

Friends of Duchess Wood Newsletter Spring 2026

With the passing of the spring equinox and the welcome arrival of longer days, there's a real sense of aliveness in Duchess Wood. In this newsletter we'll let you know what there is to look forward to - both in terms of natural wonders and FoDW events - and then have a short review of the last six months, before moving on to the sale of the wood and an appeal for new trustees ...



Natural Wonders

Spring has definitely sprung, with bird song ringing through the woods, tadpoles wriggling in the ponds, fresh green leaves unfurling and white blossoms blooming. The glossy golden flowers of lesser celandine (left) will soon be shining like mini suns on the ground. In a few weeks it will be many people's favourite time in the wood, with bluebells and stitchwort providing splashes of blue and white in the dappled shade. We hope you can take the opportunity to be still in the wood for a few moments and savour all it has to offer.

Future Events

Keep an eye on our noticeboards, [Facebook page](#) and [website](#) for details about a new event each month. If you have any **suggestions** for future events, please send your requests to nickyfodw@gmail.com.

We've created a new **Nature Quiz** for 2026 which is based on the six information panels in the wood. The worksheet is available all year on our website. Click on this [link](https://tinyurl.com/FoDWQuiz), go to <https://tinyurl.com/FoDWQuiz>, or scan the QR code on the posters on the wood's noticeboards. The Nature Quiz can be done at any time, but to enter one of our school holiday prize draws, submit your solution by the deadline stated on our website's [events page](#).



Bev Clarke, aka Batwoman, will return with her bat detectors and fun array of props for another educational and entertaining **Bat Walk** on Saturday 25th April at 7.45pm. Please book via nickyfodw@gmail.com because places are limited and Bev's walk are always popular. We're hoping she'll come back for another walk on International Bat Night on 29th August.



On May 17th and September 13th, Nicky (one of our Trustees who is also a herbologist) will be leading **Foraging Walks** in her informative yet informal way, pointing out the medicinal and edible plants growing around the wood. Join her to discover which plants to use for cuts, coughs, cordials or casseroles.

Past Events



Numbered slates appeared in the wood as part of our **Tree Treasure Trail** during October's half term. Thanks to everyone who took part and congratulations to Martha who won the prize. Why not enter one of the Nature Quiz prize draws this year for the chance to win a book?

Towards the end of October, members of Jean's Bothy created a **labyrinth**, designed to be used for a walking meditation, as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival.



We offered a **willow star making** workshop by the Upper Pond in November and participants proudly took home two sizes of willow stars to use as Christmas decorations.

Our main event of the winter season was Helensburgh's inaugural **Wassail**. It got good coverage in the Helensburgh Advertiser and was a great success (dare we say so ourselves)! About 240 people enthusiastically joined in the festivities, making a noise with pans, tambourines, bells and a rather splendid horn to 'wake up' the orchard before blessing the trees with toast and hanging tea light lanterns on the branches. Tartan Harmony entertained the crowd with six traditional wassailing songs and the Wood's King and Queen looked the part in costumes kindly loaned by the Helensburgh Theatre Group. We hope to do it again next January - do come and join in the festivities!



Maintenance

In early October **Storm Amy** left quite a wake of destruction - with fallen branches blocking paths and denting a gate - but the high winds also created a rather beautiful, finely balanced sculpture in the pine wood (right). FoDW volunteers cleared what they could with handsaws and two members tackled the larger branches with chainsaws - thank you Rob and Andrew.



We informed the landowners of precarious higher branches which we believed required an arborist's attention and some of these have been felled. However, there are a few trees which still have branches hanging from them, so we recommend you **take care** when walking beneath the oaks on the steps up to Patterson Drive and the pine at the rocky outcrop in the east of the wood.

The annual **drain clearance** took place in October, helping to reduce surface water on the paths over the winter months. We removed the usual culprits of tennis balls, twigs and bottles (perhaps you remember the squelching sounds on the Facebook video!)



Speaking of mud, we laid some kindly donated **paving slabs** by the Millig St garages to make the path more pleasant to walk on. We're aware that some have since cracked, so watch your step and we'll replace them soon.

In January we installed two pairs of **counter posts** which had been generously donated by Helensburgh & District Access Trust (HADAT). These are enabling us to obtain accurate footfall records at the car park and Millig St entrances to the wood. In the 10 weeks up to the end of March, we recorded over 16,000 visits to the wood, split fairly evenly between the two entrances.



In February, our work party volunteers transplanted 26 rowan and birch **saplings** from our nursery to the surrounding area, so in years to come white blossoms and red berries will line the path to the Lower Pond. Volunteers have also staked and mulched young hawthorns and worked on the willow hedges around the ponds.

Earlier in March volunteers replaced the broken **fence** on Montrose Street - what an improvement!

Community Pay Back has been a great help repairing the Thurgood Bridge steps and **Lomond School** did a fantastic job clearing out ditches, so our thanks go to both of these organisations.

A big **thank you** to all the volunteers who help to maintain the wood on the last Sunday of each month. We'd love to hear from you if you'd like to **get involved** - the work parties are only for two hours, from 2-4pm. Please email our Chair, David Lewin, chairofdutchesswood@gmail.com if you'd like to help.



Nature Network



Helensburgh & Garelochside Community Partnership for Nature is the working title for a new informal partnership between FoDW, Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group (Castle Wood), Glenoran, Glenarn, Ardenconnel Wood and Shandon Woodland Community Group. The aim of the group is to increase biodiversity within and between the different woods, thus creating a thriving nature network linking Helensburgh and Garelochhead. We will also share knowledge and resources, for example in the removal of invasive non-native species. Two FoDW trustees attended a workshop in December led by Fauna and Flora International to help the group choose its name and clarify its vision.

Bank Statements

Some members had inadvertently cancelled their FoDW membership because they didn't realise that 'Go Cardless' on their bank statements referred to a direct debit to FoDW. Unfortunately Go Cardless charge a ridiculous amount to personalise it to 'Friends of Duchess Wood' so please note that a £10 debit referenced as 'Go Cardless' probably relates to your FoDW membership. We are very grateful for the support from all our members and hope that you will continue to renew your membership.

Ownership



Duchess Wood is being offered for sale again after the original purchase agreement in 2024 was not concluded. This is clearly disappointing. Our position remains the same as it was in 2024 when the wood was first put up for sale, in that we are not in a position to purchase the Wood, nor lead a community buy out. This position was supported by the membership at the 2024 AGM. We will endeavour to establish a good working relationship with any new owner and hope that they will work with us to maintain this much valued asset for the community.

AGMs

The **2025 AGM** was held in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall belatedly on Monday 19th January 2026. Key issues were the acceptance of the 2024-2025 Annual and Financial Reports, acceptance of a revised Constitution (see below) and election of Trustees. This included the election of four new Trustees - Neale Dewar, Nóra Mórocz, Carolyn Rosie and Andrew Stocks - along with the resignation of Laura Baird and Stewart Campbell. Laura had been a Trustee for four years and brought a useful knowledge from her roles in the National Park and SEPA. Stewart had been a Trustee since FoDW's inception in 2008 and had fulfilled terms as Chair and Treasurer. He leaves with our best wishes as he moves to the east of Scotland to live nearer his family. We thank them both for their invaluable contributions as Trustees.

The **2026 AGM**, to which all members are invited, will be held in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall on Monday 2nd November at 7:30pm.

Appeal for New Trustees

At the November AGM we expect some long serving Trustees will not seek re-election, so **we are now looking for new Trustees to join the FoDW committee**. If you use Duchess Wood regularly, please consider joining our committee. We're a friendly bunch and only have four meetings per year (plus the AGM) so it's not a big time commitment. In addition, our Secretary has been fulfilling this role for nine years. Our new Constitution states that Office Bearers should ideally not serve more than 10 years, so we are also **asking for volunteer to take over the Secretary role**. Please email our Chair, David Lewin, chairofduchesswood@gmail.com if you'd like further information about becoming a Trustee or Secretary.

Revised Constitution

The original Constitution was adopted on the inauguration of the Friends of Duchess Wood in 2008. Due to changes in legislation dictating how Scottish Charities should be run, the Trustees directed that the Constitution should be reviewed and rewritten. We used a template provided by the Scottish Charitable Voluntary Organisation (SCVO). Major changes include more clarity on the governance, role and management of Trustees. Adoption of the new Constitution, which came into effect on 1st April 2026, was unanimously endorsed by those members at the AGM in January. It can be viewed on our [website](#).

Enjoy the Spring and Summer!

We hope you enjoy your time in the wood over the next six months. If there's anything you'd like us to feature in the next newsletter, then please contact nickyfodw@gmail.com.

