

Friends of Gedling House Woods

Annual Report 2019



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Work in the woods – clearing the undergrowth at the top of Wood Lane

Wildlife seen this year – some early butterflies and an owl chick



The past year in the woods and meadows

Progress with management plans and other news

In the meadows, the very dry summer of 2018 brought a new set of challenges. Readers will recall we no longer have access to the flock of black Hebridean sheep that visited regularly in the autumn to remove the second growth of grass after mowing. During August, while sourcing an alternative flock, a local farmer from Calverton indicated that he would be able to help us out. In return, he asked if we had any grazing currently available he could use, as his sheep had exhausted all his available areas of grassland. As a result, 120 sheep, mainly Dorset breed, spent much of the late summer grazing the meadows.



This flock had a habit of following any vehicle in the meadow, hoping for extra food, we suspect!

The sheep did a very good job of removing the foliage and put on considerable weight in the process. In meadow 3, they were very adept at removing just the green leaves from the common knapweed stems, leaving just the erect stem (see right). We eventually mowed the meadows to remove what was left, but it produced nothing but a few dried stems of grass and wild flowers, and this was not sufficient even to bale. The sheep returned in late autumn as planned to prepare the meadow for overwintering.



Hedge cutting took place much earlier this year. This meant we had longer to clear the hedgerow bottoms using the portable brushcutter. When we began the process in 2016, it took three student volunteers several weeks working for a day a week to clear by hand the hedgerows between the fence and hedge in meadows 1 and 2. The time taken to work round the meadows in this way, now using the one of our machines, has steadily reduced as we keep the woody growth at bay. This year it took about a day's work in total.

Other maintenance work in the meadows this year included:

- chipping and removing the remaining brash and branches in July 2018 from the earlier crown lifting, to provide grassland under the tree canopies in meadow 2
- reseeding the bare areas under the trees in meadows 1 and 2 to set up competition with nettles, and strimming or brushcutting the nettles to reduce growth and spread
- continuing to cut a strip of shorter foliage around the fence edge of all meadows to prevent species creep from the hedge into the meadows, and maintaining mowed paths.



In the woodland, we planted about 200 native-grown spring bulbs in the triangular area near the main gate, with help from students from Carlton le Willows Academy – for which we were very grateful. We were underwhelmed by the small number of flowers we found and hope for a more visible show next spring. We also planted 100 each of daffodils, fritillaries, aconites, anemones, snowdrops, star of Bethlehem and bluebells

in the glade and, again, not much to show in the way of spring flowers. Our thanks to B&Q for providing us with some tools for this community work.

Our major woodland task this year was to clear the undergrowth from the area close to the roadway at the top of Wood Lane. We chipped a good deal in the early weeks of March but the quantity of dead wood, dumped garden shrubs and sycamore saplings meant that we took between 15 and 20 trailer loads off the site to burn. Thanks to Connie Cole and Robert Green for allowing us to use an area of the farm to do this.



This work is intended to create a five-metre-wide strip of marginal woodland inside the fence with lower-growing trees such as hazel, rowan, elder and holly. Removal of the sycamores closest to the fence by Gedling Borough Council is due in June but has been delayed.

A large branch from an aging tree near the main gate fell during the spring. It is likely that the tree will need to be felled next winter on safety grounds. We intend to replace it by an oak.

Wildlife in the woods and meadows – a contribution from Andy Newton

It has been a good start to the year, with many birds nesting. Our main surprise was seeing two tawny owlets, which were born in a tree at the main gates to the reserve. Apart from these two, we have also seen blackbirds, robins, carrion crows, jackdaws, song thrushes, wrens, greater spotted woodpeckers, great tits and blue tits. Talking about the Blue Tits, one pair of them decided they were going to have a big family and made their nest in one of our nesting boxes, which are dotted around the woods.



But as you can see from the pictures below they went for the biggest they could find, which is at the top gate of Yew Tree Lane.

Last year one of our members found a young male kestrel by the roadside and took it in and nursed him back to life.

We then brought him up to the woods and let him go. He can still be seen flying around the meadows, upsetting the carrion crows along Military Road. This year he's found a mate and they have set up a nest at the bottom of meadow 1. Let's hope we'll soon be seeing the family flying around together.

Also this year we have seen the return of the peacock butterfly, which has not been seen for over a year. On the other hand, we have seen an increase in the orange-tip butterfly around the second and third meadows. This has brought to our attention one of their food plants, which was found at the bottom of the second meadow. This is the cuckoo flower, found in a damp area of the meadow; it is a member of the cabbage family and flowers between April and June. In folklore it is said to be sacred to the fairies and is unlucky if brought into your home. That is also why it was never included in May Day garlands.



Cuckoo flower

If you look very closely in the second and third meadows, you will see there is an army forming. There are a lot of cardinal and soldier beetles about, plus shield bugs and ladybirds (seven-spot and harlequin) – so watch where you go! At the moment you will also see the white-tailed bumble bee and the red-tailed bumble bee out and about doing their work, pollinating plants.



Plenty of honey bees are also around working hard to produce their honey. Carol Whiteley has a hive in her garden, from which bees fly out to the meadow to collect nectar and pollinate our wild flowers. The local beekeeper has jars of honey from this hive which you can order from Carol.



*Above left:
cardinal beetle*

*Above right:
soldier beetle*

*Left:
shield bug*

So, when you are out and about in the woods and meadows, keep an eye out to see what you can spot. If you go on the FGHW website or Facebook page, you can download a seven-day record sheet to help us to keep a note of what you see. You may well find something we didn't know about!

Happy hunting.

How are you at spotting wildlife?

We've come up with a game to help answer that question.

We call it Squirrel's Treasure Hunt. A squirrel has hidden his stash of nuts somewhere in the woods and meadows. To find it, look for the acorn clues and then work out a few maths formulas to come up with the final map references to locate the treasure.



Are you up for this? Can you find the treasure? If so, come along to one of our treasure hunts during August summer holidays (weather permitting) and see what you can find.

Yellow archangel

The work to remove the yellow archangel along the path alongside Wood Lane has proved successful. We have not detected any this year, although the bare earth is taking some time to green over. If you do spot this plant anywhere in the woods or meadows, do let a committee member know.



Educational visits

Again we had more than the 25 educational visits that allowed us to claim the maximum grant from Natural England in 2018. We thank the staff at Daisies Day Nursery for completing most of these from their near daily visits as part of their Forest School curriculum. Our usual thanks go to Anne Richards for organising visits from local primary schools.

Seat

If you have missed the seat at the top of meadow 3, we intend to replace it shortly.

Water troughs

Thanks to John Whyley for his work in refurbishing the water troughs. We need one in each of the main meadows so that sheep have fresh water when grazing. They were leaking badly and were no longer level. John has re-sited them to allow trimming behind them, installed a level concrete base, refurbished the plumbing and made it easier to maintain them in the future. *[Note: these are turned off when the sheep are not present.]*



Fences

Quite a number of round posts in the post and wire fences along the path up from the main gate and elsewhere are beginning to fail. We will need to replace them when this year's growth has died down.

Other links and visits

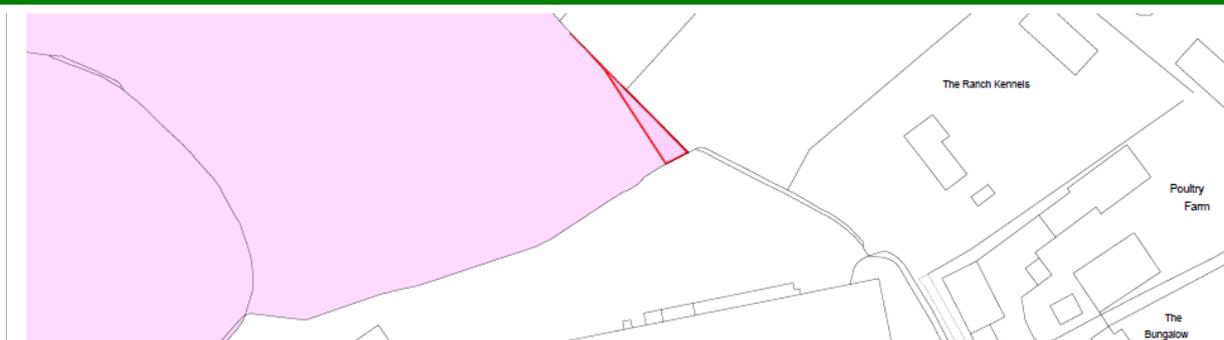
In September 2018, the glade area was used by Sam Bowen for practical work with young people during her training as a Forest School leader.

David Falkner, previous chair of FGHW, brought a group from Burton Joyce U3A to visit the woods and meadows on 28 May 2019 – and was impressed by the development that has taken place since he left the area.

Frank Knowles gave a presentation on restoration of meadow 3 to the Burton Joyce group of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust on 7 March 2019. This was well received and followed up with a visit from this group on 7 June.

GAR

The orange marker posts at the far end of the woods from the entrance show the line of our boundary with the Gedling Access Road (GAR). A post and rail fence will define our boundary with the GAR – we lose about a triangle of about 138 square metres. The actual start date is not yet known.



Survey

In early 2019 FGHW conducted its first survey amongst the members and the wider public. The aims of the survey were to discover what the membership and the public knew about the group and the site, and to ask for feedback on our direction.

The responses showed most users know how the site is managed. Most dog walkers responding also understood their responsibilities. The question about dogs off leads generated a variety of views. The narrative responses have been discussed by the committee and have been very useful in showing us what is needed. The vast majority of users of the site (both with and without dogs) are responsible and look after the site; even to the extent of cleaning up after others who are not so responsible. No changes are planned currently, but we are looking at how we can help certain dog walkers who are not respecting the site to become more responsible for their actions and those of their dogs.

Full results are on our website: www.fghw.org.uk .

FGHW Calendar

In time for Christmas presents last year, committee member Andy Newton designed an excellent photographic calendar of the woods and meadows. The print run was quickly snapped up and another edition is planned for 2019.



Comments from recent visitors to the woods and meadows

“You have done so much to open up the meadow and create such a wonderful environment for nature-lovers to enjoy.”

“This is a great resource for everyone in the area to use. Thank goodness it has nature reserve status to prevent it being developed for other uses.”

Social media

You can keep up with news about the woods and meadows on our website, on Facebook and on Twitter.



www.fghw.org.uk



[groups/fghw](https://www.facebook.com/groups/fghw)



[@fofghw](https://twitter.com/fofghw)

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 and Meadows Local Nature Reserves and their immediate surroundings, including wildlife, woodland, meadowland, hedgerows, trees and verges.

The photographs on the front page (clockwise spiral from top left) show a may tree in blossom in meadow 2 (May 2019); Dorset sheep in meadow 3 (Aug 2018); ladies bedstraw in meadow 2 (Jul 2018); apple blossom from the tree in meadow 2 (May 2019); fungus on a fallen branch in the woods (Jun 2019); may blossom in meadow 2 (May 2019); the apple tree in meadow 2 (May 2019).

Photographs by Andy Newton (wildlife section on pages 3 and 4) and Frank Knowles (page 1, wood and meadow management on pages 2 and 3, and page 5).