

Friends of Gedling House Woods

Annual Report 2018



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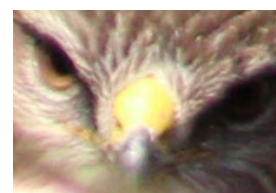
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The past year in the woods and meadows

Progress with management plans and other news

The wet weather last summer and the persistent rain through the autumn and winter took its toll on the management of the woods and meadows this year.

Mowing, baling and removal of the hay were severely delayed by the rain. We also had to find new contractors to carry out this work. The poor quality of the hay, which is persistently contaminated by dog faeces, plastic and glass, meant that we had to find an alternative destination for the bales. The late harvest also meant that the grass did not put on the usual amount of autumn growth. This, in turn, restricted the time the sheep could be onsite grazing – the hungry young male sheep soon ran out of grass to eat. We may well be unable to source any sheep to graze next year, as the flock we use is much depleted and is unlikely to be available outside the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's own sites.

Hedge cutting was successfully done as planned. The subsequent wet weather meant it took much longer than usual to clear the hedgerow bottoms. We do this to minimise the invasion of the meadow by brambles, goose grass and buckthorn, all of which affect the quality of the meadow, particularly in meadows 1 and 2. We completed this work in April this year, instead of February. There is still a little tidying to do, at the far end of meadow 2 but this will now have to wait until the autumn.



As well as the annual check during the winter, some extensive **tree work** was needed in the far corner of meadow 2. Large overhanging branches from a neighbour's trees were stopping light getting to the recently planted hedge at the end of Military Road. The poor state of some of the branches meant that the contractors brought in a tracked 'cherry picker' to remove them safely – they were too dangerous to climb.

The very wet weather also made for **very muddy walking** in the lower part of meadow 1, with or without dogs. We are looking into ways of improving this situation for future winters. Field drains may be a suitable solution.

The change to dry, warm weather in May meant that we were able to begin regular **meadow maintenance**, using our brushcutter to cut a strip round the edge of each meadow. We do this, as with the clearing of hedgerow bottoms, to minimise the incursion of hedge and woody growth into the meadow. This year we have tried using a combination of brushcutter, followed by strimming. This has proved successful and will be built into the meadow management plan for future years.

We also cleared the triangle of woodland closest to Carlton le Willows academy – the only one of the many **woodland jobs** in the woodland management plan that we managed to complete. (The plan is available on the FGHW website – www.fghw.org.uk)

One of the key tasks this year was to arrange for the **removal of variegated yellow archangel** from the woods. This invasive plant has already spread a considerable distance, extending along the path by the side of the first meadow which runs parallel with Wood Lane and into the woods. Yellow archangel is an attractive plant with yellow flowers and variegated leaves, but it is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to introduce it to the wild. The risk of it spreading extensively into meadow 1 is considerable. Reluctantly, therefore we took the decision, with the support of Gedling Borough Council, to remove it using herbicide (glyphosate). We will keep watch on the area next year to see if it needs further treatment.



Despite the trials of the weather our **meadow and woodland management plans** remain secure and helpful in scheduling our work. They are now fully in use and revised at least annually. The latest versions are on the FGHW website (www.fghw.org.uk) under the 'about' tab.

Crown lifting and clearing in the meadows is almost complete. In the autumn, FGHW was successful in applying for an EnviroGrant to purchase a chipper/shredder. This gives us the facility to chip and shred material from trees that we do not wish to leave lying on the ground – for example in the meadows. We have used the chippings around kissing gates to reduce the impact of mud in winter. The EnviroGrant scheme is run by Veolia (Nottinghamshire



County Council's waste contractors) and offers a helping hand to a wide range of grass roots community, voluntary and school projects. The crown lifting itself took place before Christmas but the wet weather has meant we have not been able to take vehicles on site to transport the chipper to meadow 2. We have tried it out on the big pile of branches cleared from near the main gate. It proved to be a useful addition to our range of machines.

Dogs remain a problem for us, with a very small minority of dog walkers not keeping their dogs under proper control. As well as the faeces left in the woods and meadows, and the bags of



dog poo hung on trees and bushes, one of our volunteers was attacked and bitten by a dog recently. The owner justified this by suggesting that it would not have happened had our volunteer had a dog with him! The incident was reported, of course but we do not have a full enough identification for anyone to take the matter further. We have been working with Gedling's neighbourhood wardens at various points in the year. They kindly loaned one of their banners to us during the year – it spent some time at each of the two main entrances.

Diversity

One of the objections raised when we removed the scrub and restored the land in meadow 3 to wild flowers was a risk of reducing the diversity of wildlife found in the area. This has proved to be unfounded. As well as many more plant species, many more butterflies are present throughout the summer. This selection was photographed in the meadows.



Brimstone



Comma



Gatekeeper



Common Blue



Large Skipper



Meadow Brown



Red Admiral



Ringlet



Six-spot Burnet Moth



Small Tortoiseshell



Small White (Cabbage White)



Speckled Wood

This summer, a local resident spotted a slow worm in meadow 3 and took this photograph of it. The sighting has been reported to Nottinghamshire's species recorder, who is now marking the meadow as a new area for slow worms.

Educational visits

We were again able to claim the maximum available grant for educational visits from Natural England in 2017, with more in the school year than the maximum 25 that generate funding. Our usual thanks go to Anne Richards for organising visits by primary schools. We particularly thank the staff at Daisies Day Nursery from Gedling House for their frequent use of the meadows and woods to support their Forest School curriculum and our funding.



The anthills in meadow 3

The anthills in the lower part of meadow 3 are inhabited by yellow meadow ants. They are more correctly called mounds.



Meadow ants (*Lasius flavus*) are surprisingly long-lived – as much as 20 years. The age of their mounds can be roughly estimated by size – they excavate approximately one litre of fine earth each year and place it on top of the mound. By this reckoning, the larger mounds in the meadow are well over 20 years old.

Meadow ants live in darkness and relative safety underground. During the summer, winged adults pair and mate. They bore holes in the mound and swarm. Females then shed their wings and find a new nesting place. They use the mound as a maternity ward, as it is warmed by the sun.

A typical colony contains about 5000 ants, with a single queen. Worker ants are about 5 mm long. The larger queens are about 7 mm in length.

Meadow ants are harmless to humans. The ants capture aphids, store them in the nest and ‘milk’ them for the honeydew they excrete. The aphids themselves feed on the roots of plants, thereby completing a perfect example of sustainable agriculture.





Meadow ants also eat small insects such as fly larvae and woodlice. They have an interesting symbiotic relationship with the caterpillar of the Chalk Hill Blue butterfly (not seen in our meadows). Attracted by substances that the caterpillars secrete, meadow ants capture and bury the caterpillars in their nests. Unintentionally, this protects the larvae from their predators. This inter-species relationship, and others like it, demonstrates the intricacies of habitats and ecosystems.

Paul Sergent

An abbreviated version of this article first appeared in the Gedling Magazine, June 2018.

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

Gedling House Woods, like every nature reserve, along with the countryside and mountains, provides the sanctuary that everyone needs to survive in a 24/7 world.

Our grandchildren were fascinated by the badger sets – and also the paw prints and the fairy houses that have been made.

My grandson and I often go for a walk in the woods. Mostly we are tracking dinosaurs, which can often involve lots of running and hiding. I have often suggested we sit on the bench in the top field to 'rest our weary bones'. It has now become a regular suggestion from him . . . Often when branching out into open country, which can be quite dangerous for trackers, he wondered what would happen if there was a need to rest our 'weary bones' in the first field. This is no longer a problem as, after a suggestion, there is now a lovely bench to 'rest our weary bones'

I would like to thank those who care for and maintain the woods and fields to enable me to enjoy my daily walk with my dog and friends. The woods are beautiful, at this time of year especially, with bluebells, primroses and the sight and smell of the wild garlic. Since the seemingly endless rain has decreased, the fields have once again become a lovely place to stroll, with a short stop to enjoy some sunshine and views from the bench seats.

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)



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