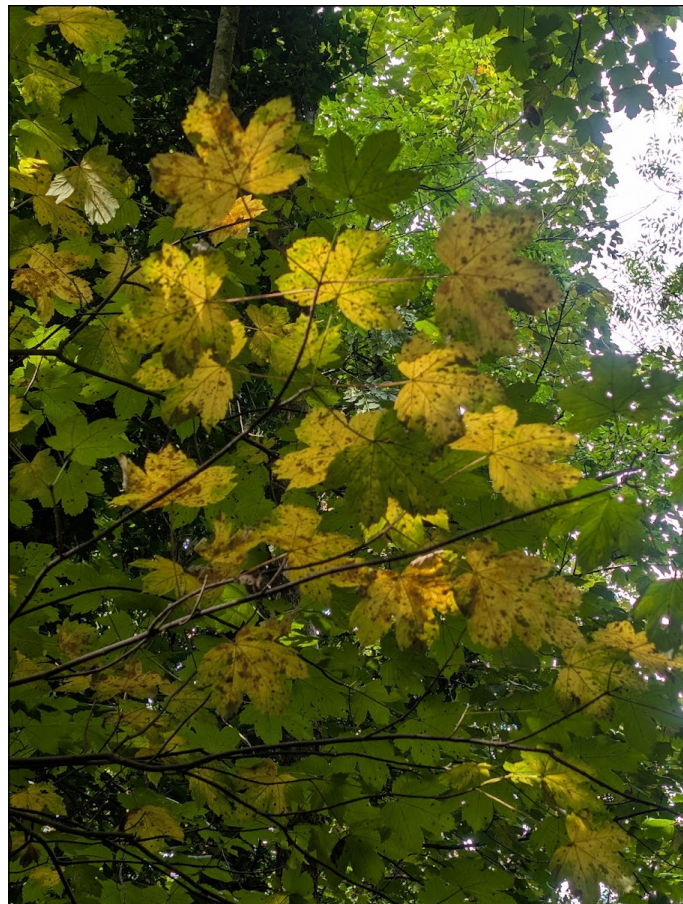




Friends of Duchess Wood Newsletter Autumn 2026

Changing Seasons - try a little *shinrin yoku* (the Japanese practice of forest bathing)

We imagine you enjoyed the refreshing shade cast by Duchess Wood's trees this summer. Perhaps you noticed *Komorebi* 'sunlight leaking through the trees', creating dancing shadows below the vibrant greens of the wood's canopy. As we move into autumn, you could try *momijigari* 'red leaf hunting'. There is a fine maple with red leaves south of the tree nursery; or you'll find a rich tapestry of gold, tan and green amongst the main wood's sycamore, beech and birch trees.

We hope you enjoy your autumn walks around the wood. Read on to learn about new activities which could enhance your visit and to find out what's been going on in the wood in the past six months...

New Tree Trail - learn about 14 species of tree

Watching time-lapse videos of trees changing through the seasons and leaf burst are amongst the fun features you can access via the QR codes on our new tree trail. In response to our members' survey in March, we have been preparing a new trail around the wood, featuring 14 different species of tree. Posts with plaques will be installed by the main paths in October. Simply scan the QR code on each plaque with your mobile phone's camera, click on the link and it will open that tree's entry in the Woodland Trust's A-Z of Trees. There you can discover more about each species' identifying features, folklore and uses, in addition to the time lapse videos.

We have devised a wordsearch to accompany the Tree Trail and you'll be able to access it by scanning a QR code on posters at the noticeboards.



New Scavenger Hunt - fun for all ages

One of our trustees, Martin Williams, has added a scavenger hunt featuring five Duchess Wood locations to an app called Adventure Lab. Download the app, click on Duchess Wood's location pin and walk to the nearest waypoint shown on your mobile phone's screen. Once you're near the waypoint, the question will appear and the answer will be visible at a nearby feature (eg a date on an information board).

Groundspeak Inc.

Adventure Lab®



4.7★

15k reviews



PEGI 3

500k+

Downloads



Guided Walks - bats and foraging

Bev Clarke from Loch Lomond Bat Group returned in April and August to lead two fully booked bat walks. Her walks are always educational and entertaining, so early booking is recommended. Nicky Brownrigg, a FODW trustee and Herbologist, led foraging walks in May and September. Participants learnt about the medicinal and culinary uses of plants growing in the wood.

Footfall Counters - c75,000 visits annually

Footfall counters at Millig Street and Kathleen Park entrances recorded 16,000 visits in the first three months of this year and 22,000 from April to June inclusive. We will keep the footfall counters in place until the end of this year and then move them to the Paterson Drive and Duchess Gate entrances, so by the end of 2027 we'll have a clear picture of footfall patterns at each entrance.



Fallen Oak - RIP

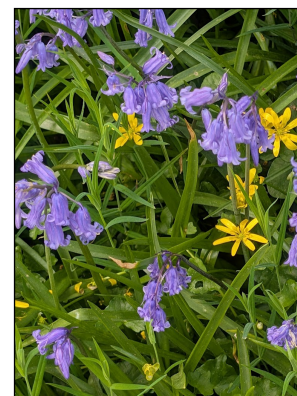
Thankfully the footfall counters remained unscathed (just!) when a large oak tree fell over by the car park on August 6th. Unfortunately the gate didn't fare so well!

We're a bit mystified as to why the oak fell as it wasn't particularly windy. Maybe it was due to the hot, dry weather.

We are grateful to Luss Estates Company for clearing the tree quickly and for committing to replace the gate next month.

Plant Survey - 226 species recorded

The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) conducted two plant surveys of Duchess Wood this year. In April they recorded 170 species of vascular plants (trees, shrubs, flowers, ferns and grasses). They found a further 56 species in July, taking the total to 226. We are very grateful to Michael Philips and his team of volunteers for recording the plants in Duchess Wood. We have added the full species list to our website and the surveys will provide a useful baseline for monitoring biodiversity in the future.



Invasive Species - focus on garden waste

BSBI's visits alerted us to a serious problem with invasive non-native species (INNS) in Duchess Wood, particularly in the Hammerhead (the eastern area which backs onto houses). Unfortunately these invasive species have been unwittingly introduced into Duchess Wood by adjacent homeowners disposing of their garden waste over their fences. Dense ground cover plants, for example golden variegated archangel, piggyback plant, ground elder and periwinkle are smothering native flora such as bluebells and stitchwort (note the contrast in the photos below).



Another area which is badly affected by INNS is by the Thurgood Bridge (below): Wilson's honeysuckle has been fly-tipped down the embankment and is colonising areas downstream, crowding out native plants and reducing biodiversity. Garden waste can also introduce pests and diseases into the wood.



Free 2-Day Community Workshop

Invasive Non-Native Species Management (INNS)

Saturday 10 & Sunday 11 October 2026
Rhu Community Hall & Ardenconnel Wood

Come and learn practical techniques on removing Rhododendron ponticum and Cherry Laurel with experts from:

- RSPB Morvern
- Climate Neutral Raasay
- Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park
- Argyll Countryside Trust
- Catkin Ecology
- Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group

No experience needed. All welcome.
Places are limited – book early

Book: www.rhuandshandoncommunitytrust.org/events-1
or email: rhushandontrust@gmail.com

Rhu and Shandon Community Trust is running a **free INNS management workshop** on October 10th and 11th. FFI or to book, email rhushandontrust@gmail.com.

In the summer term, 60 pupils from **Hermitage Primary School** undertook practical conservation tasks in the wood and devised an environmental campaign as part of their John Muir Discovery Award. They saw the detrimental impact garden waste is having on the wood and designed leaflets urging home owners to stop dumping garden waste into the wood and to take it to Blackhill Recycling Centre instead.





Work Parties - improving the wood for the community

With around 75,000 visits to the wood annually, footpath erosion is becoming a concern, especially along the top path where tree roots are becoming increasingly exposed. We trialled putting down bark shavings to protect the roots with some success. However, the conundrum is how to transport tonnes of materials up to the northern path 🙄.

Other work party, Lomond School and Community Service tasks over the past six months have included clearing a dam which was causing erosion, unblocking gullies, refurbishing the Information Hub, weeding the tree nursery, cutting back vegetation by the car

park and around saplings, weaving the willow hedges by the ponds, removing invasive species and sawing off low hanging branches. A big thank you to everyone who has helped!

Please contact chairofduchesswood@gmail.com if you'd like to join our work parties, which take place from 2pm to 4pm on the last Sunday of each month.



Donations - thank you

Congratulations and thanks to Alan Morris who successfully bid for an inscribed Duchess Wood oak bowl in June. The oak bowl was turned by Maggie Irving, who kindly donated it to us to auction - thank you Maggie!

We have been fortunate to receive other donations in the past six months, ranging from tools via Freecycle, to a selection of saplings grown by one of our members, to generous cash donations. Thank you all for your support.

We currently have a request on Freecycle for **waders**, so we can clear out the ponds. Our trustees' feet range in size from 6-10! Please email chairofduchesswood@gmail.com if you know of anyone who could donate or lend us some waders for our work party at the end of November.

AGM - 2nd November - farewell to three stalwarts

Our AGM is on Monday, 2nd November at 7pm in the Small Parish Church Hall and we hope to see you there. Our guest speaker, Norman Burton, will talk about the potential impact of the Local Area Plan on green spaces around Helensburgh.

We will welcome a new trustee, David Peck, who has been a great help with maintenance tasks in the wood since the summer. We will also be bidding a fond farewell to three trustees: Morag Young who has served on the committee for 19 years, Martin Grafton who has been our Secretary for nine years and Eilean Yendell who was our Treasurer for four years. Please do come and join us in thanking them for all they've done for FODW ... and if you know of anyone who'd like to be our new Secretary, then please contact chairofduchesswood@gmail.com



Apples - blessed trees' crop raised £30 for charities

We picked a barrow- and grocer's box-full of apples earlier this month and took them to the Shelter shop. Donations for the apples raised £30 which was split evenly between FODW and Shelter.

Perhaps we had such an abundant crop because of all the blessings the apple trees received at January's Wassail! We hope you will join us for **next year's Wassail on January 17th**. There will be good cheer, singing by Tartan Harmony and plenty of pot banging! Plus you'll have the opportunity to bless the fruit trees with toast and lanterns. Keep an eye out for posters and local press articles.

