

The Fairfield Association

Woodland _A brief report on the development of Pony and extension of Pony Wood

Background

Pony Wood is a mixed Victorian plantation of about 60 mature trees (mostly sycamore, ash, beech and lime), which has been extensively grazed by sheep in the past. It, therefore, consisted solely of canopy and ground layer, and lacked understorey and field layers, thus, limiting biodiversity. It is separated from the smaller Little Wood. This area was acquired by Fairfield in 2013 and under a Stewardship scheme 558 saplings were planted in early 2014. The understorey trees hazel, hawthorn, rowan, blackthorn and holly, as well as the canopy trees, oak, birch and small numbers of lime, sweet chestnut, field maple, whitebeam and horse chestnut, were planted to provide both an understorey and an Extension connecting Pony and Little Woods to form a single larger, future, wood of about 0.6 hectare. The addition of oak and birch trees to the woodland will, in the future, greatly enhance invertebrate and bird life. The wood is used occasionally for school visits, family campfire sessions and Forest School.

Threats

The major threats are:

1. Illegal access, including camping and campfires (estimated as 8, plus at least 2 prevented in 2015) that burn brash, which, together with the intrinsic danger of a fire, might impact upon bird and invertebrate life.
2. Deer browsing of young saplings, which might affect the mix of trees (deer love hazel). The damage so far is largely restricted to the larger oak saplings (about a dozen) and most of these have rejuvenated lower down from the damaged bark.
3. Grey squirrel activity involving stripping of bark.

Progress

Clearly, it will take some years for the new trees to be established and for a full woodland vertical structure to develop, but the wild flower diversity is increasing and the great majority of saplings are doing well. The addition of oak and birch trees to the woodland will, in the future, greatly enhance invertebrate and bird life.

Issues

A key issue to discuss is whether any steps can be taken to reduce illegal access and campfires. Some general ideas follow: -

1. The future plan to have a footpath around Pony Wood might provide opportunities for reducing illegal access as a result of the increase in numbers of walkers and hence reduction in seclusion of the wood.
2. The future footpath may also provide an opportunity to establish a bird feeding station in an area where there are fewer houses and no garden feeding stations.
3. Consideration needs to be given to whether the tree saplings will need further protection from deer browsing.
4. The suggestion for Little Wood to become 'open access' needs to be discussed.

