Lewes and Ouse Valley Living Landscape

There is a tricky balance to meet when managing chalk grassland. How much grazing is required, or how much scrub clearance? The end result of good management is a habitat that assails the senses. Lie back in the summer and smell the wild thyme around you, listen to the skylarks singing above you and watch the bright fluttering jewels that are the Adonis blue butterflies.

Below the Downs flows the River Ouse. Some areas of the river system are rich in wildlife, whilst in others centuries of engineering have left deep, often slow moving water, disconnected from its floodplain and with little wildlife value.

The link between the downland and the river is not obvious to everyone. The slow filtration of rainwater through the chalk aquifer feeds clean fresh water into the Ouse which in turn provides drinking water to thousands of residents. All along the river the natural habitats of woodland, wetland and grasslands play their part in flood control, an important issue to the residents of Lewes which flooded severely in 2000.

With over 40% of the Lewes Downs owned and managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust it is important to us that we can help local people enjoy and understand this landscape whilst we work with our neighbours to enhance its potential value for wildlife. Improving the ecological status of the Ouse is an important task as is bringing the role of biodiversity in flood prevention to the fore.

The Lewes and Ouse Valley Living Landscape Vision is to see a local community engaging fully with their local environment, as a place of tranquility, recreation and wildlife. We want to help local residents be more connected to their river and help the river provide better ‘environmental services’ for people and wildlife.

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Creating Living Landscapes - Restoring Living Seas
Our work in the Lewes area has a strong focus on bringing our wildlife agenda to the local community. Lewes is a Transition Town, and already very active at a community level on issues relating to the environment.

Sussex Wildlife Trust is working with other organisations in the area to bring biodiversity to everyone’s attention. We want to share the exquisite wildlife of our two nature Reserves with those that live so close to it. SWT helps people understand how the chalk hills around their town work, what wildlife is there and how we manage our reserves. We want people to enjoy and understand our sites.

We want to see our nature reserves as wildlife rich core areas of high quality chalk grassland across the Lewes Downs and as such we work with other local landowners to share experience and best practice. With a base at the inspirational Linklater Pavilion in Lewes we are undertaking a full programme of community events in the area.

From traditional activities like ‘lambing with Milly’ to events aimed at people of all ages to enjoy the landscape or even look at glow worms, dragonflies, moths and other wildlife wonders. We want to involve everyone. Through these and other events the importance of appropriate habitat management are highlighted so that people will in turn understand their role in creating a Living Landscape for the area. From management of the Downs, to water usage to wildlife gardening, people can engage with all these issues to play their part in making the Lewes area a Living Landscape.

Did you know?
The breed of sheep used to graze our reserves in Lewes are Herdwicks. They are a hardy variety of hill sheep from the Lake District with a distinctive flavoured meat. They were on the menu of Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation banquet!

Taking Care of Sussex