



Friends of Sharphill Wood

2024 Annual Report

May 2024

Founded 22 January 2008: Sixteenth Annual Report

In our first full year post-Covid we met on 7 occasions having decided not to stick rigidly to our monthly schedule. At our AGM on 9 May 2023 the following Officers were elected:

i.	Chairperson	Chrissie Wells
ii.	Vice Chair	Mike Rivett
iii.	Secretary	Bill Logan
iv.	Treasurer	Chrissie Wells
v.	Publicity Officer	Ben Gray
vi.	Work Party Coordinator	John Elwell
vii.	Deputy Work Party Coordinator (2)	Richard Elliott, Mike Rivett

During the year Ben Gray stood down to be replaced by Mike Rivett as Publicity Officer and, following an amendment to the Constitution creating a new post of Equipment Manager, David Nicholson-Cole was elected.

There were 90 Friends on the circulation list in May 2024, down from 101 in 2023.

Chair's Report

"Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished".

The person who wrote that obviously understood the need for incredible patience where tasks such as those involved in managing Sharphill Wood are concerned! There are all sorts of obstacles that stand in our way and prevent us from achieving all we would like to. However over the year from 2023 to 2024 we did achieve a great deal. We came to the end of our 5 year Management Plan, and reviewing progress with Paul of Rushcliffe Council, and Ben of Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust we jointly achieved most of what is required under different Objectives, which are:

- Maintaining and enhancing the habitat types and species present
- Combining habitat enhancement and management with education, recreation and access provision
- Encouraging public understanding & awareness of issues relating to [Sharphill Wood]
- Monitoring effects of management and visitor use on the wildlife on the Site

We have not yet developed the new 10-year plan because the effects of ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) require a review of methods of control not previously encountered. So at the moment we are continuing to achieve the tasks required in year 5 of the old plan.

The big news of the year was the achievement of the Green Flag Award for 2023/4 in the summer in recognition of the efforts of Friends in maintaining and developing the wood and promoting its benefit as a Local Nature Reserve.



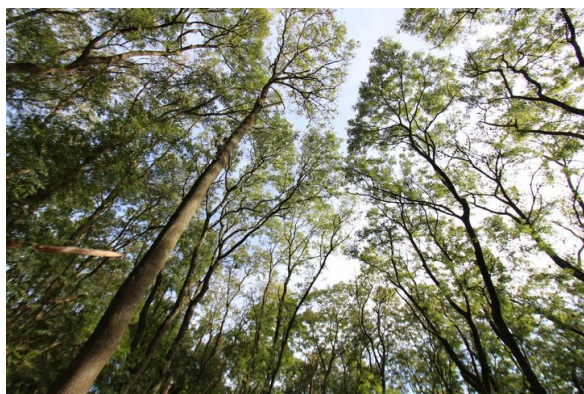
In this we were heavily supported by Alastair Glenn, Manager of Rushcliffe Country Park. Thank you Alastair! We will most likely be reapplying this year.

We also solved a knotty problem of tool storage. When the new community building is erected in a couple of years by RBC we will be allocated space for storage, however in the meantime David Nicholson-Cole not only offered his garden for this purpose, he almost singlehandedly built a shed, kindly funded by RBC. Thank you David!

During the year a special work party was organised to accommodate IFS, the multinational Information Technology Company which has an office at Toll Bar House. Their staff wanted to use their one day a year working for charity to work in Sharphill Wood and despite heavy persistent rain they did a fantastic job. We hope that they will continue to support us.

A welcome approach was made to us later in the year by Matt Brown of Hamberley Care Homes who offered us the comfortable surroundings of Edwalton Manor Care Home to hold our meetings and other events. The invitation is also extended to other community groups in the area. We now hold our monthly meetings in luxury!

Monitoring the work of the Building Development in carrying out their Mitigation promises has proved challenging. The much-needed wildlife corridor hedge is awaiting the outcome of an application to Nottinghamshire County Council by Vistry for removal and disposal of the huge mound of earth arising from their work, which is currently on top of the land allocated to the community park planting area. Our objection to this proposal was unsuccessful. Through the Sharphill Stakeholders' meetings, of which there were 2 during the year, the Friends kept this and other mitigation issues alive and on the table with varying degrees of success. The poor quality fence which is currently collapsing all around the Wood is another example of frustrating barriers to progress, although for some years the Friends have been planting whips around the boundary to support the fencing.



All of these endeavours have been carried out by an ever aging, ever shrinking pool of organisational volunteers who are willing to do the necessary extra work (organising meetings, ensuring policies are in place, monitoring the Development, responding to consultations, raising funds, recruiting, managing publicity etc. etc.). This work is not recorded in the same way as are the number of hours spent actually carrying out the manual work. We continue however to attract some great volunteers for the monthly work parties including young people, more of which from John Elwell. However, organisers are badly needed.

This brings us to examine the other challenges that relate back to Lao Tzu's quote at the beginning of this report. These include, inclement weather that occasionally forces us to cancel work parties at short notice. There is also the necessity to tailor the tasks we carry out to accommodate the bird nesting season. It is of course an offence to intentionally damage or destroy a wild bird's nest while it is being built or used, and if appropriate checks are not undertaken to ensure the absence of such nests, then it is considered intentional. The nesting period is considered to be from 1st March to 31st August, and therefore there is a long period when extreme care has to be taken with walking off path, working

on hedgerows etc. and the boundary must be robust. Of course children, dogs and some adults are oblivious to this!

Another challenge is managing the tension between the Wood as a Local Nature Reserve and as a recreational resource for the community. The Friends Group as locals, and as Management Partners, has to balance the needs of all stakeholders, and the wildlife cannot speak for itself!



However all things being equal all those involved in protecting and managing this precious resource find it extremely rewarding and go way beyond what should be expected from them, as you will see from the various reports that follow.

Well done for a terrific year's work!

Management Developments

As always in August we met with our Management partners, Paul Phillips and Ben Driver and reviewed what had been achieved and tried to set priorities for the following year. We are due some Section 106 funding from the building contractors through Rushcliffe Borough Council so we are considering what we are eligible to apply for, which might include some form of motorized transport for our tools and equipment from the base of the hill to the Wood.

Plans are currently being considered for the land to the south east of the Wood on land owned by Wheatcrofts. This might impact on the wildlife, notably red list endangered linnets which appear annually in our Spring bird surveys. The red listed endangered species yellowhammers have already disappeared with the encroachment of the housing to the SE. We continue to hope that the Green Belt land to the West is never developed as that would most likely mean the end of Sharphill Wood as a viable Local Nature Reserve.

Publicity

Our Publicity Officer resigned on July 20, 2023, after just 2 months in post, and the previous incumbent resumed his duties. We benefitted from publicity around our entry in the Rushcliffe Big Green Book and also our Green Flag award. The latter was featured in West Bridgford Wire on July 22 and both were featured in West Bridgford Local News. Our bat boxes and the volunteer day by IFS were the subject of articles in West Bridgford Local News in June and November respectively. Our Facebook page has had new posts frequently and now has 545 "Followers", up from 471 a year ago. The web site has remained essentially unchanged apart from the regular updates of news, work parties and nature reports.



The updated and revised Friends leaflet is now in use with the Green Flag logo.

We have an Instagram account ("sharphillfriends") and the intention is to invite our members to submit photos to be posted on it.

Nature Surveys

Bill Logan and Barry Cunnison have carried out 3earthworm surveys in April 2023, October 2023 and April 2024. The totals for both surveys in 2023 were 31, so the density on each occasion was 124 per square meter, which is well below the average of 200 per sqm. However, the latest April 2024 survey showed a marked increase with 2025 per sqm. A further survey in October is planned to establish if that increase continues.

Nest box inspections were carried out again during spring 2023, led by John and ably assisted on different visits by Zdena, Chris, Simon, Jenni and Jan. A total of 8 visits were made between 20th April and 12th June. It again proved to be a great year, with results comparable to 2022 (following a very poor year in 2021). Of 31 inspectable boxes, 14 were used and all produced fledgelings: 9 Blue Tit nests averaging 8 fledgelings per nest and 5 Great Tit nests averaging 4 fledgelings. This work in-



involved 28.25 volunteer-hours on site. All observations have been entered into the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Nest Record Scheme database. The 2024 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 of Sharphill Wood 2023](#)'. 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 2023 was not significantly different from recent years, with a species count of 29. Although several species recorded in the past were not recorded, every species recorded annually since 2018 was recorded again in 2023. This survey involved 27.5 volunteer-hours on site. Thanks to Chrissie, Hilary, Jenni and Tim for helping on some visits. The 2024 survey visits have already commenced.

Richard carried out a further [flora survey](#) in the wood during 2023, to complement earlier surveys. The 2023 weather was characterised by several relatively cold periods during the early part of the year, as well as alternating periods of wet and dry weather. The later part of the summer/autumn was wet, October particularly so. The summer was generally warm, but not as hot as in 2022; some woodland plants continuing flowering though September and into October. The species recorded in 2023 included 89 species of wildflower, 29 species of tree and 16 species of grass, sedge, rush and fern (a total of 134 species), a similar count to those in previous years. The flora survey involved 12 visits by Richard between February and October, involving some 30 volunteer-hours. The 2024 survey is currently underway.

Work Parties

During the period April 2023 to March 2024 we held regular work parties in May, June, July, September, October, November, December, January and February. There was no work party in April 2023 (replaced by an earthworm survey) and no work party in March 2024 (lack of suitable work and unavailability of first aider). We also held an additional work party in September with 15 volunteers from IFS, and a mini work party involving Bill, Tim and John in early January to carry out brush-cutting and hedge-trimming of bramble. Bob, Tim and John carried out the annual nest box maintenance at a session in November, including the installation of 4 new nest boxes to replace those broken beyond repair.



Participation at the regular work parties was good, averaging 10 volunteers, including 3

Duke of Edinburgh award candidates at some work parties. This, along with the IFS work party, nest box maintenance, the mini work party and numerous casual visits by individuals doing inspections, litter picking, stone spreading on paths, etc., amounted to 496 volunteer-hours.

Summer work involved maintenance of the notice boards, trimming back vegetation encroaching on the paths (including use of NWT scythes borrowed for the June work party), and checking of previously-planted whips.

A further 100 hawthorn whips donated by TCV, along with 10 oak whips grown from Sharphill acorns by Diana, were planted in gaps along southern stretches of the western boundary at the January work party, thereby tentatively completing boundary whip planting. However, any significant gaps that aren't being taken over naturally may need plugging in due course, in particular when broken fences have been repaired. The December work party undertook the planting of 10 well-developed oaks from RBC. However, these arrived unexpectedly before we had had chance to clear a substantial area

where these would receive sufficient light, so on the day we had to plant them in ones and twos where



there were sufficient gaps, mainly near the central path.

The remainder of the autumn /winter work involved thinning of some young trees in zone 1, removal of invasive Sycamore and Norway Maple, coppicing Wych Elm, and using the arisings for dead-hedging and path edging. Edging at the northern end of the central path was extended, and rotten sections at the northern end of the eastern path were renewed.

Whenever conditions permitted, David, sometimes with assistance, distributed stones to muddy sections of paths. With the contractor dealing with the central path, effort later on was concentrated on the other paths.

A big thank you to all who have been involved.

Organised Walks

Once again John led a dawn chorus walk on Sunday 30th April 2023. There were 12 participants in total, thanks to good publicity by NWT.

Finance

The main items to be funded this financial year were Public Liability Insurance (£262.71), 1200 new leaflets £200.00, £92.96 for finishing the notice boards, and a new shed for our tools, £402.00, now that Phil Miller's shed is no longer available. Thanks must go to Phil for the many years we clogged up his garden! David Nicholson-Cole, having constructed the shed is now our Tools Man and comes along to the meetings as an Officer.



Our disposable income is now a healthy £607.26, of which £477.26 is restricted to purchase of tools and equipment. Barclays Bank matched our poetry project which raised £130.00 which is an invaluable addition of unrestricted funds (Barclays contribution received after year end so not yet included).

Grants were received from Rushcliffe Borough Council £362.00 towards our shed, and Nottinghamshire County Council via Cllr Gordon Wheeler £324.66 for a scythe and insurance. Holy Rood Church donated £256.00 for another scythe and sharpener. OASIS at St. Paul's Church donated £70.00 from their Easter collection and David Batte donated £50.00. All of these funders are thanked profusely. For those who for whatever reason are unable to volunteer, this contribution is accepted very gratefully. Our Public Liability Insurance as an ongoing cost is very difficult to raise funds for and it is something without which we would not be able to hold work parties. We are seeking support from the Council, who own the Wood, for the next year, however it may be that we will have to use our precious unrestricted funds to pay for this expensive item.

And of course, thanks again go to Gordon Dyne who has audited our accounts from the very start and continues to do so, and also for his more general support.

Acknowledgements

Thanks as usual 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. Thanks must also go to Matt Brown of Edwalton Manor Care Home for offering the use of his palatial rooms for our meetings, this obviating the expense of hiring a room, or buying pints at the local pub!

Chrissie Wells (Chair & Treasurer), Mike Rivett (Vice-Chair, Publicity Officer & Deputy Work Party Coordinator), John Elwell (Work Party Coordinator), Richard El-

**liott (Deputy Work Party Coordinator), David Nicolson-Cole (Equipment Manager)
and Bill Logan (Secretary).**