

Chairman's Letter

It has been encouraging to welcome so many supporters to the volunteer days each month. Many of the participants were established Friends of the Woodlands but it has been good to see new faces including children and teenagers, who put the more mature members of the Committee to shame, when it comes to hard graft.

The bee hives and shed, discreetly sited a short distance from the glade, are in place and ready to welcome their new occupants (preferably in the hives and not the shed!), in the next few weeks. By the time of our Open Day on 30th April there should be the buzzing of innumerable bees, as well as a good show of bluebells, large numbers of bulbs having been planted in the autumn to add to our existing show.

There is now a custom made breeding place for stag beetles, amongst the oak trees planted to the left of the path up to the Glade. Large sections of cut timber have been bedded deep into the surrounding soil. It looks rather like a piece of modern art. More to the point we are reliably informed that it is just the environment for stag beetles.

The formalities of the Friends were duly adhered to at the AGM with the appointment of Officers and Committee Members and the giving of the Chairman's and the Treasurer's Reports. There were questions, and anxieties were expressed by one member that care must be taken to ensure that the basic wildness of the woodlands be preserved. The committee believes that the pond and the bee hives do not detract from that essential quality. But care must be taken to ensure the balance between limited public access and a unique wild place.

After the AGM we had a fascinating talk from Neil Rhind setting out the history of the woodlands and the crucial role played by the Blackheath Preservation Trust in acquiring and preserving the Woodlands. Some of the historical photos that Neil showed were particularly interesting.

I would like to pay tribute to the hard work put into the Friends by members of the Committee. Without their enthusiasm and commitment the Woodlands would not be the beautiful place they are to-day.

I hope to see as many Friends as possible at the Summer Party at The White House at 12 noon on Sunday June 11th.

Tim Barnes

Trees

We have continued to plant broad leaved UK native trees over the last year. These are generally very small one- or two-year old saplings: Common Oak, Beech and English Elm trees. We hope we've planted disease resistant Elms! These have been donated by a research project on the understanding that we report back on the growth and health of these saplings each year.

Some larger Oaks have been planted (up to 2m tall) that were donated from a local person who'd planted acorns from Oxleas Woods and grown them on in large pots. These have been planted at key points in the Maze Hill end of the woods or within our Oak Wood Area. Here there is a group of Trees that were planted by Dave Larkin 30 odd years ago (one of a previous group of Woodlanders!). These Oaks are now 5 to 7 metres tall and Dave was here at the February and March Volunteer Days to help clear bramble and plant new Oak Saplings to provide planting succession. We will continue to plant more saplings and experiment with woodland 'floor' planting in 2017 in the Oak Wood area.

We've added some Hazel to the Seren Park Entrance area, reinforcing a group of existing Hazels that will be coppiced this year. This will form a distinct area immediately in the Seren Park gate area. The boundary to Tom Smith Close was planted with Blackthorn, a very thorny woodland edge species producing sloe berries (to make gin!). Last

summer's warm spell has been too much for some of planting, but we will continue with the aim of making a defensive hedge to deter intruders.

Pioneer Woodland species (Birch, Hazel and Aspen) that were planted in 2013 within a clearing at Lasseter Place have established well and are now 1.5-2m tall.

Don Albrecht

WW Bees

Thanks to the generous contribution from Barclays Bank the project to introduce honey bees into the Westcombe Woodlands is becoming a reality. The bees, which are the Buckfast variety, are presently wintering in the Oxleas Wood Apiary where they spent their first season. Sometime in the Spring the hive will be moved to the new site in the Westcombe Woodlands. The hive presently consists of a 'brood box', which is the larger box at the bottom of the hive where the grubs develop into young bees and two sections called 'honey supers' on top where the honey will be stored in the summer. As the supers fill up with honey more supers are added.



There is a purpose built bench to take the hives at the top of the glade and small shed to house the equipment necessary to manage the bees throughout the year. Keeping the bees healthy and happy is an art as well as a science. The hives will be facing south to take advantage of the warming sun and the flowers in local gardens. We are looking forward to a long dry summer and a successful honey harvest.

WW Stag Beetle Project

Like many species the Stag Beetle is in decline partly thanks to their reluctance to travel very far to breed and the loss of habitat. Luckily the Blackheath area is one of their strongholds and there are ways to help them survive.



One way is to build a log pyramid which will rot over time and provide the right conditions for the larvae to live. The first log pile has been constructed in the woodlands and hopefully more piles can be built when the materials become available.



The next stage is to entice the Stag beetles to move into their new home and breed. They have a long life cycle of 3 to 6 years as larvae then emerge as adults in May - June.

They say the favourite dish for a Stag beetle is ginger, avocado and mango. This will be the bait in a simple trap. With a few traps in the woodlands we may be able to find the first residents to move into the new Stag Beetle Hotel.

Andrew Slade



Forthcoming Events

Bluebell Open Day



This will be held on 30 April 2017 and is becoming one of our two regular Open Days each year. The Woodlands will be open from 2 – 5 pm and all are welcome. We have planted more native bluebells since last year and we hope that they will be in full bloom. We will provide refreshments and are planning activities for children.

Open Gardens event

We will be opening the Woodlands from 2 – 6 pm on Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 June. This is part of the annual fund-raising event for the Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice. You will be able to buy tickets at the Seren Park gate to allow access to the Woodlands and to other gardens in the scheme.

Bat evening

We plan to hold another bat evening with the help of Les Clark of the London Bat Group. We will be arranging a suitable evening, probably in June, when Les can join us with bat detectors (some of us now have our own) and his expertise. When we have worked out the best date we will inform Friends.

This is a common pipistrelle, the commonest British bat and one that can be seen regularly in the woods at dusk.



Summer party

This will be held on 11 June from 12 noon to 2 pm at the White House, Crooms Hill. We would like to thank Tim and Trish Barnes for opening their home to Friends and hope that you will be able to join us.

Volunteer dates this year

On each of the following dates we meet at the Seren Park Gate at 10 am. Please join us, to work or simply to have a look around. Refreshments will be provided, but please remember that there are no toilet facilities on site.

Saturday 4 March 2017

Sunday 2 April 2017

Sunday 30 April (Open Day)

Sunday 7 May 2017

Sunday 4 June 2017

Saturday 1 July 2017

Sunday 6 August 2017

Saturday 2 September 2017

Sunday 1 October 2017 (and Open Day)

Saturday 4 November 2017

Sunday 3 December 2017

In addition, on Saturday and Sunday 24-25 June, we would appreciate volunteers to help with the Open Gardens event from 2 – 6 pm each day.

Nigel Duncan

Secretary, Friends of Westcombe Woodlands

The Friends of Westcombe Woodlands

A Charitable Incorporated Organisation – Registered charity number 1161352

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