

# Friends of Brandon Wood

## New Year Newsletter 2020



**A happy new year to all our members.**

### **Woodland Hygiene**

“There are many diseases that strike peoples treeses” (with apologies to Spike Milligan) but I was reminded of how important cleanliness is to our wood when we visited the Lickey Hills country park. They had just cleared all of the larch trees in the park because of an infection of *Phytophthora ramorum* . *Phytophthora ramorum* is an algae-like organism called a water mould. It causes extensive damage and death to more than 150 plant species, including some forest species like oak and sweet chestnut. There are other diseases in different woodlands in different parts of the country, ash dieback for example, which is why it is so important to remember to thoroughly clean your boots between visits to different woodlands.



***Phytophthora ramorum* in a larch wood**



## Butterflies in Brandon Wood – A visit by *Vanessa cardui*!

If you are keen on nature, you may have seen any of a number of TV programmes about the amazing Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa Cardui*). Over at least three generations, this remarkable butterfly migrates from North Africa across Europe to our shores. One generation starts the migration, lays eggs on the way and the next generation will continue the journey. They arrive in the summer and breed. Then, as the days become shorter, they start a similar migration back to Africa. This year has seen a vast number of Painted Ladies in England. Although they have mainly spread out along the east coast arriving in the north of the country, we had our first sightings of these lovely creatures in Brandon Wood this summer.



**Painted Lady**

A group of volunteers monitors the butterflies each week in Brandon Wood. You may have seen us out with our clipboards! By following the same route each week, walking slowly and counting as we go, we are able to calculate trends in butterfly populations from year to year. The butterfly population can be an indication of the health of the woodland. The information is also fed into the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme website and used by research groups around the country.

## Volunteers needed

One or two people who helped with butterfly monitoring, have had to give up so we are looking for **interested volunteers**. The task involves walking the length and breadth of the wood over 1 ½ to 2 hours, preferably in good weather, between the beginning of April and the middle of October. We work on a rota basis. With sufficient volunteers, each team or individual will hope to count once a month. If you are interested, please contact **Andrew Ireland** (024 7644 1009) or **Viv Wood** (024 7654 2658)

## Wagon Project

Work continues on restoration of the logging wagon albeit at a slow but steady pace. During the summer the second third and fourth wheel hubs have been completed and the first photo



shows Ady, our blacksmith, with the 3 hubs having just fitted the stock rings. The second wheel was completed in December. The second photo shows it being admired. All being well we hope to finish the restoration next summer.



## **The Three Pond Project**

Funding has been secured from Warwickshire County Council to improve three small densely shaded and neglected ponds adjacent to Brandon Wood Farm. The aim is to improve pond habitat and in particular to encourage greater crested newts.

Greater crested newts have legislative protection because their numbers are in steep decline. Many greater crested newt breeding ponds have disappeared across the country due to neglect. In woodland this is mainly due to excess shading from trees and scrub which causes water to become too cold for juveniles to thrive. The Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Biodiversity Action Plan for Ponds (2019) has set a target to create or restore 284 degraded ponds by 2026 in order to counter these losses. This project constitutes one of these schemes.



**One of the Ponds Requiring Attention**

Greater crested newts have been recorded in other ponds in Brandon Wood. It is hoped, that through selective tree and scrub removal around the three ponds, additional suitable habitats to support greater crested newts will be created. The Three Ponds Project is set to run from 2019-2021.

## **Woodland Management Report**

Although we had some long dry spells earlier in 2019 and again in late summer, last year was a good year for growth. We had attractive displays of wildflowers (for example: Bird's Foot Trefoil, Ragged Robin, Toadflax and Devil's Bit Scabious) which attracted many pollinating insects. All this was helped by the more-open ride verges and scallops: in fact we have been mowing open areas with the intention of encouraging more wild flower species. On the South Path West some parts are being mown in late summer and arisings removed in order to reduce fertility, enabling wildflowers to flourish. Some carefully selected seeds have been sown too, like Yellow Rattle (a hemiparasite) which restricts coarse grasses.



## Woodland Management Report cont.

An exceptionally wet autumn produced a large variety of fungi - vital to the health of trees especially in our ancient woodland, and a good sign of a mature wood. We had the bonus of a beautiful mottled carpet of multi-coloured leaves to brighten the dull November days.



**Common Stump Brittlespore**



**False Death Cap**

In addition to butterfly count last summer, our moth recordings were a fascinating list as usual, including target species of Barred Umber, Marbled Brown and Lobster Moth, also Buff Tip (pictured) and Eyed Hawk Moth. Our moth target this year is to see the Non-Pariel or Blue Underwing.



**Buff Tip Moth**

Our wooden bridges which we installed roughly 10 years ago have been rotting and are being replaced by culverts, the latest being the T-junction on the North Path West. Culverts are a more permanent solution, and blend in well with the woodland. Footpath improvements are continuing and we do appreciate comments we have had from our visitors, nearly all of which are complimentary!

Andrew Ireland – Woodland Manager

### ***Need some firewood?***

Call **Andrew Kirby** on **07976 266208**

for good quality timber from our woodland

### **FoBW Contact Details**

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