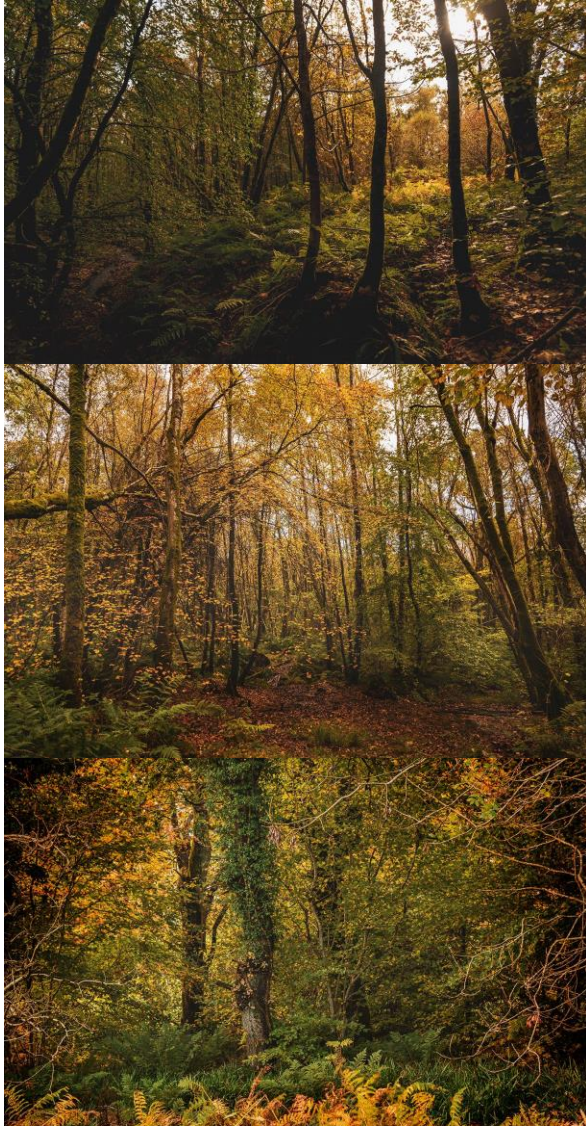


Friends of Duchess Wood

Autumn Newsletter 2024



New Trustees

Current membership stands at 211 households, an increase of 10 since April 2024. We have now recruited three new Trustees. Norman Quirk is taking over from Eilean Yendell as Acting Treasurer and Christopher Gow and Martin Williams have volunteered to become Trustees thus bringing the number on the committee to eleven. Norman is a Chartered Accountant with many years' experience of charity finance and governance. He strongly believes that woodlands like Duchess Wood are essential to both the physical and emotional wellbeing of communities and everything should be done to ensure their conservation. Chris loves walking his dog in the Wood and has become interested in ensuring and understanding how the Wood is maintained and remains available for everyone in the future. From his regular walks around the Wood Martin has grown to appreciate how valuable it is for local residents and wants to be able to do something to ensure it can be enjoyed by all. Chris and Martin's election to the Executive Committee is subject to ratification at the AGM of a minor change to our constitution to allow up to twelve Trustees. We thank Eilean for her work as Treasurer for the past three years and are glad she will be staying on as a Trustee.

Work Parties / General Maintenance

We hold work parties on the last Sunday of every month (2pm meet at garages at end of Millig Street) to which all members are welcome. Recent tasks have included bracken and weed bashing, trimming willow hedges at both ponds and using some of the cuttings for a dead hedge over the culvert at the Duchess Gait entrance. The secondary deer fence around the tree nursery has worked well and we hope to plant out some of the oak, hawthorn, sweet chestnut and alder trees over the winter. If you have any small saplings in your garden let us know as we may have room for them in our nursery.



You may have noticed marker stakes in the ground at the Pony Field. These mark the position of tiny oak saplings which may have been buried by squirrels or Jays. It seems to have been a good year for oak germination across the country, possibly due to the wet summer we have had.

Annual General Meeting

The 2023/24 AGM will be held on Tuesday 29th October 2024 at 7:30pm in the Helensburgh Parish Church Small Hall. After the normal agenda of the Executive Committee presenting the annual report and accounts, and a break, there will be a short talk by Archie Wilson (a Tree Surgeon who works in the Wood for Luss Estates) on the "Value of Trees".

Recent Committee Meetings

Since the last newsletter two committee meetings have been held. Topics of discussion included liaison with the landowner (Luss Estates) particularly on wood management, bridge surveys, glade creation and general maintenance activities. The bank account balance on 22nd August was a healthy £6396.42.

Fly Tipping

Visitors who use the Paterson Drive entrance to Duchess Wood may have noticed a new sign requesting that people do not dispose of garden waste in the wood, and instead take it to the Blackhill Recycling Centre. We are concerned that the previous disposal of garden waste in the Wood may have introduced non-native invasive species. This could have a serious detrimental impact on native plants in the Wood. An example of an invasive species which we believe has been introduced by garden waste is the hedging plant *Lonicera nitida*, which grows prolifically by the Thurgood Bridge. Garden waste in a nature reserve is unsightly, threatens the natural balance of biodiversity in the Wood and creates serious challenges for the protection of this special place. We rely on, and are very grateful to, local volunteers who cut back, bash down and root out invasive species in the Wood. We hope that highlighting the negative impact which dumping garden waste has on our Local Nature Reserve will discourage this practice.



Bat Walk 3

To celebrate International Bat Night on 24th August, Bev Clarke from the Lomond Bat Group kindly returned to give her third bat talk and walk of 2024. Unfortunately, it was another wet evening, but Bev kept the participants entertained with interesting bat facts delivered in her fun and engaging way. This time she brought a wonderful homemade bat costume - ably modelled by one of the younger participants - to illustrate aspects of bats' anatomy, such as their knees hinging the opposite way to humans'. After the talk the rain cleared and the children played an echo-location game. Two bats obligingly appeared at dusk, silhouetted against the setting sun. The evening was topped off by hearing pipistrelles' distinctive clicking sounds on the bat detectors, indicating significant bat activity at the lower pond, although we couldn't see them in the gloaming. Our thanks to Bev for the three bat walks this year and to all the participants for their donations which have been split equally between FODW and the Bat Conservation Trust. We plan to offer two bat walks next year, probably in April and to coincide with the 2025 International Bat Night on 30th August.



Helensburgh Duchess Dash and Trident 10km Trail Race

During September the Helensburgh Amateur Athletics Club held their first Trident 10Km and junior race, the 'Duchess Dash'. 65 senior runners took part and the winning time was an amazing 37 minutes with everyone completing the route within 1 hour 22 minutes. Although it's slightly short of 10Km (at 9.7Km) it has 1250 feet of climb which is gruelling over such a short distance. The junior race was slightly less popular as it only attracted 4 young runners, but all completed the 2 laps of Duchess Wood with ease. The coaches are however confident that it was worth organising and numbers will only increase if the event is run in future years.

Lomond School

We continue to have good links with Lomond School who make good use of the Woods for their educational purposes. On 14th May 36 pupils visited and cut down laurel, weeded the tree nursery, bashed weeds cut down garden escapee plants at the car park entrance and filled car park potholes. We are currently discussing with them how some of their 10 year old pupils can help in the Wood.

Horses

We are aware that some riders are still crossing the two remaining wooden bridges in Duchess Wood. These bridges were designed for pedestrians and not a half tonne plus horse and rider. We are happy that the Wood should be accessible to all but there are notices up at the bridges saying they are not suitable for horses. We have asked Luss Estates to carry out bridge surveys and await their response.

Bird Song identification

Some members may be using the new Merlin App which helps identify bird song. If you have a list of birds identified by Merlin in the Wood, please let Stewart Campbell know at stewart.campbell@zen.co.uk. This will help improve our bird list for the Wood.

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 Luss Estates Company 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:

David Lewin (Chairman) david.lewin26@gmail.com

Martin Grafton (Secretary) martin.grafton@outlook.com

Eilean Yendell (Treasurer) eyendell21@outlook.com

Morag Young (Membership Secretary) moragyoung@ymail.com

Laura Baird, Nicky Brownrigg, Stewart Campbell, Richard Horrell and Norman Quirk.

YOUR VIEWS

The FODW email address is admin@duchesswood.org.uk.

Website - www.duchesswood.org.uk

Facebook - www.facebook.com/FODW1/

Charity number SC039527

Proposed Battery Energy Storage Scheme

As many of you may well know YLEM, a Manchester based renewable energy company, plan to install a 50MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) on a 0.5ha of greenbelt land owned by Ardencaple Farm. The proposed site is adjacent to the West Highland Railway Line and very close to Duchess Wood.

The consultation period ended at the end of March and our submission, forwarded to the council before the closure date, can be seen on the news page of the FODW web site www.duchesswood.org.uk/news/. We are disappointed that the council decided an Environmental Impact Assessment was not required. Due to council delays and resubmission of parts of the proposal it is understood that the council now hope to make their determination by the end of October 2024.

Bench

A new memorial bench donated by Mary Jane Selwood, in memory of her husband Kim, was installed in August. We are very grateful to Mary Jane for her kind donation which provides a welcome place to rest after the steep climb up the east path.



Apples

There has been a good crop of apples in the orchard. The fruit trees were planted around eight years ago and are all native fruit varieties.



Some of the picked fruit will be available at the AGM.