



Friends of Ashenground and Bolnore Woods

Winter 2019/20

Conservation - Protection - Enhancement - Enjoyment

This season has been dedicated to conservation work and we look forward to exciting forthcoming events: bat walks, fungi/bug hunts and photography days – to name a few. **The AGM will be at Ashenground Community Centre, Southdown Close, Haywards Heath, RH16 4JR on 15th March 2020 @ 3pm-5.30pm.** Our speaker this year will be Alan Aylward from the Woodland Trust. We hope to see you there!

Conservation Update



Over the last six months our small team of friendly volunteers has been busy with various tasks to keep the nature reserve well-managed and encourage biodiversity. We meet one a month in the summer and twice a month in the winter.

The power scythe mower acquired earlier in the year has made a huge difference. It's enabled us to complete in one or two sessions tasks which would otherwise take much longer with hand tools. An example of this is the frequent mowing of Pond Meadow to deter the brambles and encourage other wildflowers. We've also mown the buffer zones beside the bridleway, Weavers Meadow and the ride into Bolnore Wood.

Other tasks have included cutting back holly shading over the bridleway, clearing the path to Jeremy's bridge and coppicing in Catts wood. There's always something that needs doing in the woods so if you are interested in helping out, please do get in touch



Patrick Burke

Please let us know if you would like to help with the conservation work.

Pond Meadow Update

Using the newly acquired mower, the meadow had its fourth cut in the autumn in our effort to restore the meadow to a wildflower state not dominated by brambles.



In an exciting development, the Friends have been offered a grant from Sussex Lund, a charitable fund administered by the High Weald AONB Partnership in collaboration with Lund Trust, to undertake work on the ponds themselves. This will involve manual labour and a mechanical excavator to clean out silt, reset the banks and remove as much of the invasive plant species as possible before re-planting with native aquatic plants. All going well, we hope to have pond 1 done this winter with a view to applying for further grants to tackle the other ponds in turn over future years.



Peter McKerchar



Railway Drainage Works Complete!



BAM Nuttall's drainage improvement works on behalf of Network Rail in Ashenground Wood have finished and the site returned to the council. Over 600m of new concrete drainage tunnel and 10 concrete inspection shafts were installed to increase the flood resilience of the Brighton Mainline through Haywards Heath thereby helping protect the



train timetable for years to come.

Together BAM Nuttall, Network Rail and Mid Sussex District Council have worked hard to reinstate the woods, planting 200 hundred trees on the railway shaw protected by a new post and rail fence. It is hoped that this area will be left undisturbed to allow the woodland to re-establish.

The work force also made some welcome improvements in the woods on behalf of MSDC. These included repairs to Jeremy's bridge and maintenance to the banks of the stream running under it, and widening the footpath running parallel to the railway to improve access.

BAM Nuttall and Network Rail extend our upmost thanks to everyone who was involved or affected by these works for their patience and understanding. FoABW in turn thank the contractors for their co-operation and considerate behaviour throughout.



James Hurbert

Annual Subscriptions: To join or renew your subscription you can do one of the following:

- Set up a standing order by requesting the appropriate form from Peter McKerchar.
- Send a cheque to 25 Wealden Way, Haywards Heath, RH16 4AF, payable to FoABW.
- Bank transfer to account no. 10021310, sort code 60-10-26, giving your surname as reference.

The Committee is very grateful to those who pay more than the minimum of £5. Paying by standing order or bank transfer makes our administration much easier.

A Bat's Winter

Locked in the frosty clutches of winter, Britain's countryside becomes a harsh and unforgiving place. As sunlight and temperature levels fall, so do insect populations. This poses a challenge to animals that feed on insects; the colder it is, the more energy is required to maintain body heat, yet there is less food available. For Britain's bat species, all of which must consume large numbers of insects to maintain their active lifestyles, survival seems a daunting prospect. But our bats have a simple answer to this, they do nothing, instead opting to sleep until March/April.



This very moment bats are hunkered down in their winter roosts. They've been there for months, locked in a deep wintery slumber. This is known as hibernation. It might seem strange to imagine bats, who dart and dive through the air with so much speed and agility, being asleep for months on end. Bats have to gradually work their way into a hibernation state over several weeks; they instinctively know it is time to start seeking out hibernation sites and beginning to enter torpor.

Torpor is where a bat lowers its core temperature and metabolic rate as it enters a state of fairly deep sleep. They may breathe less than once an hour whilst their heartbeat drops to just ten beats per minute! During this time, bats are still waking up every couple of days to feed. Torpor periods grow longer over November and December, and when there are almost no insects left to hunt bats enter full hibernation. Hibernation is the more advanced state of torpor where the bats remain in a very deep sleep for days to weeks. They wake up occasionally to do things like drink, expel waste, move roost and forage when the weather allows. But for the most part, their time is spent sleeping. Bats need to find the perfect hibernation roost, known as a hibernaculum. This is often a nook or cranny that they can wedge themselves into over winter. Some will hang upside down, others lie on their sides or even on their heads! Hibernaculum need to be places that stay the same temperature and are relatively humid so that bats do not become dehydrated. The ideal location is somewhere which is surrounded by habitat that will have plentiful insect populations when it's spring.

Some bat species; like Brown Long Eared Bats, prefer to hibernate in places like caves, mines and rock fissures. Other species; such as Common Pipistrelles, tend to hibernate in buildings such as house attics, old brick walls and barns. You can even put up an artificial wooden bat box which may be used by bats to hibernate next winter - or may end up getting used as a summer roost! **You can get your own bat box from www.friendsofembark.org.uk, a charity that provides work for adults with learning difficulties.**

If disturbed during the hibernation period they can become vulnerable to starvation. If you find you have any bats hibernating in your house, be sure to avoid doing anything that might disturb them. **It is illegal to kill, injure or interfere with any of Britain's bat species.**

If you see any bats that are in trouble, please contact the [National Bat Helpline on 0345 1300 228](tel:03451300228). Or go on to <http://www.sussexbatgroup.org.uk/batrescue> which will show you the contact details for your nearest local bat rescuer who will come and assist.

Alex Hatton

Buffer Zones and Nature's Corridors

This part of Sussex was once heavily wooded. Small fields were cleared, leaving wide wooded areas at the edges. Many areas are still like this, and wild plants and creatures can still move freely between bigger areas of woodland.

But there is now great pressure to develop the land, specially near towns and villages. Some protection has been given to Ancient woodland in planning law, so it is not normally built on. But if these woods become isolated, they will quickly degenerate into urban woodland, losing their rarest species. To preserve this unique flora and fauna, and prevent habitat fragmentation, linking lines of vegetation must remain to connect to the next patch of woodland.



Such Nature corridors can be hedges, tree lines, small woodland stands, road and rail side verges, and Ancient woodland buffer zones. A buffer zone is the strip of vegetation, about 15m wide, lying between Ancient Woodland and housing. It protects the woodland from pollution and trampling, but is actually part of the woodland edge, and a valuable habitat for wildlife. Nature corridors such as the buffer zones need very limited management, and will contain areas of grass (cut once a year), scrub (including brambles), shrubs and small trees. The shrubs and trees will be cut less often, and in rotation, to give alternating sunny and shady patches attractive to different species.

All these patches of wild vegetation are vulnerable to degradation. Dumping of garden waste in or near them, or in water courses, risks the spread of invasive species which are likely to out compete the slower woodland plants. Bolnore Village is surrounded by woodland, much of it designated as 'Ancient'. Ashenground Wood, Four Acre Wood, Pierces Wood, parts of Bolnore and Catts Woods, and Reading Wood are examples. Other fragments include Quarry Hollow, and the trees and shrubs lining the Bridleway. Notable nature corridors include the translocated hedge on the north side of the sports ground, and the Victorian hedge running north from Pond Meadow through the middle of that part of the Village.

Gill Rogers

Forthcoming Events

Please keep an eye out on woodland notice boards and Facebook for times and dates

- Wildlife Photography Afternoon led by Linda Howard
- Evening Bat Walk
- Children's Bug Hunt with Jo Wilson and Debbie Martell
- Fungi Hunt
- AGM Ashenground Community Centre 15th March 2020 @ 3.00pm-5.30pm

All children are welcome at all FoABW events and all events are **free**. Any under 16s must be accompanied by an adult.