



Annual Report

for 27th June 2023

Following the disruption of the Covid pandemic, we have now got our AGMs back to being held in the spring/summer in order to avoid the dark winter evenings.

Four Directors were re-elected at the last AGM on 8th February 2022 – Annie England (Secretary), Steve Pearson, Robert Todd and Guy Rollinson. Mark Tait has continued as our non-Director Treasurer. Steve, although he stood down as a Director a few weeks ago, is continuing to keeping our insurance cover relevant and up to date. We thank them all for taking on those roles and we offer our thanks for their hard work and dedication.

We currently have 52 registered volunteers, 12 of whom have joined since the last AGM. Over the last 16 months we have removed 45 volunteers from our list: they either asked to be removed or were removed as they had stopped responding to our messages some time ago. Approximately 25 volunteers are active in the woods, either on task days or on biodiversity surveys. Nearly all those active volunteers are also members who support our work and can vote at the AGM: we have 31 paid-up KCWG members for the 2023-2024 year. We send a big thank-you to all members and volunteers for their continuing support and good company.

We have had another excellent year, holding 43 woodland task days in the 12 months to the end of March 2023, with one task day cancelled due to insufficient volunteers and two lost to snow. This is above the 38 held the previous year and well above the year before that with its Covid pandemic restrictions.

The number of volunteer hours contributed in the year ending 31st March 2023 was 1,529, a slight increase on the 1,467 hours for the year ending 31st March 2022. Please note that these figures do not include the time spent on biodiversity surveys. The 2023 allocation of affordable woodland products to member volunteers is currently underway.

Our volunteering opportunities continue to be promoted via local volunteering bureaux (with little or no response) and Freegle, which continues to be our best promotional route. Our 'Woodlanders' Update' newsletter, which kept our members and partners informed, is not currently being published owing to the illness of the volunteer who had been writing for us. Our social media presence on Facebook has been maintained by Annie as Company Secretary. We no longer post to Twitter as it was not reaching potential volunteers, only other woodland-themed organisations.

Thanks to Stuart's excellent efforts, assisted by Lynne, Angie, and Nicola in particular, but also many others, our charcoal retort is generating a small regular income, making us less reliant on grant funding and more financially self-sufficient in our running costs - primarily training, insurance, and tools. Our small retort has proved not able to produce charcoal within a usual task day as planned, necessitating a "late shift" of volunteers willing to remain 2 to 3 hours later in order to shut down the kiln. This has proved challenging but we are making progress (and charcoal!) and selling through local shops.

Stuart has also started making and selling kindling, using brash arising from coppicing. Thanks to Stuart's hard work and entrepreneurial spirit, KCWG now sells charcoal in spring/summer and kindling in autumn/winter.

Since the last AGM we have not run any training courses for third parties. However, we have received some funding from Focus on Forestry First towards having more of our volunteers trained in chainsaw use.

The main new development since the last AGM is the establishment of our biodiversity survey programme. We successfully delivered training to current and new volunteers on how to carry out bird, plant and moth surveys, thanks to funding from Natural Resources Wales, having delayed the project by 12 months due to covid.

We now have 3 survey groups running who are building up a picture of the biodiversity of Castle Ring Wood and operating self-sufficiently. Sue, Dave, Stephanie and Marilyn have done sterling work with the plant group, Rebecca and Lawrie are very successfully leading the bird surveys and Lawrie (again) and Dai are heroically keeping the moth surveys going. The training and surveys have attracted new volunteers to the Woodlanders: the plant group has expanded since the training; the bird group has held steady but the moth group has struggled with numbers as few of those who attended the training went on to be surveyors.

The Woodlanders motto is "*sustainably managing woodlands for the benefit of wildlife and our members*". We have always been able to demonstrate the benefits to members of fresh air, exercise, good company, skills development, and so on. Now we will be able to start measuring the impact of our woodland activities on wildlife and the results of the surveys will feed into the management plan for the woodland.

The charcoal production and biodiversity survey training have both increased the breadth of volunteering opportunities we offer and attracted new volunteers. However, this does bring new challenges in maintaining and improving communication within an expanded organisation.

With our current directors and Company Secretary indicating that they will stand down at the AGM, we need other Woodlanders to take on their roles if Knighton Community Woodlands Group is to continue in its current form (there are likely to be other constitutional models that can be explored).

There is a job of work for the new Directors to do once appointed:

- Firstly, to identify areas of necessary work and find willing volunteers to do it - we already effectively operate 'area leads' in this manner (e.g. finance, insurance, biodiversity surveys, charcoal and kindling).
- Secondly, to work out the best way for those people to communicate with each other – for example, it might be that Directors are joined in quarterly meetings by 'area leads' forming a wider management committee and that a common, 'cloud' filing system is established.

It is our hope that whatever type of grouping is formed, it will better reflect the depth and breadth of KCWG's activities and allow better and more direct communication between those people with different roles in KCWG.

A brief summary of the work in each woodland:

Weir Cottage Wood, near Knighton. We have completed our 10-year management plan at Weir Cottage Wood. The owners are now receiving support from the Shropshire Hills AONB office in writing up a new 10-year management plan and once that is in place, we shall see what role KCWG might play in its fulfilment.

Castle Ring Wood, Beggar's Bush. This continues to be the 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 a changing volunteer workforce, but have addressed this with more volunteers coming forward to be trained. The 10-year Natural Resources Wales' Approved Management Plan has now concluded and a new Plan will need to be approved. KCWG may well have a role in helping the owner with this.

Conclusion

We have been able to continue managing woodlands for the benefit of wildlife and our members, and have expanded the breadth of our organisation. However, we do need more of our existing members, and new members, to assist with the running of our organisation, in areas such as recruiting volunteers, so do please step forward to help.