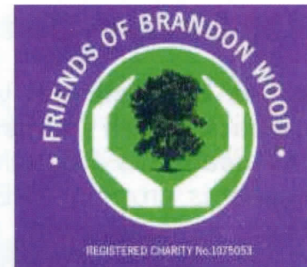


Friends of Brandon Wood

New Year Newsletter 2016



Attracting more birds to our wood

One of our aims is to increase the diversity of wildlife in the wood. In order to check how we are doing we constantly monitor and survey butterflies, moths, insects, pond life, fungus plants etc.

In a previous newsletter we briefly reported on the results of a bird survey. We now have the full report with recommendations. This survey was carried out independently for us and made a number of recommendations for encouraging more species of wild birds.

The results of the survey revealed that we already have over 40 species of bird using the wood. Some of these are common and permanently resident, whereas others nested elsewhere or are only seasonal visitors. There were five different varieties of Tit, numerous chiffchaffs, nuthatch, green and great-spotted woodpeckers, buzzards

and sparrow-hawks, jays and various finches. Less common sightings were whitethroat, warblers and greenfinch and our winter visitors included siskin, lesser redpoll, redwing and linnets.

The comments were that there was a potentially detrimental impact on wildlife because of the number of paths in the wood, some only a few metres apart from each other and no areas that are specifically designated for wildlife, involving restrictions on public access.

The trustees have already implemented some of the recommendations from the survey to create more nesting and foraging habitat and install bat and bird boxes. We now want to sound out members' views on other recommendations about closing off an area of the woodland to provide an undisturbed area where birds such as woodcock can feed. This would be enclosed by windrows created from broken branches. (see illustration on the back page)

Ash Dieback Disease

It has been several years now since **Chalara dieback of ash (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)** hit the headlines. Though no longer in the news its impact is growing; in East Anglia and the South East it is starting to decimate woodlands. Containment is not an option as the disease is spread by the wind, in one instance over a distance of 100km, so the Forestry Commission (FC) are focusing their efforts on research.

Their hope first and foremost is to find native trees with a natural resistance to the fungus. To this end trials are under way on 14 sites across the south east to see if tolerant trees can be identified. These trials are in their third year now and are scheduled to end in 2017. Secondly the FC are looking at non-native Ash species, the idea being to select trees which have shown signs of being tolerant to Ash Dieback. These could then be used to replace the lost indigenous trees. This is a good idea in theory but non-natives come with their own problems. The American Ash (*Fraxinus americana*) for example is being ravaged in its homeland by the Emerald Ash Borer, an Asian beetle which is making its way inexorably toward Europe having been identified as far west as Moscow. In any event these solutions are long term at best and will not stop the loss of the Ash tree from the British landscape.



Ash Dieback affects trees initially by defoliation (fig 1), causing the leaves to wilt. Then as the disease moves through the tree it causes diamond shaped lesions (fig 2), on branches and the main stem. These eventually girdle the affected branch cutting off the supply of water

and nutrients and leading to the death of some or all, of the tree. These lesions have also been observed at the base of young "pole stage" (about 8"-12" diameter) trees, with death occurring much more swiftly.



In mature trees early signs like wilted leaves can be hard to spot, so although they are more resilient once symptoms are spotted the tree will often die in less than 12 months. Even if the disease is not fatal it leaves the tree severely weakened allowing secondary pathogens like Honey Fungus (*Armillaria mellea*) to finish the job.

In Brandon Wood we are comparatively lucky, we do have Ash in the wood but it is well interspersed with other species. At present there are, as far as we know, no cases of Ash Dieback in the wood, however we must consider our response as and when it arrives. The Ash tree is an important part of the woodland ecosystem, second only to Oak in the number of species it supports and even when dead, is a valuable source of habitat. We will therefore only look to fell infected trees if they become a safety concern.

It would seem to me the lesson from this is that, in order to have healthy woodland, which supports a wide variety of wildlife and is resistant to the effects of disease, you must have an equally wide variety of tree and plant species. This is something we are working on in thinning the large areas of Corsican Pine, both to reduce the spread of disease (Red Band Needle Blight), and also to allow natural regeneration to recolonise those areas.

Rob Cardus

Work Party

The busy winter programme is well under way.

This is the season for thinning of Corsican pine, and we have recently cleared a stand of pine near the Glade. (A more open area just off the path going left after you cross over the bridge from the playing field entrance.) This allows much more sunlight to penetrate there and gives space for the two beautiful mature oaks.

The importance of pine thinning, a winter priority, was emphasised last autumn by the appearance of Red Band Needle Blight on some of our Corsican Pine. This is a defoliating fungus which affects pine, particularly Corsican Pine, and can cause mortality in large swathes.

Thinning is needed to reduce the risk of disease in the denser stands, although canopy shade reduction is still the main reason for thinning trees in our ancient woodland.



We do most of the path improvements in summer while the paths are relatively dry. Path buttressing, which we carried out last summer on the North Path West, is preventing path erosion – especially important in winter with the likelihood of heavy rain on wet ground. (This is the path to the right from the playing field, before you cross the ditch.)

Our new heavy-duty brush mower, which can cope with thicker undergrowth as well as grass cutting, is proving very productive on the ride verges. The mowing and raking is aimed to encourage flower, grass and orchid diversity – and the ensuing benefits for other flora and fauna.



Although we haven't conducted any formal surveys on this, I feel that dog walkers are now acting much more responsibly in removing their dogs' waste so a big "Thank you" is warranted. It means a lot to the volunteers especially when we work the verges!

Our August moth survey assured us again this year, with some 80 species recorded, that our woodland is healthy and in good hands.

Many thanks to the work party members for their dedication and stoicism as well as continued humour. We are achieving great progress!

Andrew Ireland – Woodland Manager

Paws for Thought

Our thanks to everyone who has been involved with preventing dog fouling in the wood, although not completely eliminated it is much improved. Those of us with dogs must remember that the verges on the edge of the paths will be walked on by children and the working party so must be treated like the paths.

In view of the item about wildlife it seems a good time to remind ourselves about the breeding and rearing season from March to August when we have to stick to designated paths and keep dogs under control. We have to face winter first so wrap up warm and enjoy the wood.

Beryl Smith

Princethorpe Woodlands Living Landscapes

The Friends of Brandon Wood are working with Princethorpe Woodland Living Landscapes (PWLL) with the objective of getting funding to enhance our wood. Some of the numerous other organisations involved are Brandon Marsh, Coombe Abbey Country Park, Butterfly Conservation and Ryton Pools Country Park.

PWLL has the aim of restoring an ancient wooded landscape connected by hedgerows, grasslands, trees and ponds, full of historical sites, into one rich in wildlife and accessible to all. The area covered by the project stretches from Rolls Royce Ansty in the north to Hunningham in the south and from the eastern outskirts of Coventry in the west to Brinklow in the east. The intention is to restore and enhance the wildlife and woodland areas across this part of Warwickshire so that their habitats are improved and they are better connected for wildlife.

We collaborated with all the other organisations involved, to put forward a proposal to the Lottery Fund at the end of 2014. That resulted in PWLL receiving funding to turn the proposal into a firm bid to undertake specific projects.

Projects that we have put forward include restoring some of our ponds, improving paths, especially the all-ability path, and further training. The firm bid will be submitted in 2016 and if successful funding will be available in 2017. For further information on the project visit:

<http://www.princethorpewoodlands.com/>

A Video of the Wood

Our new video about Brandon Wood "A year in the Wood" has now been completed. It was again produced by ex-trustee John Sidey and can be seen from the Links page on our own website (<http://www.brandonwood.org.uk/links>) and on YouTube.

Using windrows to create protected areas



The article on our front page mentioned a plan to create protected areas, where birds can be undisturbed. We would do this by constructing windrows (similar to the one in the illustration above) around the area to prevent people and dogs from intruding.

If you have any views on this or other issues, you can contact us in various ways:

e-mail: info.brandonwood@gmail.com
Phone (local rate): 03 301 239 215
Web page: <http://www.brandonwood.org.uk>
Facebook: [/FriendsBrandonWood](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsBrandonWood)

And finally another photograph by Phil Wood:

