



**Longhirst
Wildlife and
Community Trust**



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2023

Welcome to the Winter issue of the **Longhirst Wildlife & Community Trust** newsletter.

WHAT'S ON OVER THE WINTER

Kim Woolhead

Over the next two months or so, we have arranged several events which we hope will be as interesting and stimulating as those held recently (see below). Everyone's welcome at all our events and they're all FREE so please do come along!

If you would like to attend any (or all!) of the events, please book a place with Pauline Gilbertson by emailing her at paulinegilbertson@gmail.com.

Monday, 27 November, 10.00-12.00

WINTER WILDFLOWERS

James Common, Senior Naturalist at the Natural History Society of Northumbria, will lead us on a Winter Wildflower Walk in the area around Morpeth's Scotch Gill Wood. Come along and discover the surprising number of flowers which can be found locally in winter! Easy walking, but weatherproof footwear is advisable.

We will meet at 10.00 at Morpeth Rugby Club, Mitford Road, Morpeth NE61 1RJ (free parking). Lifts available on request, 09.30am from the Village Hall.

Friday, 8 December, 9.30-13.00

WINTER BIRD WATCH

Join us for a visit to Gosforth Nature Reserve, led by a naturalist from the Natural History Society of Northumbria. This reserve has snug hides as well as resident kingfishers and sometimes a visiting bittern, so it promises to be an exciting morning!

Thursday, 14 December, 7.30pm, Longhirst Village Hall

WINTER TALK: TREES IN WINTER

A talk by Bill Burlton from the Natural History Society of Northumbria - with the added attraction of hot drinks, mince pies and a Christmas Raffle!

2024

**Friday, 19 January, 10.30am on
WINTER LADYBIRDS**

Join us for a leisurely walk at Newcastle's Havannah Nature Reserve, led by Senior Naturalist James Common from the Natural History Society of Northumbria.

**Thursday, 8 February, 19.30, Longhirst Village Hall
ORCHIDS OF THE NORTH EAST**

Come to this illustrated winter talk and learn about the different types of orchid which can be found in our area, led by senior naturalist Ho-Yin Wong from the Natural History Society of Northumbria.

NEWS OF EVENTS HELD RECENTLY

Kim Woolhead

DRURIDGE BAY NATURE WALK

Early in September on a rather foggy day, Ho-Yin Wong from the Natural History Society of Northumbria took us on a gentle stroll along the dunes behind Druridge Bay. On such a dull day we didn't find too many butterflies about, but we learnt a lot of interesting facts about the flora and insects we saw on the day.



Photos: Pauline Gilbertson

HANDS ON EVENT FOR ALL AGES

In late September we held an event for everyone in the Village Hall, attended by four children and seven adults. The task, building bird and bat boxes, was enjoyed by all, particularly the children!

Thanks are due to Jill McManus, Andy Foreman and Richard Tordoff for their expertise and help on the day. Richard Tordoff helped two of the children to erect their bird boxes in Paddock Wood, near to the bird hide and he has since put up

three bat boxes and a bird box in St John's Churchyard. See if you can spot them next time you go!



Photo: Pauline Gilbertson



Photos: Richard Tordoff

NORTHUMBERLAND WILDLIFE TRUST WALK AT DRURIDGE BAY

We were due to have a guided walk around East Chevington nature reserve, led by Sophie Webster of the Wildlife Trust, on 21 October. Due to the rather inclement weather and access to the hides on site being restricted due to refurbishment, it was agreed that this event would be postponed until next Spring when hopefully we will be luckier with the weather.

WOODRUFF WOOD NEWS

Managing our Wood for Red Squirrels – Part 1. Transport Routes

What makes a wood attractive to a red squirrel? Well, it's all about location, location, location. Which, when it boils down to it, involves such things as living quarters, provisions, transport routes and the ever important neighbours. So from our perspective, when it comes to caring for our wood we need to consider whether what we have on offer meets these essential criteria – or not.

In this occasional series we will focus on one particular feature at a time, how the wood currently ranks in suitability, how best we can make improvements and how to plan for the future. First up, in no particular order, let's look at transport routes.

Pinch Points and Scrub

Red squirrels are predominantly arboreal mammals. 70% of their time is spent in the tree canopy*, which means that when it comes to moving around the wood, branch connectivity is key – in other words to be able to jump from tree to tree as they go from a to b on their travels. In Woodruff Wood, this is possible on the most part – but there are exceptions. Rides (paths/tracks) which intersperse the wood are vital for all sorts of flora and fauna to thrive, yet from a red squirrel's perspective they form a gap in the canopy which can be a barrier in preventing them getting to where they want to go. Though they do drop down to ground level to cross if given no alternative route, this is not always ideal. So how can we improve this?

Well, we use a couple of simple but effective ride management techniques:

1. Pinch Points – *where tree branches from either side of the ride overhang and touch allowing aerial crossing points.*

Think of them as bridges over a busy highway. The recommendation is that one pinch point is in place at a minimum distance of every 100m along the rides. In the photo of Main Ride (below), you can see an example of a pinch point whereby the birch and ash tree branches on the left hand side of the track meet the Scots Pine branches on the right hand side.



Photo: Woodruff Wood

If you look carefully, you will also see that underneath the mature trees are a row of dark tree shelters. These contain young oak saplings. We hope that they will grow up to become pinch points of the future – and though this may be quite some time off, woodland management is as much planning for the long-term as it is for the right here, right now. Trees do eventually age and die – and it is important that their successors are following on behind to take their place.

2. Scrub – *an area of land covered in small trees and bushes.*

In areas where tall trees do not overhang and touch, another solution is to allow the ride margins to scrub up. In doing so, patches of cover are created which allow the red squirrel to move around without drawing too much attention to itself. It is a much safer option than crossing open ground. Here, in the photo below, you can see an example of scrub:



Photo: Woodruff Wood

This is a section of ride margin we have dedicated many an hour to over the last decade. Planting a large mix of different trees and shrubs, they are now becoming well established (which is wonderful to see). They provide cover and food for a whole host of wildlife (including red squirrels). Going forward, our management programme focusses heavily on maintaining and improving such areas throughout the wood.

Beyond the Boundary

Finally, another important consideration when it comes to transport routes is connectivity with other woodlands beyond our boundary. This is vital to allow red squirrels to disperse and relocate (for example juveniles). The more isolated a wood is, the less favourable it becomes to a red squirrel which, simply put, cannot reach here without great risk. Around our wood, transport links are ok on the whole. A neighbouring wood joins on to ours and the Old Haul Road, along with numerous hedgerows, act as wildlife corridors. However, there is always room for improvement and in today's modern times the threat of 'development' of one description or another is always just around the corner which could quickly lead to further loss of habitat.

* Red Squirrels and Forestry Operations in England. Operations note 65. Forestry Commission

Please remember, if you sight either a red or grey squirrel in the Morpeth and surrounding area, report it to MADRS at sightings@madredsquirrels.com or telephone/text the MADRS mobile 07570 897979.

HAWK-MOTHS

Pauline Gilbertson

The hawk-moths are generally larger and more colourful than most of our moths, their name deriving from their fast, hawk-like flight. Only a tiny percentage of the world's hawk-moths live in, or visit, the UK. You may have seen a Hummingbird Hawk-Moth (a migrant) in your garden. It hovers over its food plants (which include red valerian, lilac, phlox and buddleia) like a hummingbird, in between darting hawk-like between plants. The Elephant Hawk-Moth, with its distinctive pink and green colouring, typically feeds on plants of the willowherb family, which is where I found this Elephant Hawk-Moth caterpillar in August, alongside a lake at Wallington Hall:



Photo:
Pauline Gilbertson

Much less widespread in the north of the UK is the Lime Hawk-moth, and I was excited to find a Lime Hawk-moth caterpillar (pictured below) near Longhirst Village Hall in late September:



Photo:
Pauline Gilbertson

This species is still uncommon in Northumberland, and until recently it was not found further north than Yorkshire. This caterpillar had fallen out of a large lime tree onto a car bonnet, from where I was able to rescue it. It should now be safely hibernating and I will be looking out for it as a moth when it emerges next May.

AND FINALLY....

Here's a glimpse of some of the wildlife that Longhirst residents have been capturing on our trail cameras which they have set up in their gardens. If you would like to borrow a camera for your garden (and we would love to expand our list of wildlife seen in the Parish) please email Pauline Gilbertson (paulinegilbertson@gmail.com) and get yourselves on the waiting list!



Stoat



Roe Deer



Badger

Great Oak Adventures

We have had the following message from Anna Sargent which might be of interest to those of you with small children:

'Great Oak Adventures has just set up in your area. We run two toddler groups, Acorn Toddlers on a Wednesday at 9:30am at Tritlington CofE First School and a beach Toddlers group on a Thursday morning at Cresswell Beach, either 9:30 or 11:00 depending on the tide. These sessions are great for getting your little ones outside and having fun. Sessions are £5 per child for 1-5 year olds. We are also running a holiday club during half term for 5-12 year olds. More info on our website www.greatoakadventures.co.uk'

Unfortunately due to the timing of this newsletter the half term holiday club will have been and gone, but I am sure that more opportunities will arise in the future. Up to date information can be found on the website.

We have lots more planned for the next few months which we will reveal as time goes on, but if you have any topics which you would particularly like to see covered either as an article in the newsletter, an event or activity, please do get in touch.

You can email me at kim.woolhead@gmail.com and I'll see what I can do!