



Annual Report

for 8th February 2022

Three Committee Members were re-elected at the last Knighton Community Woodlands Group AGM on 2nd December 2020 – Annie England (Secretary), Steve Pearson and Robert Todd – and Guy Rollinson was elected as a Committee Member. Mark Tait has continued as our non-Committee Member Treasurer. We thank them all for taking on those roles. Jamie Ritchie stood down as a Committee Member and we thank him for all his hard work and dedication to the Woodlanders.

Following on from our 2020 name change, in November 2021 we updated our constitution to better reflect our work as we passed our first decade of woodland management.

We currently have 88 registered volunteers, 10 of whom have joined since the last AGM. Over the last 12 months we have removed 4 volunteers from our list: they either asked to be removed or stopped responding to our messages. Approximately 23 volunteers are active in the woods and nearly 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 Members and volunteers for their continuing enthusiasm and good company.

We had another excellent year working in the woods and meeting new volunteers. We held 19 woodland task days in the 12 months to the end of March 2021, well down on the 41 held the previous year and almost entirely due to the Covid pandemic restrictions. We decided to have task days during August 2020 in order to catch-up and were lucky in that we lost no task days due to bad weather. One task day was cancelled due to not having a First Aid qualified volunteer available and one cancelled was due to us having cut all the cordwood into logs but it being too early to start felling!

We were pleased to find that the number of volunteer hours contributed in the year ending 31st March 2021 was 978, not significantly down on the 1,037 hours for the year ending 31st March 2020 despite much fewer task days. This is because, where task days were able to proceed, we had a much higher turn out on each day.

Our volunteering opportunities continue to be promoted via local volunteering bureaux and other organisations such as Freegle. Our 'Woodlanders' Update' newsletter, which keeps our members, partners and other local 'green' organisations informed and entertained, and our social media presence on Twitter and Facebook, have all been less frequent owing to the illness of the volunteer who has been writing for us.

We successfully bid to the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund for a charcoal retort, and training in its use, and can now make and sell sustainably produced charcoal. This will generate a small regular income, making us less reliant on grant funding and more financially self-sufficient with regard to our running costs - such as training, insurance, PPE and tools. We chose a charcoal retort, rather than use a traditional charcoal ring-kiln, as a retort burns much more efficiently and cleanly, producing more charcoal and far less particulate air pollution. Our small retort that will produce charcoal within one of our usual task days, which is much more 'volunteer friendly' than the 24 hours that a ring-kiln needs supervising.

Charcoal making allows to make use of small timber and brash, utilising more of the timber we grow and turning the 'waste' side branches and tops that arise from our work into a value-added product. In addition to selling charcoal, we will, in time, also run training courses on making charcoal - generating a second income

stream from the equipment.

We also successfully bid for funding from Natural Resources Wales to train current and new volunteers in how to carry out bird, plant and moth surveys. We delayed the project by 12 months due to covid restrictions but at the time of writing, the Award Letter has just been signed and the project will launch in the next few weeks.

The charcoal production and biodiversity survey training will both increase the breadth of volunteering opportunities we offer and attract new volunteers.

Knowing that the covid restrictions would result in less firewood for distribution in 2022, we took the decision to delay distributing the 2021 wood allocation from Weir Cottage wood for 12 months, in order to increase the 2022 allocation. The 2021 allocation to Member volunteers is complete. We have, as in previous years, sold to Members the 'tithe' of wood owed to the woodland owners that those owners have waived.

Since the last AGM we have held only one training course, a hedgelaying course held in December 2020 and run by Chris Gurney and Gary Cowell, which made a profit of £289.

Our last AGM was held late in the year – December 2020 - due to Covid. We are now trying to get our AGMs back to being held in the spring/summer to avoid the dark winter evenings. It is our therefore intention to hold the 2023 AGM in April or May of that year.

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 have repeatedly cut brambles and in December 2021 planted saplings to replace those swamped by brambles in 2019.

Castle Ring Wood, Beggar's Bush

This continues to be the main focus of our work, coppicing all the hazel and heavily thinning the birch to allow in more light for the regenerating hazel and other species. We have struggled sometimes with having chainsaw qualified volunteers on site, due to illness and injury in our volunteer workforce, but are making progress on the current coupe.

Conclusion

Like everyone else, we have struggled to carry out our objectives during a pandemic. However, we have managed to increase the breadth of our work so, as covid restrictions ease over time, we will be able to continue recruiting volunteers and managing woodlands for the benefit of wildlife and our Members.

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.