

WILDLIFE IN WESTCOMBE WOODLANDS

Groups of volunteers have been taking a number of steps to find out more about the wildlife that uses the woodlands, either passing through, finding food or as a home.

The clearing of the Glade has not only drawn a lot more light to help our fruit trees to grow and, in due course, to provide fruit, but it has also resulted in a fine crop of Rosebay Willow Herb, colonising the freshly-turned earth between the fruit trees.



Around the Glade we have seen Jersey Tiger and Swallowtail Moths, Small Magpie Micro-moths, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue Butterflies and *Volucella zonaria* one of the UK's largest species of hoverfly, a hornet mimic, (but, like all hoverflies, without a sting).

We have also seen stag beetles, an endangered species whose larvae develop in rotting tree roots and stumps. Their presence is one of the reasons why it is important not to clear away too much dead wood when trees die or fall. We try to ensure safety, but to allow nature to do its work.

In June a group of Friends went into the Maze Hill side of the Woodlands shortly before dusk with a number of bat detectors provided by Les Clark of the London Bat Group. We spotted a number of Common Pipistrelles, mostly around the Glade but also on the Mound and down the hill towards the end of the Seren Park car park. Les suspected that they were probably roosting in the Seren Park buildings themselves. In addition there were a few Soprano Pipistrelles and a larger bat, probably a Noctule bat although the identification was not positive. It might have been a Leisler's bat, which is similar in size.

The Mound is now establishing a good coverage of wild plants as well as the native shrubs and trees we have planted with the aim of stabilising it. What was, only just over a year ago, a bare slope of earth, now looks green from Tom Smith Close and the birches, hawthorn and aspen we have planted are establishing well. Back in the late summer a group of us were clearing and mulching around the new saplings and we found frogs lurking under the cover. That augurs well for our plans to build a wildlife pond at the Glade.

We lost a number of large trees during the storms this year. One of them collapsed on the bug hotel at Lasseter Place, which will require some re-building (although it still provides a superb shelter for a variety of bugs and beetles). Nearby, in a hole in a dead tree close to the back of the Ulundi Road gardens a pair of Nuthatches raised a brood. The same hole had been used by a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers last year. They moved to a tree close

to the Woodlands behind the bus stop on Vanbrugh Hill for this year's nest site.



Nuthatch



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Other birds nesting in the woods this year included Wrens, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Blackcaps, Dunnocks, Blackbirds, Jays and Robins. Goldcrests (the UK's smallest native bird) probably nested. In addition, we heard Green Woodpeckers although there was no sign of them nesting. Swifts from nearby colonies fed overhead and House Martins, Swallows and Meadow Pipits all passed over on migration. Some 64 Jackdaws from Greenwich Park used the Woodlands as a roost early in the year.

A tawny owl has been heard in the area on many occasions, so we have put up an owl box in the hope of attracting a breeding pair. It is high up, with a good flight path for the adult owls to fly in and out, but with branches close by so that the young owls can clamber out before they attempt their first flight. Sparrowhawks have been seen flying overhead. Sadly, we also found a dead Sparrowhawk near the top of the Mound. At least it is good to know that these wonderful raptors are hunting in the Woodlands.



Tawny Owl



Sparrowhawk

This is just a group of highlights of the creatures living in the Woodlands or using them in other ways. I am indebted to Joe Beale, whose observations have provided me with much of what I report here, and who always makes a walk through the woods so much more interesting. I would also like to thank Les Clark of the London Bat Group who led our twilight expedition in June and helped with the identification of the bats we detected.

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