

DRAFT

The Friends of Oakley Wood

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on

Tuesday 7 March 2017 at the

Bishops Tachbrook Sports & Social Club at 7.30 pm

<u>Present:</u>	Liz Sheehan (Chairman)	Rod Scott (Treasurer)
	Judy Cooper (Secretary)	Phil Dalton (Membership Secretary)
	Graham Leeke	David O'Sullivan
	Susan Watt	Chris Wood
<u>Apologies:</u>	Wendy Barlow (Vice Chairman)	Cathy Kennedy
	Chris Hastie	Geoff Cooper
	Rosemary Dalton	Karl Curtis (WWT)

and 8 members of the public with apologies from Veronica Hyland.

Minutes of the AGM held on 1 March 2016 were approved and adopted. Proposed by Graham Leeke and seconded by David O'Sullivan.

Chairman's report:

This is our 9th AGM and my first as Chair. The committee have held five meetings during the past year.

I will now try and summarise what we have been discussing at these meetings and how we attempt to act as a protective buffer between WDC and WWT for the benefit of Oakley Wood.

Our activities have been two walks led by Karl Curtis from WWT. For the Spring Walk there was a trail laid for younger ones to follow and during the Autumn Walk Karl pointed out many things including fly agaric fungus and dor beetle. Both walks were informative and well attended. We have discussed ideas for this coming year including bird listening, plant and tree recognition and the study of lichen. At this stage these are ideas.

Turning to the website we have to thank both Chris and Chris for their respective skills, firstly to Chris Hastie for producing an excellent and easy to navigate layout, and secondly to Chris Wood for strategic placements of his web camera with the wonderful pictures he has posted. It must take quite a time to extract the best pictures for us. We are grateful to have our own Oakley watch keeping us in touch in all seasons without the distraction of that 3rd Chris, Chris Packham.

We are also pleased to report that we will have a link to Facebook as a useful publicity tool, thanks to Cathy Kennedy.

We thank Susan Watt for her donation of notice boards which are with WDC for installation in the Wood which will replace a couple of our original poster boards which are now rather weather-worn.

We can report that WDC has allowed Warwickshire Search and Rescue to use the Wood on four occasions last year to train their dogs to help locate missing people.

There has been some discussion on providing seating in the Wood, which should be made from fallen logs of a suitable thickness and placed around the main paths.

We would ask regular visitors to the Wood to report sightings of any of the following who are badly behaved, namely dogs, motor or pedal cycle riders or substance sniffers. Please email WDC, jon.holmes@warwickdc.gov.uk

We are grateful to George Green of WWT for organising work parties during the year, which involve activities such as pulling unwanted saplings out. We do need more volunteers for this and having taken part myself I think he should emphasise the word 'party' and omit the word 'work'. It was all very jolly even in the rain with tools and a tea break provided.

I will now refer to the Management Plan initiated by WDC and in the process of modification by WWT which the committee spent so much time analysing last year. The latest information is that the Forestry Commission is now working with WWT across all WWT woods. The intention of WWT is to clear fell some coupes and replant with broadleaf trees. The committee remain concerned that there should be a Management Plan specifically for Oakley Wood. We are adamant that extraction routes, not on the rides, should be put in to avoid further surface damage. There is an idea that more work is due to take place later this year.

This brings me on to the current state of the Wood.....

We are where we are. Some possibilities mentioned are the laying of hard core which will eventually allow greening up, or making and laying quantities of woodchip, or mats of fresh branches. The thinning programme does not appear to be achieving its purpose as originally described to this committee.

WWT does have a programme of regular cutting of the brambles. Under the tangle of brambles some edible mushrooms are no longer able to grow and we have observed a decrease in numbers of the Peacock butterfly. On a positive note there appears to be an increase in Fritillaries. Karl has said that within fifteen years some hawthorn and hazel will come through and result in a reduction of brambles. I suppose it's like a pension - invest now and hope for the best?

Please note the following dates in your diary. We can all attend a Butterfly Survey with George Green on July 16th and a Woodland Condition Survey on May 28th. Karl will lead a Spring Walk on May 14th and in the autumn a Bat Walk and a Fungi Walk are planned. Please consult the website for details of parking and timings when these are arranged.

And finally, I have enjoyed my first year as Chairperson and must thank our excellent committee for all their help. We have a very well balanced team with complementary skills. They all deserve praise but I am flagging up Susan for her electro techno skills here tonight and Judy who gives much time and efficiency to her job and is always so willing to help in spite of a busy life and Granny duties.

I also want to thank Geoff Cooper and Phil and Rosemary Dalton who are retiring from the committee. Phil has been our Membership Secretary for a number of years and given us his reports with good humour. We therefore have vacancies on our committee. Please consider joining us. We meet quarterly in a pub ... enough said! It is good fun and not onerous.

We are all extremely grateful to Karl, who is unwell at the moment and so unable to be here this evening, but he is a regular attendee at our meetings and without whom we might have many more difficulties in interpreting information.

Treasurer's report: Rod explained the accounts before us. It was proposed they be adopted by Susan Watt and seconded by Sue Edkins.

Membership Secretary's report: Phil reported that he had been Membership Secretary for 6 years now but due to the pressure of other committee work he would be stepping down. He reported that we now have 490 members.

Election of officers: With Phil standing down, Cathy Kennedy has offered and been nominated to take over the role as Membership Secretary. As Liz reported, together with Phil, Rosemary and Geoff will also be standing down as committee members. Taking into account these changes the Election of Officers as displayed to the meeting was voted en bloc, proposed by Phil Dalton and seconded by David O'Sullivan.

Any other business:

Graham thanked Liz for her Chairman's report and requested it be posted on the website. It would be helpful to know from members whether The Friends was active enough or whether there was more it could be doing for users of the Wood.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.00 pm

(Refreshments)

Address by Simon Thompson, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Senior Hedgehog Officer talking about the prickly world of the hedgehog.

Simon reported that due to the decline of hedgehogs and the need to improve the situation a further officer has been recruited other than himself. There are only 4 such officers in the UK.

Hedgehogs are mammals which fall into the order of Euliptophyla (which also includes moles and shrews). They are an ancient family Erinaceidae dating back 56-34 million years ago. There are 17 species of which the erinaceus europaeus is the only one found in the UK. It is nocturnal, hibernatory and has a coat of spines as a defence mechanism. Its young are called hoglets. These hedgehogs can be found as far north as Scandinavia and as far south as Sicily. There are not many in eastern Europe nor at altitude eg highlands of Scotland due to lack of broadleaf trees for protection, nor in wetlands and bogs.

Fascinating facts:

A male can travel 1.8 km in a night (ie 20 football pitches) and the female only 1.1 km.

In summertime a pile of grass is an adequate nesting place but in winter they build their nests in hedgerows.

They begin hibernation in November/December.

Hedgehogs live on a diet of mainly beetles but also caterpillars and earthworms.

Reproduction: courtship begins in May, 4 weeks' gestation period, remain in nest for 4 weeks then mother leaves nest. There is no pair bonding, the male leaves immediately after mating.

From conception to independence is a 12 week cycle. Spines appear within hours of birth.

Predators are badgers, foxes and cars!

The lifespan of a hedgehog is 4 years.

The flea which lives on hedgehogs is specific to the animal and cannot live on household pets.

A viable settlement of hedgehogs needs to be around 40 in number.

Conservation status: From 2011 there has been a downward trend in reported numbers. The 2015 reported noted a reduction in rural areas down by a half and in urban areas by one third. In the 1950s hedgehog numbers were 30 million but today it is down to one million. This is likely to be due to habitat loss (urban and rural), pesticides, roads, habitat fragmentation (ie barriers, concrete fences in gardens etc). We need a neighbourhood approach to open up barriers in our gardens. Other causes climate change, increase in CO2 emissions, viruses. There is now a European group looking into this decline and what can be done about it which includes Simon and 7 other countries!

In 2014 WWT successfully applied to the British Hedgehog Preservation Society in order to create Simon's role. The structure of the role is to engage the community, discuss the issues with the community and improve habitat for the hedgehogs. For example Simon had been talking to the developers of the new housing development on Harbury Lane to encourage them to take into account the movements and habits of hedgehogs. Educating children is an important job and Simon has visited schools to encourage them to make tunnels to monitor the footprints of hedgehogs. It would be helpful to Simon if we notify WWT of hedgehog sightings, talk to neighbours to see how gardens can be linked. It is likely hedgehogs will be in Oakley Wood although the trail cam hasn't yet picked up any.