



News

No. 3: Spring 2014

Woodlands, Workdays & Wildlife

Welcome to the third edition of News from Knighton Tree Allotments Trust (KTAT). In this newsletter you can find out about the Trust and what we have been doing over the last year.

It has been a year of learning and consolidation for the Trust as we get to grips with our two current woodlands and learn more about the theory and practice of sustainable woodland management.

Thanks to successful grant applications to Environment Wales and Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a number of our members have been able to attend a variety of formal training courses. This has included Forestry First Aid, how to carry out biodiversity surveys (see p.3), woodland management courses and a number of chainsaw qualifications - including chainsaw maintenance & cross-cutting and felling "Small" and "Medium" trees. Members have also given and received informal 'on the job' training during our work days. This has dramatically increased the level of skills within the group and makes us much more self-sufficient for the future by reducing our reliance on external consultants and contractors.



Tree stump used for practice felling cuts

The skills gained have already been put to good use. KTAT now has a much more detailed Management Plan in place



Milled Larch at Greenstreete - the mobile sawmill can be seen in the background.

for Greenstreete Larch Plantation. The Japanese Larch are at risk from *Phytophthora ramorum* disease and the plantation would have to be clear-felled if the trees were to become infected. KTAT is working with the land owners - the Samatha Trust - on a 10 year programme of replacing the non-native larch with a native species coppice woodland to improve biodiversity and disease resistance.

We have almost finished our work on the first coupe which covers one tenth of the plantation. We coppiced the under-story, arranged for a contractor to fell the larch, cleared the brash and re-planted with a broad mix of native species suitable for the site including Sessile Oak, Rowan and Downy Birch. We have also milled some of the felled larch for building materials and will hold several training workdays to build a bio-loo and wood-store.

The newly-gained chainsaw skills have also been put to good use at Weir Cottage Woodland where one coupe has been felled, processed into logs and the area re-planted (see p.2).

Weir Cottage work continues

Knighton Tree Allotments Trust has been managing Weir Cottage Woodland for well over a year now and it has brought us valuable experience and some wood fuel for ourselves and the owner.

We started last winter by cutting down the agreed number of trees, choosing some dead elm and trees that were in the agreed route of the path. This wood was processed and stored for a year before being shared out between members and the owners.



Cutting 4-foot cordwood lengths into logs

A path and steps have been completed using Douglas fir for the steps and existing fallen timber for the path edge. The path zigzags through the wood joining the bottom entrance to the wood with the path to the road. This creates a pleasant walk to enjoy the wood and easier access when working and carrying out surveys. Some of our volunteers learnt new skills while engaged in these activities.

A spring bird survey and winter bird survey were carried out and also a summer flower survey. We hope to do these regularly to demonstrate the effect of our management plan.

Through the management of this woodland we were able to secure funding from the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and members and volunteers were able to attend chainsaw courses, woodland management courses, organise bird and flower surveys by experts and purchase equipment and protective clothing.

Following a woodland management course held in Weir Cottage Wood with consultant Martin Hales we adjusted the management plan. He suggested that to manage the wood for woodfuel and biodiversity we should return the wood to a coppice system with standards. There is evidence that this wood has been coppiced in the past. He suggested that instead of felling trees on an annual basis that we divide the wood into 5 coupes and coppice a coupe every 2 years.

We have now coppiced the first coupe and planted new trees to restock using Aspen, Sweet Chestnut, Rowan, Birch, Alder, Hornbeam, Wild service, Hazel, Field Maple and Wych Elm. We used planting, rather than allowing natural regeneration, to focus on tree species that will reduce the risk of losses in the future due to disease. All these trees will be protected and cleared around regularly. We will also be planting some shade tolerant hedging bushes in the roadside hedge to fill some of the gaps.

At Martin Hale's suggestion we are also going to collect seeds and create a small tree nursery for future planting.



Stacking cordwood lengths for seasoning

Biodiversity Surveys

Essential to the work of Knighton Tree Allotments Trust is ensuring that we maintain and improve the biodiversity of the woodlands that we manage.

Last year KTAT received funding which included paying professionals to conduct flora and fauna surveys, and give a bit of training to volunteers in how to do them.

In 2013, we carried out bird surveys and flora and fauna surveys at both Weir Cottage and Greenstreete, including a bat survey, a moth survey and a bryophyte (mosses, lichens, and liverworts) and fungi survey at Greenstreete. On two separate occasions we had butterfly surveys planned but were foiled by rainy weather.

The surveys revealed no big surprises apart from the moth survey in the larch plantation at Greenstreete, where we found no moths that are specific to larch, but plenty that are specific to the understorey trees. We were especially delighted to find a beautiful Large Emerald.



Different birds were recorded at Greenstreete according to the time of year, as expected – in May we heard or saw goldcrests, redstarts, housemartins and willow warblers as well as the more regular avian friends. In November we heard or saw all the Tit family including a Marsh Tit.

Using the bat detectors we heard pipistrelle bats, including soprano pipistrelle. We also heard a noctule. We were able to see quite clearly their flight path that went in front of the house.

There seems a healthy if modest level of biodiversity in each patch of woodland. We hope that over time, our management will help to increase biodiversity and encourage more plants and animals into the woodlands.

Recently, armed with magnifiers, three of us bravely tried to conduct our own bryophyte survey at Weir Cottage – there's a lot of mosses and lichens out there! And that's an indicator of a very healthy woodland too. The great

thing about plants though, is that unlike birds or bats they stay in one place and you can even take them home to look at while you have a cup of tea.

Anne Cummings, who surveys birds on behalf of the British Trust for Ornithology, was one of the experts used by KTAT. Here she describes her work with us.

In May, on a cold, breezy, but dry morning, 4 volunteers took part in the Breeding Bird survey at Greenstreete. This was a two-hour survey and 26 species of bird were identified. Later, on a cold, showery morning in November the Winter Bird survey took place. This was another two-hour survey, with 2 volunteers and 17 species of bird recorded.

Meanwhile, at Weir Cottage, a cold and damp morning in May saw 5 volunteers taking part in the

two-hour Breeding Bird survey and noting 20 species.

Later in the year, on a very cold, windy and damp November day, 4 volunteers took part in the Winter Birds survey, and recorded 16 species. However, due to the low temperatures and biting wind, the monitoring was only carried out for one hour.

Consequently, Anne and 3 volunteers re-visited the site in February 2014, for a further one-hour survey. The total species recorded on that day was 19, which included a further 6 species not seen/heard during the previous one-hour survey in November.

What is Knighton Tree Allotments Trust?

Knighton Tree Allotments Trust is a voluntary, not-for-profit group that manages woodlands. In coming together and sharing and learning woodland skills we aim to sustainably manage woodland for the benefit of wildlife and our members.

It is a common misconception that unmanaged woodland is best for wildlife. In fact, by managing the woodland through traditional practices such as coppicing, we increase the variety of habitats and increase the richness of wildlife. In ensuring that the trees that we fell for fuel or timber are replaced with new plants, we are creating a sustainable supply of woodland products.

In sustainably growing firewood and other woodland products we can meet some of our fuel and timber needs as well as reducing our carbon footprints. At the same time we are joining co-operatively with other local people to enjoy, conserve and enrich our local environment.



There are three different ways in which you can support the Knighton Tree Allotments Trust:

1. Volunteer. We are always looking for people who would like to learn about woodland management and ecology. Volunteering with those who are as passionate about a cause as you are is a

great way to meet like-minded people. We need help with administrative tasks, hands-on woodland management and regular flora and fauna surveys - ranging from simple 'walk over' surveys to more detailed plant, bird, invertebrate, bat, butterfly and moth surveys. You can get plenty of fresh air and exercise and learn new skills.



2. Become a Member. When you become a member you get a say in how the Trust is run; you can help decide policies that guide how we operate. You'll also become part of an active community of like-minded people who share our values. And that's not all. You can attend members' meetings, such as our AGM, where you can raise issues that are important to you and find out more about how the Trust is doing. Plus, you can vote for someone to represent your views as a Trustee. And if you fancy it, you can even stand for election yourself as a Trustee - it's a great chance to represent your fellow members. Membership costs just £10 a year.

3. Become a Friend of Knighton Tree Allotments Trust. If you support our aims but are perhaps too busy or too far away to play an active role then you can become a Friend of the Trust. In return for your donation you will receive regular updates on the Trust's work and be invited to our Open Days and events.

For more information about KTAT, or to enquire about becoming a member, please ring our Secretary on 01547 520929 or see our website: www.tveg.org.uk/wordpress/what-we-do/woodland-project



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