

Help needed checking Hartslock sheep

Would you be keen to have a weekly walk on a beautiful nature reserve to help us check our sheep?

For those of you who are not familiar with it, Hartslock Nature Reserve is a beautiful south facing slope of chalk grassland, located approximately a mile west of Whitchurch along the Thames Path towards Goring. Rich in wildflowers and butterflies, Hartslock is managed by The Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Wildlife Trust and known for its rare orchids and stunning views over the River Thames. The reserve is currently in a fabulous purple phase, covered in a blanket of marjoram, thyme, knapweed, scabious, bell flowers, and harebells. Definitely worth a visit. www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/Hartslock

Mainly carried out by teams of volunteers and our lovely flock of sheep, we do a lot of work at Hartslock to keep the habitats in tip top condition. Tasks including clearing areas of encroaching scrub and brambles, maintaining pathways, gates and fences, and managing the vegetation. The sheep are a very important part of our team, grazing the grassland and encroaching scrub. Chalk grassland characteristically has shallow soils, lime rich, nutrient poor, with short vegetation. The flora and fauna at Hartslock thrive due to this and the carefully timed grazing and management.

We currently have a very friendly flock of Shetland sheep at Hartslock, but we also use Hebridean and Beulah sheep. These are hardy traditional breeds, all used to being out in all conditions, and grazing steep slopes.

The livestock are checked on a daily basis by a rota of kind volunteers, and at least once a week by BBOWT staff. Our stockwatchers are invaluable, without them we would be unable to carry out the essential grazing management on our nature reserves. A stockwatcher's main aim is to make sure the animals are all there, looking well, and are secure within the reserve with sufficient water. Stockwatchers generally commit to one day a week as part of a rota. Checks need to be carried out in daylight with at least 2 hours daylight remaining in order for us to respond to a livestock emergency.

We are currently looking for extra help at weekends, so if this appeals to you, please get in touch so we can discuss more details. No previous experience needed, and we will go through a full induction on site.

Elene Walton
Assistant Reserves Officer, Oxon

elenewalton@bbowt.org.uk or 01865 775476.