



Friends of Ashenground and Bolnore Woods

Conservation – Protection – Enhancement – Enjoyment

Moving Woodlands

It's not only in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that woods move!* If you stand on the bridge in the centre of Bolnore, facing the Thatched Cottage, you are standing above a linked series of ponds which form the boundary between Catts Wood to your left and behind you, and Bolnore Wood to its north.



Map Bolnore and Catts Wood – Stuart Meier

Both these small woods have interesting histories, but let's start with Bolnore Wood. This is ancient woodland, yet most of the trees are young "modern" trees. Of course, it is entirely normal for ancient woodland to contain young trees, after all very few trees are 400 years old, and all ancient woodland is *at least* that old.

Bounded on the west by Bolnore Village, and the "Relief" road to the west, Bolnore Wood was (like much of the area) devastated by the 1987 "Great gale". It was subsequently replanted with oak "whips" now small trees, which are intermingled with birch trees self-set amongst them. That was long before Bolnore Village, in the days when landowners still practiced extensive woodland management, growing trees for their long-term economic values. Days sadly now passed!

Turning now to Catts Wood...

It is Catts Wood - or the name at least - that has moved along with Ashenground Wood. Only a hundred years ago, Ashenground, east of the railway, itself was a wood - called Ashenground Wood, of course. What we now call Ashenground Wood used to be called Catts Wood, but that name is now used for the chestnut coppice woodland - which was once part of Eleven Acre Wood.

The chestnut coppice probably dates from Victorian times, and the low diversity of ground flora suggests the soils were once heavily disturbed, possibly during use as a field, with the use of agricultural chemicals such as lime or even herbicides.

In an attempt to improve biodiversity, a special project (initiated by FOABW) translocated the more biodiverse topsoils from the school construction site to Catts Wood. The benefit of the project can only be assessed in the very long term, so let's see how it is in another ten years' time!



Regenerating chestnut coppice in Catts Wood.
Note the habitat pile of old cut 'poles' S. Meier

But what of that line of ponds...the supposed "marlpits". Well the geology shows that the pits never contained marl (a limy soil), but rather hard stone. They were probably dug long ago, possibly in the 16th or 17th century. The stone might have been used for building (think of stone buildings like Great Haywards), for agriculture work, or even for iron making.

The stone is iron-containing ('ferruginous') and in the 16th-17th century, a very active iron making industry was spread across the High Weald, Bolnore lying on its southern fringe. The nearest iron furnace was south of Cuckfield, so not that far for a horse drawn cart even loaded with stone.

So the next time you cross the bridge over the 'marlpits', pay homage to the people who created them long ago!

* See *Macbeth Act 5, Scene 5. (Text and photos by Stuart Meier)*

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears – and your photos!

We would love to receive photo contributions from children and adults who visit the woods. If you spot a wildflower, favourite tree or other wildlife you find interesting and would like to share it, send in your photo (children please ask your parent's permission), in turn, we would love to share it with the FoABW community. To share your photos:

Email: lorrainemaynard04@gmail.com for Facebook: @FoABW and Instagram: @foabwsussex

Spring flowers make the most of the sunlight that reaches the woodland floor, before the budding leaves on the trees begin to shade the ground. From the first early primroses, snowdrops and daffodils, followed by the deep yellow lesser celandine and the delicate, white, star-shaped wood anemone (an ancient woodland indicator plant), the woodland floor is dappled with yellow and cream colours as well as the lilac crocuses and deep purple violets.



Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)



Daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*)
in bud



Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*)



Crocus (*Crocus tommasinianus*)



Violet (*Viola odorata*)



Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) in bud



Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)



Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*)

The return each year of these woodland flowers is an important part of the woodland habitat.



English Bluebells (Hyacinthoides non-scripta)

In April and early May the bluebells open up, with their serene violet-blue flowers, not only beautiful to see, if it is warm you will be able to smell a sweet scent and like the wood anemones they provide a great food source for bees.

Here you can see these bluebell flowers appear cylindrical and their tips curl up backwards (revolute) while their anthers are cream or yellow. In comparison, Spanish bluebells have blue anthers and the flower tips do not curl backwards, they are also spread openly around their flower stalk while native bluebells usually droop down to one side. Spanish bluebells also have a weak scent, so you probably won't smell their perfume.

Ancient woodland flowers are part of a precious habitat that has been in rapid decline in the UK, in fact only 2.5% of our ancient woodlands remain. **Please take care while you walk around the woods, keep to the main, well-worn paths this will protect the vulnerable flower stems from being trampled upon.** (Photos by Michelle Thomasson)

Why do the conservation volunteers still coppice?

You may have seen the volunteers coppicing in the first two months of this year on the regular Saturday sessions. Originally, woodland was coppiced to produce a fast-growing, reliable supply of timber for poles, stakes and wood crafted products, also as a fuel source for iron smelting (Wealden geology consists of clays and sands that provided the iron ore). Today, woods are coppiced not only to provide a reliable source of timber, especially from Hornbeam, Hazel and Sweet Chestnut trees, but to also allow sunlight to reach across the woodland floor and help woodland plants flourish, enriching this precious habitat's biodiversity.



January and February volunteer sessions this year, in Ashenground Wood near the village school, here the volunteers are busy coppicing.



Path edge before coppiced wood is laid



After edging the path with coppicing

Partrick Burke in the photo above is explaining the techniques of how and why we coppice. We laid the coppicing along the path edge to encourage people to keep to the main paths thereby protecting the wildflowers.

Most recent past event - 21ST Jan 2024

A free 2-hour woodland art class was led by Laura from Mindfull Art Sussex, easels, equipment, acrylic paint, brushes and an A4 canvas were provided on the day. Equipment was returned for the next quarterly session, but attendees happily took their artwork home.



Art Classes for 2024. Laura will lead seasonally themed art classes throughout the year, all free to attend, please note, adults only. **All classes begin 12.30 to 14.30pm**

Sunday 7th April – Spring theme

Sunday 23rd June - Summer theme

Sunday 1st September - Autumn theme

More information please contact: Laurafoabw@gmail.com



Other events for 2024

AGM 15:00 Sunday, 17th March 2024 - Ashenground Community Centre, Southdown Close, Haywards Heath, RH16 4JR
Bug Hunt in July, with local rangers, date to be confirmed.

Bat Hunt in early September, Sussex Bat Conservation Group, date to be confirmed, evening event, please bring a torch!

Fungi Hunt Saturday 7th September, 10am - 11.30am with Daniel Greenwood (London Wildlife Trust).

Details for each event will be posted on the noticeboards and social media accounts as soon as times are confirmed.

Hazel Dormouse survey in the woods



Survey tunnel, charcoal to make ink, mammal track guide

Ancient woodland offers an ideal habitat for dormice to eat, sleep, rest and play. They hibernate from October to April, then as spring gets underway they will forage nocturnally in glades, coppiced areas and hedgerows in the woods. Although they are protected in the UK, sadly their decline continues, a recent study by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) found that they have disappeared from 20 counties in England, with the South East as one of the few areas where they are still to be found. In the spring, volunteers are going to place a number of survey tunnels with ink in each entrance, so that if any small mammal passes through, their paw tracks will be marked. Little dormice feet are only 7-10mm in length, we hope to see their tracks, more information in the next newsletter.

The Conservation Volunteers meet at 10.00 am, 3rd Saturday of each month, at the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village, where the Bridle Way crosses the road called Renfields, members and non-members are very welcome, but please note under 18s and vulnerable adults must be accompanied by an adult.

If you would like to become a member of FoABW and support our conservation activities, please contact Laura (Treasurer) email: laurafoabw@gmail.com

Membership is only £5 per year, per family. Every membership helps us to continue to run all of our events for free and helps restock or repair conservation tools (we receive no council funding).