

Newsletter

July 2016



The Friends of Linslade Woods

How did it all start?

This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Friends of Linslade Woods.

In 2004 contractors working for the Leake Trust were spotted by local residents bulldozing trees in order to clear an area of woodland. They were clearly alarmed as it looked as if the area was being prepared for development. There was also a lot of anger as in 1993/4 local residents had been involved in planting the trees under a scheme financed by DEFRA and the Forestry Commission. Victoria Harvey stepped in and stood in front of the bulldozers to prevent further destruction. With the backing of Richard Woolnough of the Greensand Trust, local residents and members of South Beds Friends of the Earth, all of whom were concerned and appalled at the destruction, Tree Preservation Orders were passed by South Beds Council in order to halt any further clearance attempts.

After further protests Karen Cursons and Malcolm Oliver with David Jones of the Leake Trust became more involved with the care of the woods.

A meeting was then held at Stockgrove Park with Esther Milne (Greensand Trust) at which a Friends group was started up with an initial fund from the Town Council. The Greensand Trust would continue to provide support for Esther to operate as the secretary of the group. A committee was duly elected and the Friends became an officially constituted group with its own bank account.

Eventually the Woods were permanently saved when they were purchased by Central Beds Council in 2009, a perfect reward for the Friends after years of campaigning and negotiation. The Friends committee continues to work with the valuable support of Steve Halton and Trevor Smith of Central Beds Council and Greensand Trust Ranger John Creasey.

What is happening now?

As testimony to all the hard work put in by our volunteer members, the Keep Britain Tidy Green Flag has been awarded to us for the past 5 years, and the Woods have been judged "Outstanding" by the In Bloom "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme for the last 2 years.



We have now completed our 5 year plan in the hazel coppice and used material from that to create path edging in the Bluebell wood to act as a reminder to walkers to keep to the paths and conserve the Bluebells.



This year, around our pond, we constructed a Fabulous Frog Fence woven by using our own ash and hazel to provide a safe haven for the frogspawn to hatch. Although protected from 2 and 4 legged creatures, the frogspawn was still vulnerable to the various aquatic insects in the pond.

Tadpoles need to be wary of the Common Backswimmer which does exactly what its name suggests - it swims on its back with an air bubble attached to its front, but it can fly, and is also carnivorous.

Pond Skaters have very long spread-out legs which enable them to walk on the surface of the water, and they use their front legs to gather up any small unfortunate insects that land on the water.

And as if this wasn't enough, a Great Diving Beetle has been observed in the pond, a fearsome beast that, as a larva and an adult, is capable of attacking a frog and will almost certainly eat some of the spawn.

Wildlife in Linslade Woods

For an area of approximately 33 hectares (80 acres), the old and new woods are rich in wildlife diversity. The management of the area maintains that diversity.

At least 50 species of birds use the woods – for nesting, feeding, and roosting; some, like Redwings, Siskins and Lesser Redpolls are winter visitors from the cold north; some, such as Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers, come from Africa in late spring to breed; others are year-round residents – though even resident species like Blackbird and Starling move in a south-westerly direction in winter.



The sight of Red Kites and Buzzards circling over the woods, once a rare occurrence is quite common now. Sparrowhawks breed here, and



Kestrels hover over open areas. This year we are very pleased to see that the Rookery has returned to double figures after last year's dearth of nests. We checked the nest boxes along the main

ride early in the year before the birds started to investigate them. All had been used; three by Great and Blue Tits and one, it seems, by a Wood Mouse who left a Hazelnut in his box. Interestingly two of those used by tits had dense bright yellow-green "moss" – but it wasn't moss at all – it was the fluff from tennis balls lost by careless dogs! This has been noted by the British Trust for Ornithology in its nest guide – so Linslade birds are not the only tennis ball scavengers!

Over 18 species of Butterfly have been recorded in the woods, ranging from the colourful easy-to-identify Peacocks, to the Small and Essex Skippers whose antennae have to be closely peered at in order to see which species they are. Not so easy!

Many mammals are small and nocturnal – some leave obvious signs behind – and just occasionally a Fox or a Muntjac is seen. A Roe Deer was heard barking and seen earlier this year – a rare treat.

The area also holds many wildflowers and grasses, including Common Spotted-orchid, Wood

Anemone, Dog's Mercury, Meadowsweet, various vetches, fleabanes, buttercups and crane's bills, and many other specialists of woodland, hedgerow or grass.

One of the reasons that it is so important to record wildlife is that if an area, or somewhere close by, is threatened by development, the records of wildlife sightings can highlight its ecological importance, and may prevent harmful building and habitat degradation.

So keep looking, enjoy, and protect your wildlife.

Who's been nibbling our nuts?

Many rodents eat Hazelnuts, and the remains of many nibbled nuts have been found by the coppicing volunteers. A Squirrel will split a nut in two with its strong teeth after

making a little nick at the top. A Wood Mouse holds the nut on the ground and makes a small hole in it, then turns the nut while gnawing on the furthest side; this makes

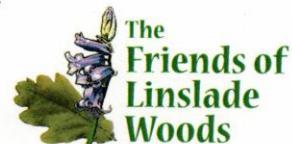


tooth marks on the outside of the nut round the hole. A Bank Vole also makes a small hole, but it puts its nose into the hole and nibbles the near edge, leaving no tooth marks on the outside. We have all three of these Hazelnut feeders in the wood – keep a look out and see if you can work out who has eaten the nuts!

The Woods need Help

The Friends of Linslade Woods, working in partnership with the Greensand Trust and Central Beds Council, have a regular programme of action days, wildlife walks and other events throughout the year. New volunteers are very welcome to take part in these activities.

If you would like to join us and help make the woods a better place for both people and wildlife our programme is



displayed on our website and on notice boards in the Woods. Further information can also be obtained from John Creasey, on 01525 237760 or johncreasey@greensandtrust.org