

Sadlers Wells Community Woodland

Registered Charity Number 1105117



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Heritage Lottery Fund

Newsletter No. 12 – Spring 2012

Welcome to the Spring Newsletter.

We are now well into our sixth year of ownership of the wood and the new trees are continuing to grow well. Some of the shrubs planted over the past few winters also appear to be thriving, particularly the hazel, but the blackthorn plants all seem to have failed. The Cheshire Landscape Trust again kindly provided us with some bare rooted trees and shrubs and a well attended working party on 25th February planted them in various parts of the old wood. The plants included Bird Cherry (to replace the existing cherries some of which have recently been lost and others of which are nearing the ends of their lives) and hazel and guilder rose to add to the understory. The working party also started the removal of the tree guards from the new plantation as the trees have now outgrown them and future growth might be restricted. There are several hundred guards to be taken off and the job will therefore take several sessions before it is finished.

Left The working party Sam , Bob Harris, David Cox, Sue Conway, Mike Bourne, Ernest Croley and Katherine Hutchinson with Doug Haynes holding the camera.



Right A large willow badly damaged by the recent high winds, taking two smaller trees with it .

The wood took another battering in the high winds which occurred early in the New Year. Two old willows beside the stream were badly damaged when their trunks split and four more trees became insecure and resting on their neighbours. All these were in positions which necessitated their removal.

Estimates were obtained in the region of £1000-00 but it is now hoped that someone has been found who will remove them free of charge in return for the timber. All the trees, except for one small rowan, were in a difficult state due to the distinct possibility of movement whilst being cut, requiring experienced operatives to remove them safely.

Nest Box Report

On 8th November last, Bob Harris and I set about checking and cleaning the various nest boxes which are scattered about the Wood. The results were mixed.

The highlights were that the tawny owl box contained an old owl's nest and the bat box had bat droppings around it showing that it also had been used. The standard hole fronted nest boxes were also well used most for nesting with others containing looser materials suggesting use as a winter roost. Unfortunately, three of the boxes contained several dead blue tit chicks; in one, the entrance hole appeared to have been gnawed by a squirrel without gaining entry but this may have been enough to cause the parents to desert the nest. The other two did not show any reason why the nests had been deserted. One of the older nest boxes near the entrance to the Wood had been attacked by a woodpecker no doubt getting at the nestlings. A woodpecker had also attacked on the nest boxes put up by the Bunbury Cubs on the south side of the stream. Some of the nest boxes are being provided with metal plates to protect the entrance holes in the hope that further predation may be avoided.

The open fronted nest boxes aimed at robins, wrens, flycatchers and blackbirds were hardly used at all with only one containing crushed dead leaves as a possible winter roost.

Death and Decay

Death and decay – a depressing thought but something that happens to everything and everyone in the end. In woodland, it is a continuous cycle as a wood renews itself always changing yet seeming to remain the same. Decay brings life, and fungi on the woodland floor break down leaves and dead and rotting timber providing food not only for other trees and plants that are growing but also for insects, worms and similar creatures, many of which provide food themselves for larger insects and birds. Blackbirds are frequently seen scratching through the leaf litter for tasty morsels.

There are symbiotic fungi that live on the roots of trees but the most conspicuous are bracket fungi where the fruiting bodies protrude from the trunks. Not many of these fungi can quickly kill a tree and many trees can survive for decades. Bracket fungi normally live on the heartwood at the centre of the tree not the outer, water conducting sapwood; this causes the centre of the tree to decay slowly leading to trees with cavities in the trunk and branches, sometimes becoming completely hollow. These hollow trunks and cavities provide roosting and nesting sites for a range of creatures from bats, woodpeckers, nuthatches, blue and great tits through to wild bees and other insects. Decay in the wood therefore provides both a home and a food chain for a great diversity of life.

Some bracket fungi are edible but the imperative rule is that a fungus should never be eaten, or even touched, unless you are absolutely certain of its identity and that it is safe to do so.

Powdered dried birch wood rotted by the fungus *Fomes fomentarius* was apparently used in olden times as kindling in tinder boxes.

Our general policy therefore is to leave as much dead wood in the Wood as is practicable and consistent with safety requirements in order to benefit and increase the diversity of the plant and animal life by the provision of food and nesting opportunities. Those trees that have to be felled are accordingly left to rot down wherever possible, although some have to be removed particularly those near boundaries and footpaths.

Flowers of the Wood **Wood Avens**



The wood aven is a small comparatively inconspicuous plant about 10 to 20 inches tall with small yellow flowers (pictured above) and is a member of the gum

family, *geum urbanum*. The flowers are 8-15 mm across and can be found between May and September. As well as woodland glades, wood avens are found in hilly country, on roadside verges and river banks. We have a small colony in the open glade between the outdoor school area and the stream, but unfortunately the wood avens and other plants found there are having to compete with an encroachment of nettles which threatens to overwhelm them.

The rhizome part of the root has been extensively used, when dried, as a herbal remedy with the rhizome collected either in the autumn or early spring before the appearance of leaves. The remedy can be taken as a powder, a tincture or an infusion and it is claimed to have antiseptic and analgesic properties and to cure stomach and liver infections and treat diarrhoea, certain cancers, bronchitis, dental and oral problems, depression and several other conditions. It is difficult to understand how one plant can apparently alleviate or cure so many differing conditions. As usual, we do not recommend that you try it, as it does sound too good to be true.

The plant is also known as Herb Bennet, a corruption of the Latin 'Herba benedicta' meaning 'the blessed herb' for its medicinal properties.

Helping the Environment

In the last two Newsletters, a request was included for volunteers to help look after and promote the wood. The last working party was well attended but we should still like a few more volunteers so that a good number of volunteers will be available in the future without obliging people to turn out on every occasion. No special skills are needed, simply enthusiasm, an interest in the natural environment and a willingness to do something for the Village. The wood does not need much attention but does require some regular maintenance. Only a few hours a year would be involved so that the commitment would not be onerous and several of the jobs could be done at a time to suit. Looking after the wood itself would require up to two or three sessions a year of a couple of hours or so each, providing fresh air, gentle exercise with something to see for your efforts and a bit of social chat as well. Secondly, two of the trustees have indicated that they intend to retire in the near future and we need someone to help with managerial tasks such as running the Friends of the Wood, arranging working parties and the occasional function.

Volunteers would be greatly appreciated. Please contact either Ernest or myself – details at the end of this Newsletter.

Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is a minimum of £5-00 each and the 2012/13 subscription **is due on 1st April**. The wood produces no income itself and we therefore have to raise all the money needed to pay for insurance, maintenance, etc. Your subscriptions are therefore very valuable to us, not only in themselves but also because they show a commitment from the local community which is a great help when we approach funding organisations for any grants available to enable the Trust to carry out its work. Please treat this as your subscription reminder. Early payment would be greatly appreciated and payment can be made with the slip at the end of this Newsletter either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given below; cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland.

Some Friends have kindly paid their subscriptions for this year and they should ignore this notice.

Gift Aid is a valuable source of income and we would appreciate subscriptions being gift aided if you are able to do so and have not already done it. The amount of Gift Aid on a single subscription is only small but the total amount we get each year is significant.

If anyone has any comments or queries regarding this Newsletter or the wood generally, please write or e-mail our Clerk, Michael Bourne. We would appreciate response from members to let us know whether we are heading in the right direction.

As mentioned in previous newsletters, if you see anything unusual or interesting in the wood, please let us know by telephone or e-mail as we would like to make a record.

Finally, if there is anyone who does not receive Newsletters by e-mail but would like to do so, please let me know by e-mail at the address below. It would save us postage or delivery, and you would have the benefit of photographs being in colour. An e-mail address would also be helpful for any other communications. Incidentally, I am using a new (to me!) programme to reduce the size of the photographs for easier e-mailing. I hope it does not cause any problems in opening the photographs on receipt. If there is a problem, please let me know.

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Trustees of the Charity Ernest Croley (Chairman), Michael Bourne (Clerk), Bob Price, Eric Lord, Alyson Thacker and Dr Katherine Hutchinson.

Friends of Sadlers Wells Wood -- Subscription 2012/13

Name(s) Amount (min. £5 per person)

Cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland.