

Big Wood nature reserve sensitively managed

A sensitive management scheme for Big Wood has been adopted by its Management Group over the past few years, approved by Barnet Council and successfully carried out by our enthusiastic Big Wood Volunteer group led by Peter Falk.

This approach has involved cutting a few glades where young oaks have been planted, and where the increased light has encouraged more species of flowers. The scheme allows for much of the old hazel to be left undisturbed as it makes up a large part of the understorey and this helps to preserve the conditions of dappled shade, which are conducive to the suckering of Wild Service Trees.

The discovery of the unusually large number of these rarer trees resulted in the wood being designated a nature reserve in the nineties. The hazel understorey also promotes a moist woodland climate, which is good for many things and gives continuity of habitat for fungi, moss and lichen.

The scheme has proved fruitful and this spring the old hazel has yielded interesting finds with two quite special fungi being discovered on the hazel branches.

We were delighted to find the Glue Fungus, *Hymenochaete corrugata*. The other, which is a black fungus called *Biscogniauxia anceps*, is plentiful here on the hazel branches and on other species. It is the first record of this fungus in Middlesex and the thirteenth in Britain.

Both species were analysed by Andy Overall, a well-known local Field Mycologist, who is in the process of doing a fungi survey of the wood. His picture of the Glue Fungus is shown below. Accompanied by notes on morphology and microscopic details, Andy deposited samples at Kew where the collections was rechecked and confirmed by an in-house mycologist. Kew is home to the national fungarium, "one of the oldest, largest and most important mycological reference collections in the world."

The Glue fungus itself grows on standing dead hazel branches or twigs. If a fallen dead twig is caught in the branches beside it, the fungus sends out hairs to grip the twig and then forms a black plate around it, thereby gluing it on. It is thought the fungus gains an advantage as it can use the twig before its gets to the woodland floor, so avoiding competition from other fungi on the ground.

A lichen has also been found on the hazel, which is currently still infrequent in the Greater London area, though common in the countryside. It was identified as *Phlyctis argena* by the Lichen Department at the Natural History Museum who have kept a voucher sample from here for their records.

Another special feature of Big Wood is the true Crab Apple, which occurs here in greater numbers than is usual. We had identified these trees in earlier years, but it has been confirmed

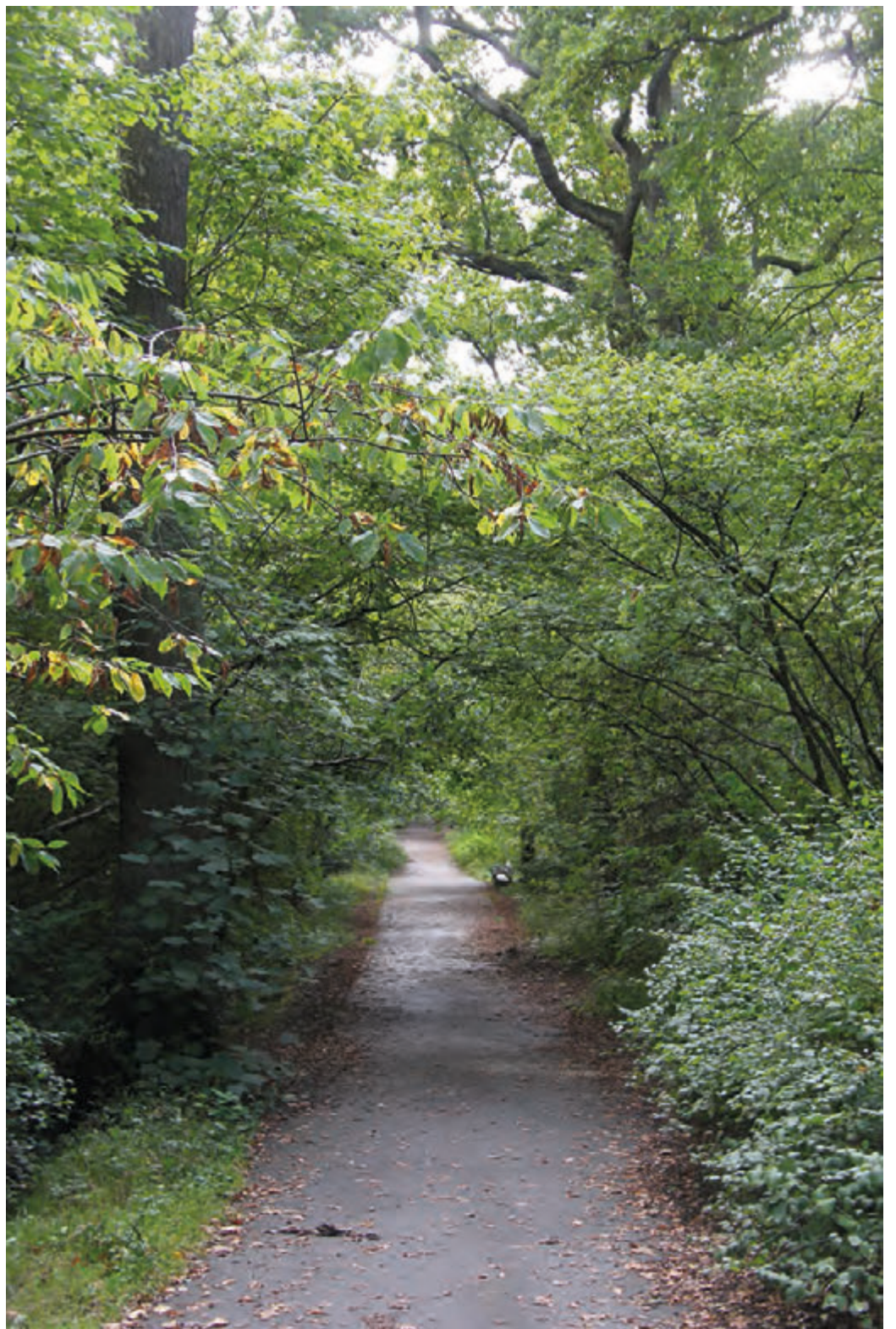
again by the botanist who is doing a plant survey of Big Wood for the Group. He was a bit sceptical at first as really true Crab Apple, *Malus Sylvestris*, is quite rare and, if present on a site, there will usually only be one or two. However, when he examined the botanical details of some of ours he found that there were at least five. It is most likely that some of the other 22 trees will turn out to be True Crabs as well. We look forward to the general results of his survey, but know from a survey done some years ago that there are over 80 species of plants in the wood.

The bird survey carried out by a professional ornithologist for the committee has also shown that the habitat in the wood supports a high density of birds and that a good variety of birds are nesting here this year. The wood also has a number of visiting species a few of which may stay to nest and it provides a short stop over for migrants.

Even a cuckoo was heard by me in May and seen in the wood by our expert, who was delighted by this. The understorey species and many of the trees produce different berries, nuts and seeds, providing food for birds as do the caterpillar crop and the insects attracted to the many flowering trees and bushes in spring. The invertebrates in the abundant supply of dead wood and wood piles are another source of food. The yew, holly and ivy give winter cover. Anyone interested in reading the bird survey can e-mail peter.d.falk@gmail.com.

All in all we find that there are many special things in our small ancient wood and we look forward to continuing a sensitive policy that allows them to flourish.

SUSAN OSBORN



Rose gardens flourish with community care

Those of us who walk regularly through Northway Gardens cannot fail to have noticed how much the flowerbeds have changed this year. The hard work put in by all those involved has had immediate visible results.

The soil is already much improved and lots more spring bulbs have been planted, which it is hoped will make it through the winter. Supporters have given their time, money, advice, expertise and plants. They've weeded and watered, filled in forms and lobbied business. And it's all paid off.

Recognition of all this effort was given by the Finchley Society when they awarded the Northway Gardens Organisation with their Environment Award early in the summer. This is given for an activity or feature that genuinely enhances the local environment.

The grant of over £2,000 from the Residents Association



paid for the manure compost and grit that was laid at the beginning of October. There was help of another kind with the manure, as we were told, "Many thanks are due to Ants Removals whose technical skills moved a massive amount of material to the site so easily. They succeeded where gardeners had baulked."

There are now five donated compost bins, all full and waiting for spring, and thoughts are now going to making some leaf mould. Residents with bags of leaves to be collected, or bags of money or time to donate, should contact the Northway Gardens Organisation, 8458 5313 or 07503 212253.

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10.30am Suburb Service of Remembrance

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Christmas Eve:

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