

Sadlers Wells **Community** **Woodland**

Registered Charity Number 1105117



Newsletter No. 18 – Spring 2015

Recent News

1. Those of you who have been down to the Wood recently will have noticed that we have started the thinning of the new plantation. The work was kindly done for us by Dan Hinde of Monkey Business and mainly concentrated on an area of Ash which has grown quite vigorously since it was planted. The oaks on the other hand have grown much more slowly and will not need attention for some time. Other areas will have to be thinned over the next few years as part of an ongoing programme.

2. The repairs to the fence on the southerly boundary have been carried out by Paul Griffiths and thicker posts and stays have been used to provide greater resistance to damage by the cattle in the adjoining field.

3. Dan Hinde has been asked to carry out a tree survey for us so that we will have a formal survey available on record of any trees which we may need to keep an eye on. An up to date survey will normally be required every few years with intermediate professional checks every six months or so, in addition to the regular monthly checks which we carry out to look for any potential problems. If anyone spots a tree which looks as if it might need attention, please notify Bob Harris or myself.

4. We were fortunate that we did not lose any trees through windblow during the winter but there is an old cherry showing signs of decay which may have to be removed.

Meet the Trustees **No. 10 – Ron Pulford**



Ron is a native of Withington, Greater Manchester and had a varied career. After leaving School, he joined the Royal Navy and trained in radio and electrical engineering becoming responsible for keeping the planes of the Fleet Air Arm flying. He also found time to be a member of a rock group playing rhythm guitar. He had various home postings and saw service at sea with the aircraft carriers Centaur and Hermes. In 1970 he left the Navy and joined the Manchester & Salford (later Greater Manchester) Police starting as a humble PC but progressing through the ranks into the CID, the Regional Crime Squad and eventually achieving the rank of Detective Chief Inspector. He ‘retired’ from the Police in 2000 after 30 years service and set up a security consultancy. One of his commissions was for Bentley and having done a security review for them, he was made an offer that he could not refuse to become their Head of Security which he accepted; he remained there until 2010 when he ‘retired’ again and took up seriously his interest in photography and, having taken various courses, became a Licentiate of The Royal Photographic Society.

Ron and his wife, Elizabeth, moved to Bunbury a few years ago to be nearer to their daughter Debbie and save on travelling time when doing baby-sitting duties. They also have a son, Simon, who lives in Chester whose hobby is restoring military aircraft cockpits.

Ron assists with the restoration using his vintage skills in aircraft maintenance. You will recall that Simon brought one of the cockpits to Village Day last year.

Ron became a trustee of the Wood some eighteen months ago and became Chairman of Bunbury Parish Council a year ago, having been Vice- Chairman for a year before that.

Chairman's Notes

We shall be having a stall as usual on **Village Day** and also intend to have the usual free quiz (this year's subject yet to be decided) to test identification skills in a gentle manner, but the prize is a bottle of wine which will go the person whose ticket is drawn out of those who provided all the correct answers. There will be a separate quiz and prize for juniors. The stall is a good opportunity to make our presence known and to meet existing Friends of the Wood and also hopefully to recruit some new ones. Do come and pay us a visit.

Spring is in the air

The arrival of spring means that some creatures are waking up from a long sleep; those that cannot fly away to sunnier climes for the winter must take other steps to avoid winter where the problem may be a lack of food more than the cold temperatures. The answer for many is to hibernate when an animal reduces its needs for food and energy by reducing its heartbeat, breathing and metabolic rate by as much as 90% in some cases. In the UK the mammal hibernators are hedgehogs, dormice and bats. The heartbeat of a hedgehog can fall from 190 to just 20 beats per minute; it takes a breath only every few minutes and its body temperature drops to around a third of normal. Some Arctic marmots and ground squirrels can hibernate for up to eight months each winter.

Amphibians, such as frogs, toads and newts, also hibernate and can absorb oxygen through their skin allowing some to hibernate at the bottom of ponds. This is risky if the water freezes completely but the Wood Frog of North America produces a glucose

compound that acts as an anti-freeze allowing it to survive being frozen solid. Some butterflies and other insects also hibernate but hibernation always carries the risk that some of those hibernating never make it through the winter.

Another of man's best friends

They have no eyes, ears or lungs and no heart as such but up to five pairs (depending on the species) of what are called aortic arches. They can consume up to a third of their body weight each day and provide food in turn for a large number of creatures, and humans depend on them because, if they were not around, the fertility of the land would be greatly reduced. They are of course earthworms, a lowly but vital part of the creatures that live on our planet.

They breathe through their skin and need to keep this moist; they must therefore avoid bright sunlight which dries them out but equally they can drown if the soil becomes flooded because the water stops them breathing. They move on bristles attached to the lower part of the annular segments of their bodies.

An earthworm exists to digest and reproduce. They are hermaphrodites possessing both male and female organs but need to mate with another to produce up to 200 offspring each year. They are prime recyclers eating decaying vegetation, leaves and even animal casualties which can be dragged down into the earth and having been eaten the droppings of a single worm can provide up to 10lbs of nutrient rich soil each year. Tons of earth and minerals are brought up to the surface improving the fertility and structure of the soil. Their tunnels through the ground also increase fertility by providing aeration of the soil and drainage. Aristotle described them as “ the intestines of the soil” and the naturalist, Gilbert White, wrote in 1757 that “ the earth without worms would soon become cold, hard-bound and void of fermentation and consequently sterile.” Their value has therefore been appreciated for a long time.

Opinions seem to differ over some of the facts relating to their existence. One source says that they have been around 150 million

years and another puts it at around half a billion. One source says that there are around 3000 different species of earthworm worldwide and another puts it at nearly double that. The smallest are only about an inch in length and the largest is reckoned to be the Great Gippsland Worm which sounds like something from science fiction but is actually from South Eastern Australia; it can measure up to ten feet long fully extended. It lives in wet, marshy ground and it is apparently possible to hear it squelching its way underground if you are in the right place at the right time. There is also mention of a dead worm being found in South Africa in 1967 which measured 21 or 22 feet in length depending on which report is read. Presumably no one has identified which species this dead worm belonged to as the sources all consider the Great Gippsland Worm the largest.

Earthworms themselves provide food for many creatures, from birds such as blackbirds, robins and buzzards to toads, frogs, snakes, moles, foxes, bears and badgers as well as slugs, snails and beetles. They are 82% protein with a high content of Omega 3 oil. Worms are however very plentiful; it is calculated that an area the size of a football field can contain between 250,000 and 2,000,000 depending on the soil quality. This means that the weight of worms underneath the surface can weigh together more than the animals grazing above.

Like many other things in earlier times, worms were used for medicinal purposes. They were first dried and powdered and then mixed with other ingredients to supposedly cure a wide range of maladies. Added to marigold juice, it would cure epilepsy and with comfrey juice, incontinence; with honey and alum, it was thought to heal wounds and with mead dropsy. Other combinations cured jaundice, stone or bladder ailments, digestion problems and earache, and if you carried one in your mouth, it could cure toothache. As usual, we do not recommend that you try these remedies!

The World Worm Charming Championships have been held at Willaston near Nantwich since 1980 starting out as a fund raising event in the local school fete. Each contestant is allocated an area three metres square and the object is to bring as many worms to the surface as possible in the thirty minutes allowed. The use of

digging, chemicals and other liquids (including water) are banned and the usual methods are vibrating the tines of a fork in the ground, dancing or playing music. The rules are taken seriously and have already been translated into over thirty different languages. A total of 511 worms was recorded in 1980 and this record stood until 2009 when a magnificent 567 were charmed from the ground. The television presenter, Ben Fogle, entered one year using a tin whistle but only managed a measly seven! Contestants are allowed one assistant to scoop up the worms as they come to the surface.

The final word goes to Charles Darwin who wrote in 1871 that:-

“It may be doubted whether there are many other animals that have played so important a part in the history of the world, as have these lowly organised creatures.”

Friends of the Wood

The annual subscription is a minimum of £5-00 each and the 2015/16 subscription became due on 1st April. The wood produces no income itself and we therefore have to raise all the money needed to pay for insurance, maintenance, etc. Your subscriptions are therefore very valuable to us, not only in themselves but also because they show a commitment from the local community which is a great help when we approach funding organisations for any grants available to enable the Trust to carry out its work. Please treat this newsletter as the usual request for payment and an early response would be greatly appreciated. Payment can be made with the slip at the end of this Newsletter either to Michael Bourne or Bob Harris whose details are given below; cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland. Gift Aid is a valuable source of income and we would appreciate subscriptions being gift aided if you are able to do so and have not already done it. The amount of Gift Aid on a single subscription is only small but the total amount we get each year is significant.

And finally

If anyone has any comments or queries regarding this Newsletter or the wood generally, please write or e-mail our Chairman, Michael Bourne. We would appreciate response from members to let us know whether we are heading in the right direction. As mentioned in previous newsletters, if you see anything unusual or interesting in the wood, please let us know by telephone or e-mail as we would like to make a record.

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Trustees of the Charity Michael Bourne (Chairman), Bob Harris (Vice- Chairman), Alyson Thacker, Dr Katherine Hutchinson, Andy Fairclough, Ron Pulford and Peter Tonge.

Friends of Sadlers Wells Wood -- Subscription 2015/16

Name(s)

Amount (min. £5 per person)

Cheques should be made payable to Sadlers Wells Community Woodland.