

Friends of Gedling House Woods

Annual Report 2022



In this edition . . .

The return of the sheep – late autumn grazing has been reinstated, with a different flock

134 species identified in a 2021 survey – local specialist Peter Smith's survey results

Our own 'pyramid builders' revealed – but on a much smaller scale than the famous ones. . . .



Thanks to our volunteers

Much of the maintenance work we do in the woods and meadows involves a regular small team of committee members who are experienced machine users, some with certificates in the safe use of strimmers. This work involves hedge cutting and clearing woodland paths, edge mowing to stop the hedges spreading into the meadows, and mowing paths to allow visitors to walk in the meadows without getting into the long grass.

Late summer brings a task where we need much more help than this – removing the hay from the meadows that was not picked up by the baling machine, which cannot get under trees and into the corners of the meadows. This is hand raking prior to composting the hay, and in 2021 a new group of supporters helped us with this task. We called upon them again when we cleared some of the woodland areas in the winter, and there were days when we had half a dozen new volunteers working with us. We are very grateful for this seasonal help and will be in touch with those again in the summer. If you are interested in helping us with these two major pieces of work, do let one of the committee members know and we'll keep you informed about dates and times.



Pride of Gedling Awards

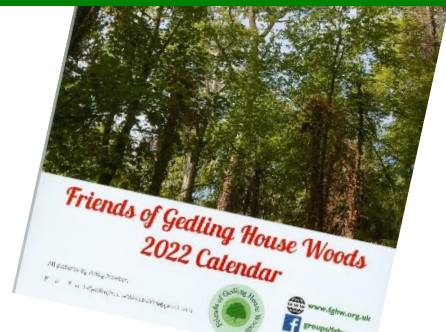
We are sure that members will be pleased to know that our Chair, Frank Knowles, was awarded an individual Environmental Hero Award in the 2021 Pride of Gedling Awards for his work in Gedling House Woods and Meadows. Full details can be found in Gedling's "Contact" magazine, which can be found online at <https://www.gedling.gov.uk/media/gedlingboroughcouncil/documents/contactsmagazine/Contacts%2058%20WEB.pdf>

Meadow and Woodland Survey

Peter Smith, a local naturalist, undertook a wildlife survey in the woods and meadows in August 2021. The results, separated into meadow plants, woodland and hedgerow plants, vertebrates and invertebrates, are available on the FGHW website (www.fghw.org.uk). He found evidence of:

- 13 species of invertebrates
- 35 species of invertebrates
- 26 species of woodland and hedgerow plants
- 60 species of meadow plants.

There is, of course, some cross-over between hedgerow and meadow plants, but we have only listed each once. The list has many surprises. The actual number of species could well be higher than this because not all may have been visible during the survey, or are dominant at different times of the year. We know bluebells and wild garlic, for example, are prominent in the spring, and we have seen other species of butterflies and birds.



FGHW Calendar 2023

This year's calendar looks likely to be highly sought after, as it will contain the winning entries to the photo competition announced on page 8. Andy Newton's excellent photographs of wildlife in the woods and meadows have meant the calendar has been extremely popular for several years. We expect this year to be no exception. Previous print runs have been snapped up quickly, so please look out for messages about availability.

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/>

Clearance work in the woods

Our management plan allows for selective clearance and replanting in the woodland. We are currently looking at replanting two areas in the autumn.

The first is close to the top of meadow 3 where we have removed the trees that supported a large den used in the evenings for activities not related to nature reserves. With the den and trees removed, there is now an open area, just behind the bramble along the path, for planting. We expect to plant some wild cherry, rowan and goat willow in this area in the autumn.



The second area is as you walk up the woodland path from the main meadow gate. On the corner opposite 35 Wood Lane we will clear that area completely and plant some beech and hawthorn in the autumn. Gedling House Woods was originally a beech wood, and we want to re-introduce some beech where older trees have died or are coming to the end of their life.

Planting woodland flowers

We planted a further 1000 bluebells in the woods last autumn, mainly close to the Yew Tree Lane gate. Those from 2020 have come up well, but thinly of course at it will take 5 to 10 years for them to develop into the carpet of bluebells we find elsewhere in the woods. We also moved around 2000 snowdrops from the bank opposite 29 Wood Lane to the triangle enclosure close to the main meadow gate to provide more interest there in the winter. The cyclamen we moved in 2020 have taken well and are now spreading in their new locations.



Did you know that snowdrops do not need deep and nutritious soil to grow well? We found some successfully growing in leaf mould a few millimetres deep on top of an old paving slab close to the entrance – they were in flower and thriving.

Other maintenance work in the woods this year

- The annual tree check to remove dead, dying, diseased or dangerous trees
- Removal of more variegated yellow archangel from the hedgerow and woodland path along Wood Lane (an invasive species prohibited outside gardens)

The last year in the meadows

The variety of wildflowers in the meadows continues to change annually. The yellow rattle we sowed among the anthills in meadow 3 was thinly spread in its first year but it now covers the



area well. Additionally, the wind has taken the seed down-wind in to meadow 2, where there is much more coverage than previously. An annual plant, yellow rattle is semi-parasitic, and feeds on the

roots. It is important as it reduces the dominance of grass and allows light and space for wild flowers to develop.



Meadow hedges

For several years we have cleared out the hedge bottoms inside the double fences along Military Road and between meadows 1 and 2. To increase the amount of hedge foliage for wildlife on these now well-established hedges, we changed our approach to cutting them in the autumn of 2021 and now maintain growth out to the fences on each side. This makes it easier for the tractor hedge-cutting we have done each year, but means we need to be a little more ruthless in cutting the lower hedge back to the fence line. The hedges were also cut about 300mm higher than previously, and we may increase their height again this year.

Sheep

After a year in which we just could not find any sheep to graze the meadow, we had to get retrospective permission from the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) not to graze as an exception in 2020. Good fortune, however, brought success in this area in 2021. We managed to find a local farmer who was pleased to use the meadow for grazing for two months from early November. We had 63 sheep in 2021, mainly Swaledale crossed with Leicester (in sheep farming known as North of England or North Country mules). We usually start them in meadows 2 and 3 for five weeks, finishing off with three weeks in meadow 1. Transferring them from one meadow to the other is a new skill we are expecting to practice annually.





Other maintenance work in the meadows this year

- Regular path mowing and brushcutting round meadow edges to prevent invasion by hedgerow species
- Further crown lifting of the meadow trees to allow air and light under the canopy and avoid the build up of brambles and nettles (last done about 5 years ago)
- Annual mowing, baling and removal of hay – 57 large square bales in 2021.

Gedling Access Road

Boundary issues

The development of the Gedling Access Road, now known as Colliery Way, along the boundary with the woods is almost complete. Significant planting has taken place to mitigate, in the long term, the impact of the new road. The difference in just over a year is great, with the hedge, and particularly the holly and the hawthorn, noticeably bigger this year than last, as the photos show.

Some taller fencing has to been installed at the lowest, southern end of the new fence to prevent any access to the woods over the post and rail fence, but this has not stopped someone making regular journeys between the GAR and the woods. We are in discussion with VIA East Midlands about this issue. The northern end awaits completion.



It was not possible to install the protective badger fencing on the post and rail fence shown in the picture as planned. Many tree roots meant it was just not feasible to dig down the 300 mm needed to set the fence into the ground. The badger fence is now separate from the boundary fence and is along the top of the embankment on the road side of the wood's boundary. We are currently working with VIA East Midlands to decide how best to prevent people and dogs from straying over the boundary, both for their own safety and to protect the newly planted hedge and trees.

The Pyramids of Gedling House Woods

Who are we talking about?



Well, that would be the Yellow Meadow Ant, also known as the Yellow Hill Ant. Their dome-shaped nests can be found in the bottom of the third meadow.



Each colony is ruled over by multiple Queens, who are about 7-9mm long. There are also male ants, which are about 3-4mm long, and then around 250,000 worker ants that are about 2-4mm long. The worker ants are the main builders of the hill. They do this by removing the soil below ground from all the tunnels and nesting chambers. The worker ants then work hard to deposit all the soil above ground to form the dome mound. The soil dome is also there to help regulate temperature and humidity in the nest, which is located nearly a metre below



ground. This helps protect the ants from attacks on the nest - normally they would withdraw down to a lower chamber in the nest and simply barricade their tunnels to fight off invaders. If they have to defend themselves they will bite their predator's skin and then squirt a little formic acid from their abdomen into the wound, causing considerable pain to its victim. The ants spend most of their life underground feeding on honeydew, which is produced by root aphids that breed in their nests. During the winter months the aphids themselves are sometimes eaten, as the ants don't always leave the nest.

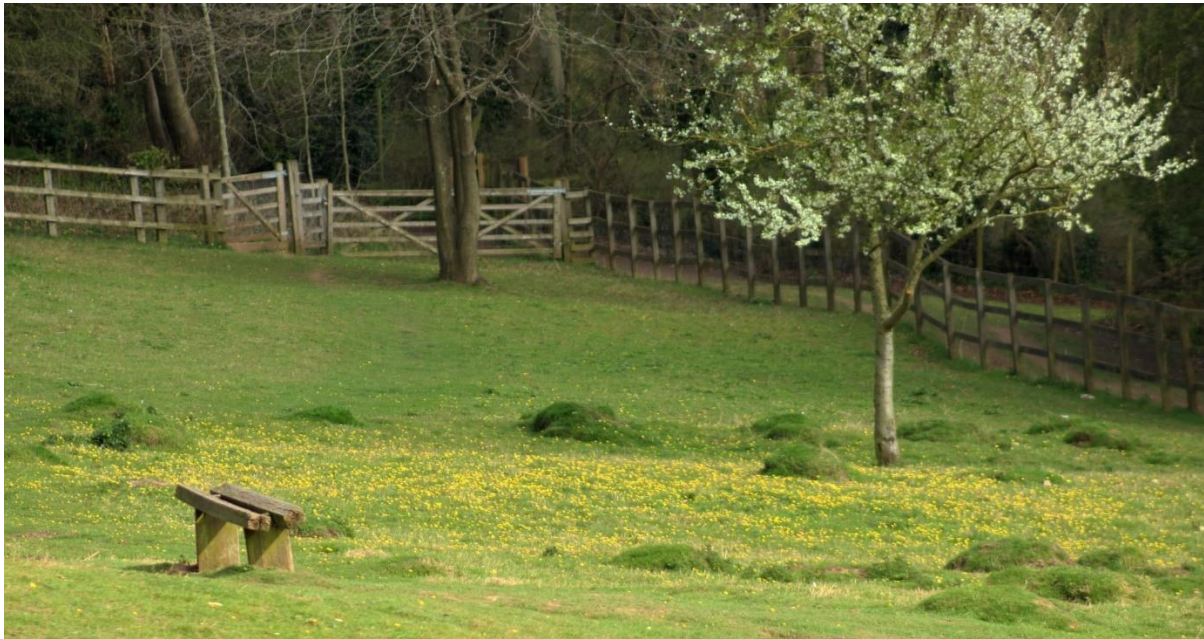


Like all ants, the Yellow Meadow Ants are social and active, with the working ants mainly underground and not often seen unless the nest is disturbed. The workers will then open up the nest entrances and then herd out all the young winged adults who pair up and can be seen out and about mating on warm sunny days and evenings in July and August. This in turn leads to some females leaving the nests to form new colonies.





The Yellow Ant has a close relationship with the Chalkhill Blue Butterfly. The ants protect the larvae of the butterfly and in return they get a sugary substance that is secreted by them. All in all, the Yellow Meadow Ants keep themselves to themselves and live a happy life underground. So, when you wander about the meadows, watch where you are walking and don't disturb the anthills. Remember thousands of ants are working hard to maintain the colony and look after the multiple Queens. Now you wouldn't want to upset the Queen, would you?



Membership news

We have decided to keep the same subscription rates for the coming year (£3 individual and £5 family). We have also introduced a new group membership, with a subscription of at least £10. Several groups have already signed up for this option, and we welcome the diversity in membership this brings.

Members will have been sad to hear that Carol Whiteley, the committee member responsible for membership and communication, has decided to leave the committee. We are tremendously grateful to Carol for holding the group together over the many years she has taken on this role. We will, I'm sure, see her about in the woods and meadows in the future.

Work pressures mean that we also say goodbye to Nikita Ward, who has proved invaluable in minuting our committee meetings and keeping the agendas on the straight and narrow. We have valued the quality minutes she provided for us.

This leaves two important roles on the committee unfilled at present. We hope that we can find two people willing to join the committee and able to take on these positions.

Noticeboard and signs

We have invested in a lockable noticeboard for the main gate to keep semi-permanent notices clean and dry. This is working well, and we may consider a second at the Yew Tree Lane entrance in future. Our original sign at that entrance blew down in the wind recently. Put up in about 2003, it has served its time and we now intend to design two signs to indicate what lies beyond the gates at both entrances. We hope to install them over the summer, after approval by Gedling Borough Council.

Calendar photo competition

Andy Newton, a member of the FGHW committee, introduces a competition to find photographs for the 2023 FGHW calendar.

I've often been told what wonderful photos I have taken over the years, so I began to produce the FGHW calendar each year to share them. I'm an amateur photographer who goes out each day to log what I see. Over the last few years I've taken over five thousand pictures of the wildlife and wildflowers from Gedling House Woods and Meadows. Not all my pictures are good, mind you, and I've seen some amazing photos from other members. So, for the next calendar for 2023, we're setting up a competition to share the best of what other members of FGHW have seen over the years in the woods and meadows.

There will be three age groups: under 16, 16-50 and over 50. We also ask that your pictures reflect a seasonal theme of winter, spring, summer and autumn.

The rules are:

- the picture must come from Gedling House Woods and Meadows
- no dogs or members of the public should be included in the picture – just the wildlife and plantlife you have seen
- the picture must be submitted as in .jpg format.

Submit your pictures by email with your name, age group, the date the picture was taken and what season you think your picture depicts best (if you can't decide, put "all seasons") to: friendsgedlinghousewoods2019@gmail.com

All pictures must be in by 31st August 2022 and the winners will be notified by the end of September 2022. We will then produce the 2023 calendar.

So, have a look at your old photos, or just go out and take a picture of what you see in the woods and meadows tomorrow. We look forward to seeing all of your entries. Get snapping and good luck!

Recent vandalism

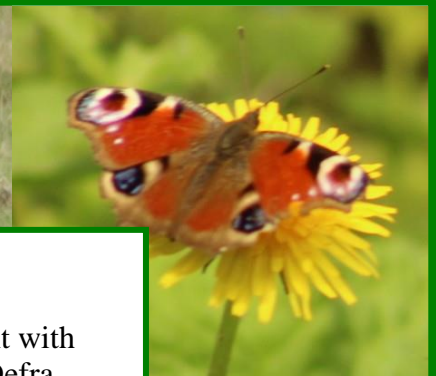
We installed a blue rope fence along the length of the GAR boundary to deter visitors from getting into the newly planted area, and have included a post and wire fence at the bottom of the fence line, in the southern corner, to reinforce this message. The blue rope fence lasted over a year without significant damage but, in April 2022, someone decided to cut the rope lines along their entire length, thus leaving no marked boundary. This was followed after about a fortnight by removal of all the posts holding the rope. We then spent a lot of time reinstating the fence so that visitors would avoid straying into the newly planted areas. Within two days, the ropes were cut again, in exactly the same way, rendering the work wasted. This is now with the police as a potential case of criminal damage, but with little hope of finding the culprit. If any members have any information, do let us know, please.





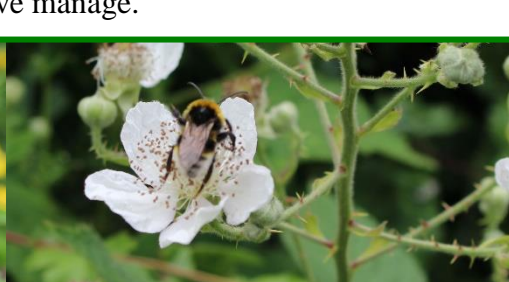
Fires

We do not permit fires in the wood or meadows, but some visitors have other ideas. Do let us know if you have any information about the group of young people who have repeatedly set fire to the large log seat in the glade. It now has a big hole burnt right through the log. There were five separate fires in May, and two of them required the assistance of the Fire and Rescue Service to extinguish them. We believe the fire-raisers are school students on the way home from school, but we have no further details, and promised photos or videos have not been forthcoming. We are currently working with Gedling Borough Council to introduce new by-laws for Gedling House Woods and Meadows and will, of course, keep members informed of developments in these areas.



The future of the woods and meadows

You may well be aware that our licence agreement with Gedling Borough Council and our contract with Defra (through Natural England) both come to an end at the end of 2024. The details of Defra's new Environmental Land Management scheme are not yet known and so we cannot be sure of our eligibility for grant funding from Defra. Gedling Borough Council has indicated that they expect to go forward with a new licence when ours ends, with details to be determined in due course. We see this as a very positive statement about our stewardship of the two nature reserves we manage.



Wildlife and dogs

The Covid pandemic saw a considerable increase in visitor numbers to the woods and meadows, which we welcome, and this has largely been sustained. Many of our visitors use the woods and meadows to walk their dogs, often letting them off leads because of the secure, sheep-proof (and therefore secure for most dogs) meadows. Similar increases have been noted around the world and some naturalists have begun to research the impact of the presence of dogs on wildlife numbers. Studies in Ecuador, the UK and Belgium, highlighted in an article in New Scientist at the end of April, all show reductions in wildlife as dog numbers increase. A range of measures have been introduced in various places in the UK. Nottingham City Council, for example, requires dogs to be on leads in nature reserves. Elsewhere in the UK, zoning is used in some larger reserves, with areas designated for “no dogs”, “dogs on a lead April to August” and “dogs off leads”. Our goal is to work positively with everyone who visits the woods and meadows, with or without dogs, to keep wildlife safe.

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)

Recent comments from visitors to the woods and meadows

“The verges on the lane are looking so much better now” – local resident

“The meadows are looking so well-kept now. Thank you!” – local dog walker

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.

Photograph acknowledgements

All photographs by Andy Newton (AN) or Frank Knowles (FK)

Front page (clockwise spiral from top left): sheep arriving in November 2021 (FK); anthills at the bottom of meadow 3 in 2021 (FK); fungus, species unknown, on a log in the glade in March 2022 (FK); a grey squirrel in the glade in March 2022 (AN); daffodils at the main meadow entrance in Wood Lane in March 2022 (FK).

Page 3: cleared woodland area to the north east of meadow 3 in April 2022 (AN) and snowdrops about to be transplanted in January 2022 (FK)

Page 4: two photos of yellow rattle in June 2022 (FK); sheep in December 2021 (AN)

Page 5: sheep in December 2021 (AN) and two shots of the new boundary with the Gedling Access Road in March 2021 and June 2022 (FK)

Page 6: two photos of anthills in meadow 3 December 2019 (FK)

Page 7: anthills in meadow 3 in April 2022 (AN)

Page 8: blue rope fence along the Gedling Access Road boundary cut in May 2022 (AN)

Page 9: three photos of the fire service and fire damage to the log seat in May 2022 (FK); then, clockwise from the top left corner in the main block: jay in the woods in June 2022 (AN); sheep in December 2021 (AN); peacock butterfly in August 2021 (AN) yellow rattle in June 2022 (FK); white rose in June 2022 (FK); bramble flower with bee in June 2022 (FK); meadow cranesbill in June 2022 (FK); pink rose in June 2022 (FK)