

# Around the Regions – with the Conservation Groups

There are over 120 Conservation Groups operating across the MOD. The following section provides an update on the dedicated work of some of these groups.

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## Spotlight on... Dartmoor Training Area, Devon

### Project summary

Dartmoor Training Area lies within the 368 square mile National Park, nearly half of which is wild open moorland. The area is recognised for its landscape of rugged tors and clitter covered slopes, blanket bogs coated in sphagnum moss and dry heath with heather, gorse and whortleberry, all deeply incised with fast flowing rivers and steams. The landscape is not as natural as at first it seems. Prehistoric man has left remains of settlements, burial mounds and stone rows. Later much of Dartmoor became an industrial landscape with streaming and mining for tin and china clay, rabbit farming, peat cutting, leats to power watermills and granite walls to contain stock. Stock grazing too has had considerable impact contributing to the open landscape.

More recently, Dartmoor's isolation, rugged landscape and changeable weather has provided a challenging training ground for the military. The success of military exercises and large manoeuvres in the 1800s, led to the War Department licensing part of Dartmoor from the Duchy of Cornwall for the artillery's first permanent land based training area. Today, approximately 13,000 hectares, of which only 1,300 hectares is held freehold, are used for light force and dismounted troop training at up to 800 soldiers in a battle group and, in conjunction with other training areas in the south west, up to a brigade of 3,000 troops.

At its simplest, legislation and licences from the landowners require MOD to ensure that



Black Tor Copse, an ancient woodland is dying because of disease and sheep grazing the natural vegetation. MOD, the Duchy and Natural England are working together to arrest its decline and regenerate the National Nature Reserve © Crown

military activities do not damage the landscape, cultural heritage and wildlife, or interfere with farming or public access except when live firing. On its freehold estate at Willsworthy and where required by the landowners, MOD is obliged to take a more pro-active role in looking after the estate. Key to fulfilling these responsibilities is the Dartmoor Military Conservation Group, formed on 9 March 1981 and about to celebrate its 30th anniversary. Originally, it concentrated on MOD's freehold estate, but recognising its invaluable contribution, its interests expanded to all of the designated training area in January 2005.

Being within a National Park and mainly using land under licence, the military has had to prove its environmental credentials as an exemplary land steward. By doing so, it has been able to argue robustly for effective use of the training area in support of training

operations. Communication with local stakeholders and other interested parties has been vital, particularly in the last eight years leading up to the renegotiation of the next Licence from MOD's major landlord, the Duchy of Cornwall.

The Dartmoor Military Conservation Group is fortunate to have members who are passionate about Dartmoor's rocks and soils, its history, the plants and animals. Some belong to NGOs such as the British Trust for Ornithology, while others are from statutory bodies such as the National Park Authority, English Heritage and Natural England. Many have been members for a considerable period; John Lamerton now takes a less active role after 25 years service and Roger Swinfin "can't remember when he joined" but it was when they drew up the first Site Dossier in the early 1980s. All the members give their knowledge and experience freely.



Female Ring Ouzel at nest with young, Watern Tor  
© Geoff Kaczanow

Geoff Kaczanow spends hours each day identifying nesting sites; his practical knowledge informing the temporary diversion of intensive training from sensitive areas. The Group tends to concentrate on understanding the moor leaving major works to contractors. However, careful placing and maintenance of bird and bat boxes by John Kaczanow and Nick Bentham Green has led to greater understanding and protection of protected species.

The Group meets three times a year and has found it preferable to walk and talk rather than sit around a table. The conversations and the pauses for a member or guest to explain some point of mutual interest against a background of moor life is stimulating. The only problem is left for the Chairman, who has to encapsulate the diverse conversations into notes for those members who were unable to attend.

Lt Col Tony Clark, who has been a member for 16 years and as Commandant Dartmoor Training Area has chaired the Group for the past ten years highlighted the assistance he has received. "I have learnt from and been guided by the members' enormous knowledge and experience. The broad spectrum of members' understanding has provided holistic guidance on how we manage our responsibilities. I also know how

much members have enjoyed broadening their understanding of Dartmoor through debate and banter. Discussion of the various views has enabled MOD to develop and implement ideas that have been of benefit to conservation and training. Explaining to the Group why and how the military trains,

have been less good at documenting them partly because digital mapping isn't available to them. Tom Greeves, a founder member and local archaeologist, successfully bid for a series of contracts to investigate and report on the archaeology and historic use of five MOD owned farmsteads.

## The military has had to prove its environmental credentials as an exemplary land steward

and involving them in preparing the Management Plan objectives and actions has been enormously beneficial. Coordination with statutory body plans and NGOs' agendas has led them to recognise MOD's commitment to sustainable development and desire to work together for the benefit of Dartmoor and our Nation's security."

John Loch, DE Estate Surveyor for 14 years recalls the benefits. "The Group provides a useful forum to explore ideas from many perspectives easing the way for later formal consultation. It has been particularly helpful in working up plans that achieve several objectives. For example, repairing the dry stone wall at Yellowmead on Willsworthy has restored a prominent landscape feature, maintained agricultural heritage, recreated an insect and bird habitat, protected a species rich meadow and improved sniper training."

Like all military conservation groups, Dartmoor depends on the goodwill of members. Members enjoy surveying and working to support their favourite subjects but they



Lapwings in the snow © Geoff Kaczanow

Regrets are few but with the benefit of hindsight, we should have involved MOD's tenants and graziers more, especially as we encouraged them into agri-environment schemes; under the next facility management contract we need to re-involve Dartmoor Training Area staff in environmental matters.

Both John and Tony are grateful for all the support that the Dartmoor Military Conservation Group has given them, which has led to stakeholders acknowledging the improvement in management of Dartmoor Training Area over the past 12 years. They hope that their successors will continue to build on their work for the benefit of Dartmoor, soldiers and future generations. ■

**Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Tony Clark OBE**  
Commandant Dartmoor Training Area and Conservation Group Chairman

**Clare Backman**  
Editor



Lapwing © Geoff Kaczanow



## Bedfordshire Defence Intelligence and Security Centre



Scheduled monument Gilbertine Priory © Crown

Chicksands has been the home of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) since 1997. Situated approximately nine miles south of Bedford, the whole of the site is centred around the remaining former cloister of a 12th century Gilbertine priory founded around 1147–1153 by the Beauchamp family of Bedford castle. Chicksands priory was the 3rd largest of the order's 13 religious houses founded by Saint Gilbert of Sempringham. The priory was dissolved in 1538 by King Henry VIII and was sold to Richard Snow in 1540 and subsequently bequeathed by his son in 1576 to the Osborne family. It remained in their hands until it was sold to the War Ministry in 1936 and used during the Second World War as RAF Chicksands, which was a Y station for Bletchley Park and then by the USAF from 1950–1995. [www.chicksandspriory.co.uk/](http://www.chicksandspriory.co.uk/)

The remaining Grade II listed priory building has been restored by the MOD and is currently used as the Officers' Mess. The surrounding Grade I listed parkland and the lakes, parts of which were laid out by Capability Brown, have been maintained in sympathy with the unique nature of the site. There are a great many notable trees of varying species and ages dotted around the grounds, the oldest of which is an

English oak *Quercus robur*, around 500 years old. There are three man-made lakes fed by the river Flit, which along with the semi-ancient woodland and unimproved grassland along the Greensand Ridge have created a wide variety of habitats.

Chicksands now has a conservation group of 20 people. We have a broad range of ranks and experience and include civil servants and family members as well as local residents who have seen the site under different management regimes. Thus far, we have had two work days of carrying out site surveys and have several more days in the pipeline to carry out some conservation

work. Luckily, we also have a very good relationship with our immediate neighbours from The Greensands Trust Sandy Smith Nature Reserve who have volunteered to advise and host the group members for a couple of days viewing the conservation work they are carrying out.

We are exceptionally lucky at Chicksands as we have many rare, specimen and veteran trees including sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, a walled garden and a 200-year-old orchard in the grounds of the 12th century Priory buildings. Accompanied by Mrs Littler, two parents and Mrs Donna Bottwright from the conservation group we set off on a morning's trek around the site. Despite it being completely out of season, I arranged for the group to identify where they could get 'food for free'. Thanks to Mrs Jenny Naylor who had submitted apple and leaf samples to the East of England Apples and Orchards Project last autumn [www.applesandorchards.org.uk](http://www.applesandorchards.org.uk) we now have both a plan of the orchard and a comprehensive list of the varieties of the apple trees growing there.

While we were busy rummaging around the trees, I asked the children to identify the oldest tree on the camp. They discovered (after much questioning) that it wasn't any of the sweet chestnut, the willows, the London plane or even the impressive cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libani*.



Walled garden © Crown



Ancient oak © Crown

While searching for the elusive veteran I described all of the other trees they saw. They were very excited about how the

London Plane was able to fix and remove atmospheric pollution and they all managed to get a couple of seeds each from the Cedar of Lebanon to try to grow their own (a few hundred years patience required there!). Eventually, we managed to find the oldest tree where it stands behind the Priory Walled Garden. Here we took a break to add everybody's ages to compare with the tree's five-century existence (we left out the adults who are, by the way, all 21... honest!). After taking a group photograph they looked in disgusted fascination at some of the owl pellets from the family of Little Owls living in a hollow in the tree.

After lunch we set up in the chapel garden at the Gilbertine centre where the children made bird boxes to take home and put up. In the true spirit of recycling and re-using, all of the wood was sourced locally from workshops off-cuts and scrap timber. Plans

were downloaded from [http://www.beautifulbritain.co.uk/htm/wildlife\\_gardening/bird\\_box.htm](http://www.beautifulbritain.co.uk/htm/wildlife_gardening/bird_box.htm) and Technical Support Section were even able to supply enough tools and some fixings to build the boxes. Total cost of building 14 bird boxes = £3.50 for nails (plus a couple of quid to wash the wood glue out of my jumper).

A highly enjoyable and educational day out in the sun which ended with the children leaving with a whole range of goodies including; bark samples, seeds, bird boxes, plans of the orchard with a list of the varieties of apples, an information and identification sheet for the bird species in their gardens and a strong desire to go scrumping in the orchard come Autumn. ■

**Staff Sergeant (SQMS) Gavin Beatty**  
Conservation Officer



## Cambridgeshire RAF Wittering

We're racing through yet another year and the time has come once again to muster up some words on conservation activities for this year's 'around the regions'. The RAF Wittering conservation group consists of a small number of Station personnel and ground maintenance contractors. Natural England and Defence Estate Ops provide specialist support and provide advice as required. The last 12 months has been reasonably quiet for RAF Wittering in terms of managing significant projects. Some members of the group investigated developing some allotments on the Station; the project manager visited Blandford Garrison allotment open day in the summer



Wittering Heath Swathe © Crown

of 2009 to take a look at how their project had progressed and gather ideas for establishing allotments at Wittering. Unfortunately since then the project manager has been relocated and the allotment idea has had to go on hold as there is insufficient interest and funding to support moving forward at the moment.

One Complete Service (OCS) our contractor which continues to maintain our Site of Special

Scientific Interest to a 'favourable standard', is constantly looking for opportunities to improve it in accordance with advice from our Natural England associates. The natural boggy area is a haven for numerous bog loving invertebrates and plants including the black bog bean, which we are yet to capture in flower; it is feared that some of our animal friends, such as muntjac deer, like to nibble the juicy shoots. OCS is also maintaining the grass and gorse in a small area known as the



Wet woodland edge of SSSI © Crown

Wittering heath. A variety of birds, butterflies and flora can be observed in this oasis on the western edge of the base; we just have to make sure that we're not in the sights of the Rough Shoot Club during a wander.

Most of the six Rowan trees that we adopted in 2008 from the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (in support of their phenology project) are managing to stay alive.

A complete annual cycle of growth recordings has been taken and passed on to the Centre of Ecology for them to analyse. It will be interesting to see how the 'whips' develop during this years recording period. Who knows... there may be a revival of those that are seemingly dead.

Having limited available 'expertise' within the Conservation Action Group (CAG) when

it comes to surveying species of flora and fauna (all moths are brown... aren't they?) it was a welcome email I received late 2009 from Gillian Catton, an ecologist from Oxfordshire. She was relocating to RAF Wittering and had offered to support conservation activities at RAF Wittering where time permits. Since moving to Wittering she has secured a job with Natural England and in January 2010 I was able to poach some of her spare time to have a look at whether our bat roost (established some two years ago in one of our woods) was being used. We visited the disused building and found a brown long eared bat hibernating. A small find, in more ways than one, but never the less exciting to find that something is appreciative of the CAG efforts. Later on in the year with advice and guidance from Gillian it is hoped to improve the building further by fixing some more roosting panels to the interior walls and sealing off a door way. ■

**Sharon Rawnsley**  
Safety Health and Environmental Clerk



## Cornwall Penhale

Following on from the feature article in last years edition of Sanctuary there have been a few changes. In April 2010, Penhale MOD Camp was closed and staff offices and accommodation for visiting units was moved to RAF St Mawgan, about six miles away. The built Camp area and Ligger House (the old mining 'Count House' on the cliff tops) are due to be sold in October 2010, whilst the dunes themselves will still be owned by MOD and used for training. The lack of public disturbance and careful liaison between training and conservation has



Penhale Choughs © Dave Thomas

resulted in a rich diversity of wildlife with visible differences between this and adjacent public access land.

Another major change since December 2009 has been the Higher Level Stewardship scheme (HLS) with Natural England (NE). Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT) have signed a tenancy agreement with MOD for the purposes of this scheme, which will provide funding for conservation work and help employ the countryside officer for Penhale Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), along

with other HLS Agreement funding and landowner contributions. CWT have already been playing a part in management work, helping with weed-wiping willow re-growth in the dune slacks over the last two years; funding scrub clearance work in March 2010 to help maintain species rich short turf and dune slack habitats; and loaning Exmoor ponies to graze specific areas. Shetland ponies have also been borrowed from NE for the last six years, grazing large fenced headlands on the MOD land and electric fenced compartments here and elsewhere on the SAC.

## AROUND THE REGIONS

This grazing has not only resulted in an increasing diversity of plant species, but in spring 2010, two choughs were seen frequently around these headlands. Choughs have only recently been reintroduced to and started breeding again in Cornwall, so this is very exciting news! The birds were identified as brother and sister from a 2009 brood, so too young to breed this year, but they may well return to suitable habitats with a mate to nest in the future. We will keep you informed and hope to expand our grazing programme!

Other birds on the dunes have also been thriving, with peregrine falcons again successfully rearing young in 2009 and 2010 and razorbills nesting on the cliffs again. Members of the Conservation Group, Cornwall Council and local volunteers carried out a skylark survey in March 2010 across the SAC – numbers of nesting skylarks have been found to be higher in the less disturbed and MOD owned areas, especially as the dunes outside the training area are very popular with dog walkers.

One of the rarest plants at Penhale, shore dock *Rumex rupestris* has made something of a comeback over the last two years! From near extinction in 2007, last year there were in excess of 271 plants on the MOD dunes alone, including a new colony in a dune slack, which had been 'scraped' to try and restore favourable dune slack habitat.

Unfortunately the wet, cool summers have affected some of the insect populations – fewer six or five spot burnet moths were seen



Cornwall College Cadets helping to clear scrub  
© Sarah Taylor

and other species emerged later in lower numbers, although rarities such as grizzled and dingy skippers were still noted from June 2010 and silver studded blue butterflies had a longer flight period than usual and were seen in large numbers. A Cornwall College student is currently researching this species of butterfly at Penhale and is now also a member of the Conservation Group. Another success has been the reptile tins which were put down two years ago – they have shown large numbers of slow worms, grass snakes and adders and have also proved popular during guided walks, school and cadet groups – and have even made some hardened marines jump!

One of my roles as countryside officer is to lead a programme of events and walks throughout the SAC and those within the MOD boundary are always popular. I also give talks and walks to MOD groups, which have been increasingly popular and well



Ligger ponies © Sarah Taylor

received. They give units additional valuable information about the site, from looking at useful or poisonous plants with Defence Survival Training Centre trainees from RAF St Mawgan to practical tasks with cadet groups and environmental activities with local scout and cub groups.

I would like to take this opportunity to pass on my thanks to some long-serving members of the Conservation Group, who have recently decided they are not as mobile as they once were and have either resigned their roles within the group or will remain as advisors on their particular specialities. Namely, these are Frank Smith who has studied Lepidoptera on the site for many years and compiled fascinating photographic records of many species; Rose Murphy who has been invaluable in her knowledge of shore docks in particular (and even has a hybrid named after her!) as well as general flora of the site; and Hazel Meredith who has amazing specialist knowledge of the rare molluscs found on the dunes. ■



Shore dock *Rumex rupestris* in fruit © Sarah Taylor

**Sarah Taylor**  
Penhale Sands SAC Countryside Officer and member of Conservation Group



## County Down Ballykinler Training Centre



Seals on Ballykinler © Crown

On the east coast at the foot of the Mourne Mountains lies the Ballykinler range complex, an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI).

Whilst our users will be aware of the excellent training facilities on offer, few will have observed the full extent of the natural environment. Plants, mammals and bird life exploit the relative isolation of the training areas, to progress unhindered by over-development or intensive agriculture.

Ballykinler Conservation Group meets in March and then in September each year and it is invigorating to see the stakeholders work so well together and further the implementation of the Management Plan.

Our key objectives are conserving the site's features, complying with all legal and other obligations. Ballykinler and Murlough is one of the largest and most important coastal sand dunes systems in Northern Ireland and are designated as a Special Area of Conservation.

The gem in Ballykinler's crown is the seal colony at the point of Dundrum Bay. It consists of 200 common and grey seals, which can live season to season with minimum disturbance. Dr Sue Wilson of Tara Seal Research, who gave a recent presentation, confirmed that Ballykinler is a significant seal site in Ireland and is doing exceptionally well as far as number counts show. With the CCTV/Radar system we are able to monitor the seals and document any disturbance from land or sea. Our staff do their utmost to ensure that they are not disturbed and educate our customers in the same.

The marsh fritillary is an important species of butterfly and is considered to be one of the most threatened species in Europe. Each year a Habitat Survey team from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) survey for patches of devil's bit scabious (good for the marsh fritillary). An interesting development is there is now a return of extensive patches since the large gorse fire of 2008. Watch this space!

Cattle grazing was reintroduced to Ballykinler range complex in 2008 and is the most effective way of managing the dune grasslands. The Galloway cattle are well adapted to eating the coarse and less palatable vegetation that grows on the dunes and their hardiness means they can tolerate the wet and windy conditions at exposed coastal sites. This year we have added two additional pieces of land for grazing, one 20 hectare section and one eight hectare section. ■

**Charlotte Holdsworth**  
DE Graduate Land Agent



Ballykinler grazing Galloway cattle © Crown



### County Londonderry Magilligan Training Centre (6)

Situated on the north coast across Lough Foyle from the hills of Donegal lies Magilligan Range.

As is the case with many of the properties owned by the MOD, Magilligan is proving to be an area of importance. Over 90% of the site has been designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI).

It is one of the most important sites in Europe because of its coastal location and its rare flora and fauna. The beach line is the best in the north, stretching over four miles across the front of the estate, with two nature reserves at the most westerly (Magilligan Point) and easterly (Ballymaclary) points.

Magilligan Conservation Group meets in March and then in September each year and the stakeholders work well together to further the implementation of the Management Plan. The management of the ASSI involves much



Extensive sand dunes of Magilligan © Crown

more than simply putting a fence around an area and leaving it to its own devices! There are five main categories of land use on the estate, which are Military Training, Conservation of the ASSI, Education (Research), Farming and Recreation. To maintain or improve a site it is necessary

to manage it by balancing all five categories without losing site of the business and what pays the bills. While all five are important, training will always be priority. ■

**Charlotte Holdsworth**  
DE Graduate Land Agent

### Dorset

### Bovington and Lulworth Training Areas (7)



Smooth snake © Cecil Pepin

Deep in rural Dorset, Bovington and Lulworth Training areas provide two Defence Training Estate facilities separated by about five to seven miles. Collectively the two sites provide training opportunities for all arms and services users and operators of Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFV). Bovington, approximately 827 hectares is predominantly a tank driver training area with metalled and cross country routes, whilst Lulworth is 3,000 hectares of specialised Armoured Fighting Vehicle Fire and Manoeuvre Ranges. Both have extensive Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and other conservation designations attached.

The conservation group which supports both sites runs to about 35 representatives, with surprisingly few subject areas duplicated

between Bovington and Lulworth conservation groups. Our biannual meetings serve as a vehicle for communications and information exchange, between the MOD, conservationists, contractors and local authorities. This report provides a flavour of the diverse activity being conducted under these auspices. Further reports can be found on pages 39 and 40.

#### **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation grazing programme at Bovington**

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (formerly Herpetological Conservation Trust) has begun to implement grazing across selected sites in the Purbeck area, including two, Woolbridge and Cranesmoor, leased from Defence Estates, which ties in with Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship

funding scheme, with the aim of providing benefit to both the flora and fauna of SSSI heathland sites as well as native breeds of cattle. Last season we grazed Cranesmoor (approx 15 hectares) and Woolbridge (c 40 hectares) with British white cattle, a breed we have previously used on other local heathland sites with positive results. Cranesmoor had previously only been grazed by a very small number of ponies, with limited effects.

Grazing is a new area for us and we have approached it cautiously, preferring in most cases to start with a low stocking density, monitor the outcome and adjust the numbers of animals accordingly. We have only used seven animals on Woolbridge, a known smooth snake site with a good mix of wet and dry heath and woodland, and up to 15 for short periods on Cranesmoor, a site with a different character – much less open with dense coverage of bracken, bog myrtle and purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea*. Naturally with so few animals on 40 hectares for only a short period it has been difficult to assess any impact therefore numbers and/or time spent on site will increase slightly next season.

On Cranesmoor the results have been more dramatic with a reduction in the incredibly dense *molinia* and a small impact on birch scrub. There was also a noticeable bracken ‘bruising’ effect with large, dense areas being trampled. We plan to lower the number of animals used on this site over the next few years as we begin to achieve the mosaic of habitat types that are essential for a fully functioning heathland ecosystem. As with most conservation projects the key is finding the right balance, we need to open up the rank *molinia* and create a better structure, while encouraging a wide range of plants. But certainly we would not want to overgraze what is a very important habitat for many species.

Native reptiles at some point in their seasonal activities will use *molinia* such as this if it is available – for instance common lizards are often seen foraging for their invertebrate prey in this habitat, and slow worms may utilise larger clumps for hibernation purposes in drier areas. Flexibility is something we think of as essential in our grazing scheme and have managed to attain this by using a local

grazier, John Alford. John and his team are able to react quickly and have the ability to get animals on or off site at short notice if we need to temporarily remove livestock to allow bracken spraying etc. This also means that the issue of animal welfare is one we can be confident about, a key element in the public perception of conservation grazing. Experienced graziers can often add in practical advice accumulated over the years that we, as newcomers, would not have been aware of.

**Gary Powell, Reserves Manager,  
Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust**

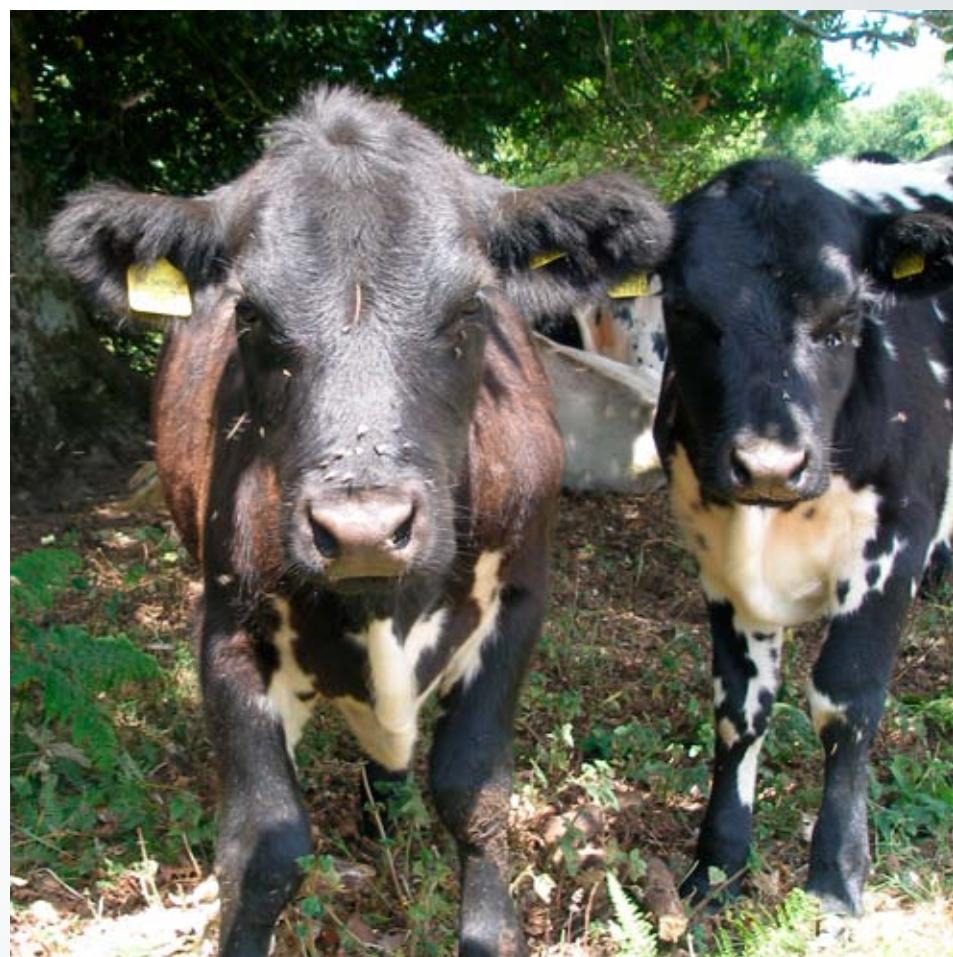
#### Dormice at Lulworth

The distribution of dormice across Lulworth Ranges has been investigated in 2009 to assess how the animals are using different habitats at the site. The data collected is being used to inform scrub management activities including cutting, burning and chemical control. Scrub control is needed

because scrub is encroaching across both unimproved grassland and heathland habitats. Research in Dorset and beyond has shown that dormice readily breed in a variety of scrub habitats including dense gorse stands. There are extensive stands of scrub across the ranges and 300 nest tubes were set out across the site to get a more accurate picture of the animals distribution.

For several years dormice have been recorded by a member of the Conservation Group in bird boxes but the systematic survey using nest tubes showed they are more widespread than previously thought. The 300 nest tubes were installed in batches of 50 at six separate locations including conifer plantations, mixed scrub and gorse scrub. Dormouse nests and the occasional live animal were recorded at two locations.

The first is an area of mature mixed scrub dominated by blackthorn and hawthorn with some hazel occurring in relict overgrown



British White calves, Cranesmoor © Richard Sharp

hedgerows. This patch of scrub links directly to Povington Wood, an area of ancient woodland and the presence of dormice was not surprising. The second location where nests were recorded was more unexpected. It is a large block of mature gorse on the north side of Whiteways Hill. The presence of

dormice here presents a challenge as the site is within the SSSI and the gorse has spread rapidly across the unimproved grassland for which the SSSI was designated. Dormice are a protected species and scrub management could adversely impact on the animals if not done sensitively. After much discussion

Natural England has agreed that some small scale scrub burning can be done in the winter when the animals are in hibernation. More survey work is planned for 2010 and it will be interesting to see if dormice are recorded in other stands of gorse.

**Oliver Howells**  
DE Natural Environmental Advisor

These articles represent only a fraction of the activity which continues on Bovington and Lulworth, much of it concerns dedicated specialists, working in cooperation not only with the MOD and its tenants but also with other conservation or official groups (not least Natural England and Dorset Wildlife Trust). We hope that our conservation group meetings provide an essential synchronisation for all these organisations as well as coordinating competing interests without forgetting our main purpose; that of providing a space for soldiers to train. ■

**Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Christopher Donaghy** Commandant DTE BLTA  
Conservation Group Chairman



Dormouse in torpor © Crown



## Dunbartonshire Clyde

The newly re-constituted Clyde Conservation Group which incorporates the four neighbouring establishments, NATO Glen Douglas, ATC Garelochhead, RNAD Coulport and HMNB Clyde got down to work monitoring many of the species that the area has become synonymous with. High profile species of conservation concern have taken priority this year with black grouse numbers remaining stable with fourteen males and sixteen females being recorded. The training area held two pairs of hen harriers and two pairs of equally rare short eared owls whilst local biodiversity action plan species such as grasshopper warbler, song thrush and cuckoo all fared well this year.



Ben with his bees © Ben Bellamy

The continued construction work at HMNB Clyde would appear to have little effect on the breeding eider colony, the densest population in the UK. It was thought that there might be detrimental effect and possible displacement of the birds during the construction phase, interestingly this did not take place and the eiders productivity is in keeping with previous years.



Buoyed by the award of the Silver Otter 2009, Peaton Hill has enjoyed visitors from all sections of the local community. With some additional funding from Scottish Natural Heritage and private business the future is positive for the reserve. With a range of conservation events planned it should continue to make a positive conservation contribution to the local community.

### A bee in my bonnet

Most readers will be aware of the serious threats to both bumble and honey bees worldwide and the potentially catastrophic impact on the natural environment and our food supplies the loss of bees to carry out plant pollination would create.

The south facing Rosneath Peninsula on the north side of the Clyde estuary is eight miles long and three miles wide. The north end of the peninsula, apart from a very narrow strip along the Gareloch, is owned by the MOD – Defence Training Estate Scotland, HM Naval Base Clyde and the Royal Naval Ammunition Depot Coulport. MOD ownership of this land has created a virtual 'cordon sanitaire' allowing the Peninsula Beekeepers to take forward their exciting project to strengthen the indigenous British black bee with minimal risk of contamination from diseased bees. Garelochhead Training Area's thousands of acres of heather-clad hills and moorland provide a rich source of food for the local bee population.

In the early 1900s the British honey bee population was almost wiped out by a tracheal infection and there was a massive importation of Italian, Carnolian and Caucasian bees which resulted in the British bee population being entirely hybridised. In the late 1900s the British bees came under pressure yet again with the invasion of the parasitic mite, *Varroa destructor*, which lives off the lymph of the bee and debilitates them to such an extent that they become vulnerable to a number of deadly viruses. The spread of *varroa* finally reached the peninsula in 2005 and it was essential that beekeepers got to 'know the enemy' – the life cycle of the *varroa* – and how to combat it. The band of enthusiastic and responsible beekeepers on the peninsula applied the new techniques and approved medications to control the spread of *varroa* to an acceptable level that the bee population could live with (*varroa* cannot be eradicated – even if killed off, the bees soon become re-infected.)

The Peninsula Beekeepers took a much closer technical look at beekeeping management and studied the science of morphometric measurement and analysis. (The study of the physical characteristics of a species to determine racial origins.)



Beehives on Garelochhead Training Area © Mr D Cairns

By a study of the veins in the bees wings, their measurements and positions in many samples from peninsula bees and plotting the results on analytical spread sheets, it was determined that the overall genetic bee population of the peninsula had a high propensity towards the indigenous British black bee, *Apis mellifera mellifera*. Eureka! A pocket of the original British black bee that was considered to be almost extinct.

Currently the Peninsula Beekeepers are carrying out a more detailed study of genetics and embarking on a programme of selective queen rearing and breeding with the objective of breeding out the hybridisation elements and strengthening *mellifera mellifera* aiming to re-introduce the indigenous bee that has inhabited and evolved in Britain over many thousands of years.

This is an ambitious project which will take several years and many bee generations, involve breeding thousands of queens and near infinite patience amongst the beekeepers. The Peaton Hill Community Nature Reserve Project – winner of the Silver Otter award in 2009 – is also playing a role in taking the peninsula black bee project forward, both in the provision of a secure area for

siting hives and also in educating youngsters in the area on the vital role bees play in all our lives.

To end on a mis-quotation of, possibly the World's greatest sportsman, Mohammed Ali, "Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee, we're doing our bit in DTE!" ■



**Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Donald Ross OBE**  
Clyde Conservation Group Chairman and  
Commandant, Garelochhead Training Area.  
Ben Bellamy has been a beekeeper for over  
30 years. He is the West of Scotland  
Representative of the Scottish Beekeepers  
Association and founder of the Helensburgh  
Beekeepers Association.



### Essex MOD Shoeburyness (9)



Rugwood CRV7 Trial Firing © Crown

The MOD site at Shoeburyness is owned by the MOD Defence Estates (DE) and operated by QinetiQ under a Long Term Partnering Agreement for the testing and evaluation of weapons systems on behalf of Trials, Evaluation Services and Targets Project Team.

The site perches on the edge of the Thames estuary, as it meets the sea, and is also bounded by the Roach and Crouch estuaries: so, the site is almost completely surrounded by water and most of its c 3,765 hectares are below sea level. In addition to the land, there is a further c 14,165 hectares of tidal sands. The site is a renowned international designated area, comprising of extensive intertidal mud and sand flats, saltmarsh, beaches, shingle/shell banks, grazing marshes, rough grass and scrubland.

The flats are of international importance for six species – dark-bellied Brent geese – which flock to the area in their thousands every winter – oystercatcher, grey plover,

knot, bar-tailed godwit and redshank. They are also of national importance for three species of wintering waterfowl – shelduck, dunlin and curlew.

The islands, creeks and grazing land form an integral part of the sheltered feeding and roosting sites for these wintering birds. The variety of habitats also provide foraging sites for nationally important numbers of wintering hen harrier. The shell banks support breeding colonies of little terns, common terns and sandwich terns. Avocets also breed on this site in nationally important numbers. The complex matrix of habitats also supports a diverse range of plants and invertebrates.

The site history is equally fascinating. The first lands at the Ness at South Shoebury were purchased by the Board of Ordnance as a Practice and Experimental Station in 1849 and the site was gradually expanded to include New England, Havengore, Foulness, Potton and finally Rushley Islands, to become

The Proof & Experimental Establishment Shoeburyness. The history of the Experimental Establishment at Shoeburyness is almost certainly unique in that for 161 years it has been directly and continually involved with the development of armaments for the Royal Navy and the Army; and since 1914, the Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force. It is situated in an environment which, apart from one other place in the world, is unique in that the size of the sands (the designated danger area) allows for shells to be fired out over the water, and then recovered for inspection when the tide retreats.

There are 15 Grade II listed buildings on the site (including the pub, although this is currently closed) and The Manor House which is Grade II\* listed. There are also Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM), a British Romano burial site and the Cold War defence boom. The remains of a series of structures dating from 1943/44 representing the various types of German 'Atlantic Wall' are also being considered for scheduling. English Heritage has recently undertaken a major thematic study of the Cold War heritage on the Fleet area of site. The report can be viewed on the EH website [http://pastscape.english-heritage.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob\\_id=1441531](http://pastscape.english-heritage.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1441531)

As you can imagine, all of this takes some looking after and MOD Shoeburyness has an active conservation group which has been running for nearly 35 years. It is attended by a wide range of organisations that join together to look after this unique place. They include Defence Estates, QinetiQ, Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Foulness Parish Council, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Foulness Area Bird Survey (FABS) Group, Essex Wildlife Trust and the Great Wakering Natural History Society. Another key member is the Foulness Conservation and Archaeological Society (FCAS), which set up a Heritage Centre in the former school on Foulness Island; a project which won one

of the four Sanctuary Silver Otter awards received by the Group.

Routine activities by members include ringing and counting birds (providing valuable scientific data), undertaking species surveys and providing land management and natural environment advice. They provide archaeological expertise, including advice on matters relating to recent history as well as history prior to the MOD's purchase of the land.



Ron Shadforth receiving the group's 30 Years of Conservation Group Award from Sir Ian Andrews in 2006 © Crown

Without the group, the Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection Areas, Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar sites would have deteriorated and the MOD would not have the basic environmental data necessary to produce an Integrated Rural Management Plan (IRMP). Once issued, the IRMP will provide a blueprint for the management of these nationally and internationally important areas. The plan will be invaluable to QinetiQ and help us to look after this special site.

This year the Conservation Group will be saying a fond farewell to one of its stalwart members, Ron Shadforth. Ron has been the Group Secretary for the past eight years and is finally retiring after spending the last 24 years of his career helping to care for the site. We all wish him a long and joyful retirement and know that his knowledge and expertise will be sorely missed. ■

**Mrs E M Crabbe**  
LTPA Estates Sustainability Manager



Two day old avocet © Chris Lewis

## Essex Wethersfield (10)

You might think that 325 hectares of grassland, an unmanaged fragment of woodland and some rough scrub may not be the most promising locality for wildlife. But, here at a former US Air Force Base at Wethersfield, North Essex, the Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency (MDPGA) has its own wildlife enthusiasts who can, and do, make a difference. We are an assorted group, including MOD Police officers, civilians, contractors and residents.

The issues we have at HQ Wethersfield are integrating site users' requirements with the conservation aims. Wethersfield is the main training area for MDPGA personnel, so it is important that those responsible for drawing up the programme for police and guard dog training, and the 4x4 driver training, are fully aware of areas where there are vulnerable ground-nesting species such as meadow pipits and lapwings.

Fire engines on skidpans, high-speed response driving and trainee pilots from the Volunteer Gliding Squadron are just some of the activities of outside agencies which need to be accommodated on site but in such a way as to limit disturbance.

All these organisations are involved in discussions with Station Administration to find ways to enable their activities to be carried out in a way that is compatible to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Using mist nets, 174 birds of 17 species have been ringed between December 2009 and March 2010. More unusual trappings included little owl, tree-creepers, bullfinch and great spotted woodpecker, as well as a kestrel which was attracted by the smaller birds caught in the nets. Great enthusiasm was shown by staff in departments who sponsored and named bird boxes, we have



Tree creeper © Dave Culham

'Chicks Away', 'Chickitita' and 'All MOD Cons', to name just a few.

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A number of Essex Biodiversity Action Plan and Schedule 1 species are on site, such as lapwing, grey partridge, breeding barn owl and skylark. Woodcock and snipe overwinter in the woodland but evaded all attempts to ring them. Wethersfield is also a migration stopover area in spring and autumn for species such as ring ouzel, chiffchaff, wheatear, short-eared owl and grasshopper warbler.

Here at Wethersfield, we are bucking the national trend of declining numbers of skylarks and meadow pipits as we have good resident populations encouraged by a change in the grass cutting regime, allowing longer grasses to provide better cover for feeding chicks.

Summer 2009 proved a bumper year for day-flying moths, in particular the seven spot burnet moth which hatched in great numbers on an area of cropped grassland. Moth trappings evenings in 2009 using a mercury vapour lamp were a disappointment, however, reflecting the national trend.

We are lucky to have a qualified wildlife tracker on site, DI Paul Mayne, who led fascinating tracking events, helping us to distinguish paw-prints left by badgers, foxes and hares as they trotted through the muddier areas of the woodland. Distinguishing between different types of deer prints however proved quite a challenge!

I had a close encounter in early April on the edge of the woodland whilst on my hands and knees, trying to count the number of tadpoles in the ponds and ruts created by the 4x4s. I suddenly noticed a grass snake up on the opposite side of the pond presumably also sizing up the tadpoles. We eyeballed each other, and then both beat a hasty retreat!

The removal of redundant buildings on site was delayed to allow important migrants such as swallows, swifts and house martins to complete their breeding season and then depart. To replace their traditional nesting places, now demolished, we have installed artificial nests, which we hope the returning birds will use this summer. Close to the gymnasium which has at least 40–50 house martin nests, our Grounds Maintenance contractor, Countrywide, have created a mud 'scrape' by removing an area of turf. Next time it rains, with a little help from welly-booted volunteers, this will be churned up into a mud bath for essential house-building material for the house martins.

Essex has one of the lowest rainfall figures in the UK and the site suffers from a shortage of standing water and natural springs. At the top of our project list for 2010 and beyond is the creation of a pond and wetland area to allow more amphibious species to find a haven on the site.



"Fox or badger?" Tracking with Paul Mayne  
© Ros Gourgey

It would be somewhat naïve to assume that these successes happen as a matter of course. Behind the scenes, it is a case of negotiation between the wildlife conservationists and the MOD's agencies on site. Although we are all working to meet the MOD's Sustainability Targets, unfortunately contractual commitments can conflict, requiring close liaison with Defence Estates, and frequent discussions with RPC Babcock DynCorp and Countrywide, to ensure we steer a path between balancing maintenance requirements and wildlife protection. ■

**Ros Gourgey**  
Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency Sustainability Manager



Grass snake © Crown



## Hampshire Defence Training Estates' Home Counties Region



A freshly emerged Small Copper on Ash Ranges © Alan Hunt

Defence Training Estates' (DTE) Home Counties Region is normally associated with vast tree and scrub clearances to re-establish Lowland Heathland habitats for the high profile species such as Dartford warbler, nightjar and natterjack toad. The short articles below are intended to give an insight into the much broader diversity of the region.

### **The Importance of the Heathlands of the Home Counties' Training Areas for Heathland Insects**

The heathlands of the Home Counties' Training Areas are particularly important for the many scarce insects which form the nesting sites for them. Many of these wonderful sites contain a legacy of occasionally disturbed bare sandy ground areas. It is the very occasional disturbance by tracked vehicles that can be useful in tearing up the vegetation perhaps once in ten years. Alternatively, for the more frequently used

sites it is the edges of such sites where they remain as bare soil, or where cuttings have been made through sandy hillocks, thereby leaving cliff-like sand faces that are most useful to our populations of solitary bees and wasps and their parasites. This disturbance creates what are called early-successional habitats.

These habitats in conjunction with the heathland containing nectar rich summer flowering dwarf shrubs in the form of various 'heather' species, provides areas that warm up quickly in the sun as well as providing good and easily accessible food sources. The heathland vegetation also comprises the food of many moth caterpillar species, which in turn are preyed upon by solitary wasps. High numbers of scarce to very rare species of solitary bees, wasps and flies are known from all these areas. In late 2009 the creation of additional bare sandy patches within the

'heather' areas was commenced on the Aldershot Training Area. This is being undertaken under Higher Level Stewardship. These new bare sand patches will help the mottled bee-fly and its host wasp to survive on this site.

### **Ash and Pirbright Ranges**

Apart from monitoring the nationally important populations of silver studded blue and grayling that are found across the ranges, surveys have been conducted on the purple hairstreak, a butterfly not normally associated with heaths but one that can be found wherever there are suitable oak trees. A major highlight was finding an old abandoned waste tip near the Alexander Barracks which has turned out to be one of the best green hairstreak sites in north Surrey, as well as having good populations of common blue, small and large skipper, ringlets, small copper, gatekeepers and meadow browns. The ranges with their rich mix of habitats from mature woods to the grass and scrub of the butts and the classic open heaths support a very wide range of lepidoptera with the promise of more species to come.

### **Striped lychnis moth at Barton Stacey**

The striped lychnis moth is nocturnal and is rarely seen, but the larva has bright and distinctive markings and can be found by searching the foodplant, dark mullein. The moth was once widespread in southern England, but it has suffered a significant decline and is a national Biodiversity Action Plan species. One of the strongholds is the area between Andover and Basingstoke – including the Barton Stacey Training Area.

The striped lychnis is associated with roadside verges, field edges and areas of open calcareous grassland. Some disturbance of the soil is needed from time to time to provide suitable conditions for the foodplant, so the Training Area is ideal. The larvae can be found there every year, but in some years over one hundred have been seen in a single small area. The larvae are most easily seen in

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late-July and August, several weeks after the superficially similar larvae of the related mullein moth.

### Otmoor

Otmoor SSSI represents the core of what was once an extensive area of wetland within the bowl-shaped area of land on the floodplain of the River Ray. It has been protected from agricultural improvement by its military training use. Outside the range, the wildlife interest of adjacent land has been reduced by drainage and agricultural improvement, though this is partly ameliorated by RSPB management of land adjacent to the SSSI.

Otmoor is a key site for the nationally rare, species-rich grassland. This occurs in a mosaic with less species-rich tussocky grassland, sedge and scrub habitats. The diverse sedge and herb flora of the unimproved meadows contains several locally and nationally rare species including the tawny sedge, downy-fruited sedge, true fox sedge (found in the

SSSI but not in the area owned by DTE) and the rare fen violet.

The site has a number of high quality ditch and pond systems, free from nutrient enrichment supporting some of the best assemblages of aquatic plants and invertebrates in Oxfordshire. The tassel stonewort, a Biodiversity Action Plan species, has recently been discovered on the margins of scrapes at the site.

The wet conditions of Otmoor favour a diverse population of breeding and wintering wildfowl such as teal, mallard, garganey, wigeon and water rail (breeding in small numbers) and breeding waders including redshank, lapwing, snipe, and curlew. Golden plover is a frequent winter visitor. A wide variety of uncommon insects occurs, including the nationally rare black hairstreak with the brown hairstreak butterfly, and several nationally uncommon flies and beetles. ■

**Lieutenant Colonel Andy Westcott**  
Conservation Group Chairman



Striped lychnis larva © Glynned Evans



## Hampshire (Isle of Wight) Newtown Range & Jersey Camp

I, like a few more Conservation Group Chairmen received a gentle reminder that the closing date for Around The Regions was nigh. So a frantic search of AGM minutes, surveys, photographs, precedes this article, not necessarily in chronological order.

The pipistrelle bat population in the loft of the Range House has been enhanced with the release of the same species by Graham Street. Graham and his wife Donna run the Isle of Wight Bat Hospital. They do a great job, promoting bats and taking in the sick and injured from the island. Once fit, the bats are released, normally back to where they came from or here. Last October Dr Colin Pope a Conservation Group Member and the local Council Ecology Officer conducted a bat count



Netting behind the range © Dave Maidment

of the Range House where some 300 pipistrelles were sighted.

Our open days in May 2009 and May 2010 brought in the interested parties came to see a carpet of green winged orchids which grow on the Range Meadow, they were somewhat disappointed certainly last year with a count of 3,330, but this year the was 43,500. The records now reach 20 years of recording, the orchids grow with no

assistance albeit the grass being mown and carried in the summer as per the management plan.

On both open days there was plenty to see, swathes of bluebells and a good showing of primroses this year. Group members Bill Shepard, Sue Blackwell, John Willmott, Barry Angell and Lee Glover gave guided the walks to a superb panoramic view of Newtown Estuary and the training estate.

During the summer one of our tenant farmers George Ablitt passed away after a long illness. George farmed Elmsworth Farm for some 50 years taking over from his father. A lively character who kept a watchful eye over his land and livestock, he is missed by the range staff; we still refer to the farm as George's. His wife Kath continues to live at the farmhouse and daughter Eve has taken on the tenancy to continue in her father's footsteps. No stranger to the group, Eve attends the AGMs as the farm representative.

A Fungi Foray during the autumn was carried out by the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society they had a satisfactory afternoon recording species in Locks Copse. ten new species of microfungi were recorded by Dr David Biggs.

During June an old acquaintance of the Range and Conservation Group, Andy Yule, found what at first he thought to be a mammoth tusk in the face of the north shore. Excavation by an expert from the dinosaur museum on the Island unearthed a broken tusk which was soft and pulpy. In the same location a molar and a segment of bone came to light. We've heard back that it is more than likely to be an elephant than a mammoth. We are excited with finding something new which adds to the history of this site. Carrying on in the archaeological theme, in May 2010 we had local experts in from Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society who looked at the earth works in Locks Copse and a crossing made of stone in Rodge Brook, which they think could be a cart crossing, or small harbour. They also looked on Elmsworth farm in one of the ponds where there could be remains of a boat house and slipway.



Solar System Jersey Camp © Dave Maidment



Toad in Claydens pond © Dave Maidment

The bird ringing fraternity from the British Trust for Ornithology have been busy all year netting, recording and ringing. They paid 20 visits during the year netting over 600 birds, among the birds netted were 14 nightingale, 32 dunnock, 21 willow warbler, also blackcap, whitethroat and sparrowhawk to name a few. The number of nightingales was encouraging when they netted two females in May. Two common whitethroats that were ringed last year returned to the same netting area.

Toads and frogs seem to be very amorous this year and are not particular with who they meet up with. Toad and frog spawn everywhere with most in Claydens pond in and around the reeds, even in depressions on the Range Meadow. Our range staff Stuart Hersey and Trevor Clark were impressed at the quantity of spawn produced this year.

Readership of Sanctuary Magazine in the United States has increased, four copies of the 2009 edition were sent to the Jones family of Salisbury New Hampshire. Sally & Wilson Jones are avid readers; they pass the copies around the family and place one copy in the local library. They are amazed what we do for conservation especially on our training areas. I hope for more feedback on my visit to the States in the summer.

Jersey Camp, our accommodation area for the Range and Training Area, has been given a green facelift. Our Facilities Manager John Coupland from South East Reserve Forces & Cadets Association (SE RFCA) has secured grants and spend to save money to reduce costs and energy on heating, lighting and hot water for the camp and range house. Jersey Camp has three sets of Solar Panels on the roof supplemented with air heat source pumps; this produces enough input to run the hot water systems for the kitchen and two ablution and shower areas. Savings have already been worked out and from 2011 we will attract an income from the government for solar energy. Under floor heating now has control for each mat and allowances for switching off and for fine adjustment to the temperature. Lighting systems throughout have passive controls thus allowing lights only to come on when required. A true transformation and with the solar system we are leading the way on the Island.

Another excellent year for our flora, fauna, Conservation Group members, visiting groups, and for SE RFCA who have had the fore sight to install energy saving devices to Jersey Camp. ■

**Major (Retd) Dave Maidment**  
Range Officer & Training Estate Manager



# Lancashire Holcombe Moor Heritage Group



Simons Sundial Cottage © Jonathan Ali

Avid readers of Sanctuary Magazine will have last heard of Holcombe Moor in 2006 when the newly formed Heritage Group there, won the Silver Otter award for its work in assessing the historic landscape of the training area north of Manchester. For those not familiar with the work this first project involved a landscape survey by archaeologists from Oxford Archaeology North (OAN) working with members of the local community. It allowed the reconstruction of the training area's landscape prior to 1600. Experts from OAN described the valley as remarkably unspoilt and probably one of the most important historic landscapes in that part of the country.

Since winning the Silver Otter, the local people who comprise the heritage group have not been resting on their laurels. In fact they have been merely regrouping for two new ambitious projects. The first is an archaeological dig on the Holcombe Moor training area at Cinder Hill cottages which were built in the late Elizabethan period.

It's hoped the investigation will yield clues into the post-medieval living conditions of farmers on the moorland of the West Pennines. At some time in the future it is hoped to investigate a second site at Bottoms on the nearby Holcombe Brook where there is some evidence to suggest there was once an early textile factory of the mid to late eighteenth century. Both will be examined under professional supervision working closely with interested members of the public.

The second, and probably the most daring challenge the group is taking on, is to try and fully restore a Grade II listed farmhouse in the heart of the training area. Simon's Sundial Cottage is a classic example of early Stuart Lancashire vernacular architecture with mullioned windows and the remains of an early sundial which gives the farm its name.

The building has remained unoccupied for several years and sadly is in a state of disrepair and has recently been placed on The Buildings at Risk Register by English Heritage. Holcombe Moor Heritage Group now wants to bring this historic building back to life for community use. Simons Sundial is close to the Redisher Wood Nature Reserve and National Trust land on Holcombe Moor and could form a focal point for all those who use this unspoilt landscape. A preliminary scheme has been drawn up by a local architect and the estimated costs amount to more than a quarter of a million pounds. The group have already obtained the voluntary services of a professional project manager and are working closely with Defence Estates to ensure the building, once restored, has a viable future. ■

**Jonathan Ali**  
Holcombe Moor Heritage Group member



## Lincolnshire RAF Coningsby (14)

During 2009, the bird population on and around RAF Coningsby contributed to data that's currently being gathered in conjunction with Defence Estates (DE) and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Surveys of RAF Coningsby estate during 2008 and 2009 have provided vital scientific work towards a four year project titled Bird Atlas 2007–11 with an aim to provide distribution and abundance of all birds in Britain. Previous Atlases have been completed 1968 to 1972, 1981 to 1984, 1988 to 1991 enabling comparable data for the current Atlas.

In the spring and summer of 2009, RAF Coningsby estate hosted many species of breeding birds, ranging from barn owl to yellowhammer. This highlights diversity in the range of habitats. For example, 'Eagles host

Swallows' was the first occurrence I had personally observed of the XI Sqn Lightning undercarriage successfully helping to fledge



Male yellowhammer © Iain Perkins

four swallows! The main gate guardians also did their bit as well as many more structures and equipment. Black Holt, more commonly known as 'The Bomb Dump' also hosted a cuckoo (a red listed species, of highest conservation priority), many birds of prey and woodpeckers. Migrant passage over the airfield in the spring and autumn enabled large amounts of data to be recorded for the BTO and DE records, although a juvenile gannet was unexpected as this bird is normally only found at sea! Winter records also continue to boost the 'species list' with observations of pink-footed geese and other northern/eastern winter visitors passing through. ■

**Sgt Taff Harry** Defence Estates Volunteer Surveyor for RAF Coningsby Estate  
RAFOS Publicity Member

## Northumberland RAF Boulmer (15)

Following on from the sterling conservation work of the Safety Health and Environmental Protection Sustainable Development team at RAF Boulmer, namely the Woodland Walk



Insect tower © Crown

and the Natural Meadow which were both created at nil costs (those magic words!) the next project was the construction of a wildlife tower beside the Woodland Walk. A wildlife tower is a structure which provides homes for many different creatures. By providing these habitats we can greatly increase the number of beneficial insects in a garden/area. Some, such as bumblebees and solitary bees, are declining in numbers in the wider countryside, so by providing homes we can contribute to their conservation. An average garden can hold hundreds of different species of invertebrates many of which are very small so are often overlooked.

Our tower was built from discarded pallets obtained on the Station, and filled with a variety of recycled materials:

**Dead wood** – An increasingly rare habitat as we tidy our gardens, parks etc. which is essential for the larvae of wood-boring beetles such as the stag beetle. Crevices under the bark hide small invertebrates.

**Holes for solitary bees** – Holes drilled into blocks of wood make good nest sites for solitary bees, which are excellent pollinators.

**Lacewing homes** – Rolled up corrugated cardboard in an old lemonade bottle (waterproof cylinder) makes a good home for lacewings, which consume large numbers of aphids and other garden 'pests'.  
**Hibernation sites** – Straw/hay, pine cones, loose bark, twigs, old vent bricks all provide safe hibernation sites for many garden invertebrates.

**Wood on top** – Logs were placed on top of the wildlife tower to provide a place for small birds to nest.

This tower was created over a year ago now and we are considering building another one further along the pathway. Again this project was created at nil cost using recycled materials obtained on the unit. And the beauty of a wildlife tower is that there is no specific size requirement – it can be as large or small as a space allows. So why don't you have a go and build a mini-beast mansion! ■

**Mac Graham and Nicki Mullen**  
Safety Health and Environmental Protection  
Sustainable Development



### Northumberland Otterburn (16)

Otterburn Training Area (OTA) is nearing completion of the new Integrated Rural Management Plan (IRMP), this document is designed to replace the Integrated Land Management Plan. The new IRMP takes into account the interests of local communities and the interests of stakeholders such as Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA). The conservation group has undergone a review and now consists of four working groups: Archaeology, Natural Environment, Public Access and Farming which report to the Environmental Steering Group (ESG). These groups will comment on strategic elements of estate management in association with NNPA.

Particular highlights over the past year have included the recovery of Harbottle Moor, which was damaged by a large fire a few years ago. Moira Owen from Defence Estates

(DE) Environmental Advisory Service has been conducting studies into how the flora and fauna is changing over the years. Prestwick Carr SSSI at Ponteland is managed by DE on behalf of the Reserve Forces and Armed Cadet Association. Recent negotiations with Northumberland Wildlife Trust have resulted in an arrangement for a small herd of Exmoor ponies to be allowed to graze the Carr in order to improve the quality of the woodland there.

Projects for this year include the restoration of woodland and renewable energy installations at a number of farms on the estate. The farms are currently off grid and rely on generators. The roll out of Natural England Higher Level Stewardship has provided an opportunity to look at the diverse habitats, which were declining under the old Countryside Stewardship Scheme.



Waterfall at Otterburn © Crown

Overall the diverse range of habitats, wildlife and fauna at Otterburn has been well managed and despite cuts in budgets it looks like it will be well managed into the future. ■

**Charlotte Holdsworth**  
DE Graduate Land Agent

### Shropshire RAF Cosford (17)

Cosford Conservation Group (CCG) is made up of a team of ten active volunteers, a mix of both Service and Civilian staff, all of whom are based within the bounds of RAF Cosford. Cosford is currently the home of a number of single and joint Service training establishments (including Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering (RAF No1 School of Technical Training), Defence College of Communication & Information Systems (RAF No1 Radio School), Defence School of Photography and RAF School of Physical Training). Still serviced by its own railway station, it is also home to the West Midlands Air Ambulance Service, the University of Birmingham Air Squadron and a sister site of the RAF Museum.

Covering an area of approximately 275 hectares the site is principally occupied by the airfield, hangars, domestic and technical



Great crested newt © Martin Noble

accommodation as well as recreational areas. Situated just off Junction 3 of the M54 motorway, there are stands of both deciduous and coniferous trees, natural water courses, a large area of short-mown grass and tarmac (occasionally used as an airfield!), along with numerous other terrestrial habitats.

The CCG is currently enjoying a bit of a renaissance with a dedicated team of volunteers wishing to see both the habitats

and the species found at Cosford conserved. I am currently studying towards a BSc in Wildlife & Countryside and following a few tentative enquiries I very soon found myself taking over as both Conservation Officer as well as the Chairman on the CCG... that will teach me to stick my head above the parapet!

The 'suspected' population of great crested newts have now been proven to exist. We initially undertook a presence/likely absence

survey in 2009 using bottle traps and egg searching. This revealed a number of males (both adult and juvenile) and a number of eggs in the aquatic vegetation. As this task calls for licensed surveyors we were fortunate enough to be able to call upon the Cannock Chase Council Countryside Service to undertake it on our behalf; it also formed part of my training to allow me to obtain the relevant license myself from Natural England (NE). This initial survey has been followed by a population survey, undertaken by myself and Fran Lancaster of the Shropshire Amphibian & Reptile Group. This has established a 'medium sized' population. This survey will be used to support the application for a Conservation Licence from NE to allow us to clear some of the encroaching aquatic vegetation and to create some alternative hibernacula.

The Shropshire Bat Group (SBG) paid us a visit towards the end of last year and were able to identify common and soprano pipistrelles. These species would appear to be not only using Fulton Block, reputedly the largest brick-built building in Shropshire, as a feeding station but also due to their arrival time on site, 'roosting' within the very near vicinity.

A small area of woodland (approx one hectare) in the corner of the domestic site has been 'adopted' by the CCG. We removed four old conifers from Long Lane Nature Area in and around the existing bird hide in order to provide a more open aspect. We have created a pond measuring approximately five metres by nine metres (with a maximum depth of 1.25 metres), which has been left to colonise naturally and is already showing signs of life after only four months. Furthermore, by ensuring it has a clean water source and is left to thrive without undue disturbance, we have been able to register it under the national Million Ponds Project.

In way of recompense we replaced the old conifers with 100 berry-bearing bushes during National Tree Week (courtesy of Chris Trivett, Tree & Woodlands Officer for CarillionEnterprise) which we have planted in the clearing around the pond. As well as maintaining a healthy selection of bird boxes in this area we have also installed a couple of insect towers, blatantly copied from the one at RAF Boulmer – see Issue 9 of Conservation Update – and with thanks to Nicki Mullen!



The new landscape starting to take shape © Martin Noble



Finishing touches to the pond © Martin Noble



Making the insect tower © Martin Noble

Following a 'letter of introduction' from myself to many local (and some national) groups we have been fortunate enough to establish strong links with a number of other organisations in addition to those mentioned. Most productively with Butterfly Conservation, who are going to engage CCG members with butterfly surveys and moth nights, as well as Bumblebee Conservation Trust who have provided advice and guidance on creating wildflower habitats around the Unit.

It's been a busy year in many respects for CCG members but also a fruitful one. Lots of things going on, lots of things still to do... and we still need to sort out that Management Plan if we're really going to be able to make a lasting

difference to the wildlife and habitats that we're lucky enough to be custodians of here in the West Midlands. Anyone got a couple of hours to spare...?

Thanks to Clare Backman and Iain Perkins of DE Strategy and Policy; Steve Haywood and Chris Trivett of CarillionEnterprise Ltd; Phil Armshaw of Cannock Chase Countryside Service; Fran Lancaster of Shropshire Amphibian & Reptile Group as well as Nicki Mullen at Boulmer and Sharon Rawnsley at RAF Wittering... and of course every single member of CCG, past, present & future! ■

**Flight Sergeant Martin Noble**  
Conservation Group Chairman



### Surrey Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (18)



Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the snow © Lt Col Deans

The name Sandhurst is familiar to most, it has been the centre of excellence for military Officer training since the original poor farmland was sold to the Government in 1801. Now internationally recognised, many famous individuals have completed their training on its hallowed grounds: Sir Winston Churchill, Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, David Niven, Josh Lewsey, James Blunt, six ruling monarchs overseas and Princes William and Harry to name a few. The values of this establishment are well embedded; its culture, traditions and standards are reflected in the buildings and landscape. Many of the historic buildings are listed and the area is well-known for its conservation work. If you are lucky enough to browse the many historic pictures around the site the views reflected are not too dissimilar today.



The 'W' in swans © Dave Fyffe

So how does today's conservation group measure up to its predecessors? The Sandhurst Conservation Group plays an important part within the estate and meets bi-annually reporting directly to the Commandant Major General Patrick Marriott CBE. It consists of local volunteers, our own bailiffs, as well as professional conservation organisations and subject matter experts. These include Defence Estates, Natural England, English Heritage and Bracknell Forest Borough Council who all work together to ensure MOD and Government conservation legislation is adhered to and the future conservation of the estate is assured. All conservation works now comes under one banner known as Project ACORN. We seek to balance conservation with the operational output and activity in training our Officer Cadets in mind.

Barossa Training Area is designated as SSSI, SPA and SAC. The woodland along the A30 trunk road is recognised as a site of nature conservation importance and there are a number of listed buildings, monuments and vistas. The training area is recorded as a SSSI because of the extensive mosaic of broadleaved woodland, dry and wet heathland. It supports internationally important populations of nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler. The area also supports nationally important assemblages of

dragonfly and damselfly and includes the valley bogs of Wishmoor Bottom which together with Broadmoor Bottom form the most important remaining type of habitat in the area.

A striking aspect of the landscape are the extensive woodlands all of which need careful management. Some of the difficulties we face are, rhododendron clearance, tree thinning and storm damage; many of our mature trees date back to the 1820s and earlier. We try to retain historic trees, where safe, to their maximum biological life, to date our approach has been to replace trees after they have been removed or have collapsed. This approach will preserve the precise location in framing views, the biodiversity value of veteran trees and the desire to retain an ageing parkland character.

We also have a number of commemorative trees, we always consider carefully in terms of planting the species used and locations chosen so that these fitting memorials are both long-lasting and in-keeping with the qualities of the site.

To increase environmental awareness, throughout the year we conduct a number wildlife and conservation interactive activities aimed at our younger residents – our adage "Do unto future generations as you would have them do unto you".

The sustainable development of Sandhurst adopts an approach whereby it fulfils present and future needs. A recent example of this has been to reinstate the walled Victorian garden at Government House, where the Commandant has kindly agreed to open the area as gardening allotments to military residents based on the Station. At present the Commandant's rare breed pigs Oxford sandy and blacks, Claude, Clarence and Clementine are doing their bit by cultivating and turning over the ground as well as adding some well needed manure, all good ground preparation. Mr Chris Shanks and his team from Turfsoil, our ground maintenance contractor, will complete the final ground clearance ready for the growing season.

Our links with the local community are far reaching, private visits by organised groups can be booked through the Sandhurst Foundation ([www.Sandhurstfoundation.org](http://www.Sandhurstfoundation.org)) and annually Sandhurst opens its gates when we hold a Heritage Day. Visitors are given access to view and enjoy the grounds, conservation and environmental awareness is promoted with a variety of stands and practical hands on experiences, bird ringing, bicycle power generators and nature walks which not only educate but also provides an element of fun for our guests.

Our ornamental lakes are well stocked with various species of coarse fish and trout and recently students from Sparsholt College

Winchester conducted a fish survey to the joy of watching anglers trying to spot the one that-got-away.

Project ACORN is a base foundation fully supported by volunteers, subject matter experts and our Commandant. He takes a very keen interest in conservation. With his direction we continue to sow the seeds to ensure the legacy left to us is continued and remains the bedrock to the Sandhurst heritage.

**Major Andy Stephens RLC**  
Conservation Group Chairman ■

## East Sussex and Kent Defence Training Estate South East (19)

Across the Defence Training Estate South East (DTE SE) over 90% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), by area, are now in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. The improvement since 2008 (which at its lowest was 65%) has been achieved mainly through Higher Level Stewardship schemes. These figures are inevitably subject to change and due to the complexity of the site, issues do remain at Lydd Ranges. However all concerned are endeavouring to ensure environmental stewardship can be achieved without any disruption to the site's operational capability.

The Coastal Defence strategy continues to progress from consultation to implementation, although improvement works at Hythe and Lydd Ranges are still some way off. Winter storms in December 2009 swept away a significant amount of beach shingle at Hythe, revealing Victorian coastal defence works in the form of hazel wattle. Landmarc's term contractor, Mackley Construction, carried out repairs to the groynes and re-profiled shingle.

At Lydd, similar shingle losses were addressed by the Environment Agency with a programme of re-charging from Jury's Gap (whereby shingle is deposited to the west of the ranges and the natural process of longshore drift



Early Spider Orchid with pink petals, Arpinge © Peter Gay

replenishes the shingle ridge along the frontage). DTE and Defence Estates Land Management Services (LMS) continue to liaise with Natural England and the Environment Agency to ensure that DTE interests are not prejudiced by the strategy.

**Folkestone/Dover Dry Training Area (DTA)**  
Following last year's summer drought (localised to Kent) and hard winter, a dry spring has been experienced which has affected many aspects of the DTA. Farmers are reporting low lamb numbers, poor grass growth and increased rabbit problems.

## AROUND THE REGIONS

The conditions have also had a detrimental affect on the normally rich flora of the DTA. The colonies of spider orchids at Arpinge and Beachborough were severely depleted (although the rare pink early spider orchid did appear) and were often eaten by rabbits as soon as they flowered. Warren Bottom's flora fared better due to its more sheltered aspect.

Recent improvements on the DTA have included, after an absence of several years, the return of cattle to Lympne Escarpment SSSI following the final stage of fencing works carried out by both the grazier and Landmarc. Cattle are vital to the site as sheep grazing alone was not reducing the cover of tor grass tussocks (which were shading out the rare lichens and mosses found on the ragstone outcrops and landslips).

The woodland management programme of wide ride creation, reversion to high forest and coppicing has continued. Last winter, some of the small woodlands were targeted as access limitations can on occasions deter management.

Following a request from a Conservation Group member, agreement is in place to start monitoring for dormice at a new location within the DTA. 50 boxes are due to be positioned at Watersend Woods. A site meeting between LMS, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species and Kent Mammal Group identified a variety of habitats for box location.

### Lydd Ranges

SSSI improvement funding is to be used on resurrecting old fire breaks at Lydd Ranges.

Liaison is ongoing with Natural England and it is aimed that the works will be carried out during the summer shutdown. The network of fire breaks is not extensive due to vegetation type and ground conditions, however it is hoped that they will assist in limiting the spread of accidental fires and afford some protection to vegetation of interest.

The Ranges continue to be intensively used and planned developments to enhance current pre-operational training have commenced. These projects have required and continue to require close liaison with all stakeholders. In the main, the necessary approvals with regard to environmental legislation have not delayed progress.

### Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Phase two of repairs to brickwork and re-asphalting of the terreplein were successfully completed at the Dymchurch Redoubt last year despite the adverse winter weather thanks to careful Landmarc management. 2010 Plans are well advanced for stabilisation works to casemates where the bulging outer brick face is to be anchored back to the main fabric of the building. This will allow the shoring scaffolding (erected in 2006) to be struck. Works will be carefully timed to avoid disruption to military training at this important facility. To finally remove the Redoubt from the Buildings at Risk register will take several years and is dependant on continued allocation of funds.

Minor works to the gun deck and copings on the two Martello Towers at Hythe Ranges will also be carried in 2010 to ensure long term integrity of the structures.



Dymchurch Redoubt re-pointing © Richard Goslett

### Conservation Groups

A summer visit to Arpinge was held and a regional BBC unit attended to document the relationship between military training and conservation. The final edit included a significant section on pre-operational training at Lydd Ranges and was generally well received. Attendance at the DTE SE and the Pippingford Conservation Group meetings was high and reports provided by members were widely distributed and provided valuable data.

Recently, DTE SE received the sad news that Alan Gilham had passed away. Alan was the Voluntary Manager at Old Lodge Nature Reserve in East Sussex and had been a valued member of the Pippingford Conservation Group since 1996. Alan planned and managed joint DTE SE conservation events with Sussex Wildlife Trust including pond creation and scrub clearance. Alan's contributions were recognised in 2006 with a Sanctuary Special Award.

### Monitoring

Conservation Group lepidopterists continue to be active across the estate finding many Local, Notable and several Red Data Book species. The Kent Mammal Group conducted a small mammal survey at Lydd Ranges. All small mammal species expected were present except the water shrew which the Group hope to find on their next visit during the summer shutdown. Flora and bird reports were also produced by Conservation Group members with the latter providing data for Bird Track. ■

### Richard Goslett

DE Land Management Services



## West Sussex Thorney Island



Aerial photograph of Chichester harbour © Nicky Horter

Thorney Island, home to Baker Barracks is also home to a wealth of wildlife. Centrally located within Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), signifies landscapes of national importance that should be conserved and enhanced. The island adjoins internationally important nature conservation areas on all sides, and indeed these designations and others cover all or part of the island.

Thorney Island has a Special Protection Area for overwintering waders and wildfowl, and breeding terns. Thorney Deeps, the channel separating Thorney Island from the mainland, is an important roost for waders and wildfowl. The island's farmland, while not included in the designation, regularly supports flocks of up to 1,500 Brent geese. Pilsey Island, an area of sand and shingle at the southern tip of Thorney Island, is arguably the most important roost for waders in the Solent supporting a huge variety and number of birds with counts on occasion exceeding 20,000 birds.

The saltmarshes and mudflats surrounding the island are designated as Special Area of Conservation. Thorney Island also is a Ramsar site for the assemblage of over-wintering wildfowl and waders.

Parts of the island and all surrounding areas are designated as SSSI. The habitats on the island included in the designation are species rich grassland which contain good populations of bee and pyramidal orchids and areas of coastal grazing marsh important for breeding and overwintering wading birds.

All of the areas of the island not already covered are listed as a site of nature conservation importance, this signifies the importance of the site at a county level. The importance is derived from areas of species rich grassland containing species such as green-winged orchids and the use of the site by overwintering and breeding birds.

There is a very active conservation group comprising of members from Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Defence Estates, Army Welfare Service, Natural England, National Trust, RSPB, the Tenant Farmer, MOD Police and volunteer members of the public who undertake many surveys; dragonfly, butterfly and orchid surveys to name but a few.

### Say Trees!

Over 40 volunteers from five local groups have braved the elements to plant 3,000 trees on Thorney Island. Thorney Island, near Emsworth, is home to 12

and 47 Regiment of the Royal Artillery. In 2001 an area of disused airfield was planted to create a new seven hectare area of broadleaf woodland. Nine years on and the woodland is beginning to establish itself, but some areas had failed and needed to be replanted. So volunteers came together from five different organisations to rise to the challenge.

The suggestion came up at a Conservation Committee meeting to replant areas of the wood, and the next thing I knew 3,000 trees were delivered, along with a task force of willing volunteers. On Sunday 21 February a team of 30 volunteers were fielded by The National Trust, Thorney Island Shoot, Chichester Conservation Volunteers and the Army Welfare Service. A further session held by the Friends of Chichester Harbour brought the total number of trees planted to 3,000. The saplings used were local species including oak, hazel and field maple. The trees were provided by Chichester Harbour Conservancy, with funding from Natural England and the Friends of Chichester Harbour.

This has truly been a partnership project, and it is wonderful to see so many volunteers coming together to help create a new woodland which will benefit both the wildlife and landscape of Chichester Harbour AONB. ■

**Major (Retd) Chris Hallam**  
Conservation Group Chairman

**Nicky Horter**  
Chichester Harbour AONB Officer



Chichester Harbour Conservancy tree planting  
© Nicky Horter



# Wiltshire Imber Conservation Group

It is May 2010 and we are gearing up once again for what often promises to be a good summer but one often dashed by wind and rain. That was the case in 2009. A 'BBQ Summer' was forecast but that turned out to be more like 2008, and another year in which the elements were stacked against us. However, even less would have been achieved without the volunteers themselves who deserve much in the way of thanks from DE and the Commander DTE Salisbury Plain. I am glad to report that we do enjoy the full support of all the MOD staff at Westdown Camp and that of Landmarc, and the continued support of Aspire Defence within Warminster Garrison.

### Archaeology

Mainly over the Autumn and Winter, the Archaeology sub-group led by Roy Canham has explored some of the more difficult areas in the centre of the West, identifying ancient field-systems and burial mounds in woodland and under scrub. Some of these areas have received little attention in the past and much of the archaeology is being overrun by scrub or lies within plantations. These areas are characterised by steep-sided coombes, many scrub covered, delineating high rounded ridges that are mostly rough grassland. Areas show signs of early arable cultivation in terms of lynchets.

In Smith's Plantation we found a well-preserved field-system, that we need to map before discussing future management with



New badger sett at the Land Warfare Centre © Aspire Defence



Shrill carder bee © Pippa Rayner

DE. Just beyond the plantation we examined an area where Roman pottery has been found, whilst in the valley there is a remarkable set of earthworks, consisting of a series of rectangular pond-like hollows flanked by banks. These banks have the appearance of a trackway running into what must be a small Roman settlement. We had great difficulty interpreting the earthworks and more research is needed.

Our visit to Ranscombe Bottom was both confusing and intriguing. We found the traces of an early bank and ditch earthwork running along the valley bottom, possibly the old Westbury Hundred boundary. Interestingly this earthwork has never been recorded, not even on early OS maps. Another find had all the appearance of a post-Medieval roadway, possibly the lost road from Bratton to Warminster. There is much more to do in this area, indeed all over the West, and there is much interest and enthusiasm to explore and record more information before it is too late.

### Badgers

The Land Warfare Centre at Warminster is undergoing a major rebuild programme, one that will last at least a couple of years. Such a programme of demolition and new buildings has significant implications for badgers that are a major headache for Aspire Defence and their contractors. So a major first step has been to build a new sett at the back of the camp but within the wire. Badgers have certainly shown interest, but we would not expect them to occupy the new sett until later in the year.

### Bats

During 2009 the Bat project on the West was centred on two principal objectives. Firstly the identification of suitable habitat and secondly to monitor dusk emergence activities. To date our surveys have shown a higher distribution of species in the south and west with far fewer in the north. Both common and soprano pipistrelles, noctule, serotine, brown long eared and Daubentons

have been recorded. This year it is hoped to record echo location calls and maintain more accurate data including insect numbers and the affect that a full moon may or may not have on bat activity.

### Entomology

A considerable effort was made to contribute to the Butterfly Survey on the West in 2009 and we hope for better things in 2010, the last year of the current survey. There are many long standing butterfly and moth enthusiasts within the ICG so it is important that we see a continued revival of group activities if we are to really be in a position to help DE.

### Imber Churchyard Project

During 2009 good progress was made in redressing the neglect of many years. Despite the daunting task ahead the Spring and Autumn grazing by sheep and the enthusiastic forays by ICG members has brought about a transformation of the churchyard and the setting of the Grade I church building. The reappearance of wild flowers, attracting butterflies and moths, is a welcome sight. We have yet to investigate the woodpiles constructed earlier in the year, however, stag beetles were observed during the warm days of April 2010.



Imber Church May 2009 © Mike Jelf

Christopher Beese has toiled tirelessly grading back the collapsing earth banks on the southern perimeter, revealing a number of half-buried memorials. This excellent work has been consolidated by the reduction of the invasive nettle population. Lesley Balfe has recorded the lichens on both the church and the churchyard memorials. In due course we hope that the Botany Group will undertake a survey of the flora, much of which has been stifled by the wilderness conditions of the past few years.

### Ornithology

The Ornithology Group continues to support the MOD Bird Count and is gearing up for this year. This past winter has seen the Winter Survey continue under the guidance of Andrew Bray, but it was not helped by the severe weather conditions and access problems. A highlight was finding a pair of turtle doves breeding. A most welcome development last year was the revival of the Ringing Group after a few years lying dormant. This is a welcome addition to our activities. A wide variety of warblers were captured and ringed which we hope to re-capture in 2010.

### Owls and Raptors

At the start of the 2009 Season we were concerned about the status of the barn owl on



Nigel Lewis inspects a tawny owl box © Nigel Lewis

the Plain. There had been some serious snow falls in early 2009 and the vole population was forecast to be down, whilst the buzzards flourish. In the event there were 55 pairs (29 West, 26 Centre) and in comparison across the last ten years it was a very reasonable result and better than expected.

The little owl had another poor breeding season and we have lost pairs from a number of our better sites. Emily Joachim continues with her three year research project into the little owl and a further 11 juveniles were fitted with tags during 2009. The BTO is very concerned about the plight of this owl and in response we have erected a further 25 Aspire Defence sponsored little owl boxes to increase our monitoring effort.

Three of this year's juveniles featured on the BBC One Show in October 2009 and their photos were taken by Wildlife Photographer Andy Rouse – they have become celebrities! This year Emily is hoping to monitor the adults and record the prey species brought to the nest. Three sites will be fitted each with two infra-red cameras, one to photograph the owl as it enters the box the other to photograph the owlets being fed inside the nesting chamber. We have checked some of the new little owl boxes but the signs are not good; it is still early in the breeding cycle so we must wait and see. ■

**Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Mike Jelf and Sub-Group Leaders**



### Wiltshire Porton Down

The decline of the Juniper population at Dstl Porton Down has been a subject of concern for many years as this species is a Qualifying Feature of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for which Porton Down, along with Salisbury Plain, is designated under European law.

This designation brings with it the expectation that Dstl will maintain and, where possible, increase Juniper populations. This is unlikely, through natural events, to occur so we are now at a point in time where we must decide what should be done.

Dr Carl Mayers, a Dstl scientist, has taken the lead and advice is being supplied from Dr Lena Ward, the acknowledged British authority on the subject. The study will supplement a large-scale project being undertaken by Plantlife and being led by Tim Wilkins. Further information about the project can be found on page 26.

From the plight of a threatened species to one which is threatening... yes, I'm afraid it is the annual report from 'Sweeper of the Yard', Porton Down's local bobby.

"Threatening indeed, Mr Conversation Officer. Threatening to uncloak the ne'er-do-wells that populate the notorious Dstl Conversation Group."

"The Conversationists had, apparently, met last year and counted the number of Dukes. They said they were very important. Well, I could have told them that, they have all got big houses and stuff. They also said, and this is the worrying bit, they needed to increase Dukes significantly so would count them again this year in the hope that numbers would have increased."

"I would spy on this year's gathering to find out their secret cloning method and how many clones they had produced. The dates were announced, the 21st and 22nd May, a



Duke of Burgundy © Iain Perkins

two day event peopled by the Conversationists and another iffy bunch, Flutterby Conversation, presumably a wing of the Conversationist movement. It only lasted one day last year so they expected a larger count.

"The group met, a most disreputable bunch of dingy and grizzled specimens including the master schemer 'Desperate Dan' (the Mathematical Man) keeping tally, Ailsa 'the 'aggis' (friend of the Avenging Angel), Richard and Tracey 'the 'orrible 'oliday pair' (known for guidance when undertaking unusual breaks and, I assume, unique multiple fractures), and 'Poltergeist Paul' (a poor devil whose secretive mind inhabits the 3rd floor of a building that doesn't exist) and all now in my rogues gallery.

"In 2010 256 Dukes were counted at Porton Down, over 100 more than last year. The final bit of the jigsaw was put in place when 'Stupid' Stuart (renowned for scribbles that no-one understands) let slip the secret of the cloning. To distinguish clones from real Dukes they are called the Dukes of Burgundy. I surmised, using my unusual talents, that a

fine wine is used in the ritual. The plan became clearer when primroses and cowslips were mentioned as these must also be an ingredient in the recipe. The Conversationists want to increase these, saying it will help increase the number of Dukes.

"Your local bobby has taken actions to protect our democracy by purchasing all local supplies of Burgundy. Meanwhile, I have to ensure the wine does not fall into the wrong hands so, martyr that I am, I am consuming each crate as quickly as possible.

"Once again Sweeper of the Yard has spoilt the rotten Conversationists despotic plans. That completes my report and now I must go home to get rid of another couple of bottles. It must be a relief for you all to know that I am around. Without me being here things could really suffer.

"Evenin' all." ■

**Stuart Corbett**  
Dstl Conservation Officer



## East Yorkshire DST Leconfield Carrs (23)

On 3 April Phil Allen, a stalwart supporter of our Conservation Group retired this year, and Colonel Paul Brook, the Commandant of the Defence School of Transport, was delighted to present him with a framed certificate for his contribution to conservation. Phil had been actively recording the activities of the barn owls on the site for many years, starting a couple of years before the Leconfield Carrs Group was formed in 1996.

June 3rd was a special day, as a group of veterans from the WW2 Free French forces visited to plant a Mulberry Tree in front of the 144 bed SLAM Accommodation Block which had been named after it. The tree planting formed part of the Mulberry Project, which all started when I originally suggested the name for the block to the Commandant, who informed me that the WW2 Operation

was supposedly named by planners after a mulberry tree in Bath during the War.

Following a bit of research I managed to track down the tree, with the assistance of the Bath Council Archives Dept, and also Senior Arboriologist Paul Wilkins, to Kingswood School Bath where the planning for the Harbours had taken place.

Paul Wilkins with the blessing of Kingswood School is in the process of taking cuttings from the tree, so that the actual tree can be planted in front of the block named after it. Due to the length of time that this will take, a tree was purchased as a temporary measure until one of the cuttings reaches a reasonable size.

The trees are to be planted either side of a lamp post in front of the new block which



Phil Allen with Colonel Paul Brook © Crown

was originally a roundabout. This will allow people to literally go round and round the mulberry bush – sorry I couldn't resist! ■

**Alan Bakewell MCMI**  
Conservation Group Chairman

## North Yorkshire Catterick (24)



Conservation Group members replacing a kestrel box at Feldom © Crown

Over the past year, the conservation work has been directed to several key projects which benefit both military training and conservation.

The Bellerby ranges live firing area, which is SSSI and grazed by three tenants has benefited from the successful conclusion of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) applications. Schemes have been agreed for over 1,000 hectares of upland moorland habitat. The tenants on the area will be changing the grazing regimes in order to protect the habitat during the winter months. In addition funding has been allocated to undertake bracken control and heather burning with small areas of native woodland being fenced and replanted. The intention is to encourage tenants across the training area to apply for HLS and we will continue to work closely with them to ensure all parties gain the maximum benefit.

The Lower Swaledale Site of Special Scientific Interest woodlands have benefited from a

programme of work to encourage natural regeneration. Individual tree guards have been installed across the site to protect the emerging shoots. It is hoped to continue this work in future years to protect and restore a very important local habitat. Large areas of windblown conifer crops have been restocked with a mixture of softwood and broadleaves. These areas are now becoming established, and will provide multi purpose woodland for the future. It is anticipated these new mixed woodlands will form an important habitat for the black grouse.

During the winter considerable work was undertaken by the Conservation Group renewing and replacing nest boxes around the training area. Some of the larger owl boxes had suffered during the inclement weather but are back in action with owls visible from a distance sitting on their eggs. ■

**Major (Retd) Tony Crease**  
Conservation Group Chairman



### North Yorkshire RAF Fylingdales

We have just come through a fairly severe cold spell on the top of Snod Hill on which RAF Fylingdales stands, but things are coming alive with a vengeance. MOD PC Graham Bedford has taken over as MOD Police Wildlife Crime Officer and has got everyone on the camp reporting what they see. Last year for the first time we had barn owls nesting in a Mango Barrel on a pole I put up in 1992, producing two young, fairly rare for a moorland location. Wilf Norman and Brian Elliot organised a more conventional box and put it in a willow tree and pellets were found this spring, but so far this year no sign of the barn owls.

The monitoring of the Greenland race of northern wheatear continues as they pass through using the base as a refuelling stop in May. Wilf Norman and myself, with the help of anyone on camp who spots them, have monitored their arrival since 2001 and we have even managed to ring a few.

We were graced last year with a male hen harrier in late spring who displayed and roosted on MOD land but to no avail; the female had left two weeks before he arrived. But this winter both a male and a female have been seen using both MOD and Forestry Commission land adjacent looking for prey. Also last spring and summer a stonechat of the race *rubicola* used a pool for washing and preening on the perimeter track and perched and sang on the perimeter fence.

Great grey shrikes which started to appear again in 2008, were back in 2009, with up to two before the cold weather before Christmas, then one again this spring. I first found one before they felled the nine hectare piece of forest adjacent to the camp and now they seem to return each year. Nightjar have been recorded there in summer.

Small areas of moorland have been burnt in accordance with the moorland management plan and corvids are being controlled meaning



Kestrel brood at RAF Fylingdales © Wilf Norman

a great increase in lapwing. They have been here since the 'golf balls' were taken down but were predated by the corvids. The lapwing population is being monitored going back to the start of controlling corvids to see the difference in chick mortality. Wilf might even get to ring a chick or two this year thanks to our gamekeeper Paddy Bentley.

Swallows and house martins nest here each summer. Nest boxes for them have been erected in the past by MOD PC Kev Benton and the new build will have swallow boxes incorporated thanks to the builder. They were nesting in every available nook and cranny along with pied wagtail, whose nest one year was found to contain seven eggs.

The usual numbers of fieldfare were down this winter. There are usually about 70 that arrive after Christmas and stay until the spring, but this year there were only two that arrived after Christmas and ten in the spring. But last year we had two fieldfares until late May!

During last years breeding season various birds of prey were observed around the camp including hobby first seen late May, merlin which nests on the moor, goshawk from the forest area, peregrine falcon from the coast or adjacent valley and buzzard who hunt the rabbits around the camp and its wider area. Kestrels nest in a box put up by Wilf Norman.

It has been successful. One wet year Wilf came up and supplementary fed the chicks on mice brought in by his cat. He did it in the pouring rain which up here can be, like the snow, fairly impressive!

Ring ouzels pass through every spring and our ring ouzel man on the group Ken Hutchinson reckons they are the eastern ones migrating to Sweden as they come later than the ones breeding on the North York Moors. In Eller Beck valley the willow warblers have arrived back, skylarks are displaying, we also have snipe nesting again where the 'golf balls' stood and curlews' song resounds around the moor. Another year has started on Snod Hill.

All records of birds go onto the British Trust for Ornithology Atlas. This summer's project: Moths ■

**Mick Carroll**  
RAF Fylingdales Conservation Group



Fylingdales kestrel fledglings © Wilf Norman

## Strategy & Policy

The Strategy & Policy Directorate maintains the long-term strategy for the estate and develops best practice guidance on estate management issues. It is the policy lead for sustainable development, including the MOD-wide Sustainable Development Strategy. The Directorate is responsible for Sanctuary Magazine and the Annual Stewardship Report on the Defence Estate.

## Defence Estates

### Strategy & Policy Directorate

Kingston Road  
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Tel: 0121 311 2021

### Land & Property Policy

(land management, including agriculture and forestry, public access, byelaws and Town & Country Planning)  
Sutton Coldfield  
Tel: 0121 311 2127

### Sustainable Development

(nature conservation, historic environment, environmental assessment processes)  
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Tel: 01225 885133  
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### Environmental Policy

(energy policy & land quality)  
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### Conservation Group Team

Building 97a  
Land Warfare Centre  
Warminster  
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BA12 0DJ  
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## Defence Estates Environmental Advisory Services

The Environmental Advisory Services (EAS) provides professional ecological, archaeological and planning support to the MOD. EAS acts as a focal point for all environmental needs and enquiries across the Defence Estate providing a dedicated team of professional experts in a variety of environmental disciplines.

### Defence Estates Environmental Advisory Services (DE EAS)

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### EAS Natural Environment Team

Westdown Camp  
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### EAS Historic Environment Team

Westdown Camp  
Tel: 01980 674718

### EAS Sustainable Development Support

Westdown Camp  
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### EAS Access & Recreation Team

Warminster  
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### EAS Environmental Planning Team

Warminster  
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Catterick  
Tel: 01748 875069

### EAS Scottish Environmental Liaison Team

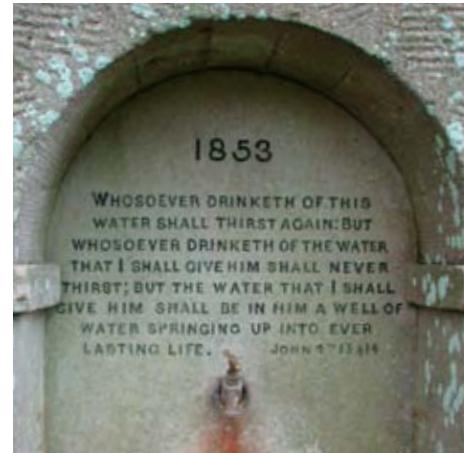
Rosyth  
Tel: 01383 648042

## Defence Training Estate Directorate

The Defence Training Estate Directorate is responsible for the provision of safe and sustainable facilities for the delivery of military training across the United Kingdom. This now includes most of the ranges and training areas formerly managed by the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy.

### Headquarters Defence Training Estate

Defence Estates  
Land Warfare Centre  
Warminster BA12 0DJ  
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### Submissions

If you would like to contribute to Sanctuary Magazine or enter future Sanctuary Awards please contact Clare Backman, Editor at: DE-Sanctuary@de.mod.uk

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