deep. The habitat for much invertebrate life and fish was virtually non-existent. Warm water due to the shallow depth in summer created further problems with algae blooms further suffocating what life did still exist. The food chain had completely broken down.

ESA lends a hand

The problem seemed insurmountable for many years due to the 20,000 tonnes of silt that needed removing, and the complicated consultation and licensing process required for this work. Thanks to the intervention of Rosie Holmes-Henderson, the ESA Project Officer, the Environment Agency agreed to licence the work,



subject to a bypass stream being incorporated in the project to prevent silt entering the river during operations and to allow fish to migrate up stream in the future.



The method approved was using a specialised suction pump dredger built by Clearwater Dredging, from Lurgashall in West Sussex. The silt is sucked from the lake and pumped to a series of settling lagoons. This extremely benign system prevented any damage to the reeds and sedges and other bankside flora and fauna. The existing fish and waterfowl quickly adopted the dredger as a source of food and entertainment, indeed ducks were daily observed asleep on the dredger's pontoons as it operated. An engineering "light touch" indeed.

Grant Aid

The project benefited from a 50% grant within an ESA Conservation Plan. Without this support a special corner of the South Downs would have faded away two centuries after it was created.



Wildlife Returns

Over the last months, following completion of the works, there have already been signs of new species visiting us. Little Egrets have been seen feeding, and a pair of Ospreys decided to pause here to enjoy the fish in the lake. The week before Christmas, Environment Agency Bailiffs observed Sea Trout upstream from the lake in good spawning condition. Since the 1780's the waterfall at the foot of the lake has prevented the Sea Trout passing upstream to spawn. Sea Trout can now use the new bypass stream to spawn in the headwaters of the Meon at least 200 years after fish had last journeyed here from the sea. What a magnificent Christmas present from Mother Nature!

Editors note:

Andrew has ESA agreement for Tier 2, Permanent Grassland in the River Valleys. The lake restoration project was grant aided through an ESA Conservation Plan under Code 6, restoration of ponds, for which there is a 50% grant.

"Lifescapes" - What's in a name?

By Malcolm Emery, English Nature

Between 2001 and 2004, English Nature is running a series of pilot partnership projects under an initiative called "Lifescapes" (a title representing the living landscape and those who care for it). The South Downs project has a broad aim 'to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the wider countryside of the South Downs, via sustainable land management and support for appropriate socio-economic initiatives'.



Through the Lifescapes project, English Nature intends to play its part in these wider issues affecting our future, both by developing our knowledge and understanding of the ecology of this landscape in order to conserve it and by co-operating with the many individuals and agencies with a stake in its well-being.

For further information about the South Downs Lifescapes project, contact: Malcolm Emery, English Nature, Phoenix House, 32-33 North Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2PH. Tel: 01273 476595 E-mail: malcolm.emery@english-nature.org.uk

Weeds 'n' Things

Some of the reasons why creeping thistles are such a major weed in grassland: seed can remain viable for 10-21 years and root fragments for several years - in the first year plants can produce 5sq m of root, increasing to 80sq m - in the second year roots can weigh up to 2t/Ha and extend up to 12m/year (source Dow AgroSciences, www.dowagro.com)



The Crop Protection Association has 50 Environmental Information Sheets available (www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk) to help farmers/advisers make more informed decisions relating to use of pesticides. 1000 are planned by 2006.