



The
Dartmoor
Society

Newsletter

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Since the last issue of the Newsletter, I am very pleased to welcome the following new members to our number:

*Daniel Alford
Philippa Bellows
Kevin Cox
Ian Craveford
Clive Darke
Paul Diffey
Michael Duff
Peter and Jessica Duncan
Yvonne Fairman
Blanche de Ferranti Andrea
Foxwell
Beau Fraser and Alice Rook
Chris Gilchrist
John Hodge
Timothy Joy
Neil Loden
George Lyon-Smith
Kate Morley
Mary Sherrill Morgan Jason
Partridge
Ines Penning
James Reddaway
Michael Reddaway
Tim Sandles
Tich and Debbie Scott
Nicola Sherriff
Tracy Turner
Chris and Marion Walpole*

Introduction

by Alan Endacott | Acting Chairman

Dear friends,

When I welcomed you to our last Newsletter in early autumn 2020, few of us could have imagined that lockdowns would continue well into 2021. As I write, restrictions are still in place but promise is on the horizon as the vaccination programme picks up pace. I truly hope that you are all keeping safe and well.

Over the months, Dartmoor has remained a magnet for people trying to get away from the depressing news, to keep fit and even to socialise – at a suitable distance of course. I've been tempted to use my two-metre archaeologist's ranging pole with spiked end to enforce the distancing on occasions but have resisted thus far!

Local people have sometimes felt threatened by the influx of people to the old 'honey pots', frustrated by gridlocked roads and upset by the damage caused by random parking and 'wild camping'. It's natural that people should want to get out – but their visits undoubtedly put great strain not only on popular sites but also on those who police and care for them.

All the more reason, then, to welcome the planned re-opening of the Exeter to Okehampton railway line. We need to continue pushing for an integrated public transport system for Dartmoor to discourage the use of private vehicles at such unsustainable levels. I recently wrote to BBC Points of View to highlight the potential for damage in the persistent over-promotion of sensitive sites such as Wistmans Wood, or practices such as foraging, to the mass audiences of their mainstream countryside programmes.

Two particular issues have come to the fore over the past 12 months. One is the negative impacts of frenetic peatland restoration works; the other is the interlinked question of vegetational changes on the commons and the need to achieve ecologically sustainable grazing levels. Both topics are covered in this Newsletter, to inform and to promote further debate.

Now that the country has a timetable for the lifting of restrictions, we've been able to reinstate for this summer some of the events that had to be postponed last year. Details are on Page 15 in this issue and information on others will follow on our website (www.dartmoorsociety.com) or in the next Newsletter. Please ensure that you've opted for email contact if you can, so that we can circulate updates quickly and efficiently to as many members as possible.

The last issue of the Newsletter appears to have been well-received, to judge from the positive and constructive feedback, so thank you and well done to the editorial team for all their efforts – and to the contributors to our Commons feature who have generously donated their time and expertise to write for us.

We hope you'll enjoy this issue. We're grateful for your continued support and pleased to welcome an increasing number of new members to the Society. We look forward to the day when we can all meet up again. Stay safe.

With all good wishes,

Alan Endacott MA | Acting Chairman



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Wistmans Wood

Cover story by Michael Buckley
Wistmans Wood has long been a timeless emblem of Dartmoor, evocative of its history, ecology and mythology. In the last year, it has become something more, propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic to the status of a mass visitor magnet. You can find reviews of it on Tripadvisor and read about it on Visit Dartmoor as the focus of a ‘dog-friendly’ excursion. Countryfile Magazine invites its readers to ‘creep beneath the trees’ lichen-covered boughs in a woodland that has remained unspoilt for hundreds of years’.

In that invitation lies the great dilemma that Dartmoor is likely to face again this year, as opportunities for foreign travel remain uncertain and holidaymakers look for domestic destinations. The characteristics that draw people to the moor can easily be damaged by them: greatly increased numbers of visitors ‘creeping beneath the boughs’ of Wistmans Wood

– a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest – may destroy mosses, lichens and plant communities that take years to develop and rely on an absence of footfall in order to thrive.

The pressure on such sites only emphasises how much work goes into designing conventional visitor attractions. Parking, waymarking, wide paths,

Moss stripped from a boulder in Wistmans Wood

handrails, controlled numbers – even dog-litter bins – all balance access with visitor safety and experience, not to mention protection of the environment. Compared with such places, Dartmoor in places looks vulnerable and defenceless. Few lovers of Dartmoor can wish to see the trappings of tourism on the high moor, where the benefits of vast open spaces are freely available. Last year, however, the implications

of easy access were tested to the limit and Wistmans Wood was one place that suffered, with paths eroded and lichen stripped from the trees and boulders. Somehow the competing demands of public access and environmental conservation have to be balanced – here as in all the UK’s national parks. The coming summer may show us how big a challenge this is, and where the answers might lie.



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The Dartmoor Society's Response to Works by the South West Peatland Partnership

On behalf of the Dartmoor Society, Chris Chapman has documented the visits he and colleagues made in February this year to Hangingstone Hill and Whitehorse Hill, and the meetings held there with members of the South West Peatland Partnership. Below is a summary of his reports, followed by the text of the letter written by Dartmoor Society acting chairman Alan Endacott to the Partnership.

The South West Peatland Partnership (SWPP) is made up of several different organisations such as the National Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust, the Duchy of Cornwall, Historic England, the universities of Exeter and Plymouth and the Ministry of Defence, and includes the Dartmoor Society.

The Partnership is funded by DEFRA to run a three-year restoration project over 1,599 hectares of what has been classified as degraded peatland

on Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and Exmoor. Some 300 hectares of this total are on Dartmoor and the main contractor for the work here is South West Water.

Dartmoor commoners who have rights over the high moor in the area of Hangingstone Hill and Whitehorse Hill, where SWW's contractors were working in January and February this year, became concerned at the scope of the works. These included the blocking of the Whitehorse Hill Phillpotts Peat Pass – cut at the

end of the nineteenth century under the direction of Frank Phillpotts to facilitate travel across the blanket bog by hill farmers and huntsmen – so that it had filled with water and was impassable by animals or people.

Following informal visits on 5 and 8 February with DS colleagues, Chris attended a meeting at Phillpotts Peat Pass on 12 February between members of the Forest of Dartmoor Commoners' Association and Morag Angus, Mires Project Leader for SWW, and several of her colleagues. The commoners were concerned that the pass had been dammed without consultation and that such deep pools presented a danger to both stock and walkers. The granite marker stones had been semi-submerged and the water level of the dammed peat pass was also perilously close to the Whitehorse Hill burial cist, a Bronze-Age site that has become renowned since its excavation in 2011.

There were conflicting statements from SWW and the Dartmoor National Park Authority – one of the partners in the SWPP – as to whether the flooding of the peat pass was a permanent or temporary measure. Whatever the case, the Dartmoor Society is concerned at the extent of the works. Large and sometimes deep ponds – one is 1.5 metres deep not far from its edge – are being created by three tracked excavators that dig up peat in order to create bunds by covering softwood barriers built across gullies.

The aim is to raise the water table to slow the passage of water from the high moor – thus alleviating flooding at lower levels and contributing to cleaner water reaching SWW reservoirs – and to encourage the formation of sphagnum moss and peat, helping carbon sequestration. The Society questioned whether such deep pools – as opposed to shallower ones – will facilitate the growth of sphagnum, while



Morag Angus, SWW meeting the Dartmoor Commoners

the commoners observed that the dug-up peat and healthy vegetation, moved to form the bunds and to re-model exposed peat, will simply dry out in the summer. They also pointed out the damage done to healthy sphagnum by excavator tracks. At a subsequent meeting between commoners and Ms Angus and colleagues on 24 February, the commoners pointed out that they would be fined heavily by Natural England if they inflicted the sort of damage on the high moor that has been done by the excavators.

On 27 February, members of the Dartmoor Society executive returned to Whitehorse Hill to inspect the bunds created across the southern part of the Phillpotts peat pass. They also looked at the area nearby that DS acting chairman Alan Endacott has been researching as part of his PhD on *'The Prehistoric Ritual Landscapes of Northern Dartmoor'*, where he has identified deliberate stone settings and other archaeological features. Alan was perturbed to find some surface stones shattered by the weight of passing excavators and further evidence of disturbance in areas he has flagged as potentially significant on various occasions over the past ten years.

The visit culminated with a walk across heavily worked terrain on the east side of

Whitehorse Hill, above Great Varracombe. Here, gully after gully had been blocked with bunds sometimes a meter high, often covered with whortleberry, suggesting the diggers had scooped up the plant in the course of their work. Despite the high rainfall in February, all these gullies were dry.

Two members of the executive went on to visit Black Hill, a remote and archaeologically little understood area, where the excavators were expected to move once their work on Whitehorse Hill was finished. They found many gullies containing water and sphagnum moss and evidence of as yet unexplored archaeological features. The Society understands that the SWPP may also at some point extend its work to Cut Hill, where the prehistoric stone row and barrow discovered in 2004 is a scheduled monument and the area requires an in-depth archaeological survey before it is fully understood.

Since these visits, the Dartmoor Society has published a statement of its position regarding peatland restoration on the 'News' page of its website, www.dartmoorsociety.com and on its Facebook page. The subject of peatland restoration will be the theme of the Society's 2021 Conference, details of which are on pages 16–17 of this Newsletter.

Below is our acting chairman's letter, written on 18 February 2021.



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'an independent voice for those who find Dartmoor a source of livelihood or inspiration'

The Dartmoor Society
PO Box 105
Okehampton
EX20 9BA

Letter to the Dartmoor Peatland Partnership

18th February, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Recent events on Whitehorse Hill, Dartmoor, including the damming of the Higher Phillpotts Peat Pass, have raised a number of concerns and highlighted the vulnerability of this world-renowned area of cultural heritage. The creation of expansive, deep pools calls into question the effectiveness of this strategy as a means of restoring peatland on the moor. We set out our specific concerns below, along with a proposal for an alternative way forward.

Archaeology

The Hangingstone Project extends well onto Whitehorse Hill and the 'Hangingstone' Phase 2 project is concerned with Whitehorse and Black Hill rather than Hangingstone. This draws the public's attention away from the fact that digging is occurring in an internationally-recognised cultural landscape. The whole hill is highly sensitive and not yet fully understood with many unrecorded features yet to be revealed, so every penetrating excavator bucket is potentially destroying archaeological remains. The policy should be one of minimum intervention and active archaeological research in the area needs to be taken into account in any future plans. We feel that environmental priorities and the protection of our cultural heritage can both be achieved with a different approach.

An example of how intrusive intervention could inadvertently damage such monuments is the recent building of the dam at the head of the Higher Phillpotts Peat Pass, creating a large pool of water that was in danger of lapping away at the foot of the peaty mound containing the Whitehorse Hill Cist. We don't currently know if the mound contains any associated burials or other features. While there is some logic in efforts to raise the water table to protect such sites, these organic remains survived for over 3,500 years, in spite of being exposed above the surrounding water table for at least a century. Their survival at this level

must have been due to the frequently mist and rain-soaked environment (neighbouring Black Hill had nearly 145 inches of rain in 2020: source Mike Sampson) and it is only since its disturbance and all the attendant publicity that the surrounding peat has rapidly eroded away - in a mere ten years. In our opinion, the creation of deep-water pools in the vicinity will do little to restore its peatland setting, or to protect it in the longer term in such an exposed location.

Safety

On Monday 8th February, a group of us visited Hangingstone Hill to see the latest works. We found crossing the hilltop quite treacherous on the frozen ground, buffeted by the strong wind while negotiating the narrow bunds between these newly created deep pools. The safety of solitary walkers (and livestock) is a serious concern. We understand that the bunds were deliberately designed with a profile to enable a person or animal to get out, but these proved ineffective when Chris Chapman broke the ice and entered one of the pools in his waders with a ranging pole. This pool was almost 1.5 metres deep not that far from the edge. This also raises questions of duty of care and liability with hazards having been deliberately created.

Assessment of the degree of erosion

We have long questioned the historical basis for the assessment that the blanket peat is being eroded to the extent it is claimed, or that the erosion gullies are a new phenomenon. While we respect the science underpinning this, we dispute the interpretation of the evidence used as the basis for the assessment, which is in part based on aerial photographs taken by the RAF in April 1947. This was the year of the severe blizzard and a long period of freezing temperatures, following which deep sheets of snow lay on the higher ground, especially in the gullies, well into the early summer. This shows clearly on the aerial photographs but could easily be mistaken for sheets of water or level ground surfaces when analysed by a computer. It also has the effect of distorting the apparent definition and depths of the gullies, thus having a significant impact on their interpretation. Other, more recent satellite and LIDAR, imagery clearly shows the softening of the edges of old peat ties where the peat is regenerating and this process can still be seen on the ground.

Methodology

We understand the theory behind attempting to raise the water table in order to 're-wet' the existing peat. It is harder to understand how the creation of large, deep, open pools on exposed hilltops will encourage new peat to form. Continuous surface disturbance will hamper any vegetation growth and hinder the formation of new peat. With the constant movement, the edges of the pools will erode further and more methane could be released from the bare floor beneath, in addition to that released by the initial machine excavations. By contrast, adjacent to one particularly large artificial pool, complete with tell-tale frozen waves on the surface, was a similar area of naturally regenerating peat in a slight hollow, with profuse and varied vegetation growing on the surface.

There are legitimate concerns about the long-term effects of climate change on the health of peatlands due to drying and erosion but we believe that this is the wrong approach for this situation. The exposed uplands of Dartmoor experience some of the highest precipitation in southern England and so the use of a 'one size fits all' approach that may well work on drier, more sheltered environments are totally inappropriate for Dartmoor.

A different approach may be to trial alternative proven methods of establishing peat regrowth and working with agencies and businesses in other areas to mutual benefit. For instance, working with Defra to establish 'sphagnum nurseries' in old peat ties on the Somerset Levels could enable commercial peat extraction companies to diversify in a more environmentally-friendly way by producing pre-seeded mats or organic gabions of sphagnum and other suitable plants. These could be sensitively-placed on upland areas like Dartmoor to form shallow pools in sheltered gullies, thereby encouraging natural regeneration and providing local employment/business opportunities here - all for significantly less cost to the taxpayer.

The Way forward

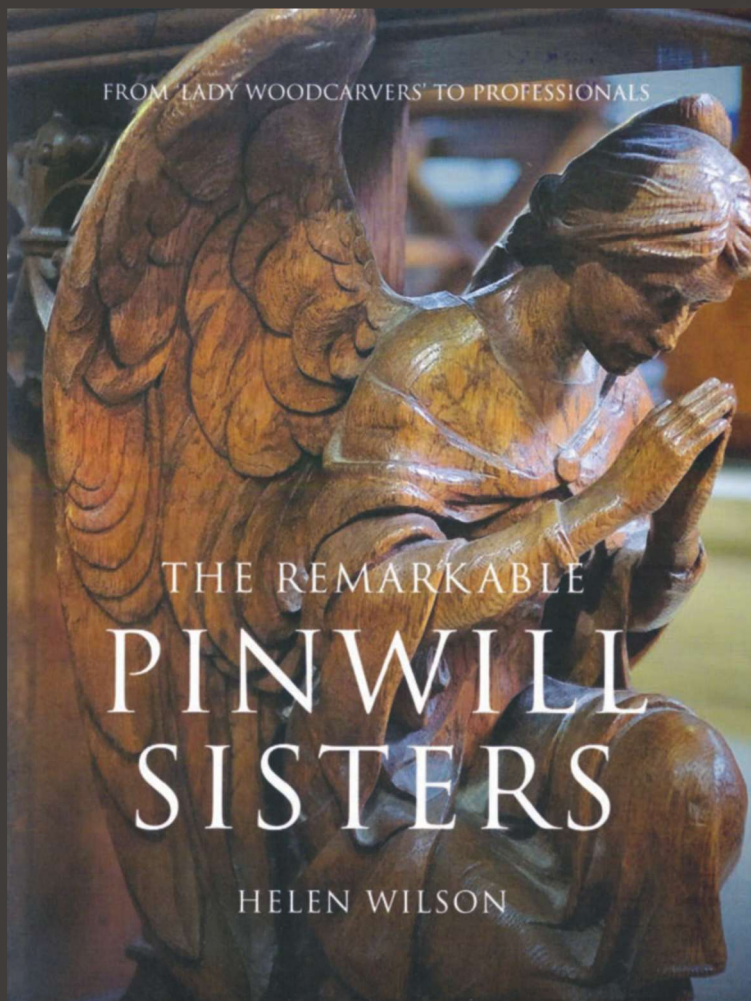
We believe that there should be an immediate pause in scheduled works in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the methodology and the attendant risks to public safety and hidden archaeology. We believe that the review should include a study of the natural regeneration of peat occurring in the vicinity. This will point to ways that we can work with nature to encourage this process. We would willingly collaborate and consider contributing to a study that considers alternatives, and we hope that the current method of creating deep pools will cease until a consensus is reached.

We would support a less invasive approach, drawing on experiences in other areas. We believe it is possible to meet the aims of all involved. Can we organise a joint symposium, with the aim of bringing together all interested parties to present new evidence and find a mutually agreed way forward?

Yours sincerely,



Alan Endacott MA
Acting Chairman
The Dartmoor Society



The Remarkable Pinwill Sisters

Dartmoor Society members will remember the talk given at Sheepstor in 2019 by Dr Helen Wilson on the work of the Pinwill sisters. Her research into this extraordinary family of professional female woodcarvers culminated in the publication early this year of *The Remarkable Pinwill Sisters*.

The beautifully illustrated and thoroughly researched book describes the supportive and encouraging family background at the vicarage in Ermington and the emergence of the sisters' business in the 1890s under the patronage of the architect E H Sedding. Over six decades, the company produced ecclesiastical carvings in wood and stone for almost 200 churches, mostly in Devon and Cornwall. Violet Pinwill, who ran the company single-handedly throughout this time, was still at her bench three days before her death in 1957 at the age of 82.

The Remarkable Pinwill Sisters by Helen Wilson is available from Willow Productions at a price of £25 plus £4 postage and packing. Read more about it on www.pinwillsisters.org.uk or order by emailing sales@pinwillsisters.org.uk.



Welcome Transport Breakthroughs

The extra recreational pressure placed on Dartmoor by the pandemic has shone a bright light on the need for an improved, integrated public transport network in the area. The Society wholeheartedly welcomes two recent developments that make a significant contribution: one, the re-instatement of the popular Dartmoor Explorer bus service across the moor between Exeter and Plymouth, operated by First Great Western; and the other a milestone decision by Network Rail to re-open the railway line between Exeter and Okehampton for scheduled services. Much credit for this latter success must go to tireless local campaigners, including Dartmoor Society member Tony Hill who also helped to produce a special supplement to *The Moorlander* newspaper in celebration.

At the same time, activists on north-east Dartmoor recently launched a campaign to create an off-road route between Moretonhampstead and

Chagford for walkers, cyclists and riders. Known as the The Greenway Project, it aims to link with the existing Wray Valley Trail from Moretonhampstead to Bovey Tracey and ultimately to create a safe, well-signed route from Chagford all the way to the sea at Teignmouth. In February the project raised enough money to pay for a feasibility study by Sustrans, which has now begun.

The Dartmoor Society has been pushing for better public transport links for many years. The theme of our debate back in 2014 was 'What Future for Railways and Their Heritage on Dartmoor?' (see our website for details) and, more recently, we pursued the subject in our response to the Dartmoor National Park Management Plan (see last September's Newsletter). We have often written letters of support for investment in the rail network to MPs and ministers. It's gratifying indeed to witness these encouraging recent developments: congratulations to all concerned, let's hope this is just the start!



Calendar of Forthcoming Events 2021

Meadow Walks and Picnic •
Challacombe Farm, Postbridge
PL20 6TD, grid reference SX694
795 • Saturday 26 June 2021
• 2.30pm

Farmers Naomi and Mark Oakley will lead two short walks taking in the widely varied archaeology and the species-rich hay meadows on their land. These will be followed by a picnic tea. Given the continuing concern with hygiene precautions, we will not be serving food or drink. Please bring your own refreshments and picnics, plus folding chairs and tables if you wish – there is an undercover area to use if the weather is wet.

Car parking will be available and signed in the first field on the left after the entrance to the farm. Well-behaved dogs on leads are welcome.

There is no charge for this visit but numbers are limited to 30 and booking is essential by Friday 18 June 2021 online on the Dartmoor Society website or by post. Please complete the enclosed form and send to The Dartmoor Society, PO Box 105, Okehampton EX20 9BA.

Visit to Wildside • Wildside
Nursery, Green Lane, Buckland
Monachorum, near Yelverton PL20
7NP • Tuesday 20 July 2021 •
2.30pm

Keith Wiley moved to Wildside with his wife Ros in 2004 after 10

years as head gardener/manager at The Garden House nearby. As a proponent of the 'new naturalism' movement in gardening, he has sought to create an environment where plants can thrive much as they would in the wild. He has written and lectured extensively and the garden has become a major destination for plant lovers and gardeners.

The Society has arranged a private tour of Wildside led by Keith which will include the Canyons, an area being developed as a tribute to Ros, who died in 2019.

Please note that the garden is not accessible to wheelchairs and dogs are not allowed. Detailed directions are available on the website www.wileyatwildside.com.

A cream tea will be served afterwards at the Drake Manor Inn, Buckland Monachorum.

Garden only: members £7,
non-members £8.
Garden and cream tea: members
£13.50, non-members £14.50.

Numbers limited to 30. Booking is essential by Monday 12 July 2021, online on the Dartmoor Society website or by post. 'Please book and pay online on the Dartmoor Society website, or complete the enclosed booking form and send with a cheque to The Dartmoor Society, PO Box 105, Okehampton EX20 9BA

AGM

Jubilee Hall, Chagford TQ13 8DP

- Saturday 14 August 2021
- 2.30pm

Nominations received and an agenda will be on the Dartmoor Society website from 1 July 2021.

Farm Visit

Elvan Farm, Throwleigh,
Okehampton, Devon EX20 2QE,
grid reference SX659 913

- Monday 20 September 2021

Details of this event will be posted on the Dartmoor Society website and sent to members by post, nearer the time. Booking will be essential.

Research Lecture: 'Dartmoor

Songs – It's not just about

Widcombe Fair' • Dolphin Hotel,
Bovey Tracey TQ13 9AL

- Friday 8 October 2021, evening
(start time to be confirmed)

Renowned Devonian singer-songwriter and entertainer

Jim Causley will talk about his research into the traditional songs of Dartmoor, with help from Bill Murray. The talk will be followed by a finger buffet.

Booking details will be provided nearer the time.

Conference 'Hallowed Turf: Perspectives on the Conservation of Dartmoor's Blanket Peat'

- Charter Hall, Market Street, Okehampton EX20 1AA
- Friday 12 November 2021

We are currently planning our Autumn Conference which this year will be looking at peat. Dartmoor's wet uplands are increasingly valued for their role in hydrology and carbon sequestration but they are also delicate ecosystems and world-renowned archaeological landscapes, where there is evidence of human activity stretching back over 6,000 years.

'Hallowed Turf: Perspectives on the Conservation of Dartmoor's Blanket Peat' aims to show the multifaceted nature of the South West Peatland Partnership on Dartmoor, and we have invited some of those closely involved to speak about their work. These include:

Richard Brazier, Professor of Earth Surface Processes and Director of the Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste (CREWW).

Adrian Colston, Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter, and former National Trust, Manager for Dartmoor and Manager for Wicken Fen.

Kevin Cox, Chairman of the RSPB in the UK, former chair of Devon Birds and former trustee of the World Land Trust.

The Dartmoor Society is well known for staging events that look into matters relating to Dartmoor and they always attract a keenly interested audience.

We will be sending you further booking information by post. Online booking will shortly be available on our website www.dartmoorsociety.com

2022

We're planning a spring visit next year to the west Devon farm of the conservationist Derek Gow, who has played a significant role in the protection of the water vole and the reintroduction of the Eurasian beaver and the white stork to England, and who is the author of Bringing Back the Beaver.

Further details will be published nearer the time.



Jim Causley



Aspects of Conservation on the Dartmoor Commons

by Alan Endacott | Acting Chairman

In the absence of an annual debate last year and with no recent events on which to report in this Newsletter, this is an opportunity to look at different perspectives of an issue that has long been a concern of the Society.

The recent controversy, both in and away from the media, regarding the number of sheep on Okehampton Common highlighted a number of issues. Public funding is moving from a system of per capita payments under the old Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to one of 'public payment for public goods', with a much greater emphasis on environmental conservation. Unfortunately,

in some cases this has brought farmers into conflict with Natural England (NE), the agency tasked with advising the Rural Payments Agency on whether desired environmental outcomes from Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements have been met.

There is clearly a delicate balance to be achieved between maintaining a healthy biodiversity and keeping traditional management of the uplands economically viable. However, many would argue that this was successfully achieved by generations of hill farmers until the later 20th century, when some ecologists raised concerns about the ecological impact of what they saw as overgrazing in some quarters. This led to a substantial reduction in stocking levels across the moor, compounded by the complete

removal of livestock during the foot and mouth epidemic of 2001.

Alarm bells started to ring among those who had known the moor intimately over many years as they witnessed a marked change in the vegetation, with an increasing dominance of *Molinia*, bracken and western gorse to the detriment of heather, ling and other species. This was most noticeable around ancient monuments such as the Shovel Down stone row complex on Gidleigh Common. Many have become progressively engulfed by vegetation as the political balance has shifted away from the conservation of cultural heritage and more towards 'restoring' our natural heritage. Of course, the two aren't mutually exclusive; but the results of the shift of emphasis

are all too visible to anyone who has known the moor over a long period.

As a consequence, the Dartmoor Society has been raising concerns over many years and pressing for action to reverse the situation. At the same time, we have encouraged constructive dialogue between commoners and the various government agencies and academic institutions involved. A list of some recent events demonstrates this: our 2016 Debate: 'Return of the Wildwood? – Is Rewilding the Future for Dartmoor?'; the 2018 Research Lecture by Adrian Colston, 'Stakeholder Attitudes to the Narratives of the Dartmoor Commons: Tradition and the Search for Consensus in a Time of Change'; the vegetation survey of Gidleigh Common that we commissioned in 2016



and the follow-up Gidleigh Common Day that we organised in 2018. More information on these activities can be found in previous Newsletters or on the DS website, www.dartmoorsociety.com.

The situation is further complicated by the effects of climate change, growing recreational pressure and natural threats such as the heather beetle. There is a real danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water if farmers are blamed for the failure to achieve desired ecological ends under the new funding arrangements. We need much more of a partnership approach, as well as a proper appreciation of many practical, financial and animal husbandry issues by the rule-makers, if these arrangements are to work. There will always be examples of bad practice which certainly should not be rewarded; conversely, the vast

majority of good farmers should not be penalised for the greed or ignorance of a few. Let's all learn from each other and give due respect to received wisdom and experience as well as long-term sound science.

As a society claiming to be an independent voice for Dartmoor, we must also listen to and appreciate all perspectives when considering our stance on various issues, always being willing to re-examine the evidence that underpins our arguments. We are a broad church and we welcome views from our members to ensure that we are truly representative as times change. We should also consider different approaches to the conservation of our rich cultural, as well as natural heritage and how cooperative partnerships between public agencies, the voluntary sector and farmers can work to their mutual benefit. A great

example of this can be seen in the sterling work of the Sticklepath and Okehampton Conservation (StOC) group, working in partnership with local commoners, the National Park Authority and NE.

We are very grateful to our contributors in this special feature. They are retired local GP and enthusiastic conservation volunteer, Tom Bell; the Dartmoor National Park Archaeologist Andy Crabb, who is responsible for the conservation of the Throwleigh Common Premier Archaeological Landscape (PAL) and its well-preserved Bronze Age settlement; conservationist Kevin Cox who is a passionate member of the inspirational Moor Meadows community group; and farmer, commoner and latterly TV celebrity Crispin Alford, who is a great ambassador for the continuance of what many

would see as traditional upland management practices.

I must declare an interest here, as Crispin took on my late father's farm when he retired a few years ago. After five generations, Dad was proud of the family's stewardship of the farmland, woodlands and commons and anxious to see that this was carried forward in a similar vein. He was thrilled to hand over not only the farm but some of his upland flock and their leers to friends and neighbours Crispin and Diana and their son, Stephen. For most farmers, these things aren't just about money or exploitation of the land. Some practices may need to change with changing times but it would be a mistake to assume that there is a contest between farming and wildlife conservation. The two are inextricably linked and we can all learn from each other.



Grazing on the Commons

Crispin Alford was born and raised in Gidleigh, on the north-east flank of Dartmoor and has farmed near Throwleigh for 50 years. He talked to Annabel Crowley about the changes he has witnessed on the commons.

When I was a boy I can remember seeing the moor pink with heather in the autumn from Cawsand all the way to Hangingstone. When the heather started dying, the Nature Conservancy Council [as Natural England was then known] blamed the farmers but it was heather beetle that did the damage.



My grandfather said that in his day, commoners burnt patches of heather as soon as they spotted the beetle, in July–August, to stop it dead in its tracks, and the heather would come back again in following years. But in my time, if the heather started dying we weren't allowed to burn in the summer and the gorse and Molinia began to grow away.

It's true that the pre-1995 system of headage payments [subsidies based on the number of animals kept by a farmer] may well have encouraged overgrazing; but when Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) were introduced after 1995, farmers had to remove 50% of stock from the moor and then the Molinia and the gorse just took over because it was undergrazed.

Restrictions on swaling have gradually grown tighter and now there are whole areas where bracken dominates, or where the gorse is too thick and high for the animals to get in and where there's more Molinia than the cattle and ponies can eat in the early summer when it's palatable. So it stands in dense clumps and dries out, and then the whole area is a fire risk.

And meanwhile, farmers on Higher Land Stewardship schemes feel they don't have much say in the management of the commons. If there are any discrepancies over stocking levels or swaling dates, for instance, we're fined, or we have our fees withheld, and there's no realistic recourse because of the huge expense of arbitration.



Now my son Steve is part of an experiment by Natural England, supported by the commoners, to see if overwintering stock on Throwleigh Common can help reduce the dominance of bracken and gorse. It's 25 years since I last fed cattle on the moor during winter, because the ESAs stopped all that, so it's interesting to see what's happening now. We had 23 head of cattle up there last winter and 27 this year, all Galloways, and they look very well on it. They're miserable when they have to spend the winter in a shed, they like to be out on the hill in their natural habitat.

Steve takes feed up to them each day and moves them on a

bit each time, so they're always feeding in a slightly different place. And as they move, they bash down the bracken and the gorse and then you stand a better chance of seeing all the archaeological sites up there – which makes the archaeologists happy. I reckon the only thing wrong with the scheme is that there aren't enough cattle on it! But you need the right ones, the Galloways that are slow-maturing and hardy. The quick-maturing types that are favoured these days aren't suited to that sort of life.

I was 12 years old when I first turned sheep out on the common, and I started range-clearing [moving stock out of reach of firing on the military ranges] in 1975. There's been a lot of changes in that time but I'm seriously worried now for the future of hill-farming and the maintenance of the commons. It's a demanding life that fewer young people want these days; and if the younger generation that's still here is driven away and the stock is taken off the moor, as some seem to want, it's difficult to see how the traditions of managing the moor could be reinstated. And what will be left will be a wilderness of gorse, bracken and Molinia, with fewer useful habitats for birds and plants and no one to manage the place or to stop wildfires, the way they've been doing on Dartmoor for thousands of years.



Conservation Work on Bronze Age Sites near Shilstone Tor, Throwleigh

by Tom Bell

The Sticklepath and Okehampton Conservation Group (StOC) has been in existence for nearly 30 years and has an interesting history. We work alongside numerous agencies to help with conservation work on Dartmoor and the surrounding countryside. Last summer we worked with Ian Brooker, the Dartmoor National Park ranger for the northernmost part of the moor; at other times we have supported Andy Crabb, the DNPA Archaeologist, the Butterfly Conservation Group, the Woodland Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust, Devon County Council, local parishes and

many other organisations. Usually we give practical help rather than initiate projects although ideas do sometimes come from members.

The work on Throwleigh Common has been an ongoing project with DNP, Throwleigh Commoners Association, Natural England, Historic England, The Duchy (landowner) and others. The whole site, with its numerous roundhouses and reaves, is an archaeological gem that had become overgrown with bracken and gorse. The bracken sends down deep rhizomes that damage the remains and interfere with soil stratification, thus affecting

the ability of archaeologists to assess any finds accurately. The bracken, being so thick and deep, has made accurate GPS analysis of the site difficult and inhibits public access.

Indeed, old surveys have been shown to be inaccurate. The blanket cover of gorse and bracken severely limited a survey in 2007, which had to be done in the dead of winter. The site is a designated Premier Archaeological Landscape (PAL) so, to prepare for a new, accurate survey, the StOC group began work there some five years ago.

One of the first roundhouses to be opened up was RH 25, just east of the road and thus separated from the others. The bracken was exceptionally vigorous, high and dense and initially we used herbicide spray as well as cutting, but there was some local concern as there is a butterfly sanctuary nearby. Thereafter, it was cut and strimmed without further use of

chemicals. It has taken annual cutting to reduce its strength and therefore height and density. This magnificent roundhouse is now clearly visible from the road and easy to access.

We are restricted to the timing of cutting, which needs to be done in the summer after nesting and flowering and before the bracken dies back. Last year we were not allowed to work during the first pandemic lockdown, so we started rather late. COVID-related restrictions also meant the plan to involve the wider community had to be temporarily shelved.

Usually, the group meets in the area behind the Finch Foundry in Sticklepath, where we are able to keep our equipment. Last year, we had to forgo this meeting, with only one of us collecting trimmers, rakes, loppers and saws and bringing them to Shilstone where the rest of us congregated (with suitable distancing!).



On our first day, about a dozen of us started clearing around roundhouses 13,14 and 15. These lie just above and to the west of the medieval Bradford Leat; indeed, RH13 is contiguous with it. A tree immediately beside the leat guides you there. Some were strimming swathes through the bracken while others cleared the thicker gorse with loppers. The rest raked up all the cut material using wooden rakes and pitchforks.

Our working day is broken into two: a two-hour morning session and an afternoon shift separated by a welcome break for lunch with excellent pasties supplied by DNPA. By the time 3pm came on that first day, the site had been transformed. A regular feature of the group's

activities is the weekly review of work and planning for the weeks ahead. This usually takes place within the confines of the Devonshire Inn in Sticklepath but due to COVID-19 this was not possible. To our delight, however, the good weather enabled us to continue the practice – suitably distanced – in the pub's garden.

We returned twice more in the following two weeks, venturing a little further north along the leat. We cleared the large roundhouse RH22, its surrounding area and the two reaves to the north, and finished clearing roundhouses 17, 19, 20 and 21. The weather being kind, we also started work on the old drovers' track to the north and Ian Brooker started on the area around roundhouses 4,5,6,7 and 8. On this occasion



we were briefly joined by Crispin Alford, chairman of the Throwleigh Commoners, who cast an expert eye on our work and thanked everyone. With the area opened up, his cattle will be able to roam freely in the area, helping to inhibit bracken re-growth.

Altogether we cleared a considerable area around the roundhouses as well as in the immediate surrounds and along the path to the site, so the visitor now has an overview of the settlement as a whole, the reaves and the Bradford Leat.

The plan that this work would also be a Throwleigh community project in 2020 was waylaid by COVID-19. With luck it may be possible later in 2021. Perhaps, now that the ancient site has become more visible, it might prove even more interesting to the young of the parish.

I went back there recently. It is an extraordinary feeling to walk among these ancient stones and to think that, no matter where our recent ancestors lived, all of us who walk the earth today owe our existence to men and women who lived in places like these. The remnants of their houses and their fields connect us to them in a very immediate way. Each year as visitors come and see this important site, I hope its influence will impress on them the need to respect and conserve the place we live in as our ancestors did.

References:

Newman, P: *Throwleigh Common, Throwleigh, Devon: A 'Premier Archaeological Landscape' within Dartmoor National Park. Level 2. Historic England 2007*

Moss, M: *The Bradford Tinwork Leat and its Route: Through Enclosed Ground. Rep. Trans. Devon Ass. Advmt Sci., 147, 155-182, 2015*





Managing Dartmoor's Archaeological Landscapes

by Andy Crabb

Andy Crabb, Archaeologist for Dartmoor National Park Authority and Historic England, expresses his personal views on managing Dartmoor's archaeological landscapes.

It is well-known that Dartmoor is blessed with a rich and diverse historic landscape; one that has been long in the making. Some of our earliest known monuments, such as the tor enclosures and long cairns, are believed to be

around 5,000 years old. These monuments were constructed during a time of revolutionary change in human society when farming, along with a host of new ideas and innovations, was being introduced. In its various guises, farming has remained a dominant influence on Dartmoor's landscape ever since.

The pastoralists of the Bronze Age left indelible marks on the landscape through their management of the land.

Remains of settlements and field systems that evolved around 3,500 years ago are now Dartmoor's most noted archaeological features. The famous 'reaves' belong to this period: low, linear boundaries composed of stone and earth that form banks about 1.5 metres wide. They divide up considerable areas of open moorland into rectangular- shaped fields amongst which are remains of hut circles, small plots and lanes. Roughly contemporary with these reave systems are the more open and independent enclosure settlements such as Grimspound and Ryders Rings.

Alongside these 'monuments of the living' can be found other, more enigmatic features including cairns, stone circles and alignments. Dartmoor is rich in these fascinating sites too.

Throwleigh and Gidleigh Commons are home to fine examples of Bronze Age reaves, or 'coaxial field systems' to give them their official name. On Throwleigh (*pictured opposite*) when the bracken is down, you can walk along an ancient lane through Bronze Age fields passing numerous hut circles arranged on either side: an area known by some local archaeologists as 'Coronation Street'. The lane eventually ends and opens out on to unenclosed moorland. Perhaps 3,500 years ago this was

communal grazing land that was used rather like the commons of today? A tantalizing thought. Excavations in the 1970s of a Bronze Age settlement on Shaugh Moor revealed the fossilized footprints of cattle, sheep and ponies: the same animals that graze the commons to this day.

As human use of the moor has evolved and responded to changes in climate, economy and technology, so each activity has left its mark. A major wave of settlement expansion and field enclosure took place in the medieval period, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But changes in climate and agricultural practice, intensified by the devastating Black Death pandemic, led to many of these hard-won gains being abandoned. The ebb and flow of farming and other activities have continued over the centuries, creating 'tide lines' around the moor denoted by the remains of relict field boundaries, forgotten settlements and mineral extraction.

It is no surprise therefore that more than 25,000 sites are recorded on Dartmoor's Historic Environment Record. The national park also contains more than 1,000 scheduled ancient monuments. These are archaeological sites protected by law under the Ancient

Archaeological Areas Act of 1979. Their management is a key consideration of many of the existing agri-environmental schemes that are currently in place on the moor. Alas, many of the options once available to manage sites in previous schemes have been greatly reduced under current Countryside Stewardship arrangements.

In 2005 a more extensive but only informal designation called the 'Premier Archaeological Landscape', or PAL, was created and adopted as part of the Moorland Vision (a statement of how all the relevant statutory agencies and the hill-farming community saw Dartmoor's future).

14 PALS were created on common land in areas of extremely well-preserved archaeology of international significance. In total the PALS cover about 20% of Dartmoor's common land. It was agreed by all the agencies, stakeholders and landowners involved that within each PAL, archaeological objectives would be the primary consideration.

But the value of Dartmoor's archaeological remains is far greater than the number or type of heritage designation. Their great wealth and diversity are direct evidence of the processes that helped create the landscape

so cherished today; processes that live on in Dartmoor's hill-farming tradition and culture.

Over recent decades – a mere blink of the eye compared to the timespans of these sites – large parts of Dartmoor's archaeological landscapes have become inundated with monocultures of bracken, *Molinia* grass and dense stands of gorse. The impact this has had on the archaeology is severe. Many factors have contributed to the changes in the local vegetation pattern, but the reduction in grazing numbers is undoubtedly a major one.

Bracken is particularly nefarious when it comes to archaeology. Its roots, or rhizomes, penetrate through the soil and into buried archaeological deposits and layers. The rhizomes act like a crude plough blade, churning up the delicate archaeology and moving artefacts through the soil profile. This is a disaster for an archaeologist trying to date and interpret a site. Bracken provides cover for burrowing animals and can grow to two metres or more in sheltered locations, totally obscuring any upstanding archaeology each summer.

Gorse can damage archaeology in several similar ways: its roots directly damage buried deposits, it encourages burrowing animals, offers shelter for livestock which creates erosion, conceals features from view and severely restricts access to sites, concentrating livestock and walkers along narrow paths, causing more erosion. Dense stands of gorse also increase the 'fire load' on the moor, making the chances of a catastrophic wildfire much more likely. Such fires burn with more intensity than those that are managed and will strip away peaty topsoils, leading to the exposure and subsequent erosion of buried archaeological deposits.

The gorse swards also provide protective nurseries for saplings to become established.

Molinia grass has steadily increased its range over recent years and can easily conceal low-standing archaeological earthworks and monuments such as reaves and smaller stone alignments. The grass is palatable to livestock for only a limited part of the year and is tough and robust, which makes it particularly hard to manage.

The best and most sustainable way to manage archaeological sites and landscapes on the moor is via livestock grazing. The mix of sheep, ponies and cattle

can provide a rich, low sward of diverse vegetation in which the archaeology is clearly visible and free of the problematic species described above. To achieve this, we need agreed archaeological objectives backed up with suitable support from agri-environment schemes, all delivered, of course, by skilled commoners and their livestock.

Getting to this stage in many areas of archaeological importance will now require commitment and hard work. On Throwleigh and Gidleigh Commons two new projects are being started that will address the balance and improve the condition of the archaeology.

Both have come about through dialogue and cooperation between the commoners, Natural England, national park staff and local conservation groups.

On Throwleigh Common, an archaeological management plan has been drawn up with the aim of reducing bracken and gorse density on the prehistoric reave system (which is a designated scheduled monument and PAL). The plan will be delivered by the local commoners via their agri-environment scheme with additional help and support provided by the Sticklepath and Okchampton Conservation Group (StOC).



Crucial to the success of the plan is a ‘winter grazing derogation’ that has been approved by Natural England. This allows for a limited number of cattle to be kept out on the common during the winter months. The cattle trample down the stands of

bracken and break up the thatch across the reave system. By feeding the cattle each day in carefully selected locations, the farmer encourages the cattle to move through the landscape, creating clearings and widening paths. This approach appears to greatly weaken the following season’s growth.

Cattle overwintering is backed up in the summer by the actions of the StOC group and the local DNPA ranger. Armed with strimmers and rakes, the group has been cutting bracken and clearing the wastings from the hut circles and their associated enclosures, opening up prehistoric droveways and leats, widening paths and generally improving access. The double attack on the bracken should reduce its density considerably and we hope that the repeated

and targeted cutting on the hut circles will result in eradication.

At Shovel Down (another PAL and scheduled monument) on Gidleigh Common the graziers are working to reduce the density of the Molinia. An area defined by reaves that formed a large prehistoric field was mechanically cut in the winter of 2019/20. The idea is that the new, sweeter (only just!) grass growth in the spring will attract livestock into the area. Before the mechanical cutting took place, the local DNPA ranger and a StOC volunteer cleared Molinia and low-lying gorse from the hut circles within the larger field. Cutting Molinia in this way is an experiment at present but if it works, livestock should again be grazing the area regularly. The new technique could then be extended across the area using the reaves as a framework.

Bordering this area to the east and just to the south of Batworthy Corner is a concentration of wonderful stone alignments. A group of five double stone rows and a

single row, along with multiple cairn circles, a menhir and a possible stone circle form an impressive arrangement of sites that are thought to be about 4,000 years old. Most are ‘lost’ under Molinia grass and gorse. Volunteers from the Chagford Conservation Group along with the local DNPA ranger have started clearing to reveal the rows and expose the full extent of this complex and unique site. They are also widening the path which we hope will relieve the erosion caused by foot and hoof fall.

In the future, archaeologists on Dartmoor would like to see the concept of Premier Archaeological Landscapes rebooted: they should receive fair and appropriate management in both the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and emerging nature recovery projects. The PAL concept should be expanded to cover other important landscapes and include site types that missed out on initial inclusion. We would also like to see the PAL designation given formal weight and consideration.

Balancing all the varied objectives and themes emerging across Dartmoor is often seen as a battleground of conflicting interests. However, there is a growing body of experience that suggests conflict is not inevitable. Both the ongoing Dartmoor Headwaters Natural Flood Management Project and the South West Peatland Project’s work on Dartmoor provide examples of a joined-up approach, in which archaeological priorities have been considered, projects modified and positive outcomes delivered. This is a result of good consultation, careful planning, regular communication and frequent site visits.

We should remember that the long-term, sustainable goal of having key archaeological landscapes in good condition and maintained through livestock grazing regimes can be fulfilled only with the continued existence of a viable hill-farming community, one that evidence suggests may have over 3,000 years of experience in managing the uplands behind it.



Where have all the flowers gone?

by Kevin Cox

There are many myths and misconceptions about Dartmoor but the main ones are these: that it is a wilderness, when there is evidence that it has been farmed for at least 4,000 years, maybe longer; and that it is unchanging, when so much about it has changed and continues to do so. Step into my time machine and let's take a trip back to 1892 ...

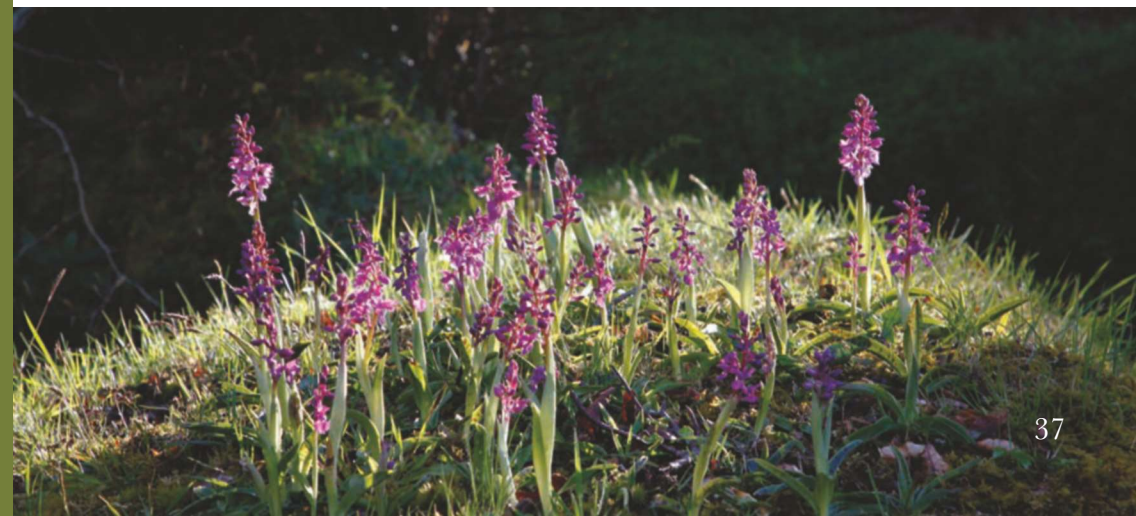
It's June, around the summer solstice and at first sight the moor looks much the same. We notice that there's more heather, though it's yet to come into bloom, and there are swathes of bilberry, which will provide an autumn treat for parties of people coming up to collect the berries by the bucketload. The berries are also the main food for

the young of the ring ouzel, our mountain blackbird, which gorge themselves before migrating to North Africa.

The cuckoos, which called incessantly throughout May, have now changed their tune, as the old saying goes. And there is the occasional bubbling call of the curlew floating to us on the summer breeze. The cattle, sheep and ponies are here but the belted Galloways and Scottish black-faced sheep have yet to arrive from the north; that change will start to happen around the turn of the twentieth century. The animals we see are mostly local red Devons and white and grey-faced Dartmoors, up here to take advantage of the summer flush and they will go back on the home farms for the winter months.

It's here, on the home farms, especially those on the periphery of the moor, where we notice

the biggest change. The animals have mostly been turned out on to the commons and, while there is some permanent pasture, many of the fields are now growing crops. There are oats to feed the horses, the main engines on the farm, and there is hay, which will sustain the stock through the winter. The hay meadows are at their summer peak, a living tapestry of colour, sound and scent. Looking closely, we can see not just grass but grasses: sweet vernal grass, cock's foot, common bent, crested dog's tail, red fescue, soft brome and others. But the grass isn't dominant, and green isn't the first colour we see. There's the yellow of the hay rattle, the meadow buttercups and the bird's-foot trefoil; the red of the common sorrel, clover and knapweed; the white of the ox-eye daisies and the tiny eyebrights; and the blue of the meadow vetchling and devil's-bit scabious.





Southern marsh orchid

There are orchids too. Earlier in the year, some of the permanent pasture will be covered with green-winged orchids and early purple orchids. The hay meadows will have a mixture of common spotted orchids and greater butterfly orchids. As evening draws on, if we get down on our knees and smell the creamy-yellow flowers of the butterfly orchids, there's a heady scent of vanilla. It's this that attracts the attention of their pollinators, night-flying moths including the beautiful elephant hawk-moth.

Moths are abundant in hay meadows, though we're not always aware of their numbers as most are nocturnal. But there are plenty of day-flying moths too. Look out for the black-and-red burnet moths, both five- and six-spotted; the



Small pearl-bordered fritillary on heath spotted orchid

burnet companion moth with its little stripe of orange on the underwing; and the tiny chimney-sweeper, a sooty black moth with white borders to its wings, a specialist of ancient meadows. There are tigers too: the ruby, the garden and the scarlet, all as exotic as if they were natives of the tropics.



Six-spot burnet moth on knapweed flower



Chimney sweeper moth

Then there are the butterflies: meadow browns, ringlets, common blues, marbled whites, painted ladies and the skippers, large and small, that are often mistaken for moths, all in such abundance that clouds of them rise before us.

It is the sound of the meadow as much as the sight that overwhelms us. There are bees everywhere, not just honeybees but bumblebees, mason bees, leafcutter bees and many others of the 250 plus species in the UK. Flowers, unlike grass, need pollinators, which is why hay meadows are alive with insects all buzzing and humming and, in the case of grasshoppers and crickets, stridulating.

Where there are insects there are birds, which need them to provide protein for hungry chicks.

The aerial acrobats are swooping above us: swallows, house martins and swifts. There are the birds of the hedgerows and bramble patches: the blackcaps, garden warblers, yellowhammers, linnets. A spotted flycatcher is hawking over the meadow for insects to take back to its nest in a hedgerow oak tree. A kestrel is hovering, ready to pounce on a vole or harvest mouse and, as evening comes, it's replaced by a barn owl. If a fox wanders through, the resident lapwing can be seen doing its broken-wing distraction display.

Above all this activity and noise there's an unfamiliar sound, instantly recognisable across the countryside in earlier centuries. 'Crex crex', a two-note rasping call from a bird with just that onomatopoeic scientific name, which we know as the corncrake. In D'Urban and Matthews' *The Birds of Devon*, published in 1892, the corncrake is called 'this common and widespread bird'. No longer. To hear one now (they are notoriously difficult birds to see) entails a trip to the Hebrides, their last redoubt in the UK.



Yellow flag iris

Now back in the time machine and here we are in the present day. The unchanging moorland has slowly changed. Outwintering sheep have reduced the heather and bilberry. The Ring Ouzel, 'once found on every portion of the moor', according to *The Birds of*

Devon, is down to a handful of breeding pairs. Just one pair of breeding curlew is left on Dartmoor and they might be the last pair in the whole of Devon. Lapwing have suffered the same terrible decline.

Perhaps the most noticeable change is the loss of our hay meadows. The colour has drained from the countryside and along with it, the corncrake, the curlew and the lapwing. Nationally, we've lost 97 per cent of our species-rich meadows.

First the scything gangs went, to be replaced by machines, horse-drawn then tractor-driven. The start date for cutting didn't change – from the end of June through to early September – but the speed increased, which made it more difficult for young birds to escape. Then in the post-war years, artificial fertilisers were introduced, which increased the fertility that favoured grasses not flowers. Finally, silage replaced hay as the main crop and in some areas as many as three cuts could be taken, often starting in April when ground-nesting

birds would previously have been on the nest. Rye-grass leys replaced flower-rich meadows; monoculture replaced diversity.

The good news is that change is happening across Dartmoor. Moor Meadows, a community group set up just five years ago, has mapped 1,000 acres of established or newly-created species-rich meadow in the wider Dartmoor area. Many farmers are recognising the benefits of cutting hay rather than silage. The diversity of the sward brings minerals up from deeper areas of the soil, so producing healthier animals and more nutrient-dense meat. The cost of inputs, especially inorganic fertiliser, disappears. No more plastic wrapping of silage bales. Less diesel because there's only one cut a year. Stocking levels have to be reduced but that brings down vet bills. Following the publication of the *Less is More** report in 2019, upland farmers have



Wild carrot



Greater butterfly orchid

recognised that farm profitability is enhanced if stocking levels are kept within the carrying capacity of the land. Finally, Brexit has brought the end of the Common Agricultural Policy with its area-based payments that penalised farmers for keeping 'ineligible features' on their land – wildlife habitat to you and me.

There is increasing evidence that many people will pay a premium for healthy and nutritious food produced in a nature-rich environment. Just as they have always done, Dartmoor farmers will change to meet the needs of a changed world. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme is designed to pay farmers for producing so-called public goods, ones that the market won't reward. These include carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, clean air and water, healthy soil and biodiversity. Species-rich hay meadows do all that and they feed the

animals that enhance the wider landscape – a truly sustainable and circular economy.

If we fast-forward 30 years in our time machine, I hope we'll step out on to a Dartmoor that looks superficially much the same: still a working landscape with a thriving farming community, maybe with a few more trees on the open moorland providing song-posts for cuckoos. The blanket bog is in better condition, storing carbon and clean water, with good numbers of snipe and dunlin. The heather and bilberry have made a comeback as sheep numbers are reduced in the winter. On the in-bye and the home farms, the hay meadows are back with all their colour and life. And if we're really lucky, maybe we'll once again hear the call of the corncrake and the curlew.

**<https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/hill-farm-profitability-report-pdf.pdf>*

The Dartmoor Society Annual General Meeting

We are pleased to announce that this year's AGM will be held in the Jubilee Hall, Chagford, TQ13 8DP on Saturday 14 August, at 2.30pm.

We look forward to seeing members at this event. In addition to the formal proceedings, Eamon Crowe of Natural England will give a talk and we will present the Dartmoor Society awards for 2020 and 2021.

We ask that you book in advance to attend the AGM either via the Dartmoor Society website or on the enclosed form by post to The Hon. Secretary, Dartmoor Society, PO Box 105, Okehampton, EX20 9BA.

The formal part of the afternoon will be to review the roles of the executive committee members and to elect new members. There are currently

four co-opted members who are standing for election as full members of the executive committee: Steve Alford, Carrel Jevons, Bill Murray and Gideon Shalom.

There are also vacancies for the posts of Chairman, Secretary and Newsletter Editor. Our acting secretary, Caya Edwards and acting newsletter editor, Annabel Crowley are both standing for election at the AGM. Anyone can put themselves forward for any of the above roles, but the only role that we currently have no nominations for is that of chairman.

You will find nomination forms with this newsletter and they can also be obtained by post from: The Hon. Secretary, The Dartmoor Society, PO Box 105, Okehampton, EX20 9BA. Nomination forms can also be obtained by email from: info@dartmoorsociety.com or downloaded from our website.

All nominations should be submitted by Friday 25 June.

Eamon Crowe is Natural England's Lead for South Devon and Dartmoor and his talk is entitled 'Dartmoor: A Public Body's Perspective'. Natural England is the government's advisor for the natural environment in England and Eamon has 26 years' professional experience on Dartmoor.

The AGM presents an opportunity to present Tom Greeves, our former chairman, with his 2020 Dartmoor Society Award and we look forward to presenting this to him in person on the day.

We are also pleased to announce that Tim Sandles is the recipient of the 2021 Dartmoor Society Award for his outstanding website 'Legendary Dartmoor'. Tim will also be our guest for the day and we are delighted to give formal recognition to this pioneering website that is rigorous in its research and always a really good read!

The proceedings will end with our customary tea and cake.

Membership Matters

Four new co-opted members have joined the executive committee this year, offering new ideas and fresh perspectives. As a reminder, the existing members are vice-chairman Alan Endacott, honorary treasurer Tom Orchard and membership secretary Wilf Hodges, as well as Liz Miall, Chris Chapman and Caya Edwards who has returned to the committee as acting honorary secretary. Annabel Crowley was co-opted last year and is newsletter editor, while hill farmer and vice-chairman of the Dartmoor Commoners Council, Layland Branfield, completes our existing line-up.

We now welcome Carrel Jevons, who cares for Hembury Fort, Dartmoor singer Bill Murray, businessman Gideon Shalom and Dartmoor farmer Steve Alford, who has recently been on our screens in the Channel 4 series *Devon and Cornwall*.

Meanwhile, we are seeking someone to chair the Society in the longer term as Alan, while happy to continue as vice-chairman, needs to relinquish the acting chairman's role in



Carrel Jevons

order to concentrate on his work and PhD studies. If you wish to put yourself forward, or if you know of somebody who might be interested in this key role, please get in touch with Alan.

We're also looking for a new membership secretary as of the AGM in April 2022, as Wilf Hodges will be standing down then, at the end of his second three-year term in the post.

You can contact us by email or post to the addresses given below.



Bill Murray



Gideon Shalom



Steve Alford

What aspects of The Dartmoor Society are important to you?

The Dartmoor Society is flourishing with many new members, including a good few family memberships. We want to make sure that we meet and exceed the expectations of our members and we would also like to know if we are tackling the issues regarding Dartmoor's management that are important

to you. Whether you're a new or long-standing member, we're always pleased to receive your thoughts and suggestions, so please get in touch.

Would you like to be involved with us in a practical or advisory capacity?

Do you have any specialism that The Dartmoor Society could benefit from, for example surveying, ecology, mining? Please let us know, so we may draw on your expertise and experience when needed. We have recently set up a number of sub-committees that cover peatland issues, hill farming, newsletter, events organising and planning applications relating to Dartmoor. You don't have to be on the main committee to get involved: any member can help on a sub-committee, in a non-voting capacity.

Would you like to help in a practical way at events?

We're looking for someone to run our popular second-hand book stall. Help with making teas and coffees at events is also always appreciated.

If you have any suggestions and offers of help, you can contact us by email at

info@dartmoorsociety.com
or by post to The Dartmoor Society, PO Box 105,
Okehampton, Devon EX20 9BA

The Dartmoor Society Newsletter

As part of your membership, under normal circumstances you receive the *Dartmoor Society Newsletter* three times a year. Over the past year we've updated its design and had time to consider how best to inform and communicate with members. We feel it's important to get news to you as promptly as possible, so we're planning a change to the current arrangement. We'd like to send you three topical newssheets at intervals throughout the year, followed by a single annual review that would report on the year's achievements, campaigns and research, profile notable

members and look back at the events we've organised.

These changes will be proposed at the AGM this coming August so that you, the members, will be involved in any decision.

In the meantime, we'd like to know your thoughts on what the Newsletter provides: do you read it? If so, which sections – for example, reports of recent events, articles, member profiles, AGM reports – do you find most interesting? Do you use it to find information about forthcoming events, or do you consult the Society's website? As ever, we look forward to hearing from you by email or post.

Dartmoor News Offer



The bi-monthly Dartmoor News is offering a special subscription to Dartmoor Society members to mark the magazine's 30th anniversary.

The first 30 Dartmoor Society members to sign up for the offer will receive a discount of 50% on the annual subscription, normally £27.00.

Go to the magazine's website, www.dartmoornews.co.uk, click on 'Shop' in the top right-hand corner and **choose the one-year subscription box. Fill in the discount box with the code -DS30 and continue to payment.** The offer will expire once 30 DS members have signed up.

Legacies

Founded in 1998, the Dartmoor Society is dedicated to sharing well-researched information and promoting the well-being of Dartmoor and its communities. It has been a registered charity (No 1111066) since 2005 and pursues its broadly educational aims through a wide range of visits, social events, lectures and other opportunities to engage with up-to-date expert opinion.

These are funded entirely by income derived from the Society's own financial resources, based on subscriptions, donations, events and merchandise. The Society has no paid officers or rented premises and only modest administration costs, so its income directly supports its work.

One additional way in which supporters can help the Dartmoor Society is to leave it a legacy in their wills. Whether large or small, these sums help to maintain the Society's status as an independent voice and forum of debate.

In particular, legacies can make a significant contribution to its Research Fund. The Society regards research as essential for good decision-making. As a wholly independent body it has a valuable role to play in ensuring that high-quality information contributes to the well-being of Dartmoor and its communities; and through the Research Fund it can foster specific investigations into key subjects that might not otherwise be undertaken.

Further information on the Research Fund can be found on the Society's website: <https://www.dartmoorsociety.com/researchfund>.

Leaving a legacy to the Dartmoor Society can be done by means of a straightforward form of words in a new will, or as a codicil to an existing one:

'I bequeath unto The Dartmoor Society (registered charity no 1111066), PO Box 105, Okehampton, Devon EX20 9BA, the sum of £, free of duty, and declare that the signature of The Dartmoor Society Treasurer or other authorised officer of The Dartmoor Society, shall be sufficient discharge for this legacy.'

Thank you for your support.



Fundraising

The Dartmoor Society is a charity that depends wholly on income from subscriptions, events, donations and merchandise to fund its activities. It has no premises or paid staff, so every pound it raises goes towards the work it does.

The Society is registered with the UK's biggest charity shopping fundraising site.



Easyfundraising generates free donations from your online shopping to your chosen charity.

We are inviting all members to consider using easyfundraising when shopping online as a way to claim valuable funds that are waiting to be donated from a wide range of food, clothing,

home and garden retailers, restaurants, entertainment and utilities companies. More than 4,000 businesses have elected to help their customers' chosen charities in this way.

At the moment, some 15 of our members are registered with the scheme and have raised over £450 for the Society through their online shopping. If more members were to register, they could generate more funds at no cost to themselves.

How?

After registering, just start each online shop at easyfundraising. When prompted, choose the Dartmoor Society as your charity, then shop as normal. The retailer will automatically donate between 1% and 5% of what is spent to charities chosen by their customers.

It's simple to register, easy to use and it's free.

Please register as a shopper at:

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/cause/dartmoorsociety



All of these retailers and 4000 more will make a donation to the Dartmoor Society every time you buy online from their stores...



Please ask your friends, family and non Dartmoor Society members to register with easyfundraising and shop in support of their important work.

The Dartmoor Society

*An independent voice for those who find
Dartmoor a source of livelihood or inspiration*

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Established 1998 • Registered Charity No. 1111066

