



Western Vole

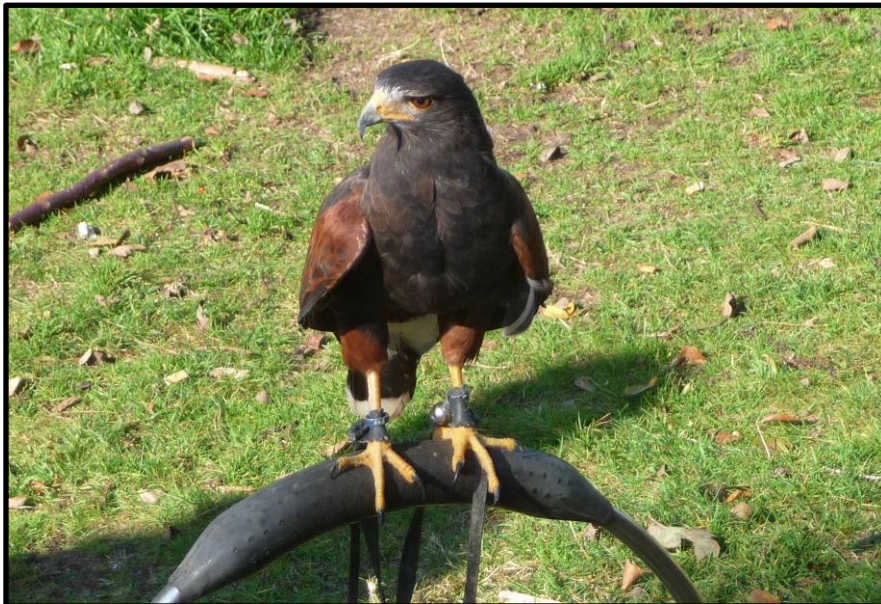


NEWSLETTER No 33 – WINTER 2016

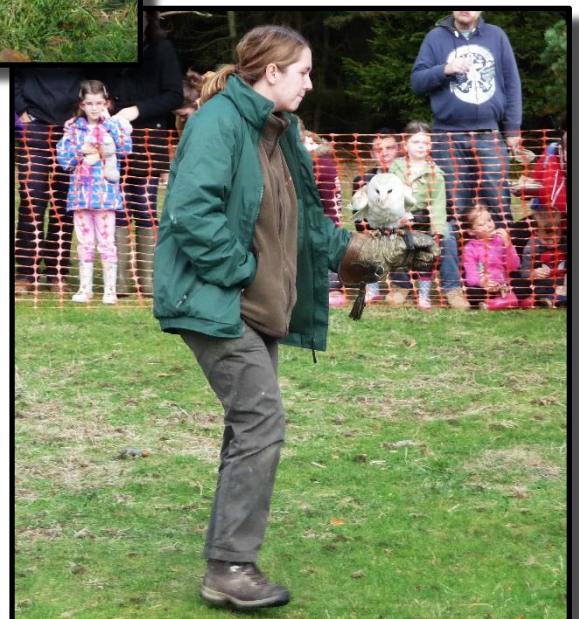
(NB. To enlarge the images on this e-newsletter use the page zoom function)

Feed the Birds Day

The annual Feed the Birds event took place at the end of October at the Rushmere Country Park, which is now well established as a popular family day out. The glorious bright sunny day certainly brought in the cars, as all 3 main car parks were full before mid-day. One of the main attractions was the Birds of Prey with several birds and owls which sat patiently on their perches. Shown below was this Harris Hawk, which is common in southwestern USA to Chile, Argentina and Brazil. It was a Harris Hawk named Rufus which was regularly employed at Wimbledon each year to scare the local pigeons away from the tennis courts.



A flying display was also given by staff from the Birds of Prey Centre based at Wilstead in Bedfordshire. Pictured right is a Barn Owl, which children were given the opportunity to handle during the display.





Western Vole Newsletter No 33



The Ivel Valley Bird ringers were once again on site to show how small birds are caught and ringed. Mist nets were erected in front of the Centre's main veranda to catch the birds, qualified handlers then carefully removed them. The birds were then weighed, measured and ringed. Below is one of their staff showing a recently caught Dunnock also known as a Hedge Sparrow, before releasing it to fly away.



Popular events for children were; making bird masks with Erika & Matt (Left) and bird feeders with Derek & Eileen (Right) shown below.





Western Vole Newsletter No 33



Shire Oak Heath

The final mid-week task in October took place at Shire Oak Heath which lies on the borders between Stockgrove and Rushmere. More heathland restoration which involves the removal of scrub regrowth, mainly the 3B's; birch, bracken & brambles.

*Most of the area including nearby Oak Wood and Rushmere Park was planted with conifers in the 1930's as a commercial crop. Shire Oak Heath was the only area that remained unplanted but due to a lack of management it became overgrown with birch, conifer and bracken, resulting in a loss of its rare heathland. Since 2008 the GST has been managing the area in an attempt to restore this part of the woodland back to its original heathland. **Fact:** 90% of the UK's heathland has been lost in the last century.*

In April 2010, after the last 'unwanted' tree was felled and removed, a contractor came in with a digger and removed all the old tree stumps and levelled the area as shown below.



Shortly afterwards children from the local school, scattered five large bags of heather seed throughout the area. The heather seed had been collected by the voles from Rammamere Heath the previous October. Now it's a matter of letting nature restore the heathland to its former glory with a little help from the voles no doubt, involving regular future bracken & birch pulling!



This is how the heath looks today as the volunteers go about their important restoration task.

Many of our newer voles may not be aware of a major project that the western volunteers undertook 5 years ago in 2011 at Shire Oak Heath. The Trust decided that the best way to maintain this area of heathland would be to graze the area with cattle, however the cattle need a regular water supply and a trough to drink from and the nearest water supply was from the Visitors Centre on the opposite side of the valley. During June 2011 contractors were employed to install a chain link fence around the perimeter of Shire Oak Heath to retain the cattle within.



Western Vole Newsletter No 33



A contractor with a small digger was supposed to dig the trench to bury the water pipe along the level sections of the 400 metre route, but guess who dug it in the end? The burying of the water pipe down the steep descent from the Visitors Centre into the valley (pictured left) and up the similar steep incline on the other side into Shire Oak Heath (pictured right) was carried out by the mid-week voles (or should that be moles?) over several weekly tasks. You may be interested to know that the wire fencing installation cost £7,000 and the water pipe installation cost a few dozen doughnuts !!

The task was finally completed at the end of July and the new water trough connected to the end of the long water pipe near the lower end of the Shire Oak Heath corner boundary.



The following week in early August the Dexter cattle, 2 cows and 3 calves, arrived to try out their new enclosure. Dexter's are an extremely hardy breed, originally from southwest Ireland which were introduced into England in 1882.



I took this photo of them busy munching away on the leaves and berries of a rowan tree. I reminded them that they were supposed to be trampling the bracken and grazing on the rough grasses, brambles and birch saplings - but they took no notice!



Western Vole Newsletter No 33



Ode to the Volunteers

*Some talk of big John Creasey
And some of Disco Bob
Of Jo, Matt, Gary and Robo
Rangers all, who do a fine job
But of all the Trust's great heroes
There's some who have no peers
They're old and grey, but willing
They're the Greensand Volunteers.*



*They slash and burn and coppice
Clear brambles, cut down trees
They pull up birch and bracken
And weed heather - on their knees
No job too big, no job too small
No task will cause them fear
Armed with bowsaws, rakes and loppers
They're the Greensand Volunteers*

*In Baker's, King's and Oak wood
Stockgrove and Rammamere Heath
Clophill, Ampthill, Maulden
Whipsnade and Aspley Heath
They care not where they travel
Be they places far or near
For distance is no object
To the Greensand Volunteers*



*They don't ask for any wages
They give their time for free
On Tuesdays and on Wednesdays
Start at ten and work till three
But when it comes to tea break
And Peter's call they hear
There'd better have the doughnuts
For the Greensand Volunteers*

*They work through all four seasons
Come wind, rain, snow or sun
The weather doesn't stop them
It just adds to all the fun
If you ask them why they do it
Throughout the twelve month year
They'd say for love of nature
That's why we're Greensand Volunteers.*



The Ode is an extract from the October 2011 newsletter, written by our own volunteer Alan Turner. I've taken the liberty of removing Rangers; Keith, Steve and Brian from the original version as they are no longer with the Trust and replaced them with; Jo, Matt and Gary.



Western Vole Newsletter No 33



Another Rhodi Bash

The end of November on a very frosty morning, 20 enthusiastic voles braved the cold to remove more of the overgrown rhododendrons from the Heron Valley area at Rushmere. Two bonfires were soon blazing as the volunteers cut and dragged the felled branches across the steep hillside to keep the fires burning, as pictured below.





Western Vole Newsletter No 33



In the afternoon several of the volunteers helped the rangers unload the 500 Christmas trees, ordered to supplement the 250 home grown trees from the Rushmere nurseries, ready for sale to the public (pictured below).



Christmas Fayre

The Greensand Trust annual Christmas Fayre took place on a cold but gloriously sunny day on Sunday 4th December at Rushmere Country Park. There was an array of stalls this year with toys, crafts, Christmas decorations and gifts, many of which were under cover in a large marquee on the picnic meadow.



After an overnight heavy frost, condensation on the inside of the marquee began to drip cold water down on the occupants in the early morning. However help was to hand as ranger Matt mopped it away using a long pole and a cloth.

The rest of the day was cold but the bright sunshine brought in the crowds.



Western Vole Newsletter No 33



There was also Christmas music provided by the local Heath Band throughout the day and carol singers from Aylesbury gave a real festive feeling. Hayleigh's catering team provided a seasonal food and drink menu which kept them busy all day. As usual many volunteers were on hand to help make the event a success which included selling the Christmas trees outside the Visitors Centre.

Children enjoyed the fun activities such as The Rudolph Hoopla and Hook a Bauble within the marquee. There was also a traditional fairground ride and a bungee trampoline for the children.





Western Vole Newsletter No 33



Before mid-day all three car parks were full and many more had to park in the overflow car park on the bottom meadow. The Rushmere Christmas Fayre is now recognised as a major annual event with increasing numbers attending each Christmas time. The marquee was full all day as pictured below.



Despite it being some three weeks before Christmas the sale of Christmas trees also did well. This year about 250 of our own trees planted 6½ years ago were cut and on sale. Next year the voles will no doubt be busy planting up replacements! Pictured below is the first Christmas tree planting carried out by the volunteers in April 2010, beside the second car park near the Visitors Centre.



Western Vole Newsletter No 33



Rangers & Voles Christmas al fresco party.

On the 14th December, down beside the Rushmere Lake in Heron Valley, Ranger John Creasey had an early morning fire well established before everyone arrived to start the morning task, as shown opposite, caught relaxing with an early morning cuppa by Mike Sumpter.

John's now famous 'cordon bleu charcoal baked potatoes' were yet again cooked to perfection, shown below. These complimented a spread of festive goodies provided by the Greensand Trust for the hungry staff and volunteers.

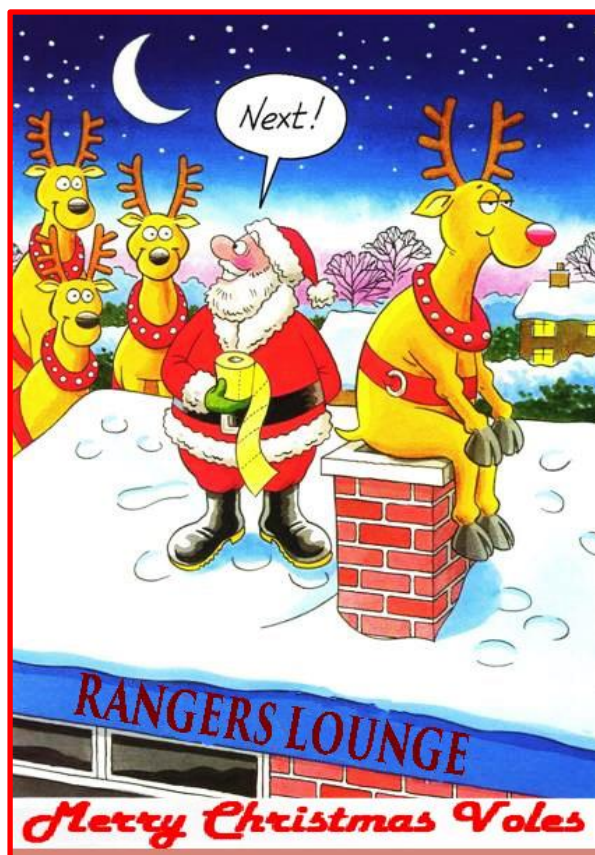




Western Vole Newsletter No 33



A VERY MERRY
CHRISTMAS
and Happy New Year!



Tony Harding

Western Volunteer
16/12/2016