

Friends of Gedling House Woods

Annual Report 2016



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The first meadow development

When we negotiated our new agreement with Natural England to receive funding under their Higher Level Scheme, we needed to produce a meadow management plan. Our current plan was drawn up by an environmental consultant as a professional opinion was needed to support our application for a Natural England grants. The grant we receive from Natural England, which includes the cost of the consultant's report, is funded through the European Union's common agricultural policy. Our meadow management plan covers in detail the management of the meadows (summarised here from the last report)

- annual spot weedkilling to remove invasive and non-native species such as dock, creeping thistle and nettles – done in the spring
- mowing to harvest the season's growth from the grass and flower mix that is in the meadows – done in the late summer
- bale and remove the hay to avoid it providing nutrients for the soil – meadows grow best with minimal nutrient – done a few days after cutting the hay
- graze the meadows with sheep to reduce the height of the grass and wild flower mix to less than 10 cm – done in November.

Scrubland soon takes over meadow if it is allowed to grow unchecked, as we found in the third meadow, which has now been restored to its original meadowland state. Scrubland incursion was a particular issue towards the top of the first meadow (see picture below) and the plan, as in the second meadow, involved removing bramble and other scrubland plants, while retaining some mature trees.



The work was done in late March, within the November to March window for such work. It involved removing all ground cover and self-sown saplings. The various heaps of bramble and branches were collected together and burnt in a single day on 14th April. On the same day, the ground was cleared and all traces of the fire removed. We have already apologised to several residents for the ash fall-out over some properties that day – the wind direction was not in our favour.



Weed killing will take place shortly, and the ground will then be cultivated and sown in the autumn. The soil in this part of the meadow is particularly good, compared with the poor soil found in the reclaimed areas of the second meadow. We are hoping that germination of the seed mix is more successful than it was for the similar sowing in meadow two last autumn.

Progress with the top meadow

The third, top meadow was mown for the first time in 2015, and is growing well. The area of ant-hills was cleared by hand to remove brambles and large weeds – this will need to be done annually to keep the bramble under control as we cannot cultivate, use weedkiller or otherwise disturb the ant-hills.



This year we have found a large amount of ox-eye daisy in the top meadow, despite this species being only 2% of the seed mix (see the picture below). We are seeking advice on how to handle this situation. We hope this top meadow will be open to the public again later in the summer or early autumn.





Boundaries and stiles

The boundary fence at the far end of Military Road has been repaired and the hedge replanted to complete the run of hawthorn hedge along this boundary. We undertook this work in conjunction with Carlton le Willows Academy, which owns the outer fence, verge and road.

Last autumn, while the sheep were grazing in the meadow, a large dog attacked the flock while being walked by a professional dog walker. A member of FGHW witnessed the attack and, as we were able to identify the dog, we reported the matter to the police, who took the matter very seriously and put together a clear set of statements. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find out whether the dog walking company was prosecuted, cautioned or whether the case just lies on the file unattended to.

As a result of this attack, we have reviewed the fencing of the meadows. The fences are there to keep the sheep in although we have considered carefully how we can keep dogs out while the sheep are grazing. Gradually, we are removing all the stiles and filling any subsequent gaps in the fence with rails and/or wire mesh. All pedestrian access will then be through kissing gates.



Conservation work by NTU students



During April, we were fortunate to benefit from a total of 28 days of voluntary work from three conservation students from the Brackenhurst site of Nottingham Trent University.

The students worked to clear the hedgerows inside the double fencing so that the hedges can be cut more effectively using the tractor cutter next year. The work contributed to their conservation fieldwork.

The students were fast workers, came in all weathers and FGHW has appreciated their contribution greatly. We have made contact with their lecturer at NTU to see whether the university would be interested in other students becoming involved in similar projects next year.



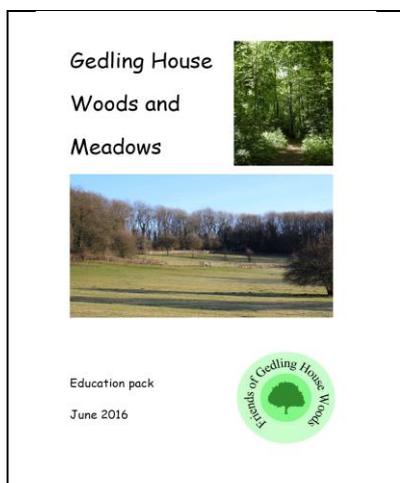
Vigilance

The woods and meadows are open to the public at all times. Most users are responsible in the way they use the facilities that this local nature reserve offers. It is, however, a nature reserve and we do hear reports of a small minority of users who act in ways that are not within the spirit of enjoying a nature reserve. Thanks to all of those who use the woods for keeping us in touch with what is happening from day to day – it is very helpful.

If any visitors to the woods notice any misuse of woods or meadows, it is important to report it. It would be helpful if visitors could dial 101 on their mobiles to report an incident while it is taking place, before reporting it to a member of the FGHW committee. In this way we can alert the police to the location and frequency of anti-social behaviour in the area.

Educational visits

For the first time, we were able to claim the maximum available grant from Natural England in 2015, with more than 25 educational visits (the maximum number that generate our funding) during the school year. As usual, the FGHW committee would like to thank Anne Richards for her continuing contribution that ensures these visits go smoothly. Daisies Day Nursery from Gedling House now makes almost daily use of the meadows and woods to support its Forest School curriculum.



New education pack

FGHW has a new education pack on its website and members are welcome to read and/or download this. It contains interesting items on the history of the meadow and its current management, with curriculum links. We intend to put additional activities on the website shortly. These will be freely available to all to use, not just schools.

Managing the sheep

Using sheep to graze the meadows keeps the grasses down to a workable level. The sheep eat a variety of vegetation and help to fertilise the soil and spread seed from some of the range of wild flowers around both the meadows. Yellow rattle is now appearing through the meadows and this is particularly good for promoting the growth of the finer grasses.



Having done their job of keeping the grass down in the meadows of Gedling House Woods, the herd of Hebridean Black Sheep were moved out in mid-January 2016. Shepherdess Agnes Kiemel, from the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, and two excellent working dogs soon had the flock rounded up and into a temporary pen.

The trailer did not look big enough to accommodate all the animals but a ramp allowed the first group to get onto an upper deck. The ramp was then used as a door to hold the sheep on the top and the remainder were persuaded to go onto the floor of the trailer. It was fascinating to see how the shepherdess used the barriers to move the sheep into the right positions, leaving them with no option! A well-practised routine.



The aims of Friends of Gedling House Woods

A reminder of what we are here for . . .

To protect, maintain and develop the local natural environment of Gedling House Woods Local Nature Reserve and its immediate surroundings, including wildlife, woods, the meadowland, hedgerows, trees and verges.

*The photographs at the bottom of the front page, taken in Spring 2016, show (left to right): Lesser celandine (*ranunculus ficaria*); Ox-eye daisy (*leucanthemum vulgare*), Cowslip (*primula veris*); and Speedwell (*veronica chamaedrys*).*