

Friends of Westcombe Woodlands – Newsletter – December 2024



Dear Friends,

Welcome to our December Newsletter. In it you'll find a number of pieces – reports on wildlife activity, a little history and information about how we are approaching our responsibilities as custodians of our wonderful woodland, and invitations to join us in forthcoming activities.

Please note that our January Volunteer Day is not on the 5th January as might normally be the case, but Sunday 12th January. We hope to see you there. And if you are free on Sunday 5th January you might enjoy joining us at the Wassail in East Greenwich Pleasaunce. Great fun for all the family, great food from the café, and mulled cider for the grown-ups. Enjoy the musicians and the Morris dancers and join the procession as we libate the fruit trees for a good harvest in 2025. There's more information at the end of the newsletter.

Nigel Duncan,

Chair of Trustees,

Friends of Westcombe Woodland

Woodland Management



The Trustee team is every mindful of our responsibilities towards the Woodland and are guided by a subcommittee led by Don Albrecht to develop a management plan. In our November Newsletter we explained the advice we have received from Russell Miller and our intention to act on it.

The woodland management team is meeting just after Christmas to finalise the plans. We have engaged our experienced tree surgeon, Mark Fenn, to undertake the essential work in the near future, so that all the work is completed well before the start of the nesting season. You may be interested to know that the cost of felling a tree varies considerably! The reason is not normally the size of the tree, but the difficulty of felling it. Many of our trees are on steep slopes which create problems of their own, and others need to be taken down in sections rather than simply being felled in one go. Mark has to take especial care to ensure safety of himself and his fellow tree surgeons, as well as ensuring that the falling tree does not damage others that we are trying to protect.

Nigel Duncan

A load of old rot?



Wood mouse teeth marks. Picture Russel Miller

We learn that “Brain rot” has been voted the Oxford word of 2024 (yes ...we know it is two words !). But in the Woodlands we are more focussed on “tree rot” in the form of "Sooty Bark fungus" which is spreading amongst the sycamore trees. Our main priority in dealing with the infected trees will always be tree safety and managing any potential risk from trees on our boundaries.



Wood mouse. Picture Pip O'Byrne

It was very interesting to learn from Russell Miller, guest speaker at our AGM, that this fungus appears to be a food source for wood mice. We spotted one of these creatures sniffing around the cake stall at our summer open day (see above) we can only hope that they will emerge from their burrows and add sooty bark to their varied diet.

Wildflower corner



Wildflower plantings in the glade. Picture Jerry Avis

In December our tree surgeons will fell a few diseased sycamore trees. The light and space created will allow trees and plants to naturally regenerate from seeds in the woodland soil - but we will do our bit clearing the logs and branches and replanting a mix trees, shrubs and wildflowers. Do join us for the upcoming Spring volunteer work parties (see date below).

Recent research from Warsaw University has found that small patches of wildflowers sown in cities can be a good substitute for a natural meadow, According to this study small areas of urban wildflowers have a high concentration of pollinating insects, and are as valuable to many pollinators as larger areas of natural rural meadow. “In this way, we can alleviate the hostile environment of urban space for wildlife,” the researchers wrote.

Closer to home, Rich and Fiona of the Friends invited the Nature Overheard project to demonstrate their mobile phone app. Local people had fun recording a impressive variety of pollinators and insect life on the wildflower verges of Blackwall Lane and Woolwich Common.

Wildlife



Picture, Jerry Avis

The Jay's Winter Secrets

The Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*), with its dazzling pinkish plumage and electric blue wing flashes, is the woodland's secretive hoarder—and winter is when its clever planning comes into play. A member of the crow family, this shy bird has spent much of autumn stashing away acorns, burying them in hidden nooks across the woodland.

Now, as the days grow colder, it's time for the Jay to cash in on its savings. Remarkably, a single Jay can hide up to 5,000 acorns in a season, relying on its sharp memory to locate these buried treasures during winter. Of course, it doesn't always find them all, which helps oak trees sprout new life in the spring—a happy accident for the woodland! Its scientific name, *Garrulus glandarius*, perfectly captures its character: *Garrulus* means “chattering,” referencing its noisy calls, while *glandarius* highlights its love of acorns.

The one pictured above was photographed this week by a resident of Seren Park Gardens where some of the apartments overlook the woods providing a few photo opportunities.

Volunteering



Niglel, Rich and Don taking 5 from their labours. Picture, Jerry Avis

The Woodlands welcomes volunteers in any capacity. Volunteer mornings occur once every month on alternate Saturdays and Sundays. It's a great time to meet others, get a dose of vitamin G(reen) and do your bit for biodiversity; children and well controlled dogs are welcome.

Volunteer mornings | dates for your diary

Sunday 12th January 2025| 10 am to 1 pm

Saturday 1st February 2025 | 10 am to 1 pm

Sunday 2nd March 2025| 10 am to 1 pm

Saturday 5th April 2025| 10 am to 1 pm

Shedding light on recent history

The Story of Our Shed

Back in 2016, the Westcombe Woodlands shed made its grand entrance—flat-packed and carefully hoisted over the fence. Once safely delivered, Frank Smith and Andrew Slade got to work, laying the foundation pads and assembling the shed piece by piece. Soon, we finally had a proper place to store our tools on-site, a huge milestone for the woodland team.

The interior was thoughtfully designed to be as practical as possible. Shelves were added for storage, tool racks installed, and hooks put up to keep everything organised. Before the shed, volunteers would arrive with their own tools or haul Westcombe Woodlands' equipment in the back of Frank's car—a far cry from today's setup.

Now, the shed is a well-equipped hub of activity, stocked with all the essential tools needed for our volunteer days. Many of these have been generously donated by supporters over the years, while others were purchased by the Friends of Westcombe Woodlands. It's not just a shed—it's a symbol of how our community has come together to care for this special place.



Frank laying a foundation. Picture, Andrew Slade



Not the usual Swedish flat pack. Picture Andrew Slade.



Andrew, Frank and the Shed (the only time it's been empty)

Time To Make A Difference

You can make a difference to our local environment, biodiversity and ultimately the planet – think global – act local! Membership starts at only £10 a year.



- Your subscription will advance the practical work of the Friends
- You will have the opportunity for volunteering in the woodlands
- You can join in our bird, bat and flower surveys You can contribute ideas for the protection of the woodlands and their improvement, while maintaining their unique 'wild' quality
- You will receive email updates and newsletters
- You will be involved in local community activity with an environmental purpose