



Westcombe Woodlands

Newsletter – Issue 13

Winter 2019 / Spring 2020

Chairman's Message

In the scale of problems thrown up by the lockdown, the inability to visit and enjoy the Woodlands is a minor matter. But it is still a sadness that at a time when the Woodlands look at their best, we cannot share them with volunteers on our monthly work date or with a wider group of friends and neighbours at the Bluebell Open Day.

The photos show how good the woods are looking. The bees are having a great time of it and having sold last year's crop for a good profit for the Woodlands we are hopeful that the current year may give us an even better supply. Andrew Slade, as our beekeeper in chief, is the most regular attender at the woodlands.



Photograph taken in late April 2020

The bees are now well established on the far side of the Glade where the hives receive more

direct sunlight than in their old position. Andrew Slade is confident of a reasonable supply of honey which we hope to have on sale at our October Open Day.

As soon as we can, we propose to hold an Open Day in the woods to welcome supporters back. Please do try and keep an eye on our website (westcombewoodlands.uk) as to when that date will be (probably in September) and join us in the celebration of life returning to normal in the Westcombe Woodlands. In the meantime, access our video of the Woodlands which will form part of the Virtual Open Garden event which is taking the place of the actual Open Garden event in aid of the Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice this Summer. You can access some 40 gardens via the Hospice website for a month from mid June to mid July.

Finally, may I thank local resident Jenny Lo for the sterling work that she has done in terms of bringing our e-mail system up to speed. This has involved many hours of trawling through messages, ensuring that the few which were outstanding were properly responded to and that the bulk were deleted. I have confidence that with Jenny's assistance any e-mail directed to the Friends in future will be responded to within 2 weeks.

Tim Barnes – Chairman – May 2020

Tree Review

Mark Clews of Arborihelp has carried out a risk assessment of all the trees in the Woodlands in 2019. The scope of his report is “to review all trees of DBH (diameter at breast height) 100 cm within the Woodlands, to attach identification tags where necessary, to risk assess the subject trees and finally, to provide management recommendations to mitigate unacceptable risks down to broadly acceptable thresholds, where reasonably practicable.”



View looking westwards in The Glade

The Risk Assessment is extremely detailed indicating whether any significant defect has been observed, and what treatment is required and within what timescale. Many of the trees need to be stripped of ivy before their condition can be properly assessed.

The existence of this Risk Assessment will enable the Committee to take informed decisions as to where to target resources in terms of tree maintenance and will also provide us with some degree of cover if by any mischance there was a tree failure which gave rise to an insurance claim.

RSBP Bird Watch

On the morning of January 25th 2020 we participated in the RSBP Annual Big Garden Bird Watch. With the invaluable assistance of Joe Beale who has been studying birds and sharing them with others for many years, we recorded 18 different types of birds in the allotted hour.

They included such unusual visitors as a firecrest, goldcrest, spotted woodpecker and stock dove among other more common birds. That was an improvement on the 2019 tally and an indication of the health of the woodlands.

Although not recorded in the survey, in May this year, 3 mallards were seen on our pond, consisting of 2 males and 1 female.



Spotted Woodpecker. Image by

https://pixabay.com/users/zkrej-9506069/?utm_source=link-

Website Update and Future Volunteer Dates

The website (www.westcombewoodlands.uk) continues to be regularly updated with summaries of the very small volunteer sessions being held which pay full attention to the required

physical distancing as part of the current coronavirus situation. As a result, it is no longer possible for the time being, that the normal weekend volunteer morning sessions at the start of each month will continue. The Committee will take advice from the government when to safely re-open the woodlands to the general public.

Westcombe Woodlands has also produced a video, with an introduction by committee member Richard Sylvester. It's hoped that when this video is uploaded, people will be able to look at the gardens and donate as if they were actually visiting them.

Flora and Fauna In Focus

In the previous issue, we wrote about 2 species which have been observed in the Woodland; Enchanter's-nightshade and the Comma Butterfly. For this issue, we will look at another 2 species of interest.

The small pond that was dug in The Glade several years ago covers an area of no more than 10 -15 square metres, but with good maintenance, although it isn't a natural feature of the woodland, it attracts a wide variety of species. However, because it's quite small and mostly shaded by trees, it was a surprise to everyone when Mallards were seen in the water!



Red Campion flowers in The Glade

In addition to occasional reports of small groups who are undertaking vital maintenance, regular updates are also being posted on our Facebook page (search for Westcombe Woodlands) and also our Twitter page (search for @WestcombeWood).

Hospice Open Garden - June 2020

In June 2019 the Woodland participated, along with many others, in an Open Garden Event in aid of the Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice. Last year, the whole group raised an amazing £14,000. Obviously this year, with the coronavirus restrictions, this isn't going to be possible, but instead, the Hospice is asking for participants to produce small videos using just their mobile phone cameras of their gardens in May and June, and for these videos to be uploaded to the Internet at a later date.



Mallards, whether a native or introduced as a species, are widely distributed world-wide. Dark, glossy green feathers and grey wings characterise the males, with the females being a mottle brown in colour. Typically, they live in wetlands, eat water plants and small animals. Although often associated with freshwater habitats, they are also found in coastal environments. They are social animals which prefer to meet in groups. Typical life expectancy is around 3 years, although ages of 20 years have also been recorded.

Although there have been several sightings of Mallards on the pond, the nesting season being at the start of Spring, no eggs have been seen. Perhaps the area is too small, and there are foxes in the Woodlands. In such urban settings, the ducklings are also susceptible to being eaten by domestic cats.

With this being the Winter and Spring issue, it feels fitting that the first plant to be looked at is the Primrose. Below are 2 photos of primroses,



taken in February 2000 in the Woodland. The sight of this plant in the Woodland, and elsewhere, says that longer and warmer days are on the way. In fact, during our first volunteer session of 2020, several of these were already in flower and they were still flowering at the start of May. Well established plants in favourable conditions are often evergreen, but most plants lose their leaves by late-Summer.

The species present in the Woodland is the Common Primrose, *Primula vulgaris*, and this is present throughout western Europe. With good growing conditions, the plant can form a dense ground cover the ground in open woods as well as hedge-banks. It can also commonly be found next to streams, orchards, woodland clearings and grassland habitats. It is a typical indicator species of a good woodland on neutral to slightly acidic, damp soil.

Its flowers are appreciated by butterflies, beetles and flies. With the hives in the woodland, the flowers will also be useful to the bees. When flowering has finished, its seeds are spread by ants, although the plant can be easily divided in late Spring so as to increase the number of plants. A very cheap process which we have done in the past!

Artist in Residence

The wife of Andrew Slade (the Woodland's bee keeper) is a keen artist, and she has the benefit of living very locally to the Woodlands. In her spare time, she has been painting scenes from the woodland, photos of which have been produced below. She writes *"When going to look after the bees with my husband I was excited to catch the blossom in this quite secluded beautiful woodland. I spent the afternoon drawing the blossom in this lovely corner of Greenwich. On another visit I was taken by the yellow lilies. I sat down to draw when three mallard ducks dived down to feed on the weed before flying off again returning a few minutes later totally unaware of my presence. When on holiday or in a lovely place I always try to record the event. When I draw a scene, it is always with me unlike the click of a camera."*



Below is another of Maureen's painting's showing the orchard trees in blossom.



Apiary Report May 2020

Last year 2019 ended with our first crop of honey worthy of selling. We engaged an organisation who specialise in extracting honey for small aperies for the modest fee of 10% of the crop. Jeremy Rosie designed the labels which conform to government regulations, a requirement if the product is to sold.

The honey was mainly sold at the gate on volunteer days. The proceeds of which have been ploughed back into stock for the shed, over £200 worth.

The season started ominously with the talk of lockdown until the government revived the WW2 ruling that bees were livestock and beekeepers had a duty of care for them and could travel.

The bees start to emerge from the hives around the end of March as the weather warms up a little. Ideally, they like the temperature to be 14 degrees centigrade or above. Just before they start to fly we have the 'first inspection' to check on the condition of the hive, how much food is left after winter and whether the queen has started laying the next generation of worker bees.

We were lucky this year, all three hives survived the winter. Up to 30% losses in an apiary are not uncommon. To give the hives an extra boost we gave them some pollen enriched fondant. The season had got off to a good start. We even managed to find one of last year's queens and mark her Green. Queens are colour coded so you know how old they are. The cycle is White, Yellow, Red, Green and Blue. As the queens do not live more than five years there is no confusion about their age.

Come mid-April the bees start thing about swarming. Swarms are the natural way bees produce new colonies when half the bees in the hive fly away with the old queen to set up an new colony.



The art of the beekeeper is to persuade the bees not to fly off. If they do, apart from the consternation in the neighbourhood there are fewer bees to produce the honey crop.



A mini hive, called an Apidea

One of the hives early on started to produce queen cells, a sign that the bees are thinking of setting up elsewhere. We took the opportunity to harvest a couple of queen cells and put them into a mini hive called an Apidea with some worker bees to help the young queen when she emerges. The process takes a few weeks and we are waiting to find out if it has been successful.

Later our Green queen showed signs of swarming so we performed an 'artificial swarm' procedure to make her think the swarm had taken place but in fact the hive has been split into two and the queen removed from the main brood. The other half of the colony hopefully are producing a new queen.

As with all livestock there are ups and downs and at the moment we are waiting to see how two hives progress and whether some intervention is required. If we match last season's crop of honey it will be deemed a good season....

The Friends of Westcombe Woodlands Annual General Meeting normally takes place in mid-October. However, if the current coronavirus situation persists, it may be re-scheduled or possibly undertaken as an online event. Further details will be announced towards mid-September.

Website Update and Future Volunteer Dates

We continue to update our website (www.westcombewoodlands.uk) and we also keep a very active Facebook page (search for Westcombe Woodlands) and also our Twitter page (search for @WestcombeWood).