



PONY EXPRESS

News from the Chairman

Spring is here and summer is on its way. Let's hope the weather is kind to us this year and we can make the most of getting out and about.

Thank you to everyone who took time to attend the AGM on 26th April at East Hoathly Village Hall. Despite unforeseen parking problems we managed to get the meeting underway on time. Whilst the run of the mill business at the AGM can sometimes be routine, the meeting is a formal and necessary requirement of the Trust's constitution. It also gives us a rare opportunity to meet up and socialise.

The formal business of the AGM was followed by an interesting presentation from Steve Wheatley, reported on by Krystyna Weinstein below. Steve is the Wealden Reserves Manager for the RSPB and has been a long time supporter of the SPGCT. Steve was instrumental in getting our ponies grazing on both the Kingstanding and Broadwater Warren sites.

As you can read in the Treasurer's report, the financial situation has improved on 2012, showing a slight profit for the year. As always, we cannot afford to be complacent on our finances. The focus of the Trustees and Committee continues to be on raising funds for these purposes, as well as continuing to tightly manage our cost base. Our ongoing focus and priority is on trying to raise funds to replace the Grazing Co-ordinators truck, so if any of you win the lottery, please keep us in mind!!

As always, I am extremely grateful for the time, effort and support provided by my fellow committee members. My special thanks to Susan Suleski, our Secretary, who does a splendid job in keeping us in line and making sure we meet our legal requirements and Alison Smith for looking after the finances.

At the AGM, the retirement of both Susan Suleski (our Secretary) and Neil Baker (long term Trustee) was announced. Both have been stalwarts of the Trust in recent years and my thanks go to both of them for their contributions. Clare McCullough has volunteered to take over as Secretary, and the AGM formally welcomed Anna Bogg, Linda Ball, Lisa Clarke and Krystyna Weinstein to the committee.

All the ponies are now on their summer grazing sites and appear to be in good condition and good health. I am sure everyone is aware that our pony numbers have grown in the last few months. We have taken additional ponies on long term loan from the

Moorland Mousie Trust based on Exmoor. The MMT is a registered charity that takes in surplus Exmoor pony foals from the moorland breeders for handling and socialisation, before moving to foster homes or onto grazing schemes. Some of the ponies deemed suitable for riding are kept at the MMT's Exmoor Pony Centre, near Dulverton, for visitors to see, handle and ride. More information can be found on the MMT website, you will find a link on our own website.

The Trust's new website is now up and running, I hope everyone has taken the opportunity to look at it. Anna has done an excellent job in getting it off the ground and managing the content etc. Any feedback on, either, the website or Facebook pages would be much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to extend the thanks of myself and the committee to everyone who helps and supports the Trust. Without those of you who looker the ponies, or assist in helping move ponies, erecting corrals and electric fencing etc., Monty and Anna's job would be much more difficult. Thank you to those of you who have donated funds to us in the past year.

I hope you all have a good summer.

Tony Clarke

Treasurer's Report from the AGM

The Trust reported a profit in 2013 of just over £2,500 compared to breakeven in 2012; this was due to grazing on the Combined Commons at Chailey last summer (a successful experiment as the ponies are now back there again) and some lower than expected variable expenses (which are unlikely to be repeated). We remain heavily reliant on grazing income and whilst additions to the herd are grazing new sites for the first time in 2014 which will increase income, there are also some associated additional costs.

As in previous years, we are extremely appreciative of the many generous donations received from our members and supporters totalling over £1,200 in 2013, sufficient to cover almost the full year's expenditure on transport and veterinary matters. Donations are gratefully received in any form and our new website and Facebook page now have an online donation facility for any 'visitors' inspired by our story.

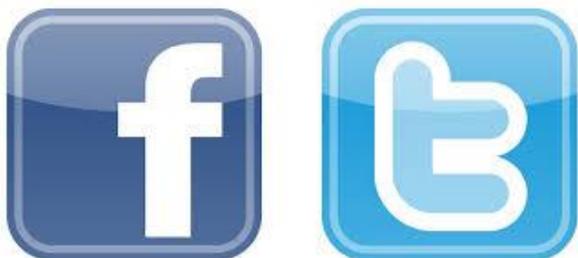
SPGCT on the net

The launch of the new website has been a great success with many positive comments received and only a few minor teething problems to sort out. It provides a more modern, interactive and informative portal for the Trust and a more user-friendly experience for our Lookers (we hope). If you have not yet visited the site, do take a look at www.sussexponygrazing.co.uk.

You can now download back issues of the Pony Express and making contributions to the Trust is much simpler with the new Donate tab.



As many of you know, we have also now ventured into social media with profiles on both Facebook and Twitter. They provide a great opportunity to share our activities and photographs and our audience is steadily growing, with some great connections made with our friends within the Exmoor pony and conservation communities. If you use these sites do please look us up and 'like us' and if you don't, do mention it to family and friends who do. You can follow us on Facebook at SussexPonyGrazing and on Twitter @sussexponytrust



As always, please do get in touch if you have any comments or suggestions.

It's all in a day's work for Monty!

As from April 1, Anna is now job-sharing the Grazing Co-ordinator position with me on a 2:1 basis. This will enable the Trust to give a better service now that we have 71 ponies. It also allows me more time to concentrate on admin work which of late has rather been on a back burner at times – hence the occasional blips on the Looker's rota! It also gives me a break two days a week from the phone and

also allows me to work on re-publishing my history of the Seven Sisters area – and some days away.

We have had several enquiries during the spring as to whether we can take on grazing of new areas of species-rich grassland. Two of these are significant sites so stay tuned for progress on these! We could really do with some more new contacts to fill gaps on the Lookers rota. (Some of you may want to take on a second day – but don't over commit).

Easter Monday action. Mid-morning and the phone rings... *'There is a pony by itself on Pound Common at Chailey, limping badly and with blood on a hind leg. It may have been hit by a car.'* Anna set off to check things out as she was looking not too far away; I made phone calls to arrange borrowing a livestock trailer and for stabling should it be required.

By the time I arrived on site, Anna had managed to contain a group of 11 ponies including the lame one. I phoned one of our vets, Duncan and he was quickly on site and looking from outside the enclosed area, he thought it was a foot injury as opposed to a skeletal injury. We left it that he would return when we had corralled the pony.

Anna then set off to collect our heavy metal corral equipment and more fencing from the Trust's stores some 20 miles away, while I kept watch over the ponies and explained matters to curious members of the public out walking. Ninety minutes later, Anna arrived back accompanied by Mick - so the 'dream-team' were on the job! After strengthening the fencing and erecting the corral we had the ponies corralled and set about shedding-off the other ten. I then went off to collect a livestock trailer in case the pony needed to be removed off-site.

The vet duly arrived mid-afternoon and after some difficulty, eventually managed to sedate the pony with a large dose of strong sedative. Upon closer examination by the vet, the injury was found to be a severe split hoof injury, perhaps caused by a forked tree, or piece of metal, or possibly an incursion on to a cattle grid – we shall never know but it was not due to a road accident.

After paring the hoof to remove loose material, the pony was given anti-biotic, pain-killer and anti-fly spray and then the collar and rope were removed. It took about another hour before he was able to stand properly and to walk and finally, to feed. Corral and fencing in the meantime were dismantled and loaded and redundant livestock trailer returned. I eventually left site after a final check on the pony, early evening. (Several days later, the limp was barely perceptible).

Conservation grazing at Broadwater Warren

After the AGM, we had a fascinating illustrated talk by Steve Wheatley, the RSPB's Weald Sites Manager for South East England. With a wonderful collection of photos, he described to us the benefits of having our ponies graze on both Broadwater and Kingstanding. The 150 acres at Broadwater in particular are in the throes of being restored from a landscape dominated by conifers to heather-covered land. As grass, bracken and deciduous trees re-colonise this land, the ponies have an important role to play.

So what do the ponies eat? A study of their eating habits – and that of other ponies – has shown that their main diet (around 75%) is grass. They only eat the heather when no other fodder is available, hence their removal from the reserve before the winter when they could damage the heather. As they move around the terrain, they tend to follow the same paths, and in so doing they create corridors of micro-climates where butterflies, insects and invertebrates flourish: bracken for butterflies and beetles, and paths through the heather for adders.

Ground-nesting birds appear to be unaffected by, and unafraid of, the ponies - who in turn ignore the birds and avoid their nests. (It is people and dogs who disturb the birds.) And the ponies' dung provides rich pickings for flies and beetles – which in turn feed the birds - and their population is increasing!

Interestingly, the ponies tend to leave their dung under trees around the edges of the reserve, and that is also where, in the richer soil, various bushes and brambles start to grow, without invading the heathland, but again providing a habitat for bees and other winged insects.

Steve's photos showed in great detail how the terrain of Broadwater has been transformed: a dramatic 'before' and 'after'. Several of us were left thinking that we need to have a similar record for the Downs, where the ponies are clearing sites of tor grass, while also enjoying large mouthfuls of prickly gorse! Steve's presentation showed in microcosm how we can achieve our aim of conservation grazing with Exmoor ponies. We need more such stories!

Sadly – for us – Steve has just left his post, to work for Trees for Life, another conservation charity in the Caledonian forests of northern Scotland near Inverness and is wondering whether maybe at some later date Exmoor ponies might have a role to play up there.



Come on in. The water's lovely! Ponies at Pippingford on a sunny May day

South East Exmoor Pony Show

The SE Area of the Exmoor Pony Society will be holding their annual show on Sunday 20th July.

If you are interested in seeing Exmoor ponies perform in the show ring, there will be In-hand, Ridden and Dressage classes.

The venue is East Bysshe Showground and Cross Country course on the A22 at Newchapel, near Lingfield.

Entry is free and anyone is welcome to attend.

Schedules for the show can be found on The Exmoor Pony Society website at

www.exmoorponysociety.org.uk or by e-mail from Lisa Clarke on serep@exmoorponysociety.org.uk

SUSSEX PONY GRAZING & CONSERVATION TRUST

Registered Charity No. 1108065

Registered Company No. 5206972

Patrons: David Dimbleby, Beverly Thompson, Alan Wells, Garry Bushell

Registered Office: Langmead, 1 Farm Approach, Brickhouse Lane, South Godstone RH9 8JW

General enquiries: 01580 714591

Pony enquiries: 07917 420296

Email: secretary@sussexponygrazing.co.uk

Website: <http://sussexponygrazing.co.uk>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SussexPonyGrazing