SHARPHILL WOOD FLORA SURVEY 2021
Report to accompany Excel Spreadsheet 'Flora Survey_2021_NC'

Introduction

Sharphill Wood is a native mixed, primarily deciduous, woodland and a designated Local Wildlife Site (formerly known as a SINC) for its important flora and fauna. In terms of flora, the canopy of the wood comprises large mature ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (pedunculate (*Quercus robur*) and sessile (*Quercus petraea*)), lime (*Tilia x europaea*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), with a range of other species in the understorey layer and at ground level. Around the wood is a species-rich field margin. The soil has been described by others as comprising a small portion of sand and gravel to the North Westerly corner of the wood, whilst the remainder is heavy red clay; the pH has similarly been described as variably neutral to slightly acidic, registering between 7.0 and 5.6. Generally, the woodland has a diverse structure.

This report summarises the results from a survey of the flora observed in Sharphill Wood during a number of visits made in 2021; the report follows similar surveys carried out by the author in the four previous years, 2017-2020.

Scope and Methodology

The data in this report are based on 16 visits to the wood between 9th February and 6th October 2021. Each visit lasted between 2 and 3 hours; the time of day varied. As described in previous reports, the methodology comprised walking south from the Peveril Drive entrance, down to the southern extremity of the wood, before returning north to the starting point, noting species which were present at any particular time. The precise transects taken on any particular visit varied, so that as far as possible all areas of the wood were covered. These included the northern, eastern, southern and western boundaries outside the wood, and the northern, eastern, southern, central and western footpaths inside the wood, as well as less frequent diagonal transects between footpaths.

As part of mitigation measures associated with the ongoing housing development to the north and east of the wood, a post and rail fence encircling the wood was constructed in the summer of 2018. Following this, a 30 metre wide 'buffer' zone in between the post and rail fence and the housing development was planted up by the developers in autumn 2018, on land (formerly agricultural) adjoining the north and east boundaries of the wood. However, the extent of this flora survey was limited to the wood itself and the immediate boundaries outside the wood; specifically, including the post and rail fence but not the buffer zone.

Identification was generally based on the observed flower, aided by other salient botanical features such as leaf, stem and fruit, where appropriate. Reference was also made to the expected flowering period and geographical distribution, as detailed in two reference documents: (1) 'The Wild Flower Key', Francis Rose, 2006, for wild flowers and trees, and; (2) 'Collins Pocket Guide. Grasses, Sedges, Rushes and Ferns of Britain and Northern Europe', R. Fitter, A. Fitter and A. Farrer, 1984, for grasses, sedges, rushes and ferns. The survey also drew on the list of species previously identified.

Based on the above methodology, a particular species was simply recorded as present on a spreadsheet; each record comprises the first confirmed sighting of the year for that particular species. The confirmed sighting would normally be triggered by the first observation in that year of a prominent botanical feature, typically the flower. Subsequent sightings of a particular species (for

example, elsewhere in the wood on the same visit, or on a different visit at a different time) were not recorded; because of the size and complexity of the task, no attempt was made to categorise frequency (for example, by a 'DAFOR' scale), or to indicate distribution locally within the wood. The methodology used is not precise and on any particular visit some species may have been missed for a variety of reasons, such as missing the flowering period, not being in the right place at the right time, inexperience and/or simply a failure of observation. All visits were made by the author.

Results

The data from the 2021 survey are located in worksheet '2017-21' in the accompanying Excel Spreadsheet: 'Flora Survey_2021_NC'. A confirmed sighting of any particular species is identified by an entry of '21' in column F (entitled '2021'). For comparison purposes, the data from the previous four years are shown alongside column F, using a similar methodology. The results from surveys carried out by others, in 2015 and before, are located in a separate worksheet entitled '2001-15'. For convenience, as in previous surveys, the results are grouped into: (i) wild flowers; (ii) grasses, sedges, rushes and ferns, and; (iii) trees. Also included in this year's spreadsheet is a 3rd worksheet, entitled '2021 NC'; this contains the same 2021 species sightings as in worksheet '2017-2021', with the addition of the actual date on which the sighting was made. This additional information has been included so that the data can be input onto Nature Counts, an online recording system for wildlife sightings which Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust started using in 2021.

The 2021 weather was characterised by a wet winter, followed by a cold and dry April with numerous night frosts and a wet but still cool May; probably as a result, many flowers initially appeared around 2 weeks later than in previous years. The summer was generally warm, but relatively dry in the later part of the season, with relatively few woodland plants continuing to flower though September and into October.

Commentary and Conclusions

The reader is referred to the accompanying Excel Spreadsheet: 'Flora Survey_2021_NC' for details of the individual plants identified. In summary, 90 species of wildflower, 28 species of tree and 17 species of grass, sedge, rush and fern were identified in 2021 (a total of 135 species), including some not previously recorded. As in previous surveys, some species which have been recorded in earlier years were not identified in 2021 (these are shown by a blank entry in column F); it is likely that the reasons for this include the observational issues outlined above, species variability and the ongoing development, rather than any significant change in composition.

It is intended to carry out a repeat survey in 2022.

Richard Elliott, on behalf of Friends of Sharphill Wood.