



IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...



Happy New Year! And welcome to the winter edition of Durham Wildlife Trust's Wild Woods Project Newsletter.

News

Flass Vale Win Northern Green Networks Award

The Friends of Flass Vale have been awarded £2740 by the Northern Gas Green Awards to manage Flass Vale Nature Reserve. The Friends will use the award to employ contractors to work with the task force through the winter and into next summer and will focus on trying to eliminate Himalayan balsam! Throughout the summer, John Burn, an entomologist, volunteered to sample the bees and wasps in The Vale and identified 104 species. John will now advise on how to manage parts of the wood to support these populations. Volunteering on a nature reserve is a great way to experience wildlife, keep fit, learn new skills and meet new friends. If

you would like to get involved with any of the work in Flass Vale, please contact the Friends of Flass Vale, vale@fofv.org.uk



Ponds Bid Successful

Durham Biodiversity Partnership has announced that a bid to SITA Trust, which supports community and environmental projects through the Landfill Communities Fund, has been successful. The project to create ponds throughout Durham, Darlington, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Tyne & Wear will commence in January 2012.

*Adult southern hawker
dragonfly (Aeshna cyanea).*
www.northeastwildlife.co.uk



Fran Mudd, Wild Woods Project Officer: fmudd@durhamwt.co.uk (0191) 584 3112



As part of the project, two ponds will be created in Milkwellburn Wood, and a third reinstated.

Aside from the obvious benefits to amphibian populations, ponds support a huge variety of invertebrates; pond-skaters, water beetles, pond snails and many other species too small to be seen with the naked eye. A number of species of dragonfly and damselfly also spend most of their life cycle living in ponds –

some species can spend several years as an aquatic (quite ugly looking!) larva, before emerging to spend only a few months as an iridescent flying adult. The larvae need shallow, sheltered water and submerged plants as cover and hunting habitat, but will need taller vegetation to crawl up when they emerge as adults. The ponds will be allowed to vegetate naturally from the locally adapted seed source, allowing the process of natural succession to produce a biodiverse habitat. Eggs and larvae of amphibians and invertebrates are predated by fish so the ponds will not be near existing streams so as to prevent fish from entering.



Southern hawker larvae live in ponds for up to 4-5 years before emerging as adults.

Training Days

Fungi

In September, the North Eastern Fungus Study Group kindly offered to survey Milkwellburn Wood and record any fungi found. This was followed in October by a fungi training day for volunteers.

During the survey, over 150 different species were recorded in a matter of hours, mostly without even leaving the path! The training day was a huge success and there have already been requests for another next year.



Thank you to NEFSG for their time and expertise.



Gordon Simpson of NEFSG delivers an excellent presentation.



Events

Children's Events



Children from Chopwell, Blackhall Mill and beyond became detectives for the day at Milkwellburn Wood, taking part in CBBC's 'Live N Deadly' Deadly Scene Investigation (DSI). Detective badges were brandished and special notebooks scribbled in as our new recruits followed the wildlife-related clues at the crime scene to uncover the culprit!

As the weather turned colder, two indoor sessions were also organised by Northumbria Mammal Group to create new homes for two of our nocturnal mammals. After much sawing, hammering, dust and swollen thumbs, hedgehog homes and bat boxes have been expertly built.

Horse Logging Demonstration



Horses cause minimal damage to the ground.

Horse-logging, or snigging, is the removal of felled timber, produced during the management of a wood, using a horse. A wide range of traditional and modern equipment and implements are used to collect a variety of timber, from small coppice poles and firewood to large saw logs and whole trees. Horse-logging has considerable benefits over other extraction techniques as it is very low impact. Horses can extract timber effectively and safely through the woodland without causing any damage to the remaining trees, compacting the soil, or causing damage or disturbance to the flora and

fauna. For these reasons, horse-logging is particularly useful in sensitive areas such as ancient woodlands with a healthy ground flora.

Last August, the Friends of Flass Vale contracted a forestry group to work with a horse to move felled sycamore out of the bog area. The timber has now been stacked neatly on higher ground within the reserve.



Forthcoming Works

Milkwellburn Pond Works

The pond works mentioned above will begin in January 2012 with the digging of two new ponds. These ponds will be given a chance to become established, before the third (existing, but heavily silted) pond will be re-excavated in January 2013.

Surveyors Required!

Volunteer surveyors are required to carry out two projects in Milkwellburn Wood:

1) **Elm Tree Mapping**

The white-letter hairstreak is a woodland butterfly that favours sites where flowering elm trees occur. It is a priority species for conservation both locally and nationally, having suffered a 99% decline in abundance over the past 25 years. White-letter hairstreak numbers decreased sharply during the 1970s when its larval food plant, the elm tree, was substantially reduced by Dutch Elm Disease.



White-letter hairstreak butterfly (Satyrium w-album)

These rare butterflies are known to occur on one clump of elm trees in Milkwellburn Wood, but are vulnerable to localised extinction due to their isolation from other suitable habitat, i.e. other elm trees. White-letter hairstreaks disperse poorly and rarely, if ever, travel further than 300m from the host elm tree. It is therefore important to survey Milkwellburn Wood for other elm trees and produce a map showing distances between these trees. If these distances are too great, elm saplings can be planted to connect suitable trees.

In addition, white-letter hairstreaks require elm trees that are mature enough to flower, but unfortunately, trees of this age are more vulnerable to Dutch elm disease. In order to ensure the survival of this rare insect a management strategy has been devised for the existing elm trees in Milkwellburn Wood. Work has already begun to vary the age structure of the elm trees in Milkwellburn Wood by coppicing one tree to produce fresh growth. This will allow flowering trees to be available over an extended number of years.



All of these works will hopefully expand the range of our current population, making them more robust in future, and able to find an alternative host tree should anything happen to their current isolated tree. Survey work would involve searching the reserve for elm trees and marking the location on a map. This will



enable us to make decisions on where best to plant saplings.

The survey work could be done at any time (although easiest when trees are in leaf) and for health and safety reasons it would be preferred for two people to work together. If you would like to help survey elm trees in Milkwellburn Wood, please contact Fran (details below).

2) **Archaeological Survey**

We currently have very little information regarding the industrial archaeological features within Milkwellburn Wood. We would like to search the site for archaeological remains, photograph them, and produce a map showing their locations. This information can then be sent to an archaeologist to be interpreted. It is hoped that the information we receive will tell a little of the story of Milkwellburn Wood, and can be printed onto a panel at the entrance so visitors can learn about the history of the site.

Again, the survey work could be carried out by two people at any time with no specialist knowledge required. If you would like to help survey the archaeological features in Milkwellburn Wood, please contact Fran (details below).

Woodland Rides

Don't worry, we're not talking about helter-skelters and dodgems; a woodland 'ride' is a track within a wood that is wide enough to allow light to penetrate to the ground (usually at least 10m in width).



*Spotted flycatcher catching a
brimstone moth*

Rides are vitally important for wildlife as they allow corridors of wildflowers to grow in the sunshine. In turn, invertebrates such as moths and butterflies travel along these corridors, nectaring on the wild flowers. These insects pollinate flowers and provide a food-source for bats and woodland birds. A greater number of species inhabit the first 10m of any woodland edge, than inhabit the remainder of the woodland.

Over time, the rides in Milkwellburn Wood have become overgrown, and the track-side flowers shaded out. This winter, volunteer teams will be cutting back vegetation to re-instate the woodland rides. Allowing light into the wood will also help surface water evaporate more quickly from footpaths.

If you would like to become a volunteer team member, or would like further information, please contact Fran (details below).



Dates for Your Diary

Lots of practical work this winter! For further information about any of the activities listed below, please contact Fran Mudd on (0191) 584 3112 or fmudd@durhamwt.co.uk unless otherwise stated.

In addition to the activities below, **The Friends of Flass Vale meet every Monday and Wednesday morning, 10am-12:30pm.** If you would like to take part in the variety of practical tasks happening at Flass Vale Nature Reserve, or would like further information, please contact vale@fofv.org.uk, or why not venture through The Vale on a Monday or Wednesday morning and have a chat - The Friends of Flass Vale will be the group looking rather mucky and busy!

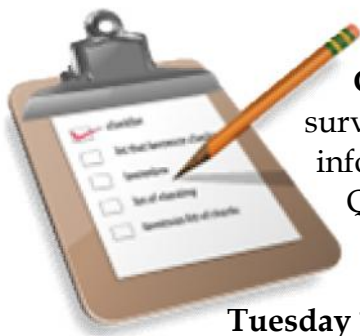
January

Tuesday 17th, Wednesday 18th, Thursday 19th - Practical Task Days @ Milkwellburn Wood, 10:15 - 3pm. Ride management - come along and help clear encroaching vegetation from the woodland rides (tracks), allowing light to reach the woodland floor and encouraging wild flowers to grow. Meeting place TBC - call or e-mail Fran the day before.



Sunday 29th - Milkwellburn Wood Weekend Volunteer Team, 10:15-3pm. Join the gang for some hands on volunteering at Milkwellburn Wood. Booking essential. To book or for further information, please contact Fran.

February



Sunday 5th February - Practical task @ Pelaw Wood, Gilesgate, Durham City, 10am-12:30pm. Come along to survey and redefine an ancient wood bank. Meet at the information board on St. Giles Close at 10am, followed by the Queen's Head pub at 12:30pm to replenish calories!

Tuesday 14th - Winter Tree Recognition @ Witton Dene,

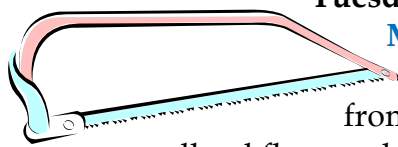
Witton Gilbert, Co. Durham, 10am-1pm. Learn to identify a variety of tree species from their bark and buds with our local arboriculture expert. And while you are in the Dene, help with some maintenance work and have a go at the Tree Quiz! Meet on Coach Lane at the entrance to St. Michael & All Angels Church. For further details, contact Penny Minney on (0191) 371 1295. Children welcome.



Tuesday 21st – Friday 24th (inclusive) - Practical Task Days @ Milkwellburn Wood, 10:15 – 3pm. Ride management – come along and help clear encroaching vegetation from the woodland rides (tracks), allowing light to reach the woodland floor and encouraging wild flowers to grow. Meeting place TBC - call or e-mail Fran the day before.



Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th - Milkwellburn Wood Weekend Volunteer Team, 10:15-3pm. Join the gang for some hands on volunteering at Milkwellburn Wood. Booking essential. To book or for further information contact Fran.



Tuesday 28th and Wednesday 29th - Practical Task Days @ Milkwellburn Wood, 10:15 – 3pm. Ride management – come along and help clear encroaching vegetation from the woodland rides (tracks), allowing light to reach the woodland floor and encouraging wild flowers to grow. Meeting place TBC - call or e-mail Fran the day before.

March

Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd - Practical Task Days @ Milkwellburn Wood, 10:15 – 3pm. Ride management – come along and help clear encroaching vegetation from the woodland rides (tracks), allowing light to reach the woodland floor and encouraging wild flowers to grow. Meeting place TBC - call or e-mail Fran the day before.



Sunday 4th March – Practical task @ Pelaw Wood, St. Giles Close, Gilesgate, Durham City, 10am-12:30pm. Today's task is to plant a hedgerow. Meet at the information board on St. Giles Close at 10am, followed by the Queen's Head pub at 12:30pm to replenish calories!

Details of further events will be circulated as and when they have been confirmed. If you have an idea for an event, or would like to learn about a specific aspect of woodland ecology, please get in touch and I will try my best to organise it.



Nature Notes

With foliage on the trees at a minimum, now is a good time to watch the mixed flocks of small, insect eating birds flitting between the branches of the mature trees in Pelaw Wood, searching for grubs and bugs throughout their winter feeding territories. In winter, long tailed tits travel together in family parties and are joined by blue tits, great tits, nuthatch and treecreepers amongst others. It is not uncommon to see flocks of 20-30 birds criss-crossing the path in the canopy above, or to hear their constant twittering contact calls which keep the group together.

Long-tailed tits are small but sociable birds with a fascinating family life. The male and female work together to build a nest, which can take up to three weeks and be lined with up to 1,500 feathers! The female incubates a clutch of 8-12 eggs, and once hatched, the nest (made of moss, lichen, cobwebs and feathers) stretches to accommodate the growing chicks. Siblings of the nesting pair who have lost their own nest help to feed the chicks, and this extra help increases the rate of survival of the chicks. After two weeks, the nest can stretch no further and the young are ready to fledge. Once independent, long-tailed tits continue to search for food as a family and huddle together for warmth through the winter with their parents and the nest helpers. They are joined by other birds of a similar size and with similar dietary requirements, and it is these flocks that can be seen and heard in Pelaw Woods.



A family party of long tailed tits

@Amy Lewis

If you would like further information about any of the items in this newsletter or would like to contribute to the next Wild Woods Project Newsletter with articles, pictures, wildlife and wildflower sightings or just suggestions for articles please contact me at fmudd@durhamwt.co.uk or (0191) 584 3112.

Many thanks to the Friends of Pelaw Wood, the Friends of Flass Vale and the Friends of Witton Dene for their assistance in compiling this newsletter.

Fran Mudd
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