



July - December 2020

A Message from the Chairman (David Briggs)



Hello to all members and friends.

We still find ourselves in somewhat difficult times with the threat of Covid 19 very much with us all. The sad thing is many of us have experienced the effects of this pandemic in different ways.

Within the woodland community it has been a different way of life but we had been able to trial work in small groups during the latter part of Lockdown 1. Having come out of Lockdown 1 we were then able to work in individual groups of up to 6 people to try and bring some order to the main wood and Moore's Lane.

There was a long drought which took its toll on many of the mature sycamores and 20 or so have died and have either already been felled, or will be in the near future. If you look carefully at the trees you will see that they are now dead and the bark has a sooty fungus on them. This is "Sooty Bark" disease.

The Bird Boxes were inspected & cleaned and either repaired or replaced.



Thanks to Mark for doing an expert job in record time. The results can be viewed on our web site.



The meadows and wild flower areas were cut and the spoils were cleared. After the severe storms in late summer there were several trees that split and had to be made safe, together with the felled sycamores. The trunks have been left for path edging. This will have to wait now until we can resume work parties once again.

We now find ourselves in Lockdown 2.

We hope for this to be lifted in early December.

However, a few of us have been able to do a little over the first few weeks of this by taking exercise and chipping the wood paths. About 40 tons have been distributed around many of the paths in readiness for the winter months.

Projects have had to be put on hold for the time being and will only commence when Government restrictions allow. That said, the sleepers that will be required for the board walk project are ready to be delivered and should arrive in early December.

The wood is very busy with people and families taking walks and exercising regularly. The footfall has dramatically increased over the last few months. We are pleased to see this and it shows that our work over the 20 or so years is much appreciated. There is an increase in litter and we respectfully ask if you all can take your litter home or please use the bin provided (outside the main gate).

A Merry Christmas and a better Happy New Year to you all.



Events. Rosemary Briggs.

In previous years, by this time you may have ordered a calendar from GWCP. Unfortunately we have not been able to have one assembled and printed this year. But hopefully it should be back for 2022.

As you will by now have realised all of our arranged trips and holidays are on hold.

Some may be rearranged for 2021. The holiday to the Lake District scheduled for May 2021 is yet to be decided. But as there may be several restrictions I think it will be a different holiday should it go ahead. We should have news during January 2021.

What to look out for - by Janet Field

“Biological diversity or Biodiversity as it has become known, a term first used in the 1980s and more regularly since the Rio Earth summit in 1992. Basically it involves noting all species of animals, birds, plants, trees, insects, micro-organisms and those in the aquatic environment.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (ICUN), lists creatures under threat in its Red List of threatened species. As an example insect numbers are declining rapidly. Since 1970 the average loss in the animal population worldwide is roughly 50% according to the WWF.

Closer to home in Gunton Wood we keep an area fenced off, known as Wildwood, which is left completely undisturbed.

We are not allowed to burn any rubbish on site so our hedge cuttings, leaves and fallen branches are put onto habitat piles, thereby giving homes and nesting sites to creatures living in the wood. Any trees damaged by storms and requiring felling for safety reasons are used for path edging. This then becomes important habitats for beetles, wood lice, centipedes, fungi etc. who all combine to return tree nutrients to the soil. So we like to feel we are doing our own small bit for nature as well as the large organisations mentioned above.”

Nature Notes *Magic Mushrooms? or Mind-bending Killers?* (Barry Shimmield)

For hundreds of years, humans have known that ‘magic mushrooms’ can cause hallucinations and ecstatic states and, more recently, the artificially made drug LSD uses the same chemical as is found in some mushroom species as its active ingredient. This ability of fungi to invade the brain of its host reveals a fascinating glimpse into one of Nature’s darker secrets. It is in fact more like a horror story.

The Carpenter Ant is not very common in the UK but colonies can be found all over the world usually in dead, damp wood. Frequently present in this same environment is a fungus called *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*. This ‘zombie fungi’ attacks by stripping the ant of its natural fear of heights, causing the ant to leave its nest and climb the nearest plant. The fungus then forces the ant to fasten its jaws around the plant leaf in a vice-like grip from which it cannot release. This enables the fungus to slowly digest the ant’s body until it sprouts a stalk out of its head from which spores rain down on ants passing below, thus propagating the fungal species.

Even more remarkable is the fact that virtually all the infected ants clamp the leaf on a major vein and exactly at noon, to give the best conditions for the fungus to fruit. Such is the strength of the fungus’ ability to manipulate the ant’s brain. Amazing.



Ophiocordyceps sprouting from an ant

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