

Sharphill Wood Work Party 22nd January 2012

Hedgerows are a vital component of Sharphill Wood as a Nature Reserve. When the Friends Group started work, the boundary hedge was very gappy with mature hawthorns which had been neither layed nor coppiced for many years. However it still managed to fulfil part of its purpose of supporting a range of wildlife, a habitat for invertebrates such as worms, small mammals such as mice and of course a wide range of insects. These support the larger predators such as birds, badgers and bats.

The Sharphill hedges have been reinforced in recent years using the “dead hedging” technique with some hedge laying, whilst the new “whips” are growing and they are therefore full of dead wood and plant litter, providing an ideal habitat. Now however you will notice around pretty much the whole circumference new whips, canes and guards (for protection from rabbits) wherever there are gaps.

We have been planting a diverse range of hedging plants (holly, wild privet, hazel, dog rose and blackthorn) so that different flowering and fruiting times sustain a range of species. These will take a few years to develop and grow and it is hoped that they will not be damaged by rabbits, dogs, people or bikes in the meantime. There will be some wastage of course, due to dry conditions etc. However following our work in the January work party we had some lovely rain which will give them a good start.

Of course at present Sharphill is an isolated area and small mammals, insects etc. find it hard to migrate to other areas where there are safe habitats. This is one thing that has been promised when the Housing Development commences – hedges to act as corridors between Sharphill and the Spinney. If you want to learn more about the hedge as a wildlife habitat, and about the value of hedge laying, go to these links.

<http://www.hedgeline.org.uk/index.php?id=26>

<http://www.hedgelaying.org.uk/>

Friends who met on Sunday were not aware that it was the fourth anniversary of the very first meeting of Sharphill Friends, to the very day, which was held at the Wolds Pub. Four people at the work party also attended that very first meeting:- Rod , Bill , Ian and Chrissie!

As well as these four hardy and persistent people, there were seven other volunteers present on the day who put in a total of 39 hours work: this included two new volunteers. There was also a very nice dog, which did a great job of deflecting the few exuberant canines that wanted to play, knock us over and raid our lunch boxes.

This can be a headache for us: Sharphill is a Nature Reserve, although Rushcliffe Borough Council made the decision not to impose bye laws. Sharphill is one of the few open spaces within walking distance of West Bridgford and Edwalton and very popular with dog walkers. The Friends have been tasked with educating people about how to protect a nature reserve whilst providing leisure facilities for people. Our notices ask that dogs are under control, and if this always happened there would be few concerns about disturbance of (often endangered) wildlife in their habitats. ***We must stress however that we meet many responsible dog owners who are obviously “pack leaders” and well in control of very nice well behaved dogs.***

On Sunday there were several dogs that were obviously not in their owners' control, racing about often without an owner in sight! The other aspect is the management of dog faeces. In the streets of West Bridgford, depositing of plastic bags of doggy doo would not be tolerated, and would be fined, however at Sharphill dog owners think it perfectly acceptable to leave these bags by the side of the path, hanging from twigs etc. There are no dog bins within the Wood for the simple reason that there is no means to collect it, although there is one at the top of Peveril Drive. If anyone has any good ideas to persuade people not to leave their deposits we should be really glad to hear from them!

The good news was that we finished planting the 1000+ hedging whips that were provided by RBC. Well done to all who have helped and a big thank you! Although it was a very windy day, especially on the west side, we weighed up the risk of falling branches and decided that as most of the work was carried out outside the boundary hedge, we would be safe and the wind did moderate. What a huge relief to finish, as it was very hard work, and we have neglected other duties. The paths are quite muddy and could do with another layer of woodchip, there is an area of wire fence, which requires removal, we need to organise surveys and prepare our nature trail, and check out nest boxes, as well as the constant litter collection. Then there is coppicing and removal of sycamore trees to continue from last year.

We have achieved a great deal in four years and put in many hundreds of voluntary man hours, not just in actual physical work, but in putting together and maintaining a website, facebook page, hours of meetings, doing minutes and other paperwork, involving the community in activities, stocking up on and maintaining tools and equipment, attending events, organising surveys and walks, raising money, and policy development. We have also recently offered to help a new group that is starting up in Gotham, to give them the benefit of our growing experience.

Here's to the next four years!

By Chrissie