



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust



Stourbridge & Hagley Local Group

Newsletter Winter 2022

Welcome to the winter newsletter. The deadline date for sending the newsletter to HQ at Smite for printing is fast approaching. It does seem to come round sooner each time but, looking back, quite a lot has happened since the last deadline in June.

Our group walk on 20th July was to Uncllys Farm in the heart of the Wyre Forest. It was led by John Iles who has been a tenant at the farm for many years. Uncllys is organically run and owned by the Guild of St. George, founded by John Ruskin in the 19th century. As we walked round the farm and into the woodland



*John Iles with the group
At Uncllys Farm*

John explained how the area is managed to support habitats for wildlife. John said that we had chosen a good day to visit as Paul Jackson and his son were in the woodland stripping bark from previously felled young oaks. They supply the only remaining company in England that use the older organic method for tanning high quality leather. We spent some time watching the process before returning to the farm for a very late lunch. It was too late to go on the planned afternoon forest walk so we walked the short distance to Simon's Orchard, named after Simon Walker who was Wyre Forest reserve manager from 2000 to 2008. The orchard is the gene pool for the fruit trees of the area and two of each variety have been planted. After the short walk



*Paul demonstrating
bark stripping*

back to the farm we left for home after a very pleasant day.

17 members and visitors joined Wendy Larmour for our walk at Hurcott Wood in September. As is usual with Wendy's walks, there was a mixture of history and wildlife. Hurcott Pool and Wood is now a Local Nature Reserve and is the largest area of alder woodland in the West Midlands. As we walked Wendy told us about the trees and the management of the pool and wood. Hurcott Pool, covered with green algae on the day we visited, was created to supply the paper mill in Hurcott village. There are records to show that the mill operated from the 17th to 20th century and a map of 1882 shows the pool at the size it is today. Wendy told the group that Park Hall, just to the south of Hurcott Wood, is where in 1847 Edwin Lees, William Mathews and James Buckman founded the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club. We made our way back to the car park after a very enjoyable and informative walk.

Our first talk of the winter season at St. Saviours was on 23rd September. John Dutton, a lecturer at the University

of Worcester, gave us an informative and very enjoyable talk on the life and history of the wild boar.

There have been several other events involving some of our local group members.

A research group has been set up, involving people from several local groups, to discover the history of our reserves before they were owned by the Trust. It is interesting to discover the previous owners of our reserves but, more importantly for future management, to discover how the land was used in the past. The group is looking into the history of Foster's Green/Eades Meadow, The Devil's Spittleful, Blackstone Fields and Dropping Well Farm.

Committee members from all our local groups were invited to a meeting at Lower Smite Farm on 27th September to talk about the future of local groups. There were several topics discussed including how we could engage more with the local community and help to set up projects to improve their local area for wildlife.

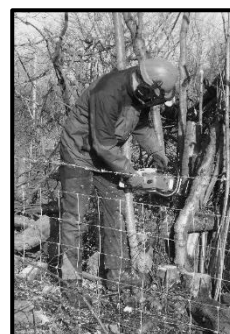
Some members of our group have already been "engaging with the community" and taking part in Growing up Green Week in Stourbridge at the end of September. We joined with Joy Stevens, leader of the Scarlet Tiger Project on the Roman Road, for a morning in the Children's Library. There were 'making' activities based on moths and butterflies, seed and bulb planting, a nature table and display. A very successful morning!

There is much work locally on heathland creation, restoration and management. In Worcestershire at The Devil's Spittleful, Blackstone and Dropping Well Farm, in Staffordshire at Staffs Wildlife Trust's Highgate Common and National Trust's (NT) Kinver Edge and in Shropshire at NT Dudmaston. It seemed a good idea for the groups to get together and share ideas.

A walk on NT Kinver Edge was organised by Andy Harris (WWT Northern Reserves Officer), initially for the Roving Volunteers, who were joined on the day by the WWT reserves officers. The walk on 16th August was led by Ewan Chapman (Head Ranger at NT Kinver Edge).

Rangers from NT Dudmaston and Kinver Edge, and SWT Highgate Common and Gentleshaw Common joined a group of WWT members on the Saving Worcestershire's Heathlands Walk at Dropping Well Farm. The walk on 23rd August was led by Andy Harris. There was much discussion and exchange of ideas on both walks.

Wild Service Awards 2022



Steve Anderson, one of our Penorchard volunteer leaders, received a Wild Service Award this year.

Steve Anderson: *Penorchard volunteer and assistant to reserves officers.*

Steve is seen here in his usual pose with a chainsaw preparing for hedge laying at Penorchard Meadows.

*Stourbridge & Hagley local group programme
January - April 2023*

Talks

At St. Saviours Church Hall, Hagley.

27th January at 7.30pm.
Open evening
Short talks, quizzes and a very short AGM.

24th February at 7.30pm.
Searching for British Orchids, a talk by John Tilt.

24th March at 7.30pm.
Amphibians and reptiles of the UK, a talk by Paul Wilkinson.

28th April at 7.30pm.
Local wildflowers, a talk by Roger Umpelby.

For details of group events please visit the WWT website at
www.worcestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

A GOOD READ

Glass half full or glass half empty?

Suggestions for Christmas reading
'God's Grandeur' Gerard Manley Hopkins 1877
'Islands of Abandonment' Cal Flynn 2020

"Generations have trod, have trod, have trod
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell"

When Hopkins wrote his sonnet in 1877 he was reflecting on the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the natural environment. In her fascinating book, 'Islands of Abandonment', Cal Flynn explores a number of sites around the world that wear 'man's smudge'; sites that have been used by man in his quest for progress and prosperity and then abandoned to the elements. Some of these places are well known to us - the Five Sisters shale bunds of West Lothian, the devastated wastelands of Chernobyl - and others are less familiar - desolate exclusion zones in war torn parts of the world, empty slum housing estates, long deserted factories and ship graveyards. All leave ruined and ravaged landscapes.

However, what Flynn has discovered is that even in the most barren, polluted and hostile places, nature finds a way to reclaim the land for its own. We have seen for ourselves how on neglected sites, vegetation takes a hold and is followed by insects and then larger forms of life. Flynn shows us that sometimes the new life forms are amazingly microscopic and can adapt to even the most challenging of circumstances. It can be depressing to think of how mankind seems to do everything he can to destroy what sustains us but as a 'glass half full' person, I find it comforting to think that some forms of life will exist long after we have gone. Hopkins put it well...

"And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;"

Wendy Wilkins

Penorcharde Meadows update

In July the Penorcharde volunteers had their, by now, traditional away day at Romsley Manor Farm Meadows removing ragwort in preparation for a hay cut. Back at Penorcharde in August the task was slowing the rate of bracken encroachment in the upper reservoir fields and removing encroaching bramble from the right of way. A hay cut had also been done on four fields at Penorcharde. September saw us cutting back scrub encroachment in bogs field and brush cutting the lower right of way in the reservoir fields. In October we removed patches of bramble, which remained in top church field after the hay cut, and removed brash left after trees were cut back under the power lines. Also in the church fields some very long low branches were removed to reduce the shading of the meadow and allow the public footpath to return to its original line. In addition two large fallen boughs were also removed from the fence line.

Thank you to all the Penorcharde volunteers for your hard work and enthusiasm.

Ian Williams

Volunteer days at Penorcharde Meadows



Jackie in top church field clearing up after brush cutting in October

Work parties are held on Mondays 10am - 3pm on

December 5th January 9th February 6th
March 6th April 3^d

Current volunteers will get an email giving details of our meeting place for each work party, new volunteers should contact Andy Harris on andyh@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org Bring lunch and a drink for mid-morning and for lunchtime if you are staying all day.



Hedge cutting at Penorcharde in February