



Friends of Ecclesall Woods

Newsletter July 2015.

www.friendsofecclesallwoods.org.uk



Bramble Flower with bee

So far, we've had the hottest day for over a hundred years, and a splendid thunderstorm with cloudburst. We have rampant growth everywhere. It's weather for being outdoors and enjoying all the natural beauty that surrounds us. We are so lucky to have accessible woods, parks, countryside walks, trails -- and points of interest everywhere. Are you keen on plants, wildlife, insects, archaeology, history? We have it all! (*)

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* What brought this on was reading an American book of essays: at one point, the author says there is a general rule that "if a place is truly beautiful, you can't afford to be there". And when I stay with my brother in Canada, at his house on one of the (many) lakes north of Toronto, you can't walk on the lakeside; it's all privately owned, and there are no public footpaths except in national and state parks.

FEW Events

Our next event for all members of FEW is the Annual General Meeting. This is on Thursday 12 November, at 7.00 p.m., at The Woodland Discovery Centre.

Our speaker will be

PATRICK HARDING (as seen on TV)

THE OAK

Its history and ecology

So make sure this date is in your diary.

Meanwhile, the Footpath Group meets every Tuesday morning, and the Ecology Group is locating invasive plants throughout the Woods. Join them if you can.

The Committee wishes all FEW's members Happy Holidays.

Footpath Group.

Jane Beresford compiles a monthly report on the work done by the volunteers, and if you don't see this it's hard to believe how much gets done. For example, in Jun, 25 volunteer-mornings were spent pulling up Himalayan Balsam by the Limb Brook. This has happened before the plant flowered and spread its seeds, so will improve the situation next year as well. It's true that Himalayan Balsam has pretty flowers, and looks quite good, but its uncontrolled spread does crowd out shy native plants and reduce biodiversity. April was largely spent clearing blocked drains, re-digging pathside drains, protecting Collier's Pond, and litter picking. In May, the boggy areas near the path from Dobcroft Road up to Parkhead were treated, by improving pathside drains and making a new channel. Some time in May was spent taking down large dens -- who builds these? Staff at the Discovery Centre say that school visits, and play sessions, always take down the dens when they've finished. But a lot of dens do appear, and aren't taken down. And this is only part of the work they do, which keeps the Woods more pleasant to walk in.

If you'd like to join the Footpath Group, they meet every Tuesday morning at 9.30 am, and work till about noon. Contact Jane Beresford, janeanden@gmail.com, or David and Judith Smith, dajusmith@live.co.uk. if Jane is away.

Ecology Group

Repeat of Report from Irene May, in April newsletter. **Volunteers still needed; we'll show you how to recognise these plants!**

The responsibility for the ecology group is shared by 3 people

Marilyn Small mhs1910@gmail.com
Sue Jackson Chris.jackson@zen.co.uk
Irene May Irenedeborahmay1949@gmail.com

For 2015 we are going to survey nuisance plants. The ecology group has consulted Jane Beresford from the footpath group and we have agreed to look at the presence of Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, skunk cabbage, Cherry laurel and Rhododendron.

We need more volunteers to make sure we cover all the Woods. If you would like to help -- and it's easy to do these surveys as part of dog walking or normal walking -- contact one of the co-ordinators above.

Bluebell Walk, led by Sue Jackson

I'm pleased to say the bluebell walk went off very well. 16 people turned up and they had seen it advertised in the Environment Week brochure, Banner Cross Neighbourhood Group, FEW newsletter and I put an advert on Streetlife, unfortunately I only thought about it on the Friday and it didn't go live until Saturday morning giving very little notice, but 2 people turned up as a result. So, it looks as if

our advertising has reached a few (excuse pun) more people. I got 2 new members for FEW as well.

The people attending were all very interested and some had floral knowledge, also some birdy people, but they were all of mature years, so we are not attracting the youngsters. I thought I would be struggling to make it last 2 hours, but everyone was so interested I had to cut it shorter than my planned route, and no one crept off early either. I pointed out plants other than bluebells and even ones only in leaf, and we had a tasting session of wood sorrel leaves which taste quite citrusy and people were quite surprised and impressed by the flavour. I hasten to add they were above the dog pee level. Several folks made lists of the flowers seen and some took photos. I feel the walk has been a success this year which is pleasing after some of the poor turn outs in recent years. I even got a round of applause at the end!

New Ponds

The charity FrogLife was given a grant in 2013 to produce new ponds, to help frogs and toads and other pondlife. Frogs and toads generally have been having a poor time recently -- worldwide, practically all the species are endangered, and some have recently become extinct. Among the ponds constructed, there were 6 altogether in Ecclesall Woods and the surrounds: 1 in the Donkey Field, 2 just downstream from the Donkey Field, on the edge of the Bird Sanctuary, 1 in the Playing Field, and 2 in a field next to Wood3 and the Playing Field. I've been watching and photographing these ponds as they develop. This is the pond in the playing fields.



At this point, (7 May 2014) the pond had been dug for 2 months or so.



By 17 Oct 2014, the pond had acquired a fence and a rubbish dump inside the fence.



This is 5th June 2015. Yellow flag iris, almost certainly planted, is in flower, and vegetation round the edges is starting to remove the raw look. There were tadpoles, too.

Parks and Countryside have planted a triangle of young trees above the pond, which will in due course become woodland, and offer more opportunities to wildlife both as it grows and when it is mature.



This is 7 May 2014, when everything looks very new and little growth has happened.



This is taken from much the same point, though closer to the edge, on 5th June 2015. The young trees are growing, but wildflowers are very vigorous.

Action for Woods and Trees

This one-day event was organised by the Sheffield Biodiversity and Landscape History Research Institute, working with Sheffield Hallam University. Marilyn Small and I both went. We heard interesting talks by Ian Rotherham and Mel Jones, who have been involved with Ecclesall Woods for many years, and other participants such as the Woodland Trust. Ian's talk was on "ghost woods", as found on the Peak District moors, which are the remaining traces of previous ancient woodland. After lunch, there was a question-and-answer session and time to talk to the people who had set up displays. I saw Barry Wright, who started his Ph.D in about 2007, and received help from Monica and the Ecology Group in his early studies of hedges; he is just about to finish. There were stands promoting urban woodlands to be planted in inner Sheffield. In the discussion, I told the meeting about the experimental tests on using Q-pits to make white coal, carried out by Toby Pillatt. I find that Ian Rotherham has been in touch with him, which will certainly help the project. In all, a good but not great day.

Spring in the Woods Event, 26 April

This was organised by the Woodland Discovery Centre, and we had a table and display there. It was obviously a good day for the many families who came, with food stands, craft stands, and activities. 5 FEW people manned the stand, in 2 hour sessions. 2 people for the first 2 sessions, 10 am-noon and noon-2 pm, and one person for the end. We talked to a fair number of people; we got 3 new members. But I'm not sure this is a good use of our resources, which are limited.

The Woodland Discovery Centre is organising "**Wild Play for Kids**" sessions during the summer holidays.

28-29 July	Woodland Creatures
4-5 Aug	Art in Nature
11-12 Aug	Bear Hunt
18-19 Aug	To be confirmed
25-26 Aug	Campfires and Dens

Children must be accompanied by an adult. Booking essential. Phone 2356348.

Kids' Craft Days

22 July Greenwood Flowerpot Characters
5 Aug Pyrography for Kids
19 Aug Woodcarving and Whittling.

Sessions £35. Contact Nadine Grundy at greenfoxwildcrafts@gmail.com