



Bracknell Forest Natural History Society



A society for everyone interested in nature and its conservation

THE SEASONS – at Nightingale Triangle

As you will be aware, the Bracknell Forest Natural History Society has ‘adopted’ the woodland between Nightingale Crescent and Firlands, alongside the Bagshot Road on the edge of Bracknell. We are now in the process of restoring the woodland, with dedicated and hardworking volunteers. The purpose of the project is to restore the native woodland, enhance biodiversity and create a safer and more pleasant environment for everybody.

Thank you for taking the time to look at what the woodland actually contains.

Throughout the year the woodland comes to life in so many different guises. We begin our theoretical walk at the Firlands entrance - at its junction with Nightingale Crescent - and we’re standing by to guide you through the four seasons.

Words by Gill Cheetham, photographs (taken in the woodland) by Gill and Ian Marsh

SPRING

In February, you’ll be starting to see **snowdrops**, peeping through the leaf litter. There could be early violets... a future food plant for the Silver Washed Fritillary butterfly, which will be seen flitting through the woodland in the early days of Summer, looking to lay its eggs. Right now, many birds twitter and swoop above.



Tree Creepers, looking to nest under the bark of the dead Scott’s Pine to the left of the park, are fighting off Nuthatches with the same idea. Tits of all sorts inhabit the nesting boxes; nearly every hole in every tree is taken, even by the Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, who may predate their smaller neighbours. Tawny Owls frequent the top storey, preferring holes way out of sight.

Walk towards the huge but dead **Chestnut tree stump** in the middle of the site, which is surrounded by ornamental wooden toadstools, and as well as the bluebells, maybe you’ll recognise wood anemones and flowering Bird Cherries. The Wild Rowans are beginning to flower high above, as the tree canopy begins to open up. Later Spring brings many more flowers into bloom.

The path meanders into the woodland thicket and carries on into a loop, passing rotting tree stumps and log piles, heaps of twigs where wrens dart in, bearing building material or food for their chicks.



Here the thicket is dense enough to screen out the A322, where Holly predominates. It's a home to Holly Blue butterflies, and also provides berries for winter feeding, of course. As the path bears right, you will see the British native ferns showing green above the remains of more trees, long ago fallen and now in the last throes of disintegration.

SUMMER



The real beauty of the woodland begins from late Spring and into early Summer. From Nightingale Crescent all through the woodland, tall spikes of foxgloves in many shades grace the view. **Red campion**, ragged robin, feverfew, and stinking iris border the paths.

Tall trees such as Oak, Chestnut, Scott's Pine and Holly are at their best and early butterflies and Ladybirds are looking to lay their eggs in the nettle patches. Bees and **Bumble Bees** can be heard and seen collecting nectar from the flowers, pollinating as they go. Over the years the flower population in the woodland has grown immensely, thanks to these busy little creatures.



Over recent Summers, parts now exposed in the woodland reveal the easily overlooked spikes of orchids. These are **broad leaved helleborines** - small purple and green flowers coat each stem, and soon the minute seeds distribute themselves onto the woodland floor.

As you venture further into the woodland you may see or hear Red Kites and Buzzards overhead – and sometimes they come into the canopy. Buzzards, often sitting on high perches, wait for Wood Mice or young Grey Squirrels to emerge. Thrushes and Blackbirds now have chicks fledging, these preferring to build their nests in the woodland thicket at the back of houses down Firlands.

By now the Stock Dove nests in the hollow Beech tree will be in full swing. The scent from the petals of Lime trees flowering in June attracts much attention from bees. Larch and Silver Birch produce their small flowers and catkins, and the understorey of Hazel and Hawthorn may also now be flowering.



Later Summer brings the bramble into flower and then fruit. **Speckled Wood butterflies** flit in dappled sunshine - and shy visits from Red Admirals, although infrequent, have been observed. Stands of stinging nettles will house colonies of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars or even Comma butterflies. Some may overwinter as pupae, secreted into the dark and secure cracks in tree bark and other likely materials.

AUTUMN

From September the woodland takes on a different appearance. Strong winds and torrents of rain pick upon the weakest of our spindly or rotten trees, bringing them down across our paths and the woodland backdrop. These trees become the rotting carcasses beloved of beetles, **fungi** and invertebrates, eventually melting into the fibrous topsoil to provide nourishment to ground cover and the understorey.



Leaves from deciduous trees make yet another layer, and as you walk around, fungus in the form of shelf-like brackets, clumps and individuals are striking in their colour and shape. Some of the older tree casualties from storms now reach a stage of almost total decay, rotting away to the point of becoming lost in the ground cover.

Blackberries, although now scarce, as well as Holly and Rowan berries provide food for both our local and visiting birds. Thrushes, **Blackbirds** and Redwings can be seen feasting on the berries.



WINTER

As Winter takes hold, the woodland quietens, although a walk through can be quite cheery on a cold day. Only Grey Squirrels scampering across the ground break the peace. Other rodents, having taken caches of acorns, chestnuts and conkers are now secreted into underground burrows and are in hibernation. The squirrels remain active throughout the cold and icy weather - a bountiful harvest will result in population growth. Their drays are significant balls of twigs and leaves, high in the forks of trees, often swaying in the breeze.

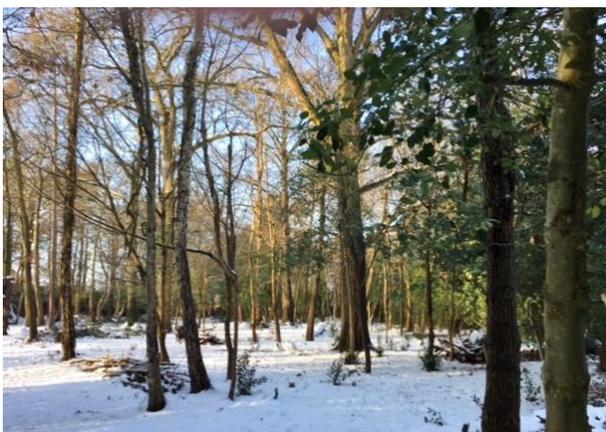


Small birds such as Titmice, **Robins** and Nuthatches flit in the topmost branches, hunting for prey – and calling out to one another from on high. Tree Creepers scurry up tree bark, hunting for invertebrates lurking inside. The Greater Spotted Woodpecker is more often heard than seen, tapping out rhythmical drum beats as it sounds out trees searching for grubs revealed from their sonic activity. The resident Tawny Owls may be heard or seen at dusk.

In January, trees encircled in Ivy begin to bear fruit, feasted upon by Pigeons, Stock Doves, **Jays** and Magpies, taking whatever they are able to consume or carry away.



A good proportion of the discarded seed in their droppings may germinate into plants wherever they fall.



Frost and snow give an almost bleak and barren appearance to the woodland, but snow is now a rare occurrence. In the mist and fog, the Crows making a familiar 'cawing' break the gloom, but reiterate that Winter is upon us. But our friendly Robins still perch in the trees, singing a sweet song of cheer.

As you leave the woodland from your circular route, you will see green shoots and tips appearing at ground level. Snowdrops in patches alongside the path flower from late January onwards. Red Fungi attached to fallen twigs decorate path edges. Dog violets will soon follow and the flowers of Cherry Plum and Blackthorn cheer up the boundaries of the woodland from February till the Spring.

Nightingale Triangle is on the corner of Firlands where it meets Nightingale Crescent, postcode RG12 9SB.

For more information visit our website – www.bfnathistsoc.org.uk