



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

On the last Sunday in November 27 young family groups braved the rain to help plant BWT's new Jubilee Wood - 70 trees marking the late Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee. Despite the weather there was a party atmosphere as children from Roseacre Junior and Thurnham Infants schools arrived with their families (and a spade to do the planting), with BWT volunteers on hand to support them, suitably dressed against the elements.

The children were invited to select a tree to plant. Each was colour coded to be matched with a bamboo cane planted in the field to find out where to dig. Grown-ups were needed to lift the turf, but many a small spade was used to excavate the hole (not too deep and not too shallow).

Then the BWT maintenance volunteers came with their heavy post thumper to add a support post and tie. Job done!

More photos on page 4.



The trees are mainly native varieties and chosen for their contribution to wildlife with blossom and berries - Hazel, the pretty Rowan Tree, Wild Cherry and Japanese Cherry, Crab Apple, Guelder Rose and Spindle among others.

They were laid out to a plan by local environment specialist Sharon Bayne, who has played a big role in BWT's development over many years.

The children and trees will now grow up together. Trees planted are already several years old and by July had already shot up - as, no doubt, had the children who planted them. They will, we hope, return in the years to come and one day tell their grandchildren "I planted that".

CAR PARK UPDATE

Hopefully our new car park off the A20 will open later this year.

Planning permission was granted in January 2022, and we quickly laid and rolled in the Cellpave matting whilst the ground was soft. However, there was then a long delay until June 2023 as we waited for MBC to approve our construction management plan for widening the entrance.



Our contractor was able to do the groundworks in the first week of July. The next step is to install an electricity supply to feed a gate opening and closing mechanism as required by our planning permission. The other condition that must be fulfilled prior to opening the car park is the provision of an EV charger and we continue to search for a low cost means of installing this.

GREEN MAN RECYCLED

The ravages of time and weather have taken their toll on some of our old trees.

We have had to remove some of the wood carvings made by the late Steve Andrews in 2017.

The condition of the fallen Oak in Moore Meadow deteriorated and we were worried that the owls could fall and injure someone in what is a popular climbing area.

FOOTBALL PITCH

As regular weekend visitors will have noticed, Roseacre Raiders junior football team no longer use our pitch. They were concerned about the uneven surface caused by moles and have now found a new location.

BWT has continued to mow the area weekly and it is now used regularly for ad-hoc games and family picnics. BWT volunteers have moved a bench to provide seating while leaving the pitch area free.

We have taken advice from a professional grounds maintenance company. They have quoted for repairing the damage but the Management Committee has decided to hold off having any repairs done pending reflections on future use of the land.

This will take place after the summer. Meanwhile the area will continue to be maintained for general recreational use.

The moles that caused the damage appear to have been keen football fans as they seem have moved off elsewhere!



Meanwhile the Green Man has been recycled - and relocated to the dry hedge opposite Church Meadow as his base deteriorated.

FLYING THE FLAG

BWT has again been awarded a top category Green Flag Community Award, a benchmark of excellence for community-led park and other green space projects nationwide and beyond.

This is the 13th year in a row that we have received an award in the highest category, a remarkable achievement.

All the work to develop BWT's green space ecology initiatives has been undertaken by the team of volunteers, backed by Management Committee expertise and trustee involvement.



It is a huge community endeavour with 26 acres of woodland and meadow. A quarter of all Bearsted households are members - but we know that many visitors do not realise that this is a truly local charity, independent of any national organisation with a similar name.

So please encourage your friends and neighbours to support us.

PUTTING IT RIGHT

Our volunteers have been kept busy this year dealing with the aftermath of vandalism at BWT.

They even had to renew the entire fence at the main Landway entrance after much of the original was torn down.

Sadly, this kind of anti-social behaviour in Bearsted is not unique to BWT.



We are in regular touch with the local Community Police contact who is well aware of the problem.

HIT RECORD

Our website has continued to provide more and more online visitors with information on Bearsted Woodland Trust's popular features and activities over the past year.

An average 2,800 visitors a month have used the site during 2023, which is around 1,300 up on the same period last year and a new record.

During the first national Covid lockdown in 2020, the website attracted a then record 2,000 visitors during the months of May, June and July. Prior to that, the website had been receiving around 1,000 visitors a month.

It is clear that our web site continues to provide essential information, both for those planning a first visit to Bearsted Woodland Trust and for our many longstanding members and friends.

Visit us:

www.bearstedwoodlandtrust.org

OUR YOUNG VISITORS

“What a fantastic fact it was”

Year 2 classes from Thurnham Infants School have been visiting BWT regularly since the Trust was created. The “Thurnham School Tree” was planted at the north west end of Oak Avenue in December 2004.

After a break caused by the Covid Pandemic they were back last year, the first outside trip by a Year Group since Lockdowns.

In April they were here again, as excited as ever, and they obviously learned a great deal from the BWT team who hosted them.

“I never knew that before apples pears and bananas there were blossoms”

“I never new (sic) there were two species of blue bells”

“Thank you for telling us about the bridge and it is from South Africa” (Hardwood for the Lilk Bridge!)

“It was amazing to hear about the bridge came from South America it can hold a lot of stuff even a tractor”

“Thank you for telling us about the Thurnham Tree. It was really fascinating. What a fantastic fact it was”

“We saw a hazel nut tree and it grew a baby”

“Thank you for telling us such interesting things... Did you enjoy showing us around?”

The answer is obviously **YES !!**

Planting BWT's new Jubilee Wood with the help of our young families

Seven months on



KEEPING IT CLEAN

Our appeal to Members asking for volunteers to form new Litter Picking squads was so successful we now have a long waiting list of people offering to help keep the Trust land clean.

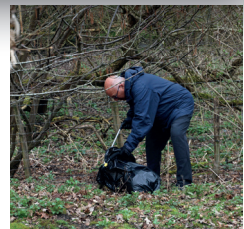
You will see the Monday team out each week, whilst the Saturday team meets monthly.

The litter pick in the first week yielded two big bags of rubbish. We thought that could be because some had been missed for some time but subsequent routine picks have yielded similar amounts and is down to the messiness of some of our users and the diligence of the two teams.



We had over 60 volunteers for the teams, which demonstrates the commitment of our supporters, but unfortunately were a bit overwhelmed. We have started the programme with just two teams of eight (and one dog)

The teams enjoy their work and are committed to keeping the Trust litter free but, of course, it would be far better if people took their picnic leftovers home with them.



BWT AGM 2023

The Bearsted Woodland Trust AGM will be held at Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club in Church Landway on the afternoon of **Sunday 1 October**.

Start time 2.30
Doors open 2.00

It would be helpful if Members would let the Management Committee know in advance if there are any specific ideas or questions you would like discussed so we can make sure they are on the agenda.

You can do this by email via the website contacts page.

However, if you do not have internet access, leave a message on: **01622 737705** and someone will call you back.

NATURE NOTES

BATS, A RARE TREE, BADGERS AND BEETLES

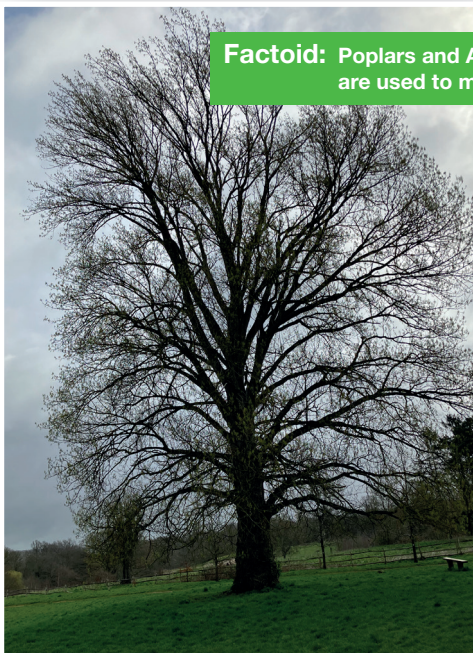
BATS

We had an interesting visit from a representative of the Kent Bat Group who advance the protection and conservation of bats and their habitat. We now know we have four different species of bat on our land.

As a result we will be increasing the number of bat boxes from the two we have in Moore Meadow and placing them close to Major's Lake as they are attracted by the insects flying above the water.



Factoid: Poplars and Aspens are used to make matches.



A RARE TREE

Our bat expert was most impressed to spot the large Black Poplar near the entrance to Gore Cottage drive. Unbeknown to us Black Poplars are rare and were once a staple of Britain's Landscape. These imposing and elegant trees come in both sexes with leaves that smell of balsam and catkins for flowers with the male catkin red whilst the female is yellow/green. Pollination is by the wind and once pollinated the female develops fluffy cotton like seeds. As we have not had any of these it is apparent we need to find it a mate.

A GREAT YEAR FOR WILD FLOWERS

You may have noticed that our wild flowers behind the agricultural machinery, which disappointed us last year, excelled themselves this year, with a lovely spread of ox eye daisies and other flowers.



Ox eye daisies

The strip opposite the balance beams is also thriving. The display of wild garlic this year at either end of Old Avenue was a delight to both see and smell which will go nicely with the fennel growing by roller bench wood.



BADGERS

A BWT member recently donated a night-vision, motion-activated, trail camera and we were very excited when it revealed an extensive badger sett on Trust land.

For some time we suspected it was a fox's lair but when we put up the camera it filmed several badgers coming and going. (To protect the badgers the exact location is not being made public.)

INSECT LIFE

Our dead hedges are now well established and hopefully home to a variety of insects, frogs and other small animals. Old Avenue has one which now stretches its whole length and the one in Moore Meadow is developing into an attractive home. In the past all of this material would have been burnt but it is now providing habitat for wildlife.



TIME CATCHES UP

Time catches up with us all and three stalwart volunteers have reluctantly decided they need to call it a day.

Gill and Geoff Rands and Roy Datson have been BWT volunteers since the start. They helped plant the Oak Avenue, People's Wood and regularly came to 'work-party' days.

They haven't worked onsite for a few years but continued as part of the delivery team for almost 20 years.

Gill and Geoff delivered to Church Lane, Eylesden Court and The Green. Roy covered The Street, Roundwell and Sutton Street.

BWT would like to say a big thank you to them for so many years of volunteering.

Fortuitously, Laura Thomas has joined the delivery team and offered to take on some of their rounds.

GRASS CUTTING

One of our members has raised the issue of when and where grass cutting should take place across our 26 acre site, suggesting that too often wildflowers are lost to the detriment of insects and other wildlife and enjoyment of visitors. "Nature is not neat and tidy!"

We thought it helpful to explain how we approach seasonal maintenance.

All planting and grass cutting is linked to the BWT Maintenance Plan agreed by the Trustees and Management Committee last year; this follows the earlier Plan developed by our Environmental Consultant and implemented over the past decade. All areas are cut with a view to offer the best long term options for wildlife. This includes the early cutting of some areas where there are invasive weeds, and delayed mowing in areas where there are wild flowers.

We appreciate that for some users a no-mow policy is preferred, but in several areas this allows grasses and invasive weeds to grow unchecked, and creates maintenance challenges with the tractors and cutters we have. It also creates problems where invasive species suppress more desirable flora.

Many areas of the BWT site have had extensive use of fertilisers by previous owners (long before BWT was created in 2004); this has left a legacy which does not encourage wildlife. In other areas we are still finding a variety of wildflowers reflecting the acidity of the soil. These varieties are gradually increasing, and we have also created wildflower strips, some successfully, others less so.

Several years ago we trialled growing long grass for hay cutting by a local farmer, but the quality was poor, although we did export to nearby stables. However the process was uneconomic for a Charity like BWT, which relies entirely on subscriptions and donations

To help wildlife we have hedges planted in 2011/2013 in Moore Meadow, and these have really flourished to provide local wildlife corridors. As reported in Nature Notes, more recently our volunteers have created bee boxes, dry hedges and bat boxes and we have been praised by Green Flag for our site management and wildlife installations.

It is always difficult to find a balance between careful management and encouragement of nature. We know we cannot please everyone, but we always plan our work carefully to try and achieve what is best for wildlife in the longer term.



CALENDARS AND CARDS

Last year BWT produced Calendars and Christmas cards for the first time. Calendars were almost completely sold out by the end of November and the cards also sold well (as did the new notelet designs).

So we are doing it all again - with the aim of raising awareness of Bearsted Woodland Trust as an independent local charity, while also raising funds.

As 2024 marks 20 years since the Trust was formed to protect and maintain land threatened by development, we have raided the archives to produce a calendar that celebrates the way the site has developed over those years.

We have also produced two new "Seasons Greetings" Christmas cards from photographs taken by Management Committee members - and this year are offering mixed packs of cards as well as packs of each single design.



The 2024 Calendars will be going on sale in local shops priced at £6, but Members can buy them direct from BWT at a discounted price of £5.50. Following feedback from last year they are now being offered either shrink-wrapped or with a cardboard envelope for ease of posting.

All Christmas cards are priced at £3.50 for a pack of 5, whether of individual design or mixed.

Contact Chris Street at **membership@bearstedwoodlandtrust.org** or on **01622 739713** to place your order. If you live in the village we will hand deliver. They will also be on sale at the BWT AGM on October 1st, along with notelets and other BWT merchandise.

OUR NEW ARCHIVIST

The historic images used in the new BWT calendar were sourced with help from the Trust's new photographic archivist, Brian Carter.



Himself a keen photographer, Brian had a 53 year career with what was formerly the Public Records Office and later became The National Archives.

He started in the microfilm department, copying official documents, and in later years ran the National Archives Photographic Studio, personally specialising in conserving and filing important TV and publishing material.

Brian has already converted thousands of images from almost 20 years of BWT activity to a consistent technical standard - a task which has taken many hours.

A HOME FOR OUR REPTILES

On a chilly morning an intrepid group of Maintenance Volunteers dug into cold ground to build a Reptile Hibernatum in the field just behind the agricultural machinery - somewhere for grass snakes, slow worms and lizards to live and more importantly to hibernate over winter.



Reptiles have long exploited human-made features such as stone walls, cracks in buildings and embankments, you may have seen them when on holiday in warm Mediterranean countries. Our Reptile Hibernatum has been carefully designed to mimic those conditions as much as possible.

A Slow Worm



- * We have sited it in a nice sunny position as reptiles are cold blooded and appreciate doing a bit of sunbathing.
- * The hibernatum is under tree cover to protect them from hawks and the buzzards we see from time to time soaring over Moore Meadow looking for something for supper.
- * It is 18 inches deep, so deep enough to be below the frosty ground and warm enough for them in winter. The grass and hedges in front of the hibernatum should be a plentiful store of food for any inhabitants.

We hope that the new hibernatum will attract reptiles already living in the vicinity but maybe we will be able to provide a home for reptiles from elsewhere.

Grass Snake



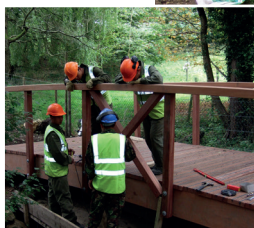
GURKHA BRIDGE

When an appeal was launched to raise funds for a new bridge to replace a rickety footbridge over the Lilk Stream 70 Gurkha Field Support Squadron (now 70 Gurkha Parachute Squadron) stepped up and offered to build it, using materials paid for through the appeal.

It hardly seems possible that was almost 16 years ago.

Now a new generation of soldiers based at Invicta Barracks will return this autumn to refurbish what is technically “Lilk Bridge” but is more often referred to as the “Gurkha Bridge.”

This time, the work will be carried out by 36 Engineer Regiment and the Queen’s Gurkha Engineers as part of their Community Engagement Programme. As before, BWT will be providing the materials.



Building Lilk Bridge in 2007

BEQUESTS AND DONATIONS

Over the past year BWT has received substantial gifts in memory of supporters who have passed away and we would like to thank families for thinking of us at what is always a difficult time.

We have also received one-off donations over the year.

Both are always welcome and we have updated the donation forms on our website to make contact and giving easier. They cover both members and non members, with our bank and contact details and current Gift Aid guidance notes.

Please note that if you are sending a cheque and write it out to “The Woodland Trust” we cannot cash it. We are Bearsted Woodland Trust.

This is also an important distinction if you are considering remembering us in your Will.

Please ensure that we are referred to as **Bearsted Woodland Trust (Charity Number 1103585)**.

ONLINE BANKING

We would like to thank our friends who have access to electronic banking and are now paying their membership direct to our bank, rather than by cash or cheque. This saves us a lot of time and effort.

TIME TO RELAX

Even a brief glance through this newsletter shows what an extremely busy year it has been for our versatile team of Maintenance Volunteers - planting and fencing, repairing vandalism, building homes for wildlife ... All that as well as carrying out regular tasks like mowing, sowing and lopping.

In early August they were joined by our new Litter Pickers and long serving newsletter Delivery Team for a relaxing morning of coffee and cakes on what turned out to be one of the few dry days amid weeks of rain.

New Volunteers are always welcome. Pop along to The Barn at about 09.00 any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday or contact us via the website.

BWT WHO'S WHO

THE TRUSTEES

Richard Ashness (Chair)
Dena Ashness
Martin Gray
Kim Martin
Christian Esposito

THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chairman - John Wale
Deputy Chairman and Ecology Lead - Adrian Bouwens
Hon. Treasurer - Martin Gray
Tree sponsorship - Dave Ward
Membership Secretary - Chris Street
Website/ Publicity - Martin Herrema
Newsletter/ Publications - Barbara Long



Bearsted Woodland Trust

Registered Charity No: 1103585

Editor Barbara Long, Designer Sue Fuller, articles and photos by Management Committee Members and supporters. Printed by Reed Printers, Rochester.

Up to date news and further information can be found at www.bearstedwoodlandtrust.org

Contact Us: The website contact page is the easiest way to send us messages or to request this newsletter by email. We also welcome nature notes from BWT Friends.

Telephone: 07807 917533 Please leave your name, number and message, and we'll return your call.
Postal address: Bearsted Woodland Trust, 8 Fauchons Lane, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 4AH.