

Friends of Selsdon Wood

Working to improve our wood



Chair's Annual Report to the AGM - 2nd March 2015

In 2014 the small band of active Friends ran a varied programme of walks and volunteers worked on site on more than 20 days – including the charcoal event and Open Day. Accounts of all our 2014 activities are archived on the website.

As last year, I shall structure this report with regard to the aims of our group as stated in the constitution.

Aim 1) To ensure that Selsdon wood is maintained for the benefit of the flora and fauna so that no one species shall threaten the survival of another and for the enjoyment and well being of the public

- a. Summer workdays focus on regular maintenance, such as the clearance of areas around benches. This year we have also cut a few drainage channels to take water away from some persistent puddles and, in the case of the most persistent patch of deep mud in The Wend, we created a diversion along a drier route. Maintenance work also involves some occasional activity such as replacing fallen route marker posts, removal of branches blocking paths and the reporting (to the Council) of hazardous or fallen trees that are too large for us to deal with.
- b. Last winter the main workday activity was carried out in a coppice area beside the Great Field close to the junction of Langford's Way and Courtwood Grove. Work has now finished in this area but some felled woodpiles have been deliberately left to create habitats for invertebrates such as stag beetles.
- c. A major project last year (not yet completed) has been the refurbishment of the Council Information boards at six of the entrances to the wood. These had become increasingly dilapidated and attacked with graffiti and, as they were almost 20 years old, their information was out of date. In the current financial climate the Council was not able to undertake replacement, so the Friends took on the project. We commissioned a new poster from the artist who designed the old Council leaflet and took down all the old boards for repairs and renovations. The poster is now ready, the refurbishment completed and replacement of the boards has begun. Selsdon Residents Association generously donated £520 to the cost of this project and we have obtained a £500 grant from Croydon Council. Any shortfall will be covered by profit from our Open Day and sales of logs and charcoal. Many thanks to David Malins who designed and coordinated this project and to Neale Fox and all others who have helped with the refurbishment.
- d. In February 2015 we organised a litter pick in the Court Wood area where there had been a considerable build up of litter from dumping of household waste. L B of Croydon Clean & Green Team supported the event and we were delighted with the result. It would be nice to think the problem had been cured but I suspect this may need to be an annual event.
- e. A regular (nominally weekly) butterfly transect and bird survey were carried out and this data has been archived on the website. Many thanks to Ted Forsyth for his work on this.
- f. There have still been no signs so far of Ash Die Back disease in Selsdon Wood but we are maintaining vigilance.

Aim 2) To carry out programmes of practical work, especially sustainable conservation and restoration work

- a. The main project for Workdays this last autumn/winter has been the thinning out of Sycamores at the entrance to the wood on Greenhill Way. Our main purpose is to open up glades to let in more light, hopefully encouraging the growth of other species like Beech. Volunteers have worked in this area on two Sundays each month since October cutting down Sycamores, building a dead hedge, and doing our best to bring down the thick ropes of Wild Clematis. Many thanks to Ted Forsyth, our Workdays organiser and to all the others who come along on a regular basis to help with the work.
- b. On a Workday in March 2014 we were joined by a group of volunteers from 'Muslims for Humanity' to clear the Wild Clematis and other unwanted vegetation from between the rows of the growing tree whips in the Jubilee Plantation (planted by FSW, Rainbows, Brownies and Guides in 2012). We worked on this area again in the summer but it is likely to demand attention again in 2015.
- c. Some of the wood from last year's coppicing was used for the Charcoal Burning Event in May. In past years we have worked under the guidance of woodsman Rob Sowter but this year he was too ill and we were on our own - although he was able to support us by offering advice. We are sad to report that Rob died last winter. We hope to commemorate him by installing a commemorative bench in the coming year.
- d. Neale Fox volunteered to serve as the FSW Health and Safety Officer and work has been carried out to create a more robust H&S policy supported by risk assessments, hard hats, eye shields, first aid kit etc. Many thanks to Neale for his work on this.

Aim 3) To educate volunteers of all ages in the principles and practices of nature conservation and encourage the public interest in Selsdon Wood

- a. Our guided walks have been well attended and all the presenters have provisionally agreed to come back in 2015 when we plan to run a similar programme. On behalf of the FSW, thanks to all our external group leaders - Meike Weiser, Malcolm Jennings, Malcolm Bridge and Roger Hawkins. Reports of all walks are published on the website.
- b. FSW members now receive an illustrated newsletter each month. Thanks to Linda Lee for delivering these to members who do not have email access.
- c. We produce three main leaflets (Membership Application, General Information, Red & Green Walks). These are available on the website, in the Selsdon Library and at events. The red and green trails are now supported by QR codes sited on all of the numbered posts and accessible by scanning to smartphones.
- d. As in previous years we have provided articles for the Selsdon Gazette, Forestdale Link and the Community Voice column in the Croydon Advertiser. I now compose these with contributions from all committee members. All events are also advertised with posters at entrances to the woods and in other places around the community. Thanks to David Malins for the production of the posters and to all committee members who support with their distribution.
- e. The display from our annual Photo Competition attracted lots of interest on Open Day and the winner was Mark Shoemith with his Squirrel Portrait. Thanks to our anonymous donor there are now cash prizes for all winners in addition to Snappy Snaps vouchers. All the winning photographs and shortlisted entries can be seen on the Photo Competition page of the FSW website.
- f. There has been much development of the website which I edit. It is now a rich source of information about the flora and fauna of the wood as well as being a public record of the work of the Friends and a notice board for all information. The Fauna and Flora pages contain annotated photographs of several hundred species. Many thanks to Tony Flecchia and Ted Forsyth who have contributed most of the photographs.

Aim 4) To act as a forum for discussion on issues that may affect the aims and activities

- a. Monthly meetings rarely attract many members beyond the core team but this does have the advantage of keeping them tightly focussed. All members are welcome to attend - location and times are advertised on the website.
- b. The website and newsletters provide a forum with a wider reach and we have published letters about dog behaviour and other issues of concern to those using the woods. We liaised with the police last summer when we had persistent invasions of youths on motorcycles endangering dogs and walkers. A current concern is the night-time locking of the Kingfisher Gardens gate which inconveniences those who wish to walk dogs in late evening or early morning. We are liaising with local councillors over this matter.
- c. The FSW have maintained liaison with other local groups through the ACCS.

Aim 5) To raise money as necessary for the carrying out of its work

- a. As in previous years, Open Day was a fruitful money raiser, netting over £200. Thanks to Linda Morris for organising the event and to all who helped on the day. We hope for more volunteers next year to make the event even more successful.
- b. We have successfully applied for a number of grants to support our work - details of which are covered in the report from the treasurer. Many thanks to Sandra Crapper for all her work on this.
- c. Membership was increased to 120 in 2014. Most memberships are eligible for Gift Aid, which adds to our funds.
- d. The FSW 2014 calendar was available for £5. We supplied 76 copies and raised £51.
- e. Distribution of logs and charcoal has raised around £466 this year. Our thanks go to Neale Fox who coordinates this excellent money raiser.

Conclusion

We have had a busy and successful year and I continue to enjoy my involvement in the role of Chair. My thanks to all members of the management group for their commitment to the FSW and for all the work they have done throughout the year.☺

We have been delighted with the growth in membership over the past twelve months but would really like to see more members getting involved with our work. We are a very friendly group so do please come along to our workdays, walks and monthly meetings and lend your hand to help us meet our aims again in 2015.