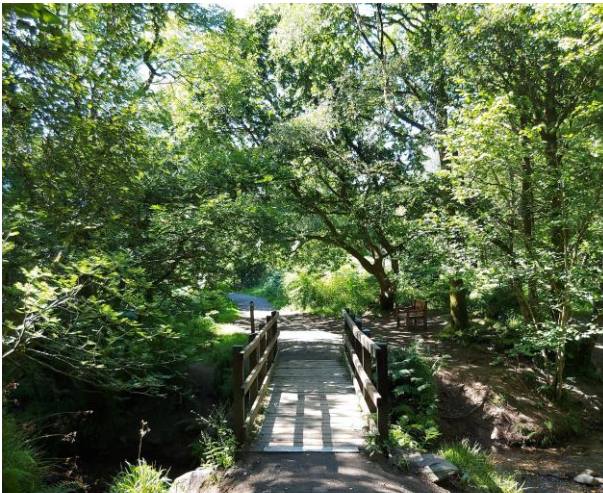


# Friends of Duchess Wood

Autumn Newsletter 2025



## Sale of Duchess Wood

Following Luss Estates advertising the Wood for sale last year the sale went to a Closing Date in November. Progress remains slow although we understand that the sale will be concluded in the very near future. It remains our understanding that the new owners will manage the Wood in a responsible way and recognise their stewardship responsibilities. We will keep you updated as and when we are informed of any developments.

## New Trustees

Due to personal reasons Stewart Campbell and Laura Baird have announced their intention to resign as Trustees at the next AGM. We have lined up three potential candidates who will stand for election: Nora Morocza, Neale Dewar and Andrew Stocks. If successful this will bring the number of Trustees up to 12, the maximum permitted under the Constitution. Our next task is to identify deputy office bearers from amongst the current Trustees who can stand in if there are any short notice vacancies in these roles. We also need to identify potential Trustees in case any future vacancies develop.



## OSCR Regulatory Powers

Recent changes to legislation have increased the powers of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Amongst other powers they now run a Register of Trustees and will publish Annual Accounts of Charities. The latter will not impact on FODW as we already publish our Annual Report on our web site. Names of Trustees have already been forwarded to OSCR for inclusion in their Register.

## Annual General Meeting

Due to the incapacitation of the Chair and Secretary the 2024/25 AGM has been postponed to Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at 7:30pm in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall. Further details, together with an agenda and draft copy of the Annual Report will be sent out nearer the time.

## 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, storm and flood damage and general maintenance activities. Additionally, the Secretary (Martin Grafton) gave a brief on the impact of changes to Charity Regulation.

The bank account balance on 5th August was £6916.65. Membership stood at a very healthy 230 households which reflects well on the recruitment initiatives we have recently initiated. We have recently invested in a card reader to enable card donations to be made at events being held in the Wood.

## Nature Corridor

A Nature Network is a strategic approach to connect and enhance nature-rich areas, including nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects. It focuses on creating ecological connectivity through suitable habitat, habitat corridors, and stepping-stones. This connectivity is vital for healthy ecosystems, robust populations, and the ability of species to move across landscapes, maintain genetic diversity, and adapt to challenges like climate change.

The Rhu and Shandon group (which are bidding to purchase Ardconnel Wood in Rhu) envisage a Nature Network running from Castle Wood, through Duchess Wood, Glenoran Wood, across to Rhu incorporating Ardconnel Wood and eventually as far as Garelochhead. We are working with them in these early days to see what might be involved and how FODW might contribute noting that we do not own Duchess Wood. This project is in its initial stages, but it is hoped it may be able to influence future Argyll and Bute planning intentions.

## Between Equinoxes – the shorter days

This is an article kindly written by one of our Trustees – Nicky Brownrigg.

Long ago, in the days before clocks and calendars, our ancestors perceived the autumn equinox as the beginning of a new year. Although we associate the autumn equinox with shorter days, our ancestors celebrated the potential for new life contained in all the seeds, fruits and nuts which are in season now.

In Duchess Wood you'll find the red fruits of hawthorns and roses; the prickly outer cases of sweet chestnuts and beech nuts; acorns (a bumper crop this year); tassels of nettle seeds and the flat seed heads of common hogweed which smell of coriander and clementines. With the correct preparation, all of these autumnal goodies are edible.

The main attraction of autumn, though, has to be the beautiful gold, bronze and copper leaf canopy, especially on a clear sunny day when the yellow leaves contrast against a cerulean sky. Have you ever wondered why leaves turn yellow or red in the autumn? Those pigments are always in the leaves, but the green pigment from chlorophyll dominates until the days become shorter and colder. Less light reduces the tree's ability to photosynthesise, so the tree reabsorbs the chlorophyll from its leaves, revealing the other colours to us, and enabling it to conserve magnesium and nitrogen. The process by which trees lose their leaves is called abscission. Hormonal changes make the cells at the end of the leaf stalk break down, causing the leaf to detach and flutter to the earth below. The final stage of abscission is the tree forms a corky waterproof scar to seal the 'wound' where the leaf stalk was attached, thus preventing water loss and infection. Amazingly clever!

In autumn, looking down at the ground can be just as enjoyable and colourful as looking up at the tree canopy. The fallen leaves' yellows and browns form a beautiful tapestry to swish through, or why not collect some of the leaves to create your own ephemeral art? Over winter, with the help of fungi, millipedes, worms and slugs, these leaves will decompose and enrich the earth below the trees, recycling nutrients for the tree. Deeper underground, the wood wide web of roots and mycorrhizal fungi continues to send chemical and electrical signals over the winter months, enabling trees to share resources and 'communicate' with each other.

Over the winter, you will still see birds in the wood, whether they're rooting around amongst the fallen leaves for insects, or feasting on the remaining berries and seeds. Robins, chaffinches, tits, wrens and blackbirds might be joined by redwings and other migratory birds. returning to the wood.

By March the sap will begin to rise in the plants, with honeysuckle leaves being amongst the first to appear. The flowers of lesser celandine are harbingers of spring, shining like golden stars amongst the decayed leaves on the woodland floor. Look carefully at hazel branches and you'll find another jewel of spring - tiny ruby sea anemone-like flowers - which will become nuts as the yearly cycle continues to the next autumn equinox.

## Events

The Events Group set up to co-ordinate events being held in the wood in order to promote its role in promoting quiet enjoyment and biodiversity has been busy. Recently events included a Bat Walk, Dawn Chorus Walk, Flower Walk and Family Event. Events are all publicised on our Web Site and on our Facebook page.

Events planned until the spring (and subject to the weather) include:

Oct 4-19 Tree Treasure Trail (half term family fun)  
Nov 29 – Making Willow Stars (ideal Christmas decorations)  
Jan 17 – Wassailing (Tartan Harmony choir and family fun)  
Feb 7 – Making Willow Hearts (for yourself or loved ones)  
Mar tbc – Dawn Chorus Walk (identify birds by their songs)

Further details will be provided nearer the event on posters, our Website, Facebook page, in the local press and by email. Please also contact [nickyfodw@gmail.com](mailto:nickyfodw@gmail.com) with any requests or suggestions for additional events.

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) [chairofduchesswood@gmail.com](mailto:chairofduchesswood@gmail.com)  
Martin Grafton (Secretary) [martin.grafton@outlook.com](mailto:martin.grafton@outlook.com)  
Chris Gow (Treasurer) [Gow21@hotmail.com](mailto:Gow21@hotmail.com)  
Morag Young (Membership Secretary) [moragyoung@yahoo.com](mailto:moragyoung@yahoo.com)  
Laura Baird, Nicky Brownrigg, Stewart Campbell, Richard Horrell, Carolyn Rosie (acting), Martin Williams and Eileen Yendell.

### YOUR VIEWS

The FODW email address is [admin@duchesswood.org.uk](mailto:admin@duchesswood.org.uk).  
Website – [www.duchesswood.org.uk](http://www.duchesswood.org.uk)  
Facebook – [www.facebook.com/FODW1/](https://www.facebook.com/FODW1/)

Charity number SC039527

## Maintenance Support

Regular monthly working parties were held and thanks to those 5 - 9 members who joined in helping to maintain the Wood. Work done has included filling potholes, repairing fence posts, chipping brash, cutting back Rhododendron regrowth, bashing bracken and weeds and mulching fruit trees in the orchard.

Lomond School continues to provide good support with maintenance in the wood. Following discussion with the Scottish Council for Volunteer Organisations it has been determined that, as we do not carry out regular activities and we do not take direct charge or control of activities undertaken by minors or vulnerable adults, we do not need to undergo the Disclosure Scotland process.

Meanwhile, during several visits, Community Service squads have carried out repairs at the Thurgood Bridge, cleared blocked gullies and using their motorized barrow, moved aggregate from the Millig St entrance into the Wood and also brought cut timber from the Wood to Millig Street.

Working parties are held monthly at 2pm on the last Sunday of the month. If you are interested in taking part, please contact David Lewin at [chairofduchesswood@gmail.com](mailto:chairofduchesswood@gmail.com)

