



Annual Report 2019-20

Friends Of Langley Wood
(FOLW)

Registered Charity number 1178721

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Foreword by Chairman Dave Bennett

I am pleased to announce that our new charity has completed year two 2019-2020.

Friends Of Langley Wood (or FOLW) goes from strength to strength, now selling cordwood in addition to our usual firewood sales, raising money to support our local nature reserves.

The Trustees would like to thank all our dedicated volunteers for all their hard work and the way they help resource and promote Langley Wood.

I am pleased to say that our relationship with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the staff at Franchises Wood is building to both our advantage.

We have achieved a lot this year despite losing several weeks due to bad weather and now to Covid 19.

On the social side in addition to our Christmas lunch, we had a summer BBQ in the woods, both were a great success, we also intend to help again this year with grass-cutting on Goat Island, Graham has already sorted our accommodation.



Reserve Management by Stuart Hales

The end of this year was certainly nothing like the start. Instead of doing our bit by volunteering in Langley Wood we all find ourselves doing our bit by staying at home to prevent the spread of corona virus. Certainly these are strange times and I really value my one permitted daily exercise, reminding me how important it is to get out into nature.

Living in Bristol my sanity is reliant on places like Ashton Court, which I value now more than ever. All of us that work in Langley Wood know what's involved to make somewhere accessible so people can enjoy it. It's a lot of work to make it safe and fun for people and I really hope our work has meant Langley Wood is valued locally in the same way I value Ashton Court.

Often this is finely balanced with making sure the woodland wildlife doesn't suffer as a result. Fortunately most people respect that and it's been reassuring this year speaking to people that use the circular walk. It's a real shame when the tiny minority of people don't respect the wood and unfortunately every year there is something to test us like fly tipping, vandalism and even theft.

It's so disappointing because of the hard work that goes in, not to mention the mind boggling stupidity on demonstration from bagged up dog poo hanging in the nearest branch. These little banners of selfishness unfortunately persist in their plastic casings and give a disproportionate picture of people's attitudes. At least that's what I like to believe, for every poo bag slinger there's a hundred people like me that wouldn't do something like that (let alone steal from a conservation organisation). Although judging by the amount of poo bags in Ashton Court they must get a lot of visitors.

What I really want to do is talk about all the positive things that have gone on this year. The neighbours seem nice and I'm looking forward to working more with our RSPB friends over at Franchise's Lodge. We're a small step away from reintroducing cattle grazing into The Outwood, a project 20 years in the making that could be amazing for the wildlife of Langley Wood.

On top of the great survey work done for birds, butterflies, moths and deer we can now add bats thanks to Kingfisher Ecology's new employee volunteer team.

The FOLW firewood empire is expanding, supporting woodland management and providing sustainable fuel to SP5 residents. Langley Wood volunteers are leading the way again by training up Volunteer Leaders, a first in Natural England that's getting the recognition it deserves.



Unfortunately the most significant event for Langley Wood has been the arrival of ash dieback. This devastating fungus is airborne and has been working its way across the country over the last few years. Ash tree mortality rate is very high, with reports of 99% loss from elsewhere in Europe.

Obviously this is devastating to any wildlife that relies on ash trees, not to mention the loss of some of our most majestic veteran trees. Understandably people are also worried about the dangers posed by lots of dead trees along roads and footpaths.

Hopefully though we can turn this negative into a positive by showing a way through this woodland crisis. Where at all possible we're keeping ash trees alive for as long as possible in the hope they'll recover.

Somewhere in Langley Wood is the small percentage of trees that are resistant to ash dieback. In this case the pen truly is mightier than the sword (or chainsaw?). Careful survey is helping us identify trees that have a chance whilst still being able to act before they become dangerously dead.

Despite initial pessimism there are reports elsewhere in England of 5, even 10% survival rates. These trees can hopefully repopulate the woodland gaps created by the ash that didn't make it. In the process creating loads of wonderful open spaces, scrubby patches and young woodland thickets....if we can just get on top of those deer (note this distinct browse-line!) ...



Onwards and upwards Friends of Langley Wood! I look forward to when we can huddle under a tatty tarpaulin in the driving rain eating a soggy bacon sandwich, bliss!



Events by Rosemarie Castle

As well as continuing our regular Thursday Natural England work-parties in Langley Wood, volunteers also got stuck in to various tasks at the RSPB Franchises Lodge.

We held our annual ragwort-pulling trip to the nearby Martin Down National Nature Reserve.



We attended our local Village Life Day and also provided information to the Redlynch Online website and should like to thank redlynch.org.uk for their free online promotion of our charity.



At the end of 2019, regular volunteers enjoyed a delicious Christmas Dinner at Hamptworth Golf Club - the closest venue with wonderful views over to Langley Wood. The golf club also hosted a splendid cooked breakfast to celebrate our chairman's 70th birthday!



From bottom left clockwise round are 'usual suspects': Bill Jones, Nick Morgan, Bob Halliday, Rob Easton, Wendy Treble, Bob Inns, Ray Jenkins, Dave Bennett, Rosemarie Castle, Julia Baker-Beale, Richard Dickson, Granville Pictor, Jan Halliday and the photo was kindly taken (from his empty chair bottom-right) by Graham Owens.

Amphibians & Reptiles by Nick Morgan

As reported in the last FOLW annual report, being no expert and as a good starting point, I was seeking advice from the Amphibian & Reptile Conservation (ARC) charity about the best way to conduct a herpetological survey in Langley Wood. To this end, I emailed an enquiry in July but, having received no reply, followed this up with a letter in August. Having still received no reply I left an answerphone message but once again still no reply so I emailed a copy of my letter to the Chief Executive in November. At the time of writing (April 2020) I have more or less given up hope of ever receiving advice from them and, whilst not wishing to criticise a fellow conservation charity, I hope enquiries to FOLW are always dealt with more helpfully!

Anyhow, as mentioned elsewhere in this report, one of the really positive aspects of our work this last year has been the strengthening of our ties with the RSPB as they gradually build momentum at Franchises Lodge. We've done quite a few different jobs over the past year including making some old roofing-tin squares for surveying reptiles and, having chatted with the Franchises team, I am hoping to make contact with the local herpetological experts to see whether the surveying they're conducting can be extended across the Hamptworth road into Langley Wood.

As well as thanking the new site manager Richard and volunteer officer Anneka, I wanted to take this opportunity to give a special mention to the live-in volunteers, Millie, Lara and Rob. These three wonderful young people all give me great reassurance that a new generation of conservationists will battle on for our wildlife in to the future. Having been asked to return home, just before the Covid19 lockdown, I wish them all well and look forward to their return to Franchises when hopefully things normalise and we can all pick up again with the conservation work programme in both woods.

So, rather than any news on the amphibian and reptile species themselves, I thought I would turn my attention to habitats and so have started looking at where especially amphibians but also Grass Snakes might live or breed.

The photographs show some of the wetter areas that I have come across including those named:

- the River Blackwater;
- Old Howard Pond;
- Burton's Bog.

Just in from Gate 3 running beneath the Fellowship Bridge, the River Blackwater rises in Lover then travels east through Langley Wood and eventually flows in to the River Test near Totton.



Old Howard Pond on the circular path from Gate 1 where Mary's Walk meets the Gills Hole path



Ephemeral pond (further round the circular route path) which probably dries out completely most summers.



Burton's Bog located off the track from Gate 3 below the cattle enclosure.



Birds by Granville Pictor

For the 2018-2019 Friends of Langley Wood annual report, I wrote an article on the birds of Langley Wood. For this report I thought it might be of interest to write a similar report on the birds (and a few other things) at the nearby Franchises Lodge RSPB reserve. This reserve is only really a 'stone's throw' away from Langley Wood and the FOLW have come to regard it almost as 'our sister reserve', albeit a big sister. By way of introduction, the reserve was acquired by the RSPB in March 2018. It extends to some 385 hectares and is thus almost twice as big as Langley Wood (217 hectares). The woodland comprises a mixture of old broadleaved woodland, some old conifer woodland, and newer conifer plantations which date mostly I believe to the 1980's when much of the older broadleaved woodland was harvested. In addition there are small areas of grassland and some wet mires, plus a quite sizeable lake. Small parts of it are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and are said to hold, amongst other things, an internationally important lichen community. Langley Wood is of course home to a similar important lichen community, and in fact much work done by FOLW volunteers over the winter of 2019/2020 in Langley Wood was clearance work to enhance the habitat for this community.

Included in the acquisition of the Franchised Lodge reserve were two old cottages. One, Franchises Lodge Cottage is now occupied by volunteers doing important survey and other work on the reserve, whilst the other, Cameron's Cottage, in a near derelict state, is earmarked for restoration in the near future and is to be used as a nature education and experience centre.



It is good to be able to report, that when unable to work at Langley Wood, the Langley volunteers have been able to help out with tasks at Franchises Lodge which included some work to Franchises Lodge cottage itself plus other tasks which included pulling up what seemed like miles of old post and barbed wire fencing prior to new fencing being erected. Richard Dickson's old 'Landie' came in especially useful for this task, but whether the clutch will ever be the same again is anyone's guess! On a bigger scale, since acquisition, the RSPB have undertaken major thinning operations in some of the newer conifer plantations, and are planning large scale Rhododendron clearance for which grant aid is currently being sought.

What then of the birds of Franchises Lodge? Being so close to Langley Wood, it is not surprising that the bird communities of both woods, both resident and migratory are in many ways quite similar. Where they differ is that Franchises, unlike Langley, has quite extensive areas of conifers. There are some splendid stands of mature Scots Pine, and in springtime it is possible to see and hear Siskins which undoubtedly breed in these pines.



Whilst they have been for many years a frequent winter visitors to garden bird feeders, it is only in relatively recent years that Siskins have started breeding in numbers throughout the coniferous woodlands of southern England. Their recent increase is also mirrored by that of the Firecrest which breeds in some numbers both in Franchises Lodge and in Langley Wood; ten years ago they were quite a rare sight, now their song is heard fairly commonly in both woods, although they are equally at home in deciduous woodland, hence their frequent appearance in Langley Wood. The other specialist conifer loving species of Franchises Lodge is the Common Crossbill. These birds feed in the tops of trees on the seeds of conifers, especially Larch, and extract the seeds from the cones with the crossed mandibles of their bills, hence their name. Whilst many are just winter visitors, a few pairs are thought to breed in the wood every year; they are easily picked up by their 'chip' calls as they fly overhead.

The deciduous bird community is very similar to that of Langley Wood, as both woods have extensive areas of very old Oaks. These areas are home to relatively common woodland species such as Nuthatch and Tree Creeper plus the usual Blue and Great Tits. All three woodpeckers are recorded here, but Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, as in Langley Wood, is an extremely rare sight these days. Not only is it a very small, almost sparrow sized woodpecker, but spends much of its time very high up in the tree canopy and is very hard to see. It has declined substantially in Wiltshire over a number of years, but the Hampshire New Forest appears to be one of its national strongholds, so perhaps it will hang on just across the county boundary in Wiltshire.



Speaking of declining birds, in my previous report covering the birds of Langley Wood, I mentioned the decline of the Wood Warbler, one of the most charismatic of our summer visitors. I can speak of its decline in Franchises with personal knowledge as I have been birdwatching in the wood since the mid 1980s. Looking back in my diaries I see that on my usual circular walk on the public rights of way on 23 May 1985, I counted no fewer than 21 singing males. Double figure counts back then were very common. In recent years on the same walk I have often found none at all; I did see and hear one singing male in May of 2019, but it only seemed to sing for a couple of days and then appeared to move on. The reasons for its decline are not at all clear; the habitat in both woods seems to have changed little over the years; it seems most likely that problems lie in its wintering grounds in sub Saharan Africa.

The other charismatic summer visitor to the reserve is the Redstart. Like the Wood Warbler, numbers seem to have declined over the years, but at both Langley and Franchises its numbers seem to have stabilised in recent years. It is always a joy to see in the wood, but its rather understated song belies its colourful appearance; it is no match for the Wood Warbler in the songster stakes.

As with Langley Wood, there have been areas of clear fell of woodland parcels over the years, and in these areas are often found Tree Pipits and sometimes Nightjars. They are also a good place to watch roding Woodcock on warm spring and summer evenings.

These open areas are also good for observing raptors, particularly on sunny days in spring and summer. Common Buzzards are frequent, but occasionally Goshawk and Hobby can be seen over the reserve, and the pylon line which crosses the reserve provides favourite perching spots for Peregrine Falcons.

Whilst this article has concentrated on the birdlife of the reserve, obviously there is a very wide range of other flora and fauna present, details of which can be obtained on the RSPB's website for the reserve. Of particular interest are the butterflies and moths of the wood and several members of the FOLW are actively involved in monitoring these species.

As I type this note, we are in the middle of the Covid 19 'lockdown' and the RSPB reserve is closed. That said it is still possible to explore the reserve on the public rights of way, indeed these were the only way the wood could be explored until its acquisition by the RSPB in 2018.

The best route using these rights of way is to park at the Telegraph Hill car park at the junction of the B3080 and B3078 at grid reference SU 227167. You then walk across the road and enter the wood via a metal five bar gate adjacent to Hope Cottage. You then walk north for about a mile before turning left (NW) at SU 236182. Continue for about another mile and a half and turn left again (SW) at SU222195. In about three quarters of a mile turn left again (SE) at SU212188. If you then follow this path, in about a mile and a half you will arrive back at the B3080 and very close to the car park from where you started. The walk in total is about five miles long.

For those wishing to take a much shorter walk, the RSPB have now opened up a permissive footpath which starts towards the end of the first leg of the walk mentioned above, but then cuts due west along the electricity pylon line and brings you out about half way along the last leg of the walk mentioned above. This walk is no more than about two miles in length. Please note however, that this walk is currently closed due to the Covid 19 lockdown, and will not be reopened until restrictions are lifted.

Invertebrates by Graham Owens

Ticks

The tick which infests Langley Wood is *Ixodes ricinus*, common names Castor Bean Tick, Deer Tick, Sheep Tick. As I said in the last edition, it is the only tick species which Public Health England found when they did their last survey in Langley Wood for which I have the results. I've often wondered about its life cycle and if there are times of the year when it's not about. The bad news is that you can be bitten at any time of the year if the conditions are warm enough. It has four life stages: egg, larva, nymph and adult and a three host life cycle. The female can lay up to 2,000 eggs. Ticks must take a blood meal in order to moult to the next life stage. The lifecycle is typically completed within three years.

The eggs hatch after about 8 weeks and the larvae, which look like miniature ticks but with 6 legs, look to find a host. They will feed on a wide variety of hosts including birds, reptiles and small mammals. After one feed which last a number of days they drop off, moult and become a nymph. The nymph looks like a small tick and has 8 legs. Again it will use wide range of hosts including humans who are supposed to be most likely to be bitten by the nymph stage. After a feed, which again can last several days the nymph drops off to moult and become an adult. Adults prefer larger animals and in the New Forest there are plenty of deer and ponies and of course, humans. These ticks quest for hosts using an 'ambush' technique whereby they climb to the tips of vegetation and wait for a host to brush pass. During questing, the tick loses moisture so has to climb back down the vegetation into the mat layer to rehydrate therefore the questing period is directly affected by temperature and humidity. We are more likely to be bitten when conditions are damp. *Ixodes ricinus* prefer habitats with vegetation that maintain high humidity e.g. deciduous woodland and Langley Wood is ideal.

Apparently it's not just humans who get Lyme disease from ticks. Dogs and horses can get it too. Finally for anyone interested in becoming a hypochondriac, this species of tick is involved in the transmission of a large variety of nasties of medical importance including *Borrelia burgdorferi* s.l. causing Lyme borreliosis, tick-borne encephalitis virus, *Anaplasma phagocytophilum* causing human granulocytic ehrlichiosis, *Francisella tularensis* causing Tularaemia, *Rickettsia helvetica* and *Rickettsia monacensis*, *Babesia divergens* and *Babesia microti* responsible for Babesiosis, Louping ill virus and Tick-borne encephalitis virus.

Butterflies

Much if not all of the exciting stuff for the year to 31st March 2020 was included in the last edition. Namely the appearance of Pearl Bordered Fritillary in large numbers and a first sighting of Grizzled Skipper. Hopefully both species will reappear this spring but if the virus lockdown continues we will not know.

The Pearl Bordered Fritillary should have overwintered as small caterpillars amongst dead leaves. By April they will have started feeding again on Violet seedlings or the fresh leaves of existing violet plants. Below is a photograph of one basking in sunshine after hibernation.



The Grizzled Skipper may also survive in the wood as it's caterpillar can use a fairly wide range of food plants although it prefers Wild Strawberry. It overwinters as a small chrysalis and should emerge in May.

Moths

Some species of moths, including two of Langley Woods specialities, have evolved camouflage which makes them very hard to see on the bark of Lichen covered trees.



The Scarce Merveille du Jour is a beautiful moth (see photo above) which flies in June. It's caterpillar feeds on Oak. It is a very rare moth (Red Data Book species) in the UK restricted to a few localities in the south of England which includes Langley Wood. Indeed our wood gets a specific mention in some moth reference books.

The second one is the Merveille du Jour which looks similar to its Scarce namesake.



However, the Merveille du Jour appears much later in the year, September-October. It's caterpillars also feed on Oak. Although rarely seen, unless you regularly run a moth trap, the Merveille du Jour as a relatively common moth.



Friends Of Langley Wood Annual Accounts for the year 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020

	Year ending 31/03/20	Period ending 31/03/19
<u>Income</u>		
Subscriptions	£ 156	£ 95
Log sales	£3565	£2930
Timber sales	£4013	
Donations	<u>£ 11</u>	<u></u>
	£7745	£3025

Expenditure

Timber cost	£2757	£ 586
Equipment	£ 154	£ 690
Advertising	<u>£ 42</u>	<u>£</u>
	£2953	£1276
Surplus	<u>£4792</u>	<u>£1749</u>

Notes

1. Gross income from all sources £7745.
2. Substantially boosted this year by the sale of Larch timber, but approx half (27/53) of this income is payable to Natural England.
3. Natural England (NE) have still not invoiced FOLW for the wood & timber we purchased from them for onward sale so I have again accumulated the money due for this year, £2757, and it will be put in a separate account. Cumulative amount now owed to NE is £3344.
4. FOLW net surplus for the year is £4792.
5. Total FOLW surplus carried forward is £6540.