

Friends of Selsdon Wood



Working to improve our wood

Chair's Annual Report to the AGM – 26th March 2018

In 2017 the small band of active Friends ran a varied programme of walks and volunteers worked on site on more than 18 planned occasions – including the Open Day on Sunday 10th September. There was also much unscheduled work as I shall detail later. Accounts of all our 2017 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 focussed on regular maintenance, such as the clearance of areas around benches and marker posts and information boards. We also erected 15 new path name boards and removed some invasive Laurel. On one Workday in July we were joined by a young woman working as part of her Apprentice Challenge 2017.
- b. The Winter workday activity this year began with a tidying up in the Gorses area where we had undertaken a major cutting back in 2016. In the intervening 12 months, Sycamore, Ash, Bramble, Nettles and Bracken had sprung up, threatening to engulf the recovering Gorse. We were joined on many occasions throughout the winter by a couple of young men working towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- c. Winter gales meant that some workdays were spent clearing trees and branches that had fallen across paths. Another major task was the cutting back and burning of Holly which had become invasive in Farleigh Border. We also erected two nest boxes for Owls in largely hidden locations. **Thanks to Ted Forsyth, our workdays organiser, and to all the other volunteers** for their dedicated efforts.
- d. A further major project continuing from 2016 was our assault on muddy puddles in paths throughout the wood. This work was undertaken single-handedly by Tony Flecchia using his Mitsubishi L200 pickup truck. The work had to be done when the conditions were wet enough for the puddles to show and the gravel to embed with the mud but not so wet that the ground would be severely damaged by the vehicle. In total, 60.5 tonnes of gravel and 7 tonnes of woodchip have been laid to date. **Many thanks to Tony Flecchia** for all his work on this project.
- e. We purchased 5 new seats – two provided by families in memory of loved ones, one funded by the National Trust to replace one of their old ones that had rotted and two funded by FSW. Our Workdays team assisted by others dug all the holes ready for the placement of the seats when the conditions are suitable. **Many thanks to David Malins** for organising this project.
- f. Another way in which we ensure the maintenance of the wood is to report to the Council any issues that we are not able to deal with. These include fallen trees that are too big for our equipment, such as the fallen giant Oak on Farleigh Border which the Council cleared very quickly after we reported it. Another issue was the fly tip of garden waste at the corner of Court Wood by the bridleway which was cleared this winter. We also reported the dilapidated state of the Cascades Gate and we are delighted to say that this was replaced with a brand-new gate on 2nd March 2018.

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

- a. We are sad to have to report that the pond in Linden Glade, which we restored in 2016, seems to have sprung a leak. There appear to be cracks in the liner so that the pond does not fill fully although there is some residual water. We are currently considering how we might address this – suggestions are most welcome. The low water level did not deter the frogs that chose to spawn there in Late February but the spawn was sticking out of the water and before the pond froze solid later that week the spawn was rescued and placed in a larger deeper pond where we hope it may have survived under the ice.
- b. Two of the seats cited in 1 (some e above are replacements for seats or benches which have been damaged or rotted). The Green Oak seats which we now install should have a very long life.

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 2018 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. A litter pick was organised with the Beavers in June 2017, supported by the Council Clean and Green team. This was well attended and very fruitful. A full report with photographs is given on the website.
- c. As last year we organised a Community Picnic in July 2017 in conjunction with the Selsdon Residents Association (SRA) with support from the Scouts who ran a refreshment tent serving burgers, cakes and hot and cold drinks. **Many thanks to Linda Morris for organising this event.**
- d. Open Day is always an effective event for encouraging public interest in the wood. Disappointing weather meant that attendance was low this year. However we did manage to get things cleared away before the worst of the rain came and none of the gazebos actually took off in the gusty wind. **Many thanks to all the Friends and others who contributed to its success and especially to our Open Day Organiser, Linda Morris.**
- e. FSW members continue to receive an illustrated newsletter each month, which I produce and circulate via email. **Thanks to members of the Committee and Linda Lee for delivering these to members who do not have email access.** These 22 non-email members now receive newsletters quarterly in batches of 3 to save on postage and/or shoe leather.
- f. We produce three main leaflets (Membership Application, General Information, Red & Green Walks) and a pocket-sized map which is very useful for rescuing lost souls. These are available in our museum, on the website, in the Selsdon Library and at events. As in previous years we have provided articles for the Selsdon Gazette and the Local Link where we advertise all events and workdays. Events are also advertised with posters at entrances to the woods and in other places around the community. **Thanks to Ted Forsyth who writes the Nature Notes for external publications and to David Malins for the production of the leaflets and posters and to all committee members who support with their distribution.**
- g. 71 people voted in the 2016/17 photo competition and the winners were as follows: 1st prize - Philip Murray-Pearce for "Iridescence"; 2nd prize - Lisa Dervish for "Peanut with his Chestnuts"; 3rd prize - Ernie Thomason for "Male Roe Deer". All the winners and other shortlisted photographs are shown on the Photo Competition page of the website.
- h. Over the past decade, we have built up a small "museum" in our room in the toilet block. This comprises skulls, antlers and other bones of foxes, badgers and deer, dissected owl pellets, galls, feathers, tree fruits and sundry other non-perishable items found in the wood. This is made available to visitors who attend events and to others on a casual basis. This year we installed some shelving to display the museum to best effect.
- i. The website continues to be 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, Flora and Fungi pages contain annotated photographs of over a thousand 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. As much work of the FSW can be done by email it was agreed that we should meet only every alternate month instead of monthly. Meetings rarely attract many members beyond the core team but this does have the advantage of keeping them tightly focused. All members are welcome to attend - location and times are advertised on the website.
- b. The website, newsletters and FSW Facebook Group provide a forum with a wider reach.
- 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 £300 and 16 new memberships. **Thanks to Linda Morris for organising the event and to all who helped on the day.**
- 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 our treasurer Sandra Crapper for all her work on this.**
- c. Membership continues to grow. Most memberships are eligible for Gift Aid, which adds to our funds. The GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) which comes into force in May 2018 has required us to seek specific assent from all members to keep their data on file. This we have done and a majority have affirmed their agreement to this. Those who have not done so will have to be erased from our files next month. **Thanks to David Malins, Membership Officer, for his work on all membership matters.**
- d. The FSW 2017 calendar was available for £5. We supplied 70 copies (some complimentary) and raised over £110.

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. 😊