



Friends of Sharphill Wood

2023 Annual Report

May 2023

Founded 22 January 2008: Fifteenth Annual Report

With the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions we were able to return to face-to-face meetings. However, sadly, the attendance at meetings has fallen badly meaning we only met four times in the year including one inquorate occasion. This has meant that we have had to look at our Constitution, which requires monthly meetings except for August and December and that we must have 6 members present to be quorate. An amended Constitution will be put to the 9 May Annual General Meeting addressing these issues.

The Officers elected at the Annual General Meeting on 14 June 2022, postponed as the May meeting was inquorate, were as follows:

Chairperson	Phil Miller		
Vice Chair	Chrissie Wells		
Secretary	Bill Logan		
Treasurer	Chrissie Wells		
Publicity Officer	Mike Rivett		
	Work Party Coordinator	John Elwell	
	Work Party Leader (2)	Richard Elliott, Mike Rivett	

During the year Phil Miller stood down as Chair. Phil will be thanked for his many years of service, over 10 as Chair, at the AGM. Chrissie Wells has acted as Chair until the AGM appoints Phil's successor.

There were 102 Friends on the circulation list in May 2023, up from 88 in 2022.

Acting Chair Report

“Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better.”

The man who said that was a scientist, a physicist and a man who tried to prove without any doubt what he believed. However, in Sharphill Wood, although we do have to look deep into nature to achieve what we have set out to do, we don't always get the right answers. We have had many vigorous debates about how we tackle the simple (on the face of it) aim “To enhance Sharphill Wood Local Nature Reserve (the site) for the benefit of the local community and for flora and fauna”. Conservation is not an exact science.

In the face of this, the Friends do a remarkable job of organising themselves, publicising themselves, keeping everyone safe, achieving consensus, carrying out most of our Management Plan, recruiting volunteers, raising money, and educating those interested in Nature. The small core of people who do much of the above, and have done so for many years, are a bunch of dedicated, committed, talented and hardworking individuals who do not look for reward or recognition and much of the work happens behind the scenes. As well as this, we have some very committed volunteers for the actual physical work carried out at the work parties, and in the surveys that we do ourselves.

In addition, the Development of school, housing and retail has given us an additional burden of monitoring the effect on the Wood, particularly as regards the mitigation measures promised but not yet delivered by the Developers, for example, the much needed wildlife corridor hedge between Sharp Hill and The Spinney. This has required an enormous amount of time and patience in noting and reporting developments on the ground, responding to consultation and attending Stakeholder meetings with RBC and other interested parties. Of course, in this and in other respects we are well supported by Rushcliffe Borough Council and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust.

The author of the above quote was of course Albert Einstein. Throughout his life he regarded his major achievements as mere stepping-stones for the next advance. This pretty much sums up what our attitude has to be, as the work in Sharp Hill Wood will never be finished, so our priority now has to be the very difficult task of ensuring that when we can no longer wield spades and billhooks there are people coming along behind to take over. We therefore have to hope that prospective volunteers subscribe to the adage that “Time spent amongst trees is never time wasted.”

Management Developments

On 23 August 2022 we had our annual meeting in the wood with Paul Phillips of RBC, Ben Driver and Lorna Griffiths of NWT to discuss the Management Plan. The main points of discussion included tree planting in the community park, access to the community hall, the hedge from the wood to the Spinney and the unsuitable fence around the wood. The new boardwalk was noted and the Friends would ensure that the inclines to the boardwalk and path edging to discourage bikes from the sett would be maintained. Paul would arrange for the 10 oaks planted in Zone 4, which had not survived, to be replaced. Lorna suggested replacing hedge plants that had not survived with more hardy varieties. She also noted a pipitrel in one of the new bat boxes. The Friends would conduct a survey of planted trees in autumn 2023. We agreed that our priorities for the following year would be Zone 1 coppicing, coppicing elder, path edging and sycamore removal.



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We were able to hold our Christmas Social on 13 December in the Stratford Haven.

Publicity

Work continued to keep members up-to-date with our news via the web site and Facebook. The latter is also a medium to promote the Friends, with an average of 4 new posts per month over the year; we now have 471 Facebook followers, up from 395 a year ago. We had an article in West Bridgford Local News about the new notice board, but overall there has been less activity on the publicity front this year.

Our publicity/information leaflet, now several years old, is in the process of being re-drafted.

A Zoom seminar “Social Media for Community Groups” run by TCV Scotland was attended in March and some ideas from that will be utilised. A popular medium now is short video clips or “reels”. We would welcome the help of any member with expertise or an interest in this or in the use of social media in general.

Nature Surveys

Nest box inspections were carried out again during spring 2022, led by John and ably assisted on different visits by Tim, Zdena, Edwina, Jenni and Jan. A total of 7 visits were made between 20th April and 1st June. It proved to be a great year, with 11 boxes managing to fledge chicks: 2 Great Tit and the rest Blue Tit. In fact two of the Blue Tit boxes managed to fledge 10 chicks each. Most of the others were in the range 5 to 7, with 3 boxes fledging 3 or fewer. Only one box failed completely, apart from a couple that were abandoned during nest building. This was out of a total of 28 boxes inspected. It is also worth noting that 6 new boxes installed the previous winter towards the northern end of the wood were all used successfully, suggesting perhaps a shortage of natural sites (tree cavities) in that area.

Since starting this activity in 2013, this was the best year yet, thanks largely to the fine spring weather. All results were entered into the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Nest Record Scheme database. This work involved 24 volunteer-hours on site. The 2023 nest box inspections have already commenced.



As in recent years, John conducted a series of bird surveys at roughly 2-week intervals from late March to early June, leading to the publication of a report '[Spring Birds at Sharphill Wood 2022](#)'. It gives a broad picture of birds present at the site during the breeding season and very rough estimates of the number of pairs of most species. A similar report had been produced each year since 2018, although the 2020 report had been somewhat limited in scope because of lock-down restrictions. The quantity and diversity of birds recorded in 2022 was not significantly different from recent years, with a species count of 31. Although several species recorded in the past were not recorded, every species recorded annually since 2018 was recorded again in 2022. This survey involved 22 volunteer-hours on site. Thanks to Chrissie, Hilary and Jenni for helping on some visits. The 2023 survey visits have already commenced.



Richard carried out a further [flora survey](#) in the wood during 2022, to complement earlier surveys. The 2022 weather was characterised by a wet winter, followed by a cool March and early April. The summer was generally warm to extremely warm, with low rainfall throughout the late spring and summer. As a result of the dry weather, particularly in the later part of the season, relatively few woodland plants continued to flower though September and into October, as in 2021. The species recorded in 2022 included 88 species of wildflower, 28 species of tree and 17 species of grass, sedge, rush and fern (a total of 133 species). The flora survey involved 12 visits

by Richard between February and October, involving some 30 volunteer-hours on site. The 2023 survey is currently underway.

Work Parties

During the period April 2022 to March 2023 we held 11 scheduled work parties (one per month apart from August), although the October work party was shifted to early November because of severe weather. In addition, John and Mike had a short work party to pollard a Wych Elm causing too much shade over newly planted canopy trees, and John, with assistance from Simon, Tim and Jenni, conducted nest box maintenance and the installation of 3 new boxes during the winter.

Participation over the year was very good, with an average of 12 volunteers per work party and peaking at 20 in September. We were able to welcome some new recruits, and for many of the work parties, particularly during the autumn and winter, we had a number of Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates. During these various sessions, and taking into account low risk work (such as site inspections and litter picking) carried out by individuals on other occasions, we clocked up 608 volunteer-hours on site, which is well above the previous average.

For much of the autumn and winter we focused on coppicing species such as Wych Elm and Elder, and cutting down or uprooting (using our newly acquired tree popper) smaller specimens of Sycamore and Norway Maple, both of which are rather invasive. Some of the material arising from this was used to construct more path edging along the central path, from the northern entrance to beyond the boardwalk. The rest was used for dead-hedging, in particular to block a few gaps along the western boundary. We also carried out a little more path edging at the northern end of the east path. During the late November work party we planted about 120 whips (Crab Apple, Dog Rose, Dogwood, Hazel and Hawthorn) kindly donated by the Woodland Trust, filling two gaps towards the southern end of the western boundary.

An ongoing task is the checking of previously-planted whips around the boundary, checking guards and canes are in place,



removing redundant guards, and removing encroaching vegetation and over hanging branches. This accounted for much of the work during the spring and summer months. Also the canopy trees planted in 4 “trial planting areas” over the previous 4 winters needed to be checked. Other ongoing tasks included litter picking and distribution of stones to some of the muddier sections of the paths. At the June work party we again borrowed scythes from Notts Wildlife Trust to trim back encroaching nettles on some of the paths. At the early November work party we installed a new metal notice board by the southern entrance.

A huge thank you to all who have helped.

Finance

As reported last year, David Nicholson Cole managed to construct a new Notice Board with great thrift, fully funded by East Midlands Airport, and this was erected in a work party. (Thank you David).



The amount left over was used to make the Board really distinctive with a metal cut out “Welcome to Sharphill Wood – Please respect it” sign at the top, and those who funded the embellishments, Rushcliffe Borough Council through Councillor Robinson and EMA have been acknowledged on the board. Councillor Gordon Wheeler (Nottingham County Council)

enabled us to pay for our annual Public Liability Insurance, whilst Councillor Ben Gray kindly granted funding for new leaflets. These will be delayed until we find out whether we have achieved Green Flag status. We received a donation of £25.00 in memory of someone’s loved one, which will be well used. A volunteer also found £10.00, which was a happier discovery than the usual litter! Thanks to all these funders.

We ended the year with a bank balance of £433.92 including £200.00 for purchase of leaflets, to continue our vital work in the Wood. Thanks again to Gordon Dyne who has audited our accounts from the very start and continues to do so.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are again due to Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, especially Ben Driver, Paul Phillips of Rushcliffe Borough Council and Valerie Holt of the South Notts Group for their continued advice and support.

Chrissie Wells (Vice Chair & Treasurer), John Elwell (Work Party Coordinator), Richard Elliott & Mike Rivett (Deputy Work Party Coordinators), and Bill Logan (Secretary).