



Sandhurst Copse & Sheepwalk

NEWSLETTER - 2024

BLUEBELL PATHS

The Bluebell paths were opened on 14th April, nearly two weeks earlier than last year. There is more bracken and sweet chestnut leaf debris than usual. Whilst Nature does not do or expect tidiness, I will clear some of the bramble and fallen timber in the bluebell area for next year. The shorter bluebell path encompasses some of the best displays, see the photo below.



MOTH SURVEY

A recent initiative is a survey of moths, carried out by John Portess, extending the range of his activities. The survey method involves a light trap, not to kill the moths; but to attract and catch them to enable them to be identified, photographed and recorded. Major challenges are weather conditions, hungry robins, and moths which do not wish to be identified.



Identification is a challenge. There are about 2500 species of moths in the UK, compared to about 60 species of butterfly. There is a [report](#) of the moths so far identified in the wood. The most recent survey included **Brindled Beauty** *Lycia hirtaria*, which is one of the winter moths causing the defoliation of oak trees about 12 years ago. This is a male as the females are flightless and have no wings or very small ones.



Wingspan 35-45 mm. Occurring locally throughout a large part of Britain, this species is commonest in the south, especially the Home Counties. The moths fly in March and April, and the males at least, are attracted to light. It prefers woodland and suburban habitats, and feeds on a range of deciduous trees.

TREE DAMAGE – POWER LINE OUTAGE

This winter has seen the most tree damage since 1987/9. A very large sweet chestnut, c.150 years old, took out the power lines to Green Lane in both directions from the adjacent pole.



It appears that the wind was unusually from the south east at the time. There is a pole elsewhere in the wood with switching equipment to isolate the power lines, which also has equipment which signals to UK Power when there is a problem. The tree collapsed around 13.30hrs. By 16.00hrs they had walked the course of the line and a crew were on site with equipment to effect a repair, which was completed by midnight. The photograph is after repair of the power line. Trees in ancient woodland will on occasions fall down.

Unfortunately this incident was a few weeks after an ash tree had also taken the power lines down. A small group of ash trees near power lines in Sandhurst Copse have been monitored annually for ash dieback and some felled each year accordingly. In a recent storm one of the trees was blown over, taking out the power lines to Green Lane (the power was restored within 24 hours); however this tree was not exhibiting significant ash dieback; but was weak at the base, honey fungus being a contributory factor.



At my request Sean Harrison carried out a check on the other trees and most exhibit some weakness at the base, and need to be felled. An unexpected, unwelcome; but unavoidable task.

PUBLIC BRIDLEPATH FENCE BY WOODHILL SANDPIT

Ben Nicholson, owner of the adjacent old sandpit has replaced the boundary fence on the boundary of the pit. Horseriders have expressed appreciation that the bridlepath is much safer.



In the vicinity of his storage yard for the equipment for his tree business it is a boarded fence; but beyond is wire mesh.



FUNGI

The iconic Fly Agaric mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*.



Over one hundred and thirty fungi have been identified, much aided by the interest and assistance of Dr Brian Ferry, Guest Senior Lecturer at Royal Holloway, University of London, in Biology (Life Sciences School). Subject teaching and research: mycology (ectomycorrhizal associations) and ecology (shingle vegetation).

When we first encounter the natural world, it is dominated by what we see. Later we may encounter scent and sounds. Sight is sufficient for identification of flowers, trees and butterflies; sounds are also important for birds; but unfortunately fungi eventually need a microscope to examine spore size and shape, and increasingly DNA analysis, way beyond the capability of most observers.

I am restructuring my [reference catalogue](#) for Sandhurst Copse & Sheepwalk, primarily to recognise those amenable to visual identification.

BIRD SURVEYS

Monthly surveys of birds in Sandhurst Copse and Sheepwalk have been carried out for a number of years, and in particular since 2015 by Jackie Blizzard, giving some assurance of consistency of methodology. The surveys take a couple of hours, unless something is observed during that period it is not recorded. The overall picture is of stability confirmed by a [report comparing performance in 2021-23 with 2015-2020](#). It is very encouraging that the Green Woodpecker, absent for a few years, has returned.

TOAD DELIVERY

I am very happy to have offered a home to a number of young toads which were introduced into the pond in Sandhurst Copse. They had been rescued when very small in the general Toad Migration, and expertly cared for until large enough to release. Sandhurst Copse is a site not only with a pond; but with plenty of scope for toads to live and over-winter out of the water, hopefully without having to traverse a busy road.



BUTTERFLIES

A good display of butterflies in addition to the ubiquitous Meadow Brown, brilliant examples of Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock and Marbled White displaying; but only when I did not have my camera! I did however manage to photograph a Ringlet in the meadow.



And later a Marbled White



Please continue to enjoy the woodland but do let me know if you see anything that appears out of place, unauthorized, or needing urgent attention. The number to use is 07966 210 062. Thank you.

*Patrick Mannix, The Court House, Shamley Green.
23 April 2024*