

Friends of Gedling House Woods

Annual Report 2021



In this edition. . .

Major changes in part of the woods – with the coming of the Gedling Access Road

Ongoing work in the woods and meadow – continuing to provide open spaces throughout the Covid pandemic – and another very wet winter

Dragon special – we have dragons in our woods, though they are quite small!!



The woods and meadows in numbers: 1600 new plants in 2020–21

- 1000** bluebell bulbs planted in the woods
- 280** saplings along the GAR boundary
- 180** hazel saplings along Wood Lane
- 100** tree saplings in the woods
- 30** 2.2m young trees along the GAR
- 10** 1.8m rowans at the top of Wood Lane



Meadow 3 in late June 2020

Fires

The hot weather in April and May brought many visitors, some of whom took to lighting fires in the woods – four within a month. For obvious reasons, we do not allow fires in a woodland nature reserve (or in our meadows) and we are grateful to visitors who report these fires to us. We managed to put out some ourselves with a can of water but one, lit by four teenagers wearing hoodies, required the attendance of the Fire and Rescue Service. With typical efficiency the crew put out the fire and stopped it spreading further through the woods.

Thanks to our volunteers

FGHW would like to thank the committee members who have managed the woods and meadows throughout the last year. We would also like to thank our other volunteers who help us when needed; and, in particular, Pete and Linda Wood, who have been stalwart supporters in most weeks since they joined FGHW.



*Hawthorn berries in
late September 2020*

A child's-eye view of the woods and meadows

Occasionally, we are sent a piece of writing about the woods and meadows. The piece below was written by Helena, following a visit to the woods and meadows with her mother during lockdown. We thought it was good enough to share it more widely with our members. As Helena was just seven when she wrote the piece, we have changed some of her phonetic spelling so it does not detract from adults' appreciation of the content of this exceptional piece.

Did you like the woodland? What did you like about it?

Yes I really liked the woodland because in the meadow part there was nobody there except us and there was a track of mowed grass and I ran down it. In the forest there were trees everywhere and their roots were really high and I was jumping over them. Six of the roots made steps in the soil.

How did the woodland make you feel?

When I first took a step in the woodland it felt like my paradise. I could run freely, nothing mattered, the grass was thirty centimetres tall and it felt like I was brushing my legs through swan feathers and the smell was like fresh blossom that was as white as the puffy clouds. When I was under the green leaf canopy it was like a roof of green stained glass.

Covid-19 and the past year

Deferral of the AGM, the committee's response to Covid, and elections.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant we were not able to hold an Annual General Meeting in 2020 and, in view of that, the committee remained in place to ensure management of the nature reserves continued until such time as we were able to hold elections. At about that time, too, our secretary, Linda Metcalfe found she was not able to devote the amount of time the role needed, and resigned. Our thanks go to Linda for her work in managing the committee paperwork – it was much appreciated and immediately missed.

As FGHW provides a voluntary service the core team was exempt from the restrictions on leaving home and meeting outside during the lockdown. We maintained the full range of our maintenance work throughout, while adhering to all relevant social distancing rules. Our thanks go to the committee for their dedication during such a difficult time.

In December a new member, Nikita Ward, joined us and volunteered to take on the role of secretary, as well as supporting our work in the woods and meadows during the early part of 2021. The committee informally co-opted Nikita, where she has proved her worth in contribution to discussions and in writing minutes, prior to the normal round of elections restarting after lockdown. Our thanks go to Nikita for stepping into this role so that the committee can function effectively.

The Gedling Access Road

Tree felling on the boundary and mitigation planting

The loss of 138m² of the woodland for the GAR at the very far corner of the woods was not a particular issue for FGHW – it was not a particularly attractive or well-stocked area and it



meant that the old access down towards Whitworth Drive was removed. We were not, however, expecting so many trees to be felled on the boundary of the woods with the Gedling Access Road. The embankment of the cutting for the road is so steep as it passes the woods

that the main 'anchor' roots of many large trees would be severed during excavations, leaving them unstable. For this reason, all the large sycamore trees on the boundary, along with one wild cherry, were removed.

The resulting stumps presented a problem – to curb regrowth, FGHW would need to cut back any new shoots annually, for many years, until the stumps finally died. We felt that this was an unacceptable burden on a voluntary group and argued strongly for the stumps to be removed. Excavation by a large machine was not an option, as has happened elsewhere on the GAR, as it would destabilise the embankment. Stump grinding was the only option. Access was particularly difficult because of the excessive rain in the late autumn, so a radio-controlled tracked stump grinder was brought in to do the work, driving it up from Whitworth Drive on each of the half-dozen days the task took.

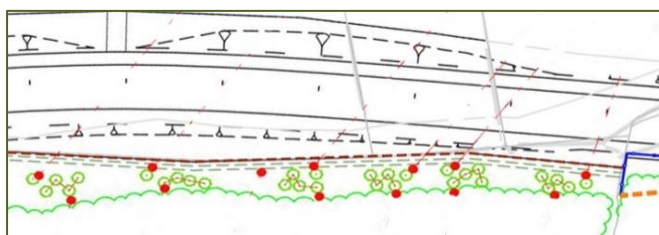
With the stumps gone, the new post and rail fence was quickly installed, again by hand because it was too wet to bring a tractor up the GAR to drive in the posts. The extent of tree roots along the fence line means that the wire badger-proof fence will be installed some 300mm on the other side of our fence, instead of on the wood's side, as is usual. The steep embankment itself has been held in place by a metal grid, kept secure by 650 soil nails, with a layer of stacked bags contain a 50/50 mixture of 20mm gravel and topsoil to aid vegetation growth and drainage. Once all the bags are in place, hydro-seeding (as FGHW used in restoring meadow 3) will provide a vegetated face.



Surveyors using detailed boundary maps from the Land Registry also discovered that part of our original boundary fence was in the wrong place – it was up to 1m out, both to our advantage and disadvantage, roughly equally, over about 100m.



We worked with a landscape architect from VIA East Midlands to design a planting plan for the now bare area. Essentially, we planned a double hedge of 40% hawthorn, 40% hazel, 10% holly



and 10% wild privet (just below the red dotted line in the plan). In the clearings where large

trees had been felled, we planned to plant groups of two groups each of 4 beech, 4 oak or 4 wild cherry, with 6 rowan (mountain ash) closer to the GAR.

In the event, we decided to plant the rowan in the hedge to provide some variety of colour and height. We managed to separate the contract for this mitigation planting from the GAR planting so it could take place almost a year earlier, at the beginning of 2021. The planting was completed at the beginning of March by Streetwise, who will maintain the young trees for their first year in the ground. We now have 280 new hedgerow saplings and 30 two-metre trees coming into leaf.



The past year in the woods and meadows

Progress with woodland and meadow management plans

We revise the management plans for the woods and the meadows each year to reflect new work, changes in how we tackle tasks and drop activities no longer needed. We work to a very detailed set of plans so that our core team of volunteers know 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/>
<http://www.fghw.org.uk/about-gedling-house-woods-and-meadows/managing-the-meadows/>

Wood Lane verges

We planted 180 hazel saplings along the Wood Lane verge in the autumn of 2020, filling some gaps resulting from our continued clearance of larger trees along the verge. Each year our contractors check the safety of the overhanging trees and this year we removed several in December 2020. One unexpected consequence of our work on the verge is the much greater number of cow parsley plants that have self-seeded along the roadside.



Woodland flowers

Following on from the removal of Spanish and hybrid bluebells in the spring of 2020, we planted 1000 bluebell bulbs along the woodland path just up from the bend in the lane. This year we saw a large number of small bluebell flowers in that area. We will have to wait about five years for them to achieve the density of flowers we see elsewhere in the woods, and we can check on progress annually. We did not manage to remove all the non-native bulbs and continued with the removal in May 2021, concentrating on the area near the gate at the top of Yew Tree Lane. We will be planting more replacement native English bluebell bulbs in these areas in the autumn.

We also split a number of cyclamen corms near the main gate to the meadow to extend their presence in this part of the woods and introduce some further up the main woodland path. Next year (early 2022) we hope to split some snowdrop clumps “in the green”, as it is called, to increase the spread of snowdrops further into the woods.

New trees

FGHW was able to access 100 saplings of native broadleaf trees from TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) programme “I dig trees”, funded by OVO Energy. We cleared a good number of sycamore saplings from several areas just above meadows 2 and 3, and planted, in groups of five, oak, beech, hornbeam, alder and silver birch. You can just see the spiral guards and canes in this picture.



The replacement rowans at the top of Wood Lane and around the top of meadow 3 have taken well; one even has two flowers on (shown on the front of this report), which is unusual for such a small young tree. The bare-root rowans were of very good quality, coming from a new supplier, Cumbria Tree Growers.

Other maintenance work in the woods this year



- The annual tree check to remove dead, dying, diseased or dangerous trees this year involved removing some overhanging trees on Wood Lane and a fallen tree crossing a



main path in the woods, for which our contractors needed a tractor and winch. The steel hawser goes from the tractor on the right through a strap on the fallen tree and is anchored to the tree just behind the tractor. The tree was sawn below the strap and pulled down safely.

- FGHW has removed ivy from mature thriving trees within about 4 metres of our boundary with Wood Lane (*see page 9 for details of why we do this*).

The last year in the meadows

Each year is different in so many ways from previous years. The early autumn was much drier and we were able to get our contractor to cut the hay, arrange for a local farmer to bale it, and remove the bales by the end of September. The very wet winter made little difference to us this year, therefore, but the increased use and wet weather made for slippery conditions particularly in the gateways.

The farmer who baled the hay for us this year used a rowing-up machine on the front of the tractor and a long baler behind, making tight turns impossible. This left us with quite a lot of



cut hay to remove by hand. Thanks to much support from volunteers we collected all the surplus hay and composted it in a clearing in the hawthorn copse at the far end of meadow 2. Not much remains, but we will see what its quality is like when we come to it again in the coming hay-cutting season.



Other maintenance work in the meadows

- After a very wet year when we were unable to get a tractor on site to cut the hedges, the dry autumn meant hedge cutting was done by the end of September, leaving us plenty of time to clear the hedge bottoms before the end of January.
- We again cleared the tree trunks on the meadow trees of their new season's growth.
- We planted 60 hawthorn saplings just over the fence in our neighbour's land to create a hedge to deter unauthorised access to the meadow through their property
- We continued with our practice of cutting a strip of shorter grass around the fence edge of all meadows to prevent species from the hedge invading the meadows. We also kept the main meadow paths mowed and, using the access created through to the meadow last year, kept the woodland glade mowed as well.

We have Dragons in our Woods!

by Andy Newton

Black-tailed Skimmer
(female)



Here at Gedling House Woods and Meadows we have a variety of wildlife, but one of the major species we have over the summer months is the dragonfly. They are not only beautiful, but have wonderful aerobatic skills and a fascinating life-cycle. All this is beneficial to humans because the adult dragonflies consume a large number of biting insects such as mosquitoes, midges and other flies that can cause a variety of problems. This flying insect is a member of the Odonata, an order of predatory insects that comprises the Anisoptera (dragonflies), meaning unequal winged and the Zygoptera (damselflies), meaning equal winged. They have long, slender bodies, two pairs of membranous wings, large compound eyes and aquatic larvae.

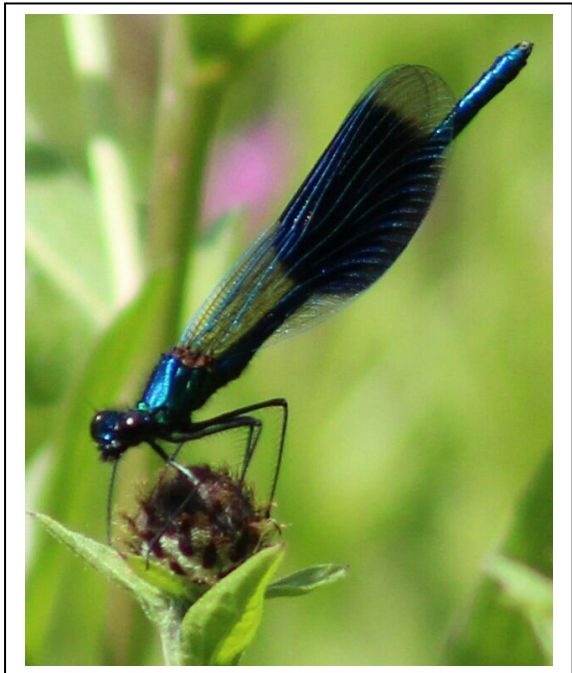


← Migrant Hawker (male) flying on meadow
↓ Southern Hawker (female)



In some cultures, the humble dragonfly represents good luck or prosperity. So, if you see dragonflies, make a wish and it could become true. Also, if you get a dragonfly hovering over you this is another sign of good luck. In other cultures the dragonfly has a spiritual meaning which is the light of God – this means to look within and dance. To a warrior or fighter, a dragonfly tattoo represents power, speed, victory and courage. Put these all together and you get a good representation of a dragonfly.

Dragonflies can hover in one place, fly extremely fast (in some cases over 30 miles per hour) and even fly backwards. All these skills make them one of the most aggressive insect hunters in the world. With nearly 360 degree vision and only one blind spot (directly behind them) this is one reason why dragonflies are able to keep watch on a single insect within a swarm and to go after it while avoiding mid-air collisions with other insects in the swarm.



↑ Large Red Damselfly (female)

← Banded Demoiselle (male)

You will find most of the dragonflies and damselflies in all the meadows, but mainly in the third. Once the wildflowers start to bloom, this encourages the insects to go about their business and you will find the dragonflies out and about patrolling the area too. But on a good sunny day around noon, I've observed (along the outside of the third meadow) a lot of Migrant Hawkers hanging around in the sun. The most I've seen so far in one place is ten, mainly male hawkers with the female being surrounded by them. The damselflies are in and out of the flowers all over the meadows looking for their prey, as you can see in the picture below of the Common Blue Damselfly.

We were lucky last year in lockdown to see one of the dragonfly's main predators, the Hobby Falcon. This fast flying falcon, which is identified by its rusty-red trousers, was flying over the third meadow catching the dragonflies in its talons and then transferring them to its beak and eating them while slowly soaring around in a circle looking for more prey. It's not every day you see this happening. So, while you are enjoying your walk around our beautiful nature reserve, keep an eye out and see what you can spot. Let us know about your wildlife experiences.



↑ Hobby Falcon



↑ Common Blue Damselfly (male)

Should we remove ivy from trees or not? A controversial issue.

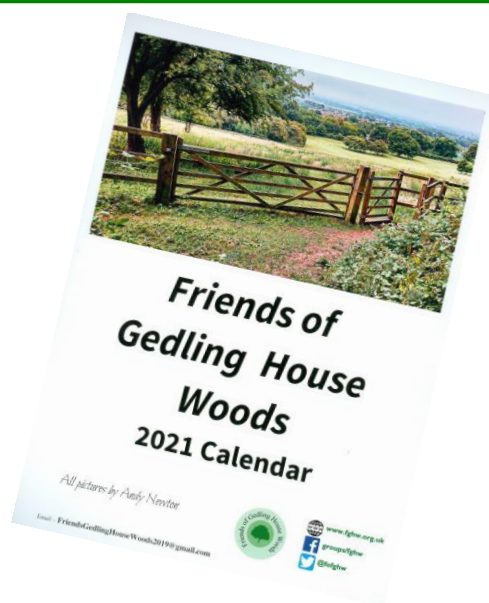
Some people would cut back all the ivy clinging to trees in the woods. If we did that, we would lose a huge amount of cover for birds, small mammals and insect. We would also lose the white flowers that provide late summer nectar and the black berries that provide winter feed for birds. Ideally, we would leave things alone in a nature reserve. Unfortunately, ivy tends to accelerate the decline of aging and diseased mature trees and cause branches and whole trees to fall unexpectedly. FGHW has therefore decided to remove the ivy from the trees along a 5m strip along the Wood Lane boundary to avoid branches falling and damaging property and vehicles. We are decidedly unhappy that someone has sawn through perfectly acceptable mature ivy in many other places in the woods. Please do not remove any more, whoever it was!

Educational visits

The Coronavirus epidemic has again reduced the number of educational visits from our usual schools to zero in the past year. Daisies Day Nursery from Gedling House was able to provide the number of evaluation forms we need to claim our 'higher level' grant, however; for which we thank them. We hope the coming year proves better.

FGHW Calendar 2022

Committee member Andy Newton will again be designing a new calendar in time for Christmas presents this year. Andy's excellent photographs of wildlife in the woods and meadows mean that they are extremely popular. Previous print runs have been snapped up quickly, so please look out for messages about availability.



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)



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

Recent comments from visitors to the woods and meadows

"We have spent lots of time recently in the woods and fields. This note is just to say thanks for the time and work you all put in to maintain the area. It is appreciated. The lane hedge looks really good, too."

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: Prunus cerisifera (cherry plum) at the top of meadow 1, the first tree in the woods to flower in the spring (Mar 2021); late afternoon sun in meadow 2 (Jan 2021); the newly planted hedge adjacent to the Gedling Access Road (Mar 2021); well secured by ropes, a tree climber moves from one stem of a tree being felled on Wood Lane to the another (Mar 2021); not a dragon but a tracked stump grinder (Dec 2020); hawthorn in bud in meadow 2 (Mar 2021); rowan flowers on the newly planted trees at the top of Wood Lane (May 2021).

Photographs by Andy Newton (dragon section on pages 7 and 8) and Frank Knowles (remaining pages).

Here's a challenge for everyone.

In this grid can you find ten birds and ten butterflies that you can find in Gedling Woods and Meadows? Have a look forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonally to find the names and place them in the boxes below. If you don't know any names, checkout the name boxes either side for ideas, but this doesn't mean they are in the grid.

J	P	M	A	N	C	H	N	A	M	M	O	C	N	O	J	P
A	I	G	A	T	E	K	E	E	P	E	R	K	W	L	A	I
M	P	N	I	G	H	T	R	O	N	O	E	A	O	L	M	P
E	L	I	O	D	P	M	W	R	E	P	P	W	R	I	E	L
N	D	B	B	R	E	I	D	E	S	K	E	A	B	A	N	D
O	G	O	R	A	N	G	E	T	I	P	E	D	W	K	O	G
K	R	R	O	Z	T	E	L	G	N	I	R	K	O	M	T	R
S	E	C	W	Z	T	C	I	K	S	I	C	C	D	Y	S	E
M	A	R	N	U	R	E	U	L	B	E	E	A	A	G	M	A
T	H	A	A	B	O	G	S	K	I	B	E	J	E	H	I	T
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B	L	A	C	K	B	I	R	D	E	E	E	Y	H	C	N	M
A	T	D	E	R	B	T	L	U	G	Y	T	A	E	H	S	O

<u>Birds</u>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p>BUZZARD, KESTREL, WOODPIGEON, CROW, JAY, MAGPIE, BLACKBIRD, ROBIN, LONG-TAILED TIT, BLUE TIT, GREAT TIT, COAL TIT, WREN, WAGTAIL, GREEN WOODPECKER, GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER, DUNNOCK, REDWING, SONG THRUSH, TREECREEPER, GOLDFINCH, GREENFINCH, CHAFFINCH, PHEASANT, THRUSH, ROOK, JACKDAW, CHIFFCHAFF.</p> </div> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p>SMALL SKIPPER, LARGE SKIPPER, ORANGE-TIP, SMALL COPPER, SMALL WHITE, LARGE WHITE, COMMON BLUE, HOLLY BLUE, BROWN ARGUS, TORTOISESHELL, RED ADMIRAL, GATEKEEPER, BRIMSTONE, PEACOCK, SPECKLED WOOD, COMMA, MEADOW BROWN, RINGLET, SIX-SPOT BURNET, YELLOW SHELL.</p> </div> </div>	<u>Butterflies</u>
1.....		1.....
2.....		2.....
3.....		3.....
4.....		4.....
5.....		5.....
6.....		6.....
7.....		7.....
8.....		8.....
9.....		9.....
10.....		10.....

Compiled by Andy Newton