Old Shoreham

FOldS newsletter September 2026

Osprey near the Toll Bridge September 2026 Photo by Jo Whiting

We live in an area of exceptional richness for wildlife – both resident and passing through – all within our town boundaries. So we are delighted that Jonathan Crawford of Sussex Butterfly Conservation is guest-editing this month, sharing some of the organisation's remarkable knowledge of Old Shoreham wildlife across the Downs and valley.

Sussex Butterfly Conservation is the volunteer-run local branch of a national charity dedicated to conserving butterflies, moths and their habitats. Its work combines recording and monitoring with practical conservation, research, public engagement and advice to landowners and site managers.

The Branch has supported systematic studies and counts across Sussex since at least 1989, building on a much longer tradition of butterfly recording.

Old Shoreham is particularly important. Mill Hill is one of Sussex's outstanding butterfly sites, supporting Adonis and Chalk Hill Blues, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and Silver-spotted Skipper. Volunteers have walked a standard butterfly transect there for many years, providing an invaluable record of change.

Butterfly Conservation

Click here to learn more about Sussex Butterfly Conservation, to volunteer or to support what they do.

THIS MONTH IN OLD SHOREHAM

EXHIBITION
Mon to Sat
5-19 SEP
10 -16:00

Skyway Gallery Pond Road

Sat 12 SEP 11:45-14:00	**Adur River Paddle Safari** with FOASSI. For paddle boarders, kayakers and canoeists. Book Here
Thu 17 SEP 10 -13:00	**Greening Old Shoreham** Conservation volunteering on **Mill Hill.** Meet at the Upper Car Park. Details from **joan@oldshoreham.org**
Fri 18 SEP 19:00	**Neighbourhood and community–a** talk by Becky Allinson of Adur Council (See p6) Organised by the Shoreham Society St Peter's Hall, West St. £3 on the door
Sat 19 SEP 10 -13:00	**Greening Old Shoreham** St Nicolas churchyard and the Conservation Area Details from **joan@oldshoreham.org** Plus **Coffee, Cake & Chat** at St Nicolas to support **Macmillan Cancer Research**
Sun 20 SEP 10:30-13:00	**10.30 - 13.00 - Adur Walking Safari** and Equinox Celebration. Organised by FOASSI Details and bookings.
Wed 23 SEP 19:30	**FOldS Committee 'Resilience'** The Amsterdam Inn
Wed 23 SEP 11:00	**FOldS Nature mapping walk** Along the riverside. Meet at Waterfront flats. **Details:** gosh@oldshoreham.org
Fri 25 SEP 20:00	**FOldS Fourth Friday Music Sessions** With Liege and Leaf, Stewart Coupe and Swiss Cottage, Old Shoreham Road
Sat 26 SEP 15:00	**Friends of St Nicolas** *Singalong to the musicals* with Nicole Wilson-Smith
Sat 3 OCT 7.00	**Greening Old Shoreham** Taster session on **Mill Hill.** **joan@oldshoreham.org**
Mon 5 OCT 7.00	**FOldS Harmony and Singing Group I** at the Swiss Cottage every first Monday

Every month there are too many Old Shoreham stories and too little time to tell them. Send yours to info@oldshoreham.org

A year on Mill Hill

For many years Sussex Butterfly Conservation volunteers have walked a standard butterfly transect on Mill Hill. A transect is a fixed route walked regularly through the butterfly season, recording the species and numbers seen under broadly consistent conditions. Repeating the survey year after year builds a valuable picture of how butterfly populations are changing. This year's results show just why that long-term record matters.

But recording what is happening is only part of the story. Over the past year, Butterfly Conservation has become increasingly involved in practical work to improve the habitat, working with local volunteers and South Downs National Park Rangers.

Regular readers will know that conservation work parties began just twelve months ago and rapidly built momentum. Over the winter, volunteers cleared more than half a hectare of privet and other scrub that was steadily encroaching on the remaining chalk grassland.

The work has not simply been about removing scrub. Overgrown paths have been reopened and widened, helping direct visitors away from sensitive areas, while monitoring has been strengthened through fixed-point photography, vegetation surveys, butterfly transects and reptile recording.

Spring and summer have seen Herdwick sheep and now Exmoor ponies keeping the newly cleared areas under control. There is much more to do, but after a year we have moved from identifying the problem to an active, collaborative programme of recovery.

Come and join us

This winter we start again, building on what was achieved last year. You can join our conservation work parties on Mill Hill, or join Sussex Butterfly Conservation to learn more and perhaps help with recording and monitoring.

You can also spread the word to friends, family, schools and local groups. Our chalk grasslands are a nationally important habitat, surviving on our doorstep. Above all, we want the next generation of Shoreham residents to discover what is here, understand why it matters, and help look after it for the future.

Greening Old Shoreham has resumed twice-monthly sessions on Mill Hill on the first Saturday and third Thursday of each month, with additional special sessions where needed. Email gosh@oldshoreham.org for details or join our **Taster Session on Saturday 3 Oct**.

The stars of the show

Mill Hill's chalk grassland supports some remarkable specialists. Adonis and Chalk Hill Blues, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and the Silver-spotted Skipper are among its star butterflies, alongside a rich variety of specialist moths, especially the Barred Tooth-Striped Moth.

All depend on the plants and warm, open conditions chalk grassland provides — and restoring that habitat gives them room to thrive again.

Chalkhill Blue (top)
Barred Tooth-striped Moth (left) Grizzled Skipper (right)
Photos by Charles J Sharp and Frantisek Sarzik. All CC-BY-SA-4.0

And a welcome return

This year's transect recorded 30 butterfly species. Adonis and Chalk Hill Blue numbers remain low — part of the reason our restoration work matters. But there was exciting news: a Silver-spotted Skipper was recorded on the transect for only the fourth time, after sightings in 2016, 2017 and 2020. Nine were also counted on the slope on one day.

Silver-spotted Skipper— photo by Jonathan Crawford

Immigrants and travellers

Jonathan Crawford

Swallowtail —Photo by Kirsty Gibbs

One of my favourite butterflies is the Silver-studded Blue. This little heathland butterfly, found in East and West Sussex, lives for just four or five days. During that brief period, it will travel no more than fifty metres, while any hedge or bush over a metre tall is an impenetrable barrier. Other butterflies are more intrepid. The annual migration of the Painted Lady from Morocco to Northern Europe is well known, and their autumn return journey in vast swarms has been tracked by radar.

Painted Lady — Photo by Martin Kalaher

Less well known is the fact that both Large White and Red Admiral numbers are regularly topped up each year by butterflies from the continent. In spring you can stand on the beach at Shoreham and see them arrive. In fact, Sussex is one of the few places in the UK where Red Admirals overwinter in small numbers on the coast.

The Large Tortoiseshell went extinct in Britain in the 1980s, but in recent years, sufficient numbers have crossed the Channel for it to become re-established as a British species, particularly in Sussex.

(Cc-by-SA 3.0)

Large Tortoiseshell— Photo by Algirdas

As our climate has warmed, some continental butterfly species have been crossing the Channel and attempting to establish themselves in Sussex. For most of them the winter is still too cold and they head south in the autumn, but it is only a matter of time before they stay here all year round.

An exceptional Summer

Immigrant butterflies have a simple way of finding other members of their species on arrival. They head for the top of the first hill they encounter after crossing the sea, so it is not surprising that they are often spotted on the Downs.

The long hot summer of 2026 was exceptional for immigrants. Butterflies head north when it is warming and south when it is cooling.

Long-tailed Blue butterflies are now regular summer arrivals in Sussex. They breed here, and their offspring collect on the seaside in late September, waiting for the right wind to make the return journey south.

Long-tailed Blue—Photo by Neil Hulme

A continental Swallowtail (main picture) appears in Sussex once every few years, but this year at least nine have been recorded from Chichester to Eastbourne.

Rare visitors

The Queen of Spain Fritillary is a rare immigrant. Only a few hundred have been recorded in England since 1700. They are usually seen in ones and twos in late summer. This year there have already been more than 20 sightings in Sussex, including one at Lancing Ring. There is clear evidence that they bred in Sussex this summer. If the weather holds, a second brood will emerge in early October and head south over the sea.

Queen of Spain Fritillary—Photo by Neil Hulme

Shoreham sites

It's not just about butterflies

We humans like to classify nature and draw boundaries around places. Nature doesn't work like that and the real world is all joined up.

Anchor Bottom and the Norfolk Bridge are the 'bookends' to the area we like to call Old Shoreham – an area shared by an uncommon mix of wildlife.

Adonis Blue at Anchor Bottom, Photo by Neil Hulme

Anchor Bottom

If I had to pick a favourite butterfly, I would probably choose the Adonis Blue, which is the rarest of all the blue butterflies in Britain. Whilst the females of this species are a drab brown, the males are a vivid sky blue, which once seen can never be forgotten. Adonis Blues live on chalk grassland, where they can find their caterpillar food plant, the horseshoe vetch. Adonis Blues have two broods a year, the first in May and the last in August and September. The latter brood is normally the largest. Adonis Blues are a red listed butterfly officially classified as vulnerable. Most people are delighted to see a few dozen Adonis Blues. Here in Shoreham though, we can see them in their thousands at Anchor Bottom, a long steep sided downland valley just north of the Beeding cement works.

Anchor Bottom is a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its butterflies and orchids. In recent years it has suffered badly from overgrazing. However, once in a while the farmer can be persuaded to take off the cows in the spring and the results are phenomenal. This happened in 2021 and again in 2026. From April to July this year the site was ungrazed and the downland flora burst into life all over the valley.

Horseshoe Vetch, Bird's-foot trefoil, Field Scabious, Round-headed Rampion, Wild Marjoram, Cowslip and Wild Thyme to name just a few of the plants.

The South Downs National Park alongside Natural England surveyed the site and recorded over 4500 Green winged Orchids. The nationally rare and endangered Red Star-thistle covered the valley floor. In August, after a series of surveys, Butterfly Conservation concluded there were somewhere between 8000 and 10,000 Adonis Blue butterflies flying in Anchor Bottom. There were also extraordinary numbers of Clouded Yellow butterflies and Hummingbird Hawkmoths. Silver Spotted Skipper butterflies also thrived. Autumn Lady's Tresses orchids have just come out and look to be having a good year too.

Anchor Bottom in the summer of 2026 was a sight that have been familiar to our forebears but is now altogether uncommon. Once you have seen how wonderful downland can be, when its full potential is realised, you understand how impoverished so much of Sussex downland is now.

It's like living in a black and white movie world and for a brief moment being able to see in glorious technicolour.

Jonathan Crawford

Main picture: Autumn Lady's Tresses— Photo by Douglas Neve
Inset: Green Winged Orchid— Photo by Jonathan Crawford

Norfolk Bridge

Roughly once every 29 days you might see a group like this gathered at the western end of Norfolk Bridge in Shoreham. They are equipped with cameras, binoculars and telescopes, which often sparks the curiosity of those passing by.

Photographer John Pointing with SDOS 'birders' at the bridge

The group are members of Shoreham and District Ornithological Society-SDOS-the oldest birding society in Sussex. They are there to count birds on the Shoreham reserve of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

The waters of the estuary are a haven for wetland birds, especially in winter. Bird numbers are swollen in spring and uutumn by passage migrants stopping off on the way to their summer or winter grounds. The birders gather on the highest tide of the month because when this happens almost the entire estuary is flooded, leaving one small island of scurvy grass opposite the Norfolk Bridge. All the waders and other birds congregate here and can be easily counted.

Amongst the birds regularly seen are Lapwing, Redshank, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Dunlin, Turnstone, Grey Plover, Little Egret, Oystercatcher, Whimbrel and Curlew. My favourite is the Snipe. These enigmatic birds are expertly camouflaged and their main defence is to lie motionless in the grass so unless you almost tread on one you are unlikely to see it. However, on the Adur estuary on full tide they can gather in clear view in their hundreds on the small island of scurvy grass.

The full tide is a time of change and uncertainty, and many opportunists try to take advantage of this. Once we saw a Heron catch and eat a weasel. Presumably the weasel thought it might find an easy bird lunch and ended up on the menu itself. Another time a fox swam across the Adur onto the scurvy-grass island. Unfortunately for the fox, its potential prey had wings and knew how to use them. Sometimes seals take advantage of the deep water, perhaps to reach the large catfish found in the less accessible waters. JC

Adur Fox—Photo by John Pointing

Heron with Weasel—Photo by John Pointing

Adur *Snipe—Photo by John Pointing*

Adur *Seal—Photo by John Pointing*

HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The Streets
A new shared history project

FOldS Heritage Group is starting a new project exploring **the streets and routes that have shaped Old Shoreham**—connecting buildings, people, landscapes and everyday life. It's the next stage in *Capturing Old Shoreham*.

Ordnance Survey, 1912. With permission of the National Library of Scotland.

We'll begin with one of the oldest: the changing east–west route through Old Shoreham, now divided between the A27 and A270. Its story may reach back to movement across the Downs long before Shoreham itself existed.

'The road to Brighton', today *Source: Google Earth*

We've started with the maps, bringing together what we alr/eady know and following the questions that emerge: **What was here before? Why did the route develop where it did? Who lived and worked along it? What has changed — and what survives?** Maps, photographs, documents, archaeology, memories and local knowledge will all contribute.

The Streets is an open-ended, shared enquiry. If something along the way interests you, come and explore it with us.

The Heritage Group meets at 7pm on the second Tuesday of each month at the Amsterdam Inn.

FOldS – Friends of Old Shoreham
email info@oldshoreham.org
web folds.info/about

FOldS MUSIC

A family ceilidh with Ceilidh Vibes

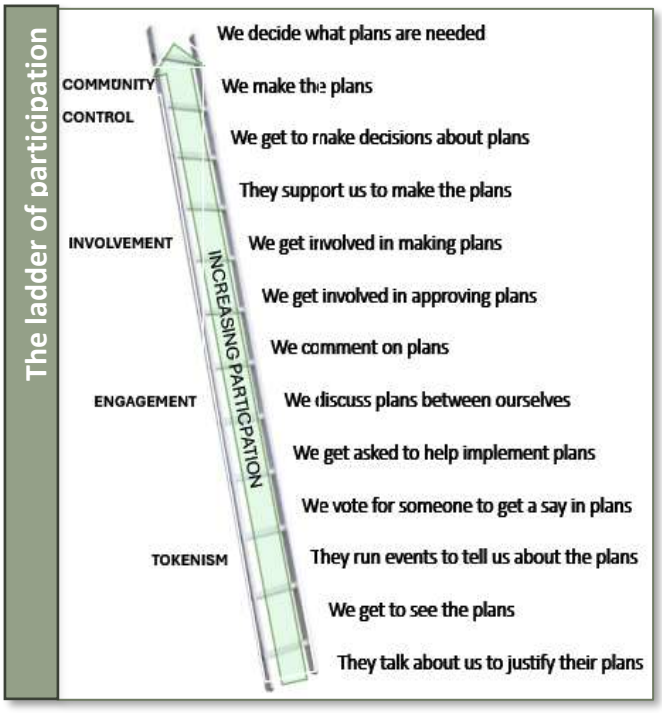
Shoreham Baptist Church Hall | BN43 5WD | 7pm Fri 30 Oct

Join Ceilidh Vibes dance band for an evening of reels, jigs, polkas and hornpipes. Fun for all the family—and a great way to raise funds for FOldS' nature, heritage and community initiatives. Ceilidh Vibes will lift your spirits with fiddles, flute, recorder, guitar, concertina, percussion and bass- playing traditional folk and dance tunes, original and contemporary music, harmonies and sea shanties. BOOK NOW £10 (£5 for children)

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY

Who decides the future of Shoreham?

St Peter's Church Hall, West Street | 7pm Fri 18 Sep | £3

Becky Allinson, Deputy Leader of Adur District Council will draw on research into *"systems thinking, place-based governance and community stewardship",* to talk about how neighbourhoods can play a stronger role in responding to long-term change, inviting discussion about using community knowledge and participation to build a resilient, successful Shoreham.

This "ladder of participation" was a talking point at our 2025 Forum. In the past, public involvement in Adur rarely rose above its lowest rungs.