



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

CONSERVATION : PROTECTION : ENHANCEMENT : ENJOYMENT

Newsletter – Winter 2011/12



At the beginning of Winter the fallen Autumn leaves provide golden carpets along the footpaths through our woods

Winter is a time when our woods seem to be devoid of life, with most of our trees having shed their leaves. Many of the woodland creatures will also be hibernating and there are very few colourful woodland flowers on view. However many things are happening. The leaf litter helps to protect our wood from the frost that will undoubtedly be part of the winter experience. This allows insects to keep going and fungi to fruit. There are also many microbes in the soil that are active. Decomposition and nutrient recycling is ongoing.

FoABW is continuing to scrutinise the plans for the next phases of the **Bolnore Development** and its impact on our nature reserve, including important aspects of the not very sexy subject of sewage and drainage. Read our inside pages for more about this work and also about the protection won for the 400 year old **Great Spreading Oak**. Lorraine's monitoring of our **bird life plus other fauna and flora** is proving very successful and it is planned that a link will soon be provided on our website to enable you all to view the detailed recordings made – see p.2 for sightings over the past quarter. **Autumn** in our hedge and wood is reflected upon by Gill on p.3 and she also reminds us of the roles played by the **ponds** in Ashenground Wood. The back page gives details of our conservation events.

Do come along to the **talk on Sunday 22nd January at 2.30 p.m.** in the Ashenground Community Centre by talented local wood carver **Eric Johnson**. Eric will be talking about his carving and showing examples of his work. And we also hope to see you at our **AGM on Sunday 12th February at 2.30 p.m.** in the ACC.

Janice Tipping

FoABW Logo Clothing

The opportunity has arisen for all the members of FoABW to buy items of clothing with our logo. We have chosen a polo shirt and fleece, both in yellow. Polo shirts - £11.50. Fleece - £28.50. Sizes small – xxxlarge. Some members will be sporting these new items of clothing during conservation events within the next few weeks. In addition we will have examples available at the AGM. If you wish to buy one before the AGM, then please contact me on 01444 473179.

Fleur Carey

Protecting The Great Spreading Oak

They say that oaks grow up for 200 years, are in middle age for another 200, then slowly fade away over a final 200. Well, it's a good theory!



The Great Spreading Oak in Winter

OUR Great Spreading Oak is about 400 years old we think, and has a vast canopy covering about 600 square metres or more. It sits close to the Pinchpoint north of Four Acre Wood. We and Crest are both committed to protecting this beautiful great pollard oak. Because of its veteran status, we fought for and won a special buffer zone for this tree, about 5 or 6 metres beyond the norm. We continue to argue for suitable details to protect it from building works.

Recently we have been concerned that the building site will cause changes to the surface water flows which could reduce rainfall finding its way to this crucial tree. After much negotiation and three revisions, a special revised drainage plan has been agreed to incorporate 'infiltration trenches' to ensure that surface water flows are changed as little as possible once development is completed.

We are also asking for Crest to undertake monitoring work to protect against any changes in acidity around this particular area.

Wildlife Monitoring Update

If you went down in the Woods during Autumn you could have seen and heard a wide variety of **birds**. Many of you did and reported your soundings and sightings to Lorraine, our bird monitor. The list for September – November 2011 is long: Blackbird, Blue Tit, Common Buzzard, Collared Dove, Crow, Dunnock, Feral

Pigeon, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Great Tit, Jackdaw, Jay, Magpie, Mallard, Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch, Robin, Rook, Sparrow Hawk, Song Thrush, Starling, Tree Creeper, Woodpigeon and Wren.

As well as this impressive list of our feathered friends, other **wildlife** was spotted and reported to Lorraine: Fox Cub, Honey Bee, Buff Tailed Bumble Bee, Wasp Nest, Hornets, Black Spotted Ladybirds, Sloe Shield Bug, Dock Leaf Shield Bug, Rabbit, Bat, Migrant Hawker Dragonfly, Millipede, Red veined Darter, Brimstone, Orange Tip, Speckled Wood, Hummingbird Hawk Moth, Large White, Small White, Red Admiral, Gatekeeper and Painted Lady.



Speckled Wood in Ashenground Wood in late September

And then there are the **fungi**: Fly Algaric, The Blusher, Puff Ball, Birch Polypore, Glistening Inkcap, Ink Cap, Death Cap, False Chanterelle, Oak Bracket, Benzoin Bracket, Fairy Ring Champignon.



Ink Caps in Bolnore Wood in November

And of course there have been many, many **wildflowers**, too numerous to list here.

We will let you know when the Link to Lorraine's records is on the FoABW website.

Going Down the Drains!

Not a topic for the dinner table, but sewage has to go somewhere, and in South West Haywards Heath much actually passes through a sewer right under Ashenground Wood. We think it was installed about 40 years ago. Sewers from Bolnore Village join it in various places, and soon a new link will be needed from Phase 4a of Bolnore Village.

Unfortunately, Four Acre Wood lies right in the way, and FoABW have been negotiating with Crest and Southern Water for years to avoid pits and manholes in this important Ancient Woodland we fought so hard to protect. The only way to avoid pits and manholes is.....a tunnel right under the wood, many metres under the surface. We accept and support this 'micro-tunnelling' approach as the sewer will be impermeably lined and safe for the woodland.

Several years ago boring trials proved that the ground below Four Acre Wood is solid rock. This means a giant machine will have to do the drilling, right from the building site, in a single push down to the bridleway by Foundry Brook, some 250 metres away. About a foot in diameter, the hole will then be lined by pulling a plastic pipe back UP the tunnel to form the sewer, which will then be linked into the existing sewer. But even now we are negotiating because the 'exit pit' proposed would have damaged roots of two 'sentinel' oaks on the Bridleway. We are pressing for a different line slightly further south, on MSDC land, where a small clearing for the work would be away from major trees and would actually benefit the woods.

Autumn in Hedge and Woodland

Many of our native wild berries grow in our woods, providing food for small mammals and birds. Blackberries are first, along the field edges. There are black and red currants in our woods too, but most don't fruit because the trees have shaded out the light. Blackthorn branches have been laden with sloes along the railway path, and the scarlet of hawthorn, holly, mountain ash and guelder rose decorate the wood-edge and canopy. There were lots of hazel nuts too, but most of them went while they were still green, to pigeons and squirrels. Glowing ropes of bryony twine in the hedge - I don't know what eats them - certainly we shouldn't! The winged seeds of ash, maple, sycamore and hornbeam are taken too.



Autumn Berries alongside Railway Path

This year has seen amazing crops of acorns and beech mast, making all the paths crunchy underfoot. As a child I used to sit on the prickly ground under a huge beech, prizing open the three-sided nuts to find the tasty kernel within. Most were empty. I expect the full ones get eaten early. Trees produce huge quantities of seed, but very few germinate, and even fewer grow to adulthood. Some seeds such as ash and birch, germinate everywhere in the wood, but only survive where a clearing in the wood has left a lit patch of ground. Holly will grow in deep shade - the only one to do so in our woods. Oaks prefer the fields close to woods and the other trees all need some light. We have a few precious seedlings of the wild cherry.

Gill Rogers

Protecting our Woods Around the New Building Site

At the Planning Inquiry five years ago, Crest agreed to work with Local Community Organisations including FoABW when building eventually happened. This was based on a legal agreement signed on behalf of the groups including FoABW.

Now FoABW are one of the groups who meet Crest - including their managing director David Huggett - at a regular monthly Forum. We don't pull our punches, but the result has we hope been good for both sides, hammering out solutions to important issues. We welcome and give credit to Crest for the regular appearance of key directors to help solve problems fast. As a result of this Forum, we have negotiated improvements to both foul and surface water drainage, lagoons to avoid silt runoff into Foundry Brook, how conservation work will take place in the woods and the buffer zones, and we are now going into battle - we hope a friendly battle - to agree a proper communication plan to explain the nature conservation importance of the woods to the eventual new residents.

Stuart Meier

Ashenground Wood Ponds

We are lucky to have so many ponds in our woods. If you live in Bolnore Village you will know the several balancing ponds, and the line of old quarries that have turned into ponds over the years. But in Ashenground Wood there are two very different ponds. They lie in the north west of the wood, near the school fence, and are the merest dimples in the ground. They fill up with the autumn rain, but dry completely in the summer – so dry they are not even muddy. The amazing thing is that they have been there for hundreds of years. All the old Ordnance Survey maps mark them in the same place, two small circles side by side, from the early 1800s, and they were probably there for long before that.



As part of our pond surveys for Sussex Wildlife Trust, the FoABW pond team (me and Debs Moore!) took our dipping equipment along while there was still water to dip in. The ponds are completely shaded, with no vegetation in or around them, and filled with dead leaves and years of leaf litter. It was more of a scrape than a dip, the water was so shallow. We were astonished to find **caddis fly larvae**. These insects use whatever material there is to hand to cover themselves with a protective, camouflaging tube. The head and several pairs of legs may be visible. We went back at night, with a torch, and could see the whole bottom of the ponds covered with what looked like gently waving tiny sails of neatly cut leaf pieces. What happens to them when the ponds dry up? Those that are nearly ready to turn into adult flies seem able to hurry the process and escape. The others dig themselves in and wait for the rain!

When the school grounds were being designed, FoABW was concerned to ensure that the existing rate of water-flow from the school buffer down into the ponds should be kept unchanged. Stuart Meier spent hours poring over the plans for surface water drainage, and his efforts seem to have paid off. We shall continue to monitor this unusual habitat.

Conservation Work

See our **Programmes** on the **notice boards** on the Bridge at the Ashenground Road entrance to the woods, and at the entrances to Pierce's, Catts and Bolnore Woods. Take a look at our **website** for our Newsletters and Programmes plus photographs and details of special events.

www.foabw.com

We invite you to join us to help with **Conservation Work**. We meet each month on the **1st Sunday** (meeting place Ashenground Bridge) and **3rd Saturday** (meeting place the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village). Meeting time 10.00 a.m. The work we do is very varied and you do not need to have any expertise or bring any tools. We have a refreshment break. For all our events, children must be accompanied by an adult who must take responsibility for their welfare and behaviour. If you have any **ideas for special events** then do get in touch.

General Information – Contact Janice on 01444 414053 or 07752 003529

Membership - Fleur Carey on 01444 473179

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