

FILE NOTE

Date: 18 September 2017
Site: **Therfield Heath SSSI**
Subject: Meeting with Conservators
By: Sonja Kaupe

Meeting with:

- The Conservators: Vincent Thompson, Cynthia Combe
- Natural England: Sonja Kaupe

1. Ground nesting birds

Though this is not a notified feature Natural England encourages any initiative to help to maintain the bird populations (incl. ground nesting bird).

Cynthia and Vincent propose to put up signs during the bird nesting season to inform dog owners of the need to keep dogs under control.

We discussed what the legal background was for bird disturbance and especially by dogs. I enquired internally about this issue. All wild bird species, their eggs and nests are protected by law (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wild-birds-protection-surveys-and-licences>). Nevertheless it is unclear how this applies to dogs, especially if there is no clear destruction of bird or nest. The law is tighter for Scheduled 1 species, but species such as skylarks are not sch1. Unless it can be proved that dog keepers intentionally or recklessly destroy / damage or encourage their dog to destroy / damage such features, it would be difficult to enforce it through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. I couldn't find a previous example of a member of the public being prosecuted because of the disturbance caused by their dog. An English Nature report (attached to this email) from 2005 (Report number 649 – Dogs, access and nature conservation) gives a bit more information about dogs and the law (see page 99).

The best approach seems to be byelaws or education (such as doggy days run by some Wildlife Trusts - <http://www.wildlifebcn.org/news/2015/03/30/dog-day-afternoon>).

2. Byelaws

It would be useful to be able to see the byelaws for the common.

3. Gallops

Vincent mentioned that the gallops were topped and not cut and collected again.

ACTION: Sarah and Sonja to have a conversation with J. Jenkins

4. Grazing

Vincent and Sarah C. have recently been in close contact with Robert Law.

Vincent suggested the following grazing options for the end of the season:

- ~ top of the rifle range at the beginning of October to tackle the scrub and regrowth
- ~ whole of Church Hill, maybe in November?
- ~ bottom of Church Hill in spring next year to tackle the scrub and rougher grasses at the bottom of the slope (NB: make sure not to graze the Pasque Flowers).

Vincent and Cynthia mentioned they could regularly check the sheep are taken off at night when grazing Church Hill.

We discussed the need to keep a Grazing Diary to monitor grazing areas and periods from one year of to another. **ACTION:** Vincent mentioned that he would be happy to keep such a diary.

5. Golf Club

- Vincent is worried about the fairway width increasing, especially on the 1st fairway.

ACTION: Sarah or Sonja to talk to Tim Hopwell who GPSed the fairways a few years ago. Another option is to look at, and compare, old aerial photos.

- Height of semi-rough: there's a worry about the height of the semi-rough.

ACTION: check the HLS prescription and have a discussion with the Golf Club.

- There's a worry about the increase in the use of buggies and damage caused on the grassland.

ACTION: Sarah or Sonja to discuss it with the Gold Club

6. Management plan

We discussed again the need of a conservation management plan. Unfortunately there isn't anything definite planned at the moment.

7. Scrub management

Cynthia and Vincent mentioned they would like to form a volunteers group to help with tasks such as scrub clearance. If such a group gets created, they hope, this winter, to work on:

- Two Hill: knock back the scrub at the top of the hill. We discussed and agreed the need to keep a scrubby edge along the woodland ("soft edge").
- Rifle range: work on the dogwood and scrub

Not all the work agreed on the last meetings (7 November 2016 and 6 February 2017) has been or will be carried out in winter 2017.

Sonja Kaupe

26/09/2017