

## The Wood Reopened!



In mid-June 2019, following a tree safety survey carried out for Argyll and Bute Council (A&BC) council officials decided to shut the wood to all access. As highlighted at the AGM and at the Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee the way this was done was far from ideal with no stakeholders being consulted. However, following a rather belated Health and Safety inspection by the council in the late autumn, a more pragmatic approach was taken with the essential work required to reopen the wood identified. This was undertaken in January and the wood reopened to the public in early February. Work completed by the council in the wood was not confined to that required solely to open the wood. They also undertook resurfacing of the car park approach road, repairs and installation of new fencing and repairs / new treads on the Thurgood Bridge.



## Management Agreement

Work continues in preparing for the management of the wood to revert in July to Luss Estates from A&BC. We have been liaising with Doune Ponds, who have a similar relationship with Moray Estates to that we seek with Luss Estates. Sadly a visit scheduled for early April had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 Lockdown. We have been in touch with Scottish Natural Heritage and do not believe there is any reason in principle why the wood should lose its Local Nature Reserve status, subject to the council retaining a "light touch" interest in the ongoing management of the wood. Are still discussing how this might be best achieved.

## Frogs booming in Duchess Wood

by Pete Minting (Trustee)



The ponds in Duchess Wood have been alive with frogs this spring, with more than 1000 clumps of common frog spawn in the lower pond and around 500 clumps in the upper pond. The peak spawning night in February this year would have been quite an event to witness. Herons have been taking a keen interest in the booming numbers of frogs and no doubt some of you will have seen herons taking off from the ponds, as you approach.

You may also see newts and dragonfly larvae feeding on frog tadpoles in the shallows. As spring and summer progress, you should see many other animals in or around the ponds, including damselflies and dragonflies, which spend most of their lives developing underwater before emerging to fly on sunny days. At dusk or dawn, you may see bats (probably Daubenton's bats) swooping low over the ponds to catch insects, in addition to pipistrelle bats which tend to fly higher up.



Since the ponds were built with the help of funding from Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in 2016, the Friends of Duchess Wood committee have put a lot of effort into managing the ponds and this work has really started to pay off.

A fence has been added around the lower pond, partly to protect the pond habitat from the effects of swimming and trampling by dogs. If the pond water is frequently stirred up, or the vegetation repeatedly trampled, this has a bad effect, so it is best if dogs are kept out of the ponds. Dogs can enjoy paddling in the burn, where they will have much less of an impact on wildlife.



Most dog walkers have been complying with notices asking people to keep their dogs out of the ponds, which is much appreciated. We will install a fence around the upper pond during 2020. A range of native plants have been planted to improve the pond habitat and in 2019 there was a fine display of water lilies in the lower pond, along with yellow flag iris and other marginal plants.

The success of the Duchess Wood ponds project was recently featured on ARC's website on World Frog Day – to read the article and find out more about amphibian conservation, see:

<https://www.arc-trust.org/news/world-frog-day-2020>

## Annual General Meeting

The 2019 AGM was held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November at 7:30pm in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall. It being a particularly wet and stormy evening only about 20 members attended. Following the AGM there was short talk on Luss Estates by their Land Agent Sean McCay. This was then followed by a general discussion which focussed largely on the recent closure of the woods on safety grounds by Argyll and Bute Council and what action was being taken to reopen the woods as soon as possible.

## News in brief

### Maintenance

The wood closure followed on by the Covid-19 lock down has meant that there have been no routine maintenance work parties over the last nine months. However there have been some adhoc work by individual members and the council undertook some work (see item on wood reopening).

### Rhum Memorial

New Look to Duchess Wood from Paterson drive.

Rory MacKinlay, a Friend of Duchess Wood, has made good use of this "lock down" period to tidy up and clear the entrance to Duchess Wood from the top of Paterson Drive. He walked there most days with his beautiful Bernese mountain dog Rhum who sadly died earlier this year and so he has put a memorial to Rhum there. So nice to see the personal touch from somebody who uses and loves our Duchess wood



### Chivas Volunteer Day

Before the Covid-19 lockdown we had several meetings with Chivas as they prepared for their Responsib'ALL Day 2020 where the whole company spend a day away from the workplace doing good deeds. We were hoping to be able to host around 20 or so volunteers for a day's work in the wood. Hopefully we will be considered as a suitable venue for 2021.

## Bins

Sadly, following the lockdown, the council have not been able to empty the bins as often as usual. It was disappointing, that despite signs being put up, dog walkers were still using already full bins to deposit poo-bags.



FODW is a voluntary, non-political local community group and a registered charity. It works co-operatively with other groups such as Community Payback, The Access Trust, Branching Out and a range of other bodies especially Argyll and Bute Council's Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee which is responsible for the wood. We are grateful to them for the contributions they make to the successful running of the wood.

Membership of FODW costs £10 per household per year and requires no obligations although volunteers to help with simple maintenance tasks are always welcome.

Current FODW Trustees are:

Matt Offord (Chairman)  
Martin Grafton (Secretary)  
Bill Hassall (Treasurer)  
Morag Young (Membership Secretary)  
Paul Blackburn, Rachel Bailey, Stewart Campbell, Richard Horrell, David Lewin and Pete Minting.

#### YOUR VIEWS

The FODW email address is [fodwg84@gmail.com](mailto:fodwg84@gmail.com). The website shows the contact email as [enquiry@duchesswood.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@duchesswood.org.uk) and forwards emails to the fodwg84 address.

Website - [www.duchesswood.org.uk](http://www.duchesswood.org.uk)

Facebook - @FODW1

Charity number SC039527

# Friends of Duchess Wood



Spring Newsletter 2020

