

Friends of Gedling House Woods

Annual Report 2020



In this edition...

The past year in the meadows – and the result of the very wet winter

Work in the woods – work on the marginal areas of the woods

Butterfly special – how the meadows are now hosting more than twenty species



The past year in the woods and meadows

Progress with woodland and meadow management plans

We have well-developed management plans for the woods and the meadows. These are worked out in considerable detail so that our core team of volunteers have a clear plan for what needs doing and when, and who to contact where others outside the group are involved. You can find a summary of both of these plans on the FGHW website:

<http://www.fghw.org.uk/about-gedling-house-woods-and-meadows/managing-the-woods/>

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After many years focusing on the meadows, including major restoration work, we have begun to devote more attention to the woods.

Wood Lane verges We spent some time on the marginal woodland along Wood Lane this year. This is intended to be lower-level trees and shrubs that provide a buffer between the lane and the tall trees in the more central part of the woods.



The winter work consisted of removing all trees and saplings from the fence line to preserve the fence for the future - it was being damaged, mainly by sycamore saplings, and needed clearance.

One way of keeping the roadside under control is to coppice it every five to seven years. This particularly applies to hazel but can be used on sycamore and ash, too – and we have plenty of both. Traditional coppicing cuts all the wood back to ground level for it to regrow, but it does leave large gaps which change the character of the verge. To preserve the continuous green verge for much of the lane, we have chosen an alternative approach. In 2019, we removed all larger saplings (over about 50mm) and some trees from the verge, leaving the slender ones to grow until they, too, are removed.

This process has identified some areas of verge where we need more saplings and we intend to plant hazel next autumn to fill gaps.

The top of Wood Lane Following the clearance which took place early in 2019, the overhanging sycamores at the top of the lane were removed by Gedling Borough Council in the summer. This created a much more open space and a lot more light for the vegetation under the trees. In the autumn we planted 60 hazel whips and 6 rowans there (with 4 rowans elsewhere) and all seem to have been growing well. Unfortunately a mix-up at our suppliers meant that we were supplied with *Sorbus intermedia* (Swedish whitebeam) rather than the *Sorbus aucuparia* (rowan or mountain ash) that we ordered. It is almost impossible to distinguish them apart in bare-root form. As a local nature reserve, we should only be planting native English species. We have now removed them from the woods before they become too established, and will replace them with rowan in the autumn.



←
Swedish whitebeam growing well
—
but not the rowan intended



Other maintenance work in the woods this year included:

- removing a large group of Spanish and hybrid bluebells from the main path along Wood Lane, intending to replace them with several hundred native English bluebells in the autumn
- clearing a way through from the field gate at the top of meadow 1 so we can get the mower in easily to mow the glade regularly
- started using chippings to try to relieve the muddy paths in really wet weather – we hope to expand that process next autumn
- planting a donated oak tree in the triangle near the entrance gate to the meadows – this will eventually replace an aging tree close to the entrance
- and, of course, the annual tree check to remove dead, dying, diseased or dangerous trees.

The last year in the meadows It is amazing what a difference a year can bring. Following a typical summer, we intended to mow the meadow as usual in August. Unfortunately the rains came midway through the month and the grass became too wet to mow. The rain lasted all autumn and winter, on and off with few breaks. In one of them our contractor managed to mow meadows 1 and 2, but meadow 3 was too wet. We had arranged for a local farmer to bale the hay but it became so wet that baling was not possible. To try to disperse the hay, our contractor tried using a flail cutter but that too found the grass too wet to disperse. Meadow 3 was still too wet to venture on it with a tractor so it remained uncut. As a result, one of our committee used a rechargeable hedge-cutter in the early spring to remove the tall brown stems that remained from last year.

An additional issue was the lack of any local sheep in 2019 to graze the meadow. We have typically used the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's flock of Hebridean sheep, but the Trust downsized the flock in 2018 to save costs, and so it was not available. Other local farmers managed find grazing close to home and so were reluctant to transport sheep over the longer distances to our meadows. We hope to find a solution for autumn 2020.

The wet weather affected hedge-cutting, too. It was impossible to get a tractor onto the meadow to cut the hedges, so they will have to wait for two year's growth to be removed this autumn. As a result, we have not been able to clear the hedge bottoms before the new growth started in 2020.



Other maintenance work in the meadows

- maintaining clean tree trunks on the meadow trees to provide more light under them for grass and wildflowers, and cutting back the nettle and bramble still growing under the trees to promote grass growth
- successfully sowing yellow rattle in the anthill area of meadow 3, to try to reduce the thickness of the grass and allow some wild flowers to develop there
- 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.

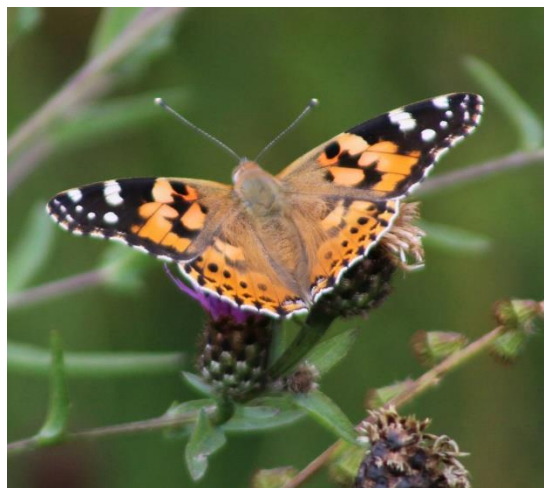
Friends of Gedling House Woods have worked hard over the years on what we call the “Third Meadow”. If you look at the picture on the right, you can see a wild and plain looking meadow, with hardly any wild flowers. Compare this to the picture below where you can see its transformation into a beautiful wild flower meadow, which also in turn transformed the wildlife we now get there. Each year, something new appears and the old favourites come back. My main focus for this article is going to be the butterfly and moth population.



Over the years, we have had our favourites: Small Tortoiseshell, Orange-Tip, Red Admiral, Peacock, Speckled Wood, Brimstone, Common and Holy Blue, Comma, Meadow Brown, Small and Large White butterflies. To add to this list after the meadow was transformed, we now have seen Small and Large Skipper, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Six-spot Burnet Moth, Yellow Shell Moth and, last year, we saw the Painted Lady.

Over the last few years, I’ve started taking part in the Big Butterfly Count. You may well ask, what is this? Well, it’s a nationwide survey aimed at helping to assess the health of our environment. It was launched in 2010 by the UK charity Butterfly Conservation. It starts on 1st July and ends on 31st August each year and all you have to do is choose a place, which in my case is the Third Meadow, and just count all the butterflies and moths you see in 15 minutes. To help you with this they developed an app for your phone so that you can download your results. To help me I created a picture sheet, which can be found on our website and Facebook page. You can then print this off and fill it in. Once filled in, you can then send your results to Butterfly Conservation either via the app or their website (www.bigbutterflycount.org). Why do this? Well, butterflies react quickly to change and they make an excellent indicator of the health of the environment. When butterflies decline in numbers it’s an early warning for other wildlife losses and the effect of climate change on wildlife.

The results of last year’s national monitoring scheme show an increase in population. This is the best year since 1997. Just over half the butterfly species showed higher population levels in 2019 compared to 2018, making it the 8th best year overall. The top butterfly from 2019 was the Painted Lady, and over the two months of July and August, I myself counted over 25 of them in our Third Meadow. It’s surprising when you think that a small creature can fly such a great distance - arriving here from North Africa, which is about 6100 miles away from our woods in Gedling. From here they may then carry on up to Scotland or even Iceland. With the Painted Lady at number one, what do you think came next in the national league of butterflies in the UK?



Peacock



Gatekeeper



Meadow Brown



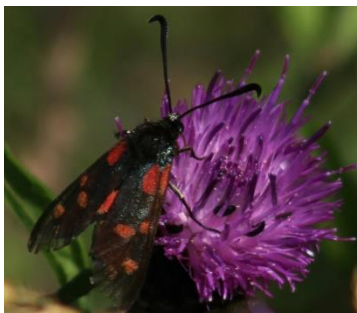
Small tortoiseshell



Green-veined White



Six-spot Burnet Moth



Well, it was the Peacock in second place and the Small White came in third, Gatekeeper fourth and the Large White was fifth. Coming in at number six was the Meadow Brown and the Red Admiral was seventh. Small Tortoiseshell was eighth, ninth was the Speckled Wood and in tenth place came The Green-veined White. All of these butterflies you could see in our woods and meadows last year. With my sightings, though, the league would have been quite different:-

1. Small White
2. Meadow Brown
3. Speckled Wood
4. Gatekeeper
5. Six-spot Burnet Moth
6. Red Admiral
7. Painted Lady
8. Comma
9. Yellow Shell Moth
10. Ringlet

As you can see, there is a lot of difference, with two moths being in my Top Ten. All the other butterflies you can see in our meadows, but this list shows we have a different mixture of wildflowers and maybe our weather conditions were either better or worse for some butterflies and moths. Whatever it is, all the hard work has paid off and we have attracted more wildlife to Gedling Woods and Meadows. On my last count, I counted 25 different species of butterflies and moths that use Gedling Woods and Meadows as their home, but it seems that something new always comes along each year.

Ringlet



Small White



Large White



Red Admiral



Speckled Wood



Yellow Shell Moth



Comma



Whatever happened to the ox-eye daisy?



2016 – plenty



2017 – few



2018 – selected areas



2020 – a few isolates

There were concerns in 2016 that the seed mix we used when restoring meadow 3 had too much ox-eye daisy. The different and drier spring conditions in 2017 saw fewer seeds germinate and this concern was short-lived. They reappeared in patches in the slightly wetter springs of 2018 and 2019. With a hot, dry spring very few germinated again in 2020, and the plants have much smaller flowers than in 2016 and 2018. It looks like a cool, damp spring gives the ox-eye daisy the best chance of germination and strong growth.

Anthills

The anthills in the lower part of meadow 3 seem to have taken a turn for the worse. The yellow meadow ants live in colonies in grassland that has not been ploughed for some time. They inhabit intricate mounds that can extend to a metre below the surface of the ground and can be a hundred or so years old. The mound is usually raised a little each year as the ants build additional chambers. The mound itself is very fertile and so grass generally grows strongly and thickly.



This year, however, most of the anthills have not been disturbed or expanded and the grass on top has dried out. The big question is why? One possibility is that the very wet winter has devastated many of the colonies in the anthills. In contrast, because the ants can only build upward in moist ground, the very dry spring may have created ground so hard that it prevented new building this year. Because the ants tend to avoid contact with the outside world, we will have to wait until next year to check on the long-term survival of the anthills.

FGHW Calendar for 2021

Committee member Andy Newton will be designing a new calendar in time for Christmas presents this year. We are expecting another excellent photographic record of the woods and meadows during this year. Previous print runs have been snapped up quickly, so please be alert for messages about availability.



Response to Covid 19

The woods and meadows have remained open for personal exercise (with or without dogs) during the lockdown period. We have seen an increase in the number of users among families taking exercise together, and from users from further afield who have newly discovered the woods and meadows.

FGHW has a formal licence agreement to manage the woods and meadows, so our core team of volunteers continued to carry out essential maintenance work. We maintained strict social distance rules, of course.

Water troughs

The refurbished water troughs are working well. In response to requests, we left them turned on over the winter and, if we are able to maintain their cleanliness, we aim to keep them operational in the future, even when no sheep are present.

Fences

We have undertaken some repairs to the top rails of the fences in meadows 1 and 2 ourselves. We used a contractor to secure the fence at the end of meadow 2 – driving in about 45 new posts to make the boundary sheep-proof. The necessary replacement of the gates and gate posts between meadows also needs a contractor, and discussions are ongoing.

Seat

We are very grateful to Anthony Deane for donating and installing the new seat at the top of meadow 3. He presented it to us in memory of his dog Maisie, who had many happy walks in the meadows before she died.

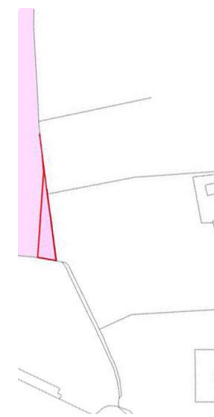


Gedling Access Road (GAR)

The picture shows the route of the GAR to the east of Gedling House at the bottom of the picture, going past Gedling House Woods, where the road will bear to the left of Gedling Wood Farm, just visible in this aerial view taken in May. Meadow 3, with hawthorn in bloom, is top left. The marked car parking spaces are in the walled garden of Gedling House. *Thanks to VIA East Midlands for use of this photo.*



The small triangle of woodland lost to the GAR (shown outlined in red below) is roughly located above the top of the bare earth in the centre right of the picture.



Visitors' parking

The larger numbers of visitors recently has increased the pressure on parking, both in Wood Lane close to the main gate to the meadow, but particularly at the top of Yew Tree Lane. Increased noise levels – loud music, banging of car doors, dogs barking and visitors shouting to each other, often early in the morning – have all meant the number of complaints from residents is growing. We ask all who park on Yew Tree Lane to show consideration for residents at all times, please.

We also ask users not to park cars right on the corner of Yew Tree Lane and Wood Lane, please, as this means large vehicles are not able to make the turn into Wood Lane. This particularly affects traffic to the farm at the very end of Wood Lane, including tractors towing farm equipment.

We recognise that parking is not plentiful at either of our entrances but ask that users walk those extra few yards to avoid causing noise, congestion and obstruction close to the gates. Thank you.

Educational visits

The closure of schools and nurseries during the coronavirus pandemic has seriously reduced the number of educational visits to the woods and meadows. This means that we are unlikely to be able to claim the maximum grant from Defra in 2020.



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)

Comments from recent visitors to the woods and meadows

"The meadows are looking better than they have ever done."

"Being out in the sunshine here on a lovely summer's day is really helping with my mental well-being."

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: betony in meadow 3 (June 2020), prolific after a very slow start from when sown; a summer evening view from meadow 3 (June 2020); wild garlic in the woods (May 2019); the hawthorn coppice in meadow 2 in full bloom (May 2019); a close up of a cowslip in bloom (May 2016); low winter sunshine in meadow 2 (Dec 2017); cool shade in the woods on a hot day (June 2020).

Photographs by Andy Newton (butterfly section on pages 4 and 5) and Frank Knowles (page 1-3 and 6-8) except the aerial shot on page 7 courtesy of VIA East Midlands.