

Sadlers Wells Community Woodland

Registered Charity Number 1105117



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Newsletter No. 3 - Autumn 2007

Welcome to the third newsletter of Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. News since the last newsletter includes (as some of you may have seen already in the Parish Link or the Bunbury Journal):-

1. A talk was given on Tuesday 3rd April on the subject of "The Barn Owl" by John Holland of the Broxton Barn Owl Group, which was well attended and much enjoyed. The Group were considering putting up a Barn Owl Nest Box in the area of the new plantation, but it is now felt that it may be too near the main road for their safety as Barn Owls seem to suffer higher losses from road kills than other species.
2. There was also a Summer Walk in the wood on evening of Tuesday 12th June with The Cheshire Landscape Trust and a number of local tree wardens from around the County, including one warden from the Macclesfield area. We were blessed with a fine evening (quite rare this summer!) and Bob Price and Tony Gentil were on hand to provide information on what we were doing in the wood.
3. Apart from a few oak trees in a block which are still quite small, the majority of the new planting is still growing well, and we have not suffered many losses so far. A circular footpath has been mown through the plantation. This is still uneven in places but will hopefully settle down with use. Rabbits are unfortunately proving to be a problem with holes appearing in the path and also undermining some of the trees.
4. We had a stand again at Village Day manned by volunteers including Ernest Croley, Ted Fowles, Mike Bourne and Eric Lord. The Adults Quiz Competition was won by Liz Jones of The Square and the Children's by Robert Jones. Seven new Friends of the Wood were recruited.
5. A large number of Nest boxes have been acquired with the aid of a grant from the Cheshire EConet Project. These arrived too late for use this spring, but they have been put up in the wood. They should however provide shelter this winter before being used for breeding next year.
6. When a working party went into the wood in early July to erect a seat for the benefit of the less mobile, it was found that two large adjoining beech trees had fallen right across the glade where the seat was going to be put. It is thought

that the reason was that the ground had become waterlogged as a result of the incessant heavy rain which we had then had and could no longer support the weight of the trees in full leaf. We hope that heavy summer rain does not become a regular occurrence; otherwise other trees may be lost. It can cost several hundred pounds to remove them if a duly qualified tree surgeon has to be employed. Fortunately, a neighbouring owner volunteered to remove these particular two trees for us, and this has saved us the expense this time. We have in the past cut up fallen trees and branches and left them in log piles, but there is a limit to the number of log piles that the wood will take and it was therefore decided that the timber should be removed on this occasion. It is a good job that the trees fell a few days before the seat was due to be put in and not a few days afterwards! Another larger beech tree adjoining the two which fell may well have had its roots disturbed and will probably have unfortunately to be removed to avoid the risk of damage or injury if it falls.

7. In the summer, a grass snake was seen by Bob Price down by the stream, and a jay has been seen recently. If anyone else has any unusual sightings, please let us know.

Introducing the trustees

No. 2 Bob Price

Bob was nominated as one of our Trustees by the Cheshire Landscape Trust, and has been involved with Sadlers Wells Wood from the start. He started as a forestry worker on the Eaton Estate and, after attending forestry training school, became Assistant Woodlands Manager with the Grosvenor Estate looking after their woodland and forestry interests over most of the country. In 1961 he became



Contracts Manager with Pulford Forestry, a position which he held until he became North Wales Area Manager for Flintshire Woodlands. For five years from 1968, he was Principal Forestry Officer to Cheshire County Council, and subsequently their Chief Conservation Officer. He has served on various Forestry Commission committees and was for two years an examiner for the Royal Forestry Society. He is resident of Wrexham.

His knowledge and enthusiasm have been invaluable to the Trust and, with Tony Gentil, he provides the woodland management expertise which we need.

Thoughts on Autumn

Three contributions on this seasonal topic

Sustainability - Tony Gentil

The water mill at Bunbury is a wonderful local asset, and I find that it has an interesting connection with Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. Several meetings have been held at the Mill to raise awareness of the woodland and the work of the Trustees.

Every time I visit it, I pause on my way across from the car park to the meeting room. I am drawn to the noise of the water pouring from the mill dam around the sluice gates. It's the sluice gates that for me have the link with Sadlers Wells Community Woodland; not because the timber to build them came from the woodland, although it might have been done historically, but rather because the sluice gates perform a similar function to the leaves of trees in autumn.

Have you ever wondered what it is that makes the leaves of deciduous trees fall off at the advance of winter? Inside every tree is an advanced plumbing system which runs from the roots below ground to the veins in the leaves. One part of the plumbing system carries water extracted from around the soil particles to the topmost leaf. A separate part of the system transports food manufactured in the leaves down to the rest of the tree in a constant flow during the spring and summer.

As autumn approaches with its colder temperatures and shorter hours of daylight, a sluice gate grows across the base of the leaf stalk. This shuts off the flow of liquids in both directions. The sluice gate, technically called the abscission layer, causes dramatic changes in the leaf. The leaf may change colour according to the species of the tree. Ash leaves turn pale yellow, oak khaki brown, birch a translucent gold and beech a bronzy brown. The connection between the leaf stalk and the twig becomes weaker until finally with an autumn breeze or first frost the link is severed and the leaf falls off. The fallen leaves add to the organic carpet on the woodland floor eventually decaying through the action of fungi and bacteria to become part of the soil. This then goes on to support and feed the trees in a perpetual cycle of sustainability.

Trees in autumn and winter - Bob Price

Autumn, following leaf fall, gives the opportunity to examine a tree's structure, its branch pattern and distinctive features which would otherwise be obscured by foliage. The majority of the trees in Sadlers Wells, with the obvious exception of the abundant Holly, are deciduous and are therefore laid bare for inspection. Oak, Sycamore, Beech, Ash and Wild cherry are the dominant mature hardwoods, or deciduous species, whose structure can be compared one with

another so that, with practice, a distinction can be made to aid identification at any time of the year. To be able to identify tree species by their shape or outline, perhaps from a distance, can add interest and enjoyment to a walk in the countryside, especially if an unusual or uncommon variety is spotted - nowadays the once common Elm is something of a rarity as a result of the ongoing losses due to elm disease.

A good pocket sized tree book always comes in handy when out and about, especially if illustrations of the trees' summer and winter outlines are featured, as an aid to positive identification.

Autumn is the time to collect nuts and seeds, to sow and germinate for future planting. Perhaps the easiest to gather is the acorn, as usually Oaks provide them in abundance. Collect them preferably when they are dry and store them in a sack, hessian not plastic as this weeps, in a cool dry place secure from mouse attack, until early spring when they can be sown, out of doors or in pots, just lightly covered with a layer of soil. Pots can be left on a sunny window-sill but indoors or outside-they-should-be lightly- watered-until germination, which should be in about a week's time. Leave them in situ until the following autumn when they can be moved to a spot in the garden where they can remain for another year or so before final planting out. With oak it is important when lifting for transplanting to sever the long tap root, which will stimulate more fibrous root material to develop and so promote more vigorous growth.

So autumn is the time to take a closer look at the trees now devoid of foliage to see how they are structured, to collect seed such as acorns and to spot the various types of fungi which depend on trees for their sustenance.

Reflections - Ernest Croley

There is no doubt that it has arrived; the trees are a giveaway and the lawn is white in the morning, whether with dew or frost is not always clear. The nights have suddenly got darker and there is no doubt that winter is not far behind. Perhaps now is a time to take a brief moment to reflect on the Trust's second growing season. It has been an appalling summer, for humans at least, although the trees might not necessarily agree. The conditions seem to have been entirely to the satisfaction of the newly planted with outstanding growth rates having been achieved. The ash and wild cherry (*prunus avium*) have done particularly well.

The old wood has not done as well. Extreme wet weather and high winds with trees in full leaf has resulted in a number of casualties. Removal of the fallen trees will give us a number of glades, where the canopy is not so dense and the light levels are correspondingly higher, perhaps providing an opportunity for regeneration or to make a few alterations. What to actually do is a surprisingly complicated question. The immediate gut reaction is to say that it is after all ancient woodland so it ought to be returned to its state before men disturbed it and destroyed the natural balance. The trouble is men have adapted and used woods to

such an extent that there probably never was a natural balance and some of the systems of management, such as coppicing, have been positively beneficial to wild life.

The history of British Trees is interesting because the original population must have been virtually wiped out by the ice cap that covered the British Isles. As the ice melted trees spread from what is now Europe to re-colonize the newly exposed ground. The process came to an abrupt end when water levels rose sufficiently to flood the Rhine Delta and form the English Channel. We were left with probably less than twenty tree species. Additions to this number followed a variety of routes but it must be assumed that men played a decisive roll in bringing them here. Most of the original species are to be found in the Wood, the exceptions being box and lime. We would not be surprised at the absence of box because the conditions hardly favour it. The absence of lime is, however, surprising because some of the most substantial trees in the rest of the Village are lime. Lime does not regenerate readily but, at the same time, it is a useful tree providing both feed and timber. Perhaps it was just exploited to extinction. Our new planting does acknowledge the historic significance of lime by incorporating a small stand of lime into the scheme.

There does not seem to be any case for trying to return to the original top twenty old time favourites even if that were possible. The new species are only a problem if the absence of natural competitors or some external disturbance allows them to become unduly prominent. There are signs that this will happen with the sycamores. The sycamore is not a native, but a modern usurper, which was certainly not widespread until the seventeenth century. Examination of the Wood and counting the tree rings of the fallen specimens suggests that many of the standing trees are about ninety years old. Perhaps there was a major removal of trees probably oak and ash, during the First World War. If that is the case then it may well be that the present superabundance of sycamore is due to convenient empty spaces being left available.

There are other cases of introduced flora and fauna but that is perhaps the subject for another occasion.

Dogs

People are welcome to walk their dogs in the Wood, but unfortunately we have recently had complaints about dog mess not being cleared up. We would therefore ask that dog owners tidy up after their dogs so that others do not run the risk of treading in something nasty.

Bunbury Aldersey Primary School

Near the end of the Summer term, the School made good use of the wood in various projects within the National Curriculum, including Art, Geography, Poetry and Design & Technology, and these involved the whole School from the Reception Class to Year 6. As education is an important aspect of the work of the Charity, we are very pleased to make the wood available for use by the School and we hope that it will be used by the School for many years to come.

Friends of the Wood

. The annual subscription is £5-00 each. 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. Early payment of any outstanding subscriptions would be greatly appreciated and payment can be made either to Ernest Croley or Michael Bourne whose details are given at the end of this Newsletter. **New members** (who would like to support our work to maintain and improve the amenity of the wood and to make it available for educational projects by the School and others) would be greatly appreciated. Please send your name, address (including e-mail address where applicable) and subscription to either of the above. All contributions will be gratefully received.

If anyone has any comments or queries regarding this Newsletter or the wood generally, please write or e-mail our Clerk, Michael Bourne.

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Trustees of the Charity Ernest Croley (Chairman), Michael Bourne (Clerk), Bob Price, Tony Gentil, Eric Lord, Alison Phillips and Dr Katherine Hutchinson.