



Chair's Annual Report to the AGM – 29th March 2021

In 2020 the work of the FSW was severely disrupted by the Covid pandemic. Accounts of all our 2020 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.

Early in 2020, before Covid, our major activity involved work on our coppicing strip alongside Steven's Walk. We cut and cleared brambles and low vegetation, planted 50 whips (small sapling trees) and created a fence around the site to prevent deer from eating the young shoots. All of the new trees were also protected by tubes and supported by stakes.

When Covid restrictions started, all scheduled FSW Walks and Workdays were cancelled and this continued until the end of the year. However, our Workdays Team continued to work in small, Covid-safe groups at times convenient to them and this will continue throughout 2021 until all restrictions are lifted.

Work included:

- a. **Clearing fallen trees** - Stormy weather in late summer and autumn meant that a number of trees were brought down and some were blocking paths. We have cleared nine substantial falls including massive fallen birch trees in Farleigh Border and Avis Grove.
- b. **Replacing or restoring fallen guide posts** - Many of the wooden posts signing the red and green walking routes around Selsdon Wood had rotted through at the base. To restore these we used Metposts - metal sheaths for the base of the wooden posts with spikes which can be hammered into the ground. In addition we cleared vegetation around some of the undamaged posts which had become overgrown.
- c. **Restoring some of the fallen waymarker signs and creating new ones** - The signs which name the various paths are mounted on backplates and erected with long screws that do not damage the trees. The backplates are surrounded with steel bands to stop squirrels gnawing them. Four new signs have been erected and we have several more to put in place over the next few months.
- d. **Clearance in the Gorses area** - Without intervention the gorse gets swamped with brambles and bracken. In past years clearance has been a communal workday effort and we have also been supported by TCV (a local community volunteer support group). This year large group activity has not been possible but we have worked within Covid rules on a number of occasions to clear some of the invaders.
- e. **Clearing vegetation blocking the view of the Jubilee Pond** - Our thanks to a new member who has been involved with this work. He has also cleared out some of the Iris and debris from this pond to make it a viable ecosystem once again. This has proved effective as many frogs have been seen spawning and numerous species of birds visit the pool to drink.
- f. **Toilet Cleaning** - We keep the toilets relatively clean (and on one occasion replaced a lock which had disappeared). We turned off the water supply in winter to avert the danger of frozen pipes. We changed the locks and and put notices on the toilet doors to explain the situation to the groups who regularly use the toilets.
- g. **Thanks to Ted Forsyth, our workdays organiser, and to all the other volunteers** for their dedicated efforts. We could do with more help so please join us if you are able.
- h. **The FSW Facebook site and our newsletter have encouraged more people to help with litter picking in the wood.** A number of Friends now do this on a regular basis as part of their daily walks.

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

- a. All formal programmes of work were cancelled this year because of Covid.

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 were all cancelled because of Covid. However use of the wood increased enormously during the pandemic as people sought peaceful places to exercise and relax.
- b. To support users of the wood, especially newcomers, we continue to produce three main leaflets (Membership Application, General Information, Red & Green Walks) and a pocket-sized map. Dispensing boxes were installed this year at all main entrances and these are kept stocked by committee members.
- c. In addition a QR version of the information booklet has been created and a notice showing the QR code is posted with all the dispensing boxes and also at minor entrances which do not have the dispensers.

- d. As in previous years we have provided articles for the Selsdon Gazette newsletter and the Local Link where we also advertised our calendars. These were 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. Thanks also to Neale Fox who set up the QR codes and produced the signs.**
- e. The FSW website is regularly updated and provides a rich source of information about the wood. In addition this year a FSW Facebook group was set up which now has over 700 members. This is a rich resource for the sharing of information about the wood, especially interesting sightings such as those of a white squirrel. **Thanks to Steve Budd who established and manages this group and to all participants who share photographs and experiences.**
- f. The new dog poo bins, installed last year, are well used and have been emptied regularly by Croydon Council despite their financial problems and difficulties created by the pandemic. However, poo bags thrown into the undergrowth and hung on trees continue to be a problem.
- g. Our **Open Day 2020 was cancelled** because of Covid. We are hopeful that conditions will allow us to hold one in 2021.
- h. FSW members continue to receive an illustrated newsletter each month, which I produce and circulate via email. **Delivery of these to members who do not have email access was suspended this year** because of Covid.
- i. **The 2020 Photo Competition was conducted online.** Due to the cancellation of Open Day we were not able to display the photos for voting in the usual way. Instead they were shown (anonymously) on the website and also on the FSW Facebook page. There were 13 entrants who submitted 51 photographs. FSW members were invited to vote via email messages and the FB page and 61 people cast their votes. In a first for the FSW competition, one entrant, Ruth Budd took first, second and third places; a remarkable achievement. First Prize £50 was for "Pot of Gold", Second Prize £20 for "Peacock Beauty" and Third Prize £10 for "A Deer Friend". These winners and all other entries are shown on the Photo Competition page of the FSW website. Ruth donated her second and third prize winnings to FSW - many thanks Ruth!!

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

- a. Due to the pandemic there have been no meetings of the FSW this year. Discussion amongst Committee Members continues in a more informal way through email. A formal proposal that the AGM should be cancelled was agreed by all members of the Committee.
- b. The FSW Facebook group website is well used and promotes much discussion. The website also 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.
- c. The FSW have maintained liaison with other local groups through the Association of Croydon Conservation Societies.

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

- a. Open Day, one of our main money raisers in normal circumstances, was cancelled due to the pandemic.
- b. Bankruptcy of Croydon Council meant that all of the usual grants were not available this year.
- c. However, membership continues to grow. Most memberships are eligible for Gift Aid, which adds to our funds. **Thanks to David Malins, Membership Officer, for his work on all membership matters.**
- d. The FSW 2020 calendar was available for £5. We purchased and sold 65 copies and made a profit from sales

Conclusion

We have had a busy and successful year.

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.☺