

Thanks!

A significant number of people help with the day to day upkeep of the Wood and help keep it as place people love to visit.

Thank you to James Gould and all the other visitors who pick up cans, tins, bottles and litter. It makes such a difference, and the appearance of the Wood deteriorates hugely if it is left lying about.

Thanks to Colin Rae and the Community Payback team for strimming the Pony Field and the area down and around the lower wildlife pond. It makes these areas look so much better and, in particular, helps keep the bracken under control.

Finally, thanks to Luss Estates personnel for taking over emptying the bins at the entrances. On occasions this isn't a pleasant task, but we know what a terrible mess and potential health hazard these areas become if the bins are not cleared regularly.

So thank you everyone for your help.

Management Agreement

As the covid-19 pandemic was interfering with the handover of the wood back to Luss Estates Company (LEC) from Argyll and Bute Council we wrote to the CE of the Council requesting a three month delay to allow a proper handover to be conducted. Sadly this request was denied and the wood reverted to LEC control at the beginning of August. The handover walk round wasn't conducted until mid-October! Meanwhile we continue to build our relationship with LEC and look forward to working together productively in looking after the wood.

Meanwhile we continue to challenge the council's opinion that, following the reversion of management to LEC, the wood needs to lose its Local Nature Reserve status.

Life in the woods

Stewart Campbell (trustee)

Despite all the difficulties around us this year the Wood mostly seems to have been unaffected. The start of lockdown was like Christmas morning in that there was almost no environmental noise and this certainly resulted in more birds being seen in the Wood and in neighbouring gardens. The rookery seemed stable with 70-80 nests. The woodpeckers were making their usual racket in the first half of the year and the jays have been quite evident in the last six weeks or so, including one sunning itself on one of the fruit cages by the pony field. Grey squirrels seem to have made a bit of a comeback this year, but no red ones in evidence yet, even though their range is creeping down the lochs from the north. I've not seen deer in the Wood for most of the year and perhaps this is linked to what appears to be greater use of the Wood during the pandemic, and more dog walking. Fox sightings are always thin on the ground and they have been a rare sighting this year. Both the ponds, but particularly the lower ponds, had vast numbers of tadpoles, newts and dragonflies this year, and the plants in the lower pond flourished; they have made a great display throughout the year. The upper pond has struggled to build up its plant life, but the new fence around it should dissuade dogs from splashing about and help plants get established. Although we had suspicions that some different bats might be in the vicinity, the bat detector has continued to record only pipistrelle and soprano pipistrelle. The insect life of the Wood and all the ferns, mosses and fungi have all been going through their normal cycles. I visited a woodland National Nature Reserve in Appin recently and Duchess Wood is not dissimilar – a reminder of how valuable the Wood is in environmental terms. Remember if you see any more unusual species in the Wood to let Stewart know at stewart.campbell@zen.co.uk

Annual General Meeting

The 2020 AGM will be held on Tuesday 26th January 2021 at 7:30pm. Due to continuing social distancing restrictions, as a result of the pandemic, the meeting will be held on Zoom with the agenda restricted to discussing the annual report and accounts and electing the committee members and office bearers. Links and instructions on how to join the AGM will be forwarded in the days leading up to the event.

Amazon Smile

This is not an encouragement to you to use Amazon, but if you do shop using Amazon you are now able to benefit FODW. Each time customers shop at smile.amazon.co.uk Amazon will donate a percentage of the net purchase price for millions of eligible products. There is no additional cost or charge to customers or charities for this.

Request for donations

When you are tidying out your shed this autumn/winter, if you have any unwanted liquid wood treatment material in black or shades of brown or unwanted fence posts or tree stakes, would you like to donate to the Friends of Duchess Wood please? Treating wooden fencing with wood preservative help extends its life considerably and, as we have new trees to plant, tree stakes would also be very useful.

Please deliver to the Acting Chair at 36 Queen Street and leave behind the gate post if nobody is at home.

News in brief

Maintenance

The social distancing requirements of Covid-19 lock down has meant that there have been limited routine maintenance work parties over the last nine months. However there has been some adhoc work by individual members and the council undertook some work to prepare the wood for handover to Luss Estates.

Duchess Drive

A few weeks ago, the Friends were alerted to the felling of a tree in the Wood behind Duchess Drive. Investigation confirmed that a 100-year old oak tree had been cut down and in falling had damaged or knocked over other trees. It has now transpired that the tree was taken down by a contractor working on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council in the last few days of the Management Agreement. Residents have complained about the felling and the large amount of brash left behind and we have brought these concerns to the attention of Luss Estates and the Council. The fallen tree has some value if it can be removed, so we are looking into the possibility of removing the main trunk for sawmilling, but this will not be easy.

Multiple Users

The wood is used by a variety of users, schools, walkers, dog walkers, horse riders and cyclists. In particular mountain bikers have been using the wood and have been constructing trails (since dismantled) although it seems their activities have recently focussed more on areas further up Highlandman's Wood. Please be aware of other users and treat them courteously.

New Chairman / Committee vacancy

Due to work commitments Matt Offord recently resigned as Chairman of the Friends. David Lewin has been appointed Acting Chairman and this will be ratified at the next AGM (January 2021). David has been an active member of the committee for over eight years and has led on many activities including fund raising.

Matt has also stood down as a committee member so we have a vacancy should anyone want to volunteer!

Bins

Whilst the future of bin collections is still being discussed. Meanwhile LEC are continuing to empty bins although this service can not be guaranteed in the longer term.



FODW is a voluntary, non-political local community group and a registered charity SC039527. It works co-operatively with other groups such as Community Payback, The Access Trust, Branching Out and a range of other bodies. We are developing a new relationship with Luss Estates Company, the owners of the Wood, since the termination of their Management Agreement with Argyll and Bute Council. We are optimistic that we can work together to continue to enhance and maintain 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:

David Lewin (Acting Chairman)

Martin Grafton (Secretary)

Bill Hassall (Treasurer)

Morag Young (Membership Secretary)

Paul Blackburn, Rachel Bailey, Stewart Campbell, Richard Horrell and

Pete Minting.

YOUR VIEWS

Anyone wishing to contact FODW should use the 'contact form' found on the website.

Website - www.duchesswood.org.uk

Facebook - @FODW1

Charity number SC039527

Friends of Duchess Wood



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