



# Annual Report

## for 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020

Four Trustees were elected at the last AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019 – Jamie Ritchie, Annie England (Secretary), Steve Pearson and Robert Todd. Mark Tait has continued as our non-Trustee Treasurer. We thank them all for taking on those roles.

We currently have 81 registered volunteers, 10 of whom have joined since the last AGM. Over the last 12 months we have removed 7 volunteers from our list: they either asked to be removed or stopped responding to our messages. Approximately 26 volunteers are active in the woods and all of those volunteers are also members who support our work and can vote at the AGM. We send a big thank-you to all trustees, members and volunteers for their continuing enthusiasm and good company.

We had another excellent year working in the woods and meeting new volunteers. We have held 41 woodland task days in the 12 months to the end of March 2020, improving on the 37 held the previous year and almost equalling the 42 we held with the support of a paid Co-ordinator in the year ending March 2018. We do not have task days in August and we lost 3 task days due to bad weather and 8 due to having insufficient volunteer numbers for the task day to go ahead.

The number of volunteer hours contributed in the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 was 1,037 – significantly down on the 1,983 hours for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 and the 1,415 hours given in 2017-2018.

Given the number of task days that were being cancelled due to an insufficient number of volunteers, a special meeting of Members was held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019 to discuss the future of the organisation. All those in attendance said that they wanted the organisation to continue so it was agreed to use half of our reserves to appoint Gary Cowell to improve our marketing presence, increase volunteer recruitment and identify funding opportunities.

A task list was agreed with Gary and, despite the coronavirus pandemic, the number of volunteers active in the woods has increased and we set a new record of having 14 people at a task day on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. The increase in numbers attending each task day has meant that all of our spring/summer tasks were completed on schedule, despite the task days lost due to the first lockdown. Since Gary started, only two task days have been cancelled - other than by Covid 19 lockdown: one was due to none of those who had volunteered having a current 1<sup>st</sup> aid qualification, the other was due to us having cut all the cordwood into logs but it being too early to start felling!

We now have a social media presence on Twitter and Facebook and a new name, the change from 'Knighton Tree Allotments Trust' having been agreed by Members and formally adopted in February 2020. Our volunteering opportunities are now clearly laid out, in a similar fashion to job opportunities, and promoted via local volunteering bureaux and other organisations such as Frengle. Local newspapers and magazines have carried a series of articles about us and our work and we now have a fortnightly newsletter to keep our members, partners and other local 'green' organisations informed and entertained.

We are seeking funding to start charcoal production – our first funding bid having unfortunately been unsuccessful – and have submitted a bid to train current and new volunteers in how to carry our bird, plant and

moth surveys. We wish to increase the breadth of volunteering opportunities we offer, both to improve the work that we do and to attract new volunteers.

At the time of writing, the Wales firebreak lockdown and the second England 4-week lockdown, have respectively lost us 3 task days and reduced the number of volunteers able to attend. This will impact on our work rate during the autumn coppicing / felling season.

After a delay caused by Covid 19 restrictions, we have almost finished distributing this year's allocation of 33 cubic metres of firewood that was cut and dried in the previous year - 25 member volunteers received an allocation. This is a lesser amount than our peak of 39 cubic metres distributed in 2019. This is partly due to there being no wood to distribute this year from Llangunllo, where we have paused work, or Weir Cottage Wood, which distributes bi-annually. Our distribution of firewood in previous years was: 2018 – 37m<sup>3</sup>; 2017 - 13m<sup>3</sup>; 2016 – 24m<sup>3</sup>.

We held two training courses in 2019-2020. Our first hedgelaying course was held on 12-13<sup>th</sup> October 2019, run by Chris Gurney, and made a profit. Our first attempt to run our three-day training course on "*Introduction to Woodland Management*" in November 2019 was cancelled due to lack of interest. We tried again in March 2020 and this time Covid intervened, delaying the final day of the course until the beginning of September and causing some attendees to drop out. Even so, the course broke even. Our second hedgelaying course has sold out quickly, meaning that it will be profitable, but has been delayed by Covid restrictions.

A brief summary of the work in each woodland:

### **Weir Cottage Wood, near Knighton**

We have continued with our planned management of Weir cottage. We thinned a coupe in January 2020 and processed the cordwood into logs in September 2020. We cut back brambles in August 2020 and need to plant saplings in the winter of 2020-2021 to replace those swamped by brambles in 2019.

### **Castle Ring Wood, Beggar's Bush**

This is the main focus of our work. We just managed to finish cutting the 1<sup>st</sup> coupe at Castle Ring in March 2020, before the first lockdown: we have coppiced all the hazel and heavily thinned the birch to allow in more light for the regenerating hazel and other species. The work rate here will now increase, Covid restrictions allowing, with increased volunteer numbers, better work planning and additional chainsaw operators meaning that we should be able to complete the second coupe in a much shorter time.

### **Conclusion**

This has shown that we have developed and progressed over the last 'long' year since our AGM in June 2019. From a serious dip in late 2019 we have, despite the restrictions of working in a global pandemic, managed to recover and are now in a good position to move into the future. We are about to ask our members to agree an update to our constitution and to start on a 5-year plan for the future.

However, we do need more of our existing members, and new members, to assist with the running of our organisation so do please step forward to help.