

Sadlers Wells Community Woodland

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Newsletter No. 5 - Autumn 2008

Welcome to the Fifth Newsletter of Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. News since the last newsletter includes:-

1. As you are no doubt aware, Alison Phillips retired as Head of Bunbury Aldersey CE Primary School at the end of the Summer Term and we are pleased to report that her successor, Alyson Thacker, has agreed to become a Trustee in her place.
2. A talk was given on Monday 21st April on the subject of "British Bats" by Ged Ryan of the Cheshire Bat Group, which was much enjoyed by those who attended. Bats are apparently a subject on which comparatively little was known until recent years when the advent of technology such as DNA testing and ultrasonic bat detectors have added greatly to our knowledge. Even now, little is known about where British Bats spend their winter in hibernation. Many surprising facts emerged. A small pipistrelle bat will consume about 3000 insects in one night equal to a human being eating a 40 course meal. They need to eat at this rate because they have a very high metabolism and need an enormous amount of energy to keep going. Their heart rate is about 1000 beats per minute whilst active although it can slow right down to nearly 15 beats per minute in hibernation. The gestation period for a bat is only five weeks but the single pup is about a third of its mother's weight at birth (equivalent to about 45 lbs in human terms!) and reaches adult size in another five weeks or so. There was a remarkable photograph of a hibernating bat that had ice on its fur without apparently suffering any ill effects. The talk ended with a demonstration of the use of a bat detector outside the building at Bunbury Mill.
3. The Trust are extremely grateful for a generous gift by the family of the late Miss Marjorie Rumsey which will help enormously in providing funds for upkeep and maintenance of the Wood.
4. Tony and Liz Gentil kindly hosted a Walk in the Wood on May 28th looking in particular at wildflowers. A new species not previously recorded in the wood was found, the Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*) found near to the entrance to the wood. It is tall with yellow-orange flowers and is related to the poppy. Oddly it is not related to Lesser Celandine, the spring flower like a

small shiny yellow buttercup, that grows in damp ground. Greater Celandine has been used as a herbal plant and the latex inside the stems has been used against skin warts, however it is very irritant to the eyes so should be handled with caution. It is thought that the smell attracts ants who distribute the seeds.

5. The Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership very kindly agreed to give us a grant of £665 towards the cost of the construction of a boardwalk over the old ditch which runs through the new plantation, and the work has now been completed.
6. The Trust are extremely grateful to Mr Bill Mayers who has kindly built and given to the Trust another bench seat and this has also been put in the new plantation.

Introducing the trustees

No. 4 Tony Gentil

Tony is another of the Trustees whose expertise in woodland management is invaluable to us. He is a native of Cheshire and lives at Aston near Wrenbury. He trained in both horticulture and forestry, and has worked for the Forestry Commission and local government. He has lectured in horticulture and horticultural management at Reaseheath College and has also staged horticultural exhibitions at International Garden Festivals and Chelsea Flower Show. He is currently Horticultural Director to the Nantwich Show.

Between 1976 and 2006 he wrote a weekly gardening column for a group of newspapers with a circulation of one million and regularly appeared on Radio Manchester.

With his wife, Liz, Tony runs an orchard consultancy business and enjoys working with the 400 plus different varieties of fruit trees on their 10 acre smallholding. Anyone who has heard him will know his enthusiasm for his subject. Liz is also a qualified ecologist and she was responsible for producing the habitat surveys for us after the purchase of the Wood in 2006. Tony and Liz have recently again come to public attention through their work on the Cheshire Gooseberry Project about local Cheshire gooseberry shows.

Fungi

Autumn gives the opportunity to explore woodland and look for the various types of fungi which appear at this time of year. The fungal fruiting bodies, or fructifications, take on many different shapes, sizes and colours, from the typical toadstools or mushrooms, usually short lived and found growing on the woodland floor, to the large hoof or bracket shaped varieties which attach themselves to the trees' trunks and branches. Many of these are ephemeral and are destroyed by the onset of bad weather or frost, so it is best to look for them in early rather than late autumn. Others, of the bracket type, are perennial and grow in size year on year. As a general rule it is better, and safer, to look at rather than touch fungi, leaving them undisturbed, as some are dangerously toxic, so always wash hands if any contact has been made.

The majority of fungi are parasitic, which means they obtain their sustenance from another organism, trees being among the most frequently used hosts for this purpose. Fruiting bodies, such as the commonly found mushrooms and toadstools, and the various bracket types, develop and grow from a mass of tiny threads known as hyphae, which feed like roots, on decaying matter either in the soil or within the tree itself, in which case they are the cause of progressive rot attacking the tree's structure, which frequently results in the tree becoming hollow or unstable. Without the visible fructifications growing on a tree there is often no indication of the active decay taking place within it or on its roots, so it is important, in woodland management, to be aware of the effect any fungus may be having on tree health.

Organisations like the Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the Cheshire Countryside Service hold annual 'fungal forays' in various woodlands during the autumn, led by experts in their field who will identify and describe the different fungi which may be found.

Woods such as Sadlers Wells, which are not commercially managed, will allow a variety of different fungi to develop and the presence of these is important to the overall richness and diversity of the woodland's ecology and its wildlife - flora, fauna and invertebrates - thereby adding to its interest, not just in the autumn but throughout the year.

Bob Price

Following on from Bob Price's note on fungi, I was interested to read an article by Monty Don in a gardening magazine that a single teaspoonful of good quality soil can contain up to 25,000 species of bacteria, 10,000 species of fungi, 1,000 protozoa and 100 nematodes. It said that each one is contributing to the balance and health of the soil. Some exist to feed on others, some get food from plants and some provide food for plants creating a balance of considerable complexity. Conventional use of chemicals inevitably upsets the balance wiping out the majority of life in the soil for only short term benefit and substantially weakening the ability of the soil to grow healthy plants. Good, healthy

home-made compost is the answer to improve the soil and supplement the incredible intensity of life in healthy soil. Compost is not just decayed vegetable matter but is full of living organisms which help plants to take in the nutrients they need.

Mike Bourne

End of Term Report

Autumn is always a very special time in a wood when, for an all too short a time, the trees clothe themselves in gorgeous yellows, reds and browns. It is also the end of the visible growing season. and an appropriate time to consider "how are we doing"? It has been another successful growing season with most of the new trees showing substantial gains in height. This has been particularly true of the Wild Cherry whilst many of the Ash are already twelve feet high. A few of the youngsters have had their growing points broken off and whilst this does not seem to have reduced their vigour, it can result in a fork which can be a weakness at a later date. The cause may well be the crows. The new growth looks strong, even before it has had the chance to mature and may be that it looks like a tempting landing place! A little light surgery may be required on a very few of the trees. The Oak has been rather slower to get started. The tree is acknowledged to be a slow starter and this would not surprise anyone who watched the transplanting. The whips had long deep tap- roots that had to be cut to get them out of the ground. Their time will come, because many of the oak will still be standing long after the competition has succumbed the hazards of living in a wood. Many of the recently planted oak trees have suffered mildew attack. This is blamed on the damp summer and whilst it does not do any good and is definitely unsightly, Bob Price assures me that it is unlikely to cause any long- term damage.

Last winter's gales blew over several trees leaving us with entirely natural glades, which we are slowly turning to our advantage. The wood is well mature and the canopy has closed, shading out many of the ground cover plants, leaving only an excess of holly. The Holly itself has suffered from a type of holly dieback and this has cleared much of the established growth making clearance much easier. There is still some work to do before the spaces can be replanted but we hope to be ready to replant with native shrubs such as guelder rose before next spring. Help will be needed to fetch the plants from the Cheshire Landscape Trust Tree Nursery at Northwich and also with the planting when we get them back to the Wood. Fortunately it is work that can readily be done in winter especially as the areas concerned stand up well to wet weather.

Leaving Trees for a minute, can we consider people? We have had some enquiries about the scattering of cremated remains within the Wood. The Trustees are anxious that the Wood should not become a garden and certainly

not a garden of remembrance. Nonetheless we can sympathise with the idea that it could be a suitable resting place and after due consideration, the Trustees have decided to allow ashes to be scattered. This will be allowed only in places designated by the Trustees and the ashes will have to be scattered rather than contained. The site cannot be marked, although an oak post will be erected on which, by arrangement, the Trustees will affix a brass plate showing the name and year only of all those who have made a bequest to the Trust. For the record, I shall not be availing myself of the facility because whenever I go into the Wood I find another job!

Ernest Croley

God's cock and hen

According to an old rhyme:-

The robin redbreast and the wren
are God almighty's cock and hen.

The robin and wren are two of Britain's favourite garden birds, particularly in winter when they are some of the few birds singing and bring brightness and cheer to the short dark days. Both are instantly recognisable and need no introduction.

The robin was originally known as the redbreast or ruddock, and its reputation for friendliness goes back as far as the Dark Ages. Continental birds are of a different race and prefer more of a woodland habitat and so are not usually as confiding as our own. You only have to go into a garden and there will be a robin watching you to see whether you are going to disturb the soil and provide some tasty morsels for dinner. Robins will choose any convenient site for a nest as is well known, including flower pots, abandoned pots and pans and anywhere else that takes their fancy, including the case of the gardener who went to collect his jacket at lunchtime to find that a robin had built a nest in it during the course of the morning.

Robins sing throughout the year except when they are moulting, as they like to proclaim their territory all year round and not simply during the breeding season. A singing robin will often trigger a voluble response from a rival holding an adjoining territory, and it can be very pleasant to stand in the middle and listen to their rich and varied songs as they hurl abuse and defiance at each other.

The wren's song is even more impressive in its strength and vehemence when you consider that the wren is one of our smallest birds. If all the other birds made as much noise in relation to their size, the result would be deafening! Wrens are quite perky birds flitting about hedgerows with their tails held high, but are comparatively unobtrusive except when singing. Although

one of the most common birds in the country, they are often overlooked in garden surveys with a reporting rate of less than 40% nearly half that of more obvious birds such as wood pigeons and collared doves. They also are not slow to take advantage of what man provides when looking for nest sites but tend to go for nooks and holes which gave rise to their Latin name of *Troglodytes Troglodytes*, a cave dweller. There were in olden times traditions of hunting wrens, particularly around Boxing Day and Twelfth Night when people used to go out looking for and capturing wrens. The reasons appear to be lost in the mists, or even myths, of time and are the subject of much discussion. One theory is that the wren was hunted because of some pagan ritual, and another is that a singing wren is supposed to have revealed the whereabouts of St Stephen to his persecutors.

Wrens are also noted for roosting together during the cold winter nights. There are records of over 50 wrens roosting in a single nest box.

Mike Bourne

Bunbury Aldersey Primary School

The School have already been busy in the Wood this term. Year 1 class have visited as part of their literacy work looking at story books set in woodlands, one of which was called "Where's my Teddy". They acted out the story of the book and many other stories as well.

Year 3 have also visited the Wood this term and used the Wood as a stimulus for their creative writing.

Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is £5-00 each payable on 1st April each year. 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, and cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland

A final thought

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”

A Native American proverb quoted in the recent issue of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust Magazine, The Grebe.

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, Alyson Thacker and Dr Katherine Hutchinson.