

HOB HEY WOOD FRIENDS GROUP

YEAR REVIEW 2020

Summary

- Over 100 volunteer hours. Pandemic seriously affected group activities.
- Several litter picking days, invasive sycamore and bramble clearance before tree planting.
- Maintenance tasks, including path clearing, fallen tree removal, and drain clearance.
- Planted 250 trees.
- Excellent social media engagement. Facebook page now has over 650 members.
- Sold 148 Hob Hey Wood Calendars to raise funds.
- Income: £2,115 (£986, calendar sales; £1,166 Tesco Bags of Help).
- Expenditure: £144 (hay cutting in meadow).
- Regular feedback to FTC Amenities committee.

Volunteer Activities

The pandemic had a severe effect on our volunteer days, with only five completed in 2020 compared with twelve in 2019. The COVID 'rule of six' meant that even when we could hold volunteer days, we were limited to six members. We had to turn down volunteer help because of this. Several of our volunteers did perform tasks solo in the wood to ensure that as much work as possible was completed.

Over 250 trees were planted during the year, all native species. These were obtained, free of charge, from the Woodland Trust and the Tree Council as 'whips'. The trees were used to fill areas cleared of invasive sycamore and bramble as well as being used to build hedges to delineate paths in the wood (in an attempt to keep visitors to the paths). These hedges will look far better than wooden fences and add to the biodiversity of the wood.



Several fruit trees in the orchard died. Tom Blundell bought four fruit trees as replacements and planted them in the orchard.

Volunteer activities also included maintenance such as clearing boardwalks of leaves (to prevent rotting), litter picking, fallen tree clearance, and planting of bluebell seeds and bulbs.

The seeds were collected from bluebells in the wood and the bulbs collected during the building of a path the previous year.

In an effort to encourage wildflowers in the wood’s meadow, we had a contractor perform a ‘hay cut’ in the autumn. The next volunteer day focused on removal of the tonnes of hay resulting from the cut, not an easy task!

The group were successful in ‘winning’ a disease-resistant elm from the Tree Council. Several mornings were spent clearing the area where the elm is to be planted.

Finances

Due to the restricted volunteer time in 2020, the group’s expenditure was very low with the only expenditure being paying a contractor to perform a hay cut in the meadow (£144).

Fundraising consisted of two activities:

Participation in the Tesco Helsby ‘Bags of Help’ scheme where we were awarded £1,166.

Proceeds from the sale of 2021 calendars which gave an income of £986.



A statement of the group’s account is given in the table below.

Hob Hey Wood Friends Group Account 20-82-13 13539962

Statement January 30th 2021

Opening balance 01/01/2020: 49.99
Closing balance 08/01/2021: 2058.45

Date:	Reference:	Description:	Income:	Payment:	Balance:
28/08/20	Groundwork UK – TE	Tesco Bags of Help award	1166.00		1215.99
01/10/20	Ecological Land Management	Meadow Hay Cut		144.00	1071.99
24/11/20	Calendar sales	Summary 15/10/2020 – 24/11/2020	941.63		2013.62
24/11/20	Hawk Publications Ltd	Calendar printing costs for second print run		235.00	1778.62
21/12/20	Calendar sales	Summary 24/11/2020 – 21/12/2020	127.83		1906.45
08/01/21	Dandelion	Income from calendar sales at Dandelion	152.00		2058.45

Social Media and 'Outreach' Activities

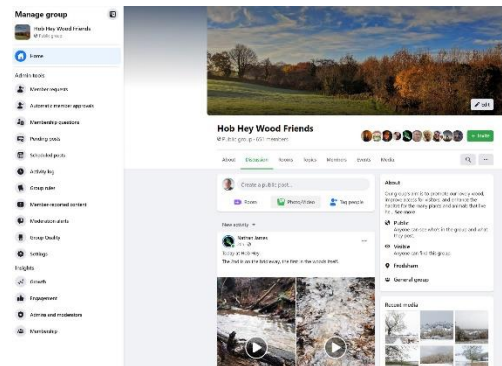
The Frodsham Festival of Walks was cancelled due to the pandemic, so the planned Hob Hey Wood walk, which proved popular in 2019, could not be held.

The chair did, however, host several small walks (outside of the lockdown periods, and compliant with all COVID guidelines) with very small numbers of people.

In 2020, Hob Hey Wood visitors increased significantly. During the first lockdown, where people were required to exercise locally, many people who had not previously visited the wood started using it for their daily exercise.

Our Facebook page, which posts pictures and articles about the wood became more popular as a consequence. We gained almost 400 new members of our Facebook page and membership now stands at over 650.

The increase in popularity of the wood and engagement with our Facebook page did result in more interest in volunteering and we welcomed several new people to volunteer days. However, it was frustrating that we had to turn volunteers away due to the 'rule of six' even when we were able to hold a volunteer day.



We continued to build our group's website, which now contains many articles, photos and videos about Hob Hey.

Our Flickr page now contains over 150 photos of the wood.

The group's photos on the Google Maps Hob Hey Wood entry has over 67,000 views.

Our group also engaged with other groups such as Frodsham Transition Initiative, Frodsham Root Network, Peak & Northern Footpath Society. It is hoped that future projects between groups could be initiated.

White-letter Hairstreak Butterfly

In the 1970s, Dutch elm disease destroyed around 60 million British elms, changing the landscape drastically. The white-letter hairstreak, which lives solely on elm trees saw its population crash by 99%. This once common butterfly is now very rare in Cheshire.

Early in the year our group found several stands of elms in the wood. We thought it was possible that white-letter hairstreaks still existed in Hob Hey so during the butterfly's flight season (June), the elms were surveyed for their presence. Several white-letter hairstreaks were found on trees in the wood: this rare butterfly is hanging on in Hob Hey!



Discovering the butterfly gave the group another conservation goal: maintaining and improving the habitat for this butterfly. It was noted that Dutch elm disease is still killing trees in the wood so the butterfly colony needs all the help it can get.

Tom Blundell made us aware of a competition, run by the Tree Council, to win one of 30 disease-resistant elms. These trees are completely resistant to Dutch elm disease and if we could get one it could secure the future of this butterfly in Frodsham. We submitted our application, showing evidence of the butterfly colony and were delighted to win! An area for planting the tree was cleared and it will be planted when lockdown allows.

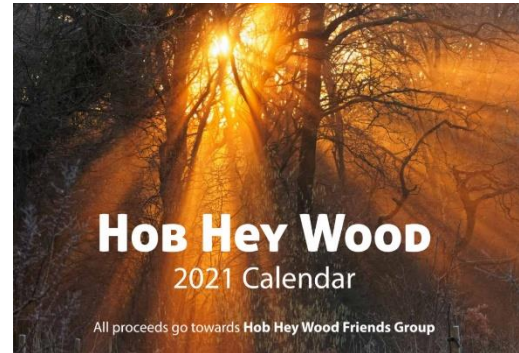
Wildlife recording

Ancient semi-natural woodland is the most biodiverse habitat in Britain. Hob Hey Wood contains many species of plant, fungi, insects, mammals and birds, some of which are rare or uncommon. Species such as purple hairstreak butterfly, white-letter hairstreak butterfly, Nathusius' pipistrelle, and woodcock are found in Hob Hey Wood, records of these, and the many other species can provide important data for the understanding of distribution (and in many cases, decline) of species and should be recorded. For this reason, data on some species living in the wood has been collated and submitted to iRecord, a national database for wildlife records. These records are verified by experts, putting Hob Hey Wood 'on the map' for various rare species. These recording activities will hopefully be expanded upon in 2021.

Calendar

The photographs on our Facebook page proved very popular with visitors so we decided to produce a calendar of pictures taken in the wood to raise funds for the group.

We worked with Hawk Publications Ltd to design a calendar for 2021 and ordered 100 copies. FTC kindly covered the printing costs for this print run (£385). The calendars sold so well that we ordered another 50, paying the printing costs out of the Hob Hey Wood Friends Group account (£235). These also sold meaning that we raised £986 for the group to spend on helping to maintain and improve Hob Hey.



Plans for 2021

We are expecting that, as with 2020, group activities will be severely limited by COVID restrictions. We will attempt to perform the following activities, but may not be able to complete all of them.

- Planting of the disease-resistant elm.
- Litter picking.
- Hay cut and clearance of the meadow.
- Removal of fallen leaves from boardwalks.
- Non-native sycamore clearance.
- Tree planting (220 native trees).
- Bluebell seed collection.
- 2022 calendar production.
- Wildlife surveys with submission of records to iRecord.

In addition to the above activities to be performed by the group, FTC have commissioned a contractor to replace the rotten boardwalks in the southern part of the wood with an aggregate path. This work will hopefully commence in Q1 2021.

Mark O'Sullivan
30th January 2021

