

Big Wood: your ancient woodland

Big Wood Nature Reserve

Big Wood is an ancient woodland site which can be traced back over 1000 years, a remnant of extensive woodland that once covered the area before gradually being cleared for fields.

History
In the middle ages the site was part of an estate called Blawod in the Manor of Finchley, which the Bishop of London had acquired about 1040 from the Bishop of Hereford as part of the Fulham estate and the church continued to own it until 1533.

Ecological Interest
Over the last century, the coppice and a variety of trees have regrown and the site has become a rich and varied habitat. Management was strict and the wood has been little disturbed.

Woodland Management
The present management scheme allows for coppicing of hazel to create a number of glades. This aims to promote saplings, add flowers and more variety. Young trees are being planted in some of the glades.

Education
There is a nature trail around the wood with a free leaflet available. This can either be obtained from the separate table or, if empty, from local libraries and the HGS Trust office in Finchley Road.

There has been a lot of activity in Big Wood over the last 12 months. Although the wood is ultimately owned by the London Borough of Barnet, much of the work carried out is in conjunction with the Big Wood Volunteer Group who meet regularly during the winter months to work in the wood. Work is carried out according to a five-year plan agreed with Barnet. The Volunteer group has now created nine glades where there was little or no canopy cover with a view to permitting seeds in the soil to re-germinate. Over

180 oak saplings have been planted in these glades. Barnet and the Volunteer group applied successfully to the Forestry Commission for a grant and this money has been used in the last 12 months to update the signs at the two main entrances to the wood (pictured) and commission surveys into the bird life, bats and fungi in the wood as well as a floral survey. The bird survey has revealed a high density of birds in the wood and a large variety of nesting birds. The fungi survey has revealed a number of

rare fungi. These surveys will be available to all suburb residents on request. The management scheme for the wood seeks to preserve the habitats that have allowed so much to prosper. The group of Volunteers who give up their time to work in the wood need to be thanked by the community. However there is always a need for more people to be involved. At the end of 2014 a UK report was published on the management of parks and woods. It concluded that, although the condition of parks in London had improved significantly in the 15 years to 2010, the future is very uncertain. With government funding reducing by 25% in real terms over the last 5 years and further reductions expected, parks and

local woods, as a non-statutory service, are highly vulnerable. The reduction in park maintenance may go unnoticed until neglect results in a spiral of decline. We know the increasing pressures on Barnet's green spaces department and the possibility of the work being contracted out in the future. This could result in a loss of skills and therefore less ability to effectively manage green areas. The report suggests that pressure needs to be put on Councils for ongoing and renewed commitment for some funding to support staff and manage parks despite the cuts but that in addition there is an urgent need to get communities more involved and expand the number of volunteers. In the Suburb the Big Wood group is one example but there are other groups in the Suburb such as Northway Gardens, Meadway Gate and the flowerbed committee in Central Square where groups have been formed to protect and develop these areas, which were deteriorating due to the reduction in expenditure by the Council. It is likely that the degree of local involvement will have to increase over the next few years if all our green spaces are to be preserved. We are fortunate to have the HGS Trust whose current management is more prepared to get involved and help preserve the green spaces.

Another area of concern in Big Wood is damage caused by a small minority of the primate - Homo sapiens. Over the last 12 months there has been damage in Big Wood caused by people taking quantities of earth, picking or cutting wild flowers, dumping rubbish and carting

off dead wood in their barrows. Dead wood is vital for old woodlands and needs to be left in situ. Not only does it enable a slow release source of nitrogen but also provides, as it decays, a fantastic array of microhabitat. It is estimated that over 40% of woodland wildlife is dependent on this eco system. So please all of you using the wood, if you see this kind of thing happening, do reason with them or get their details so they can be contacted to explain the damage to the eco system they are causing

Finally cycling. The objective which Barnet sets out for Big Wood is that it is 'managed primarily as amenity woodland with emphasis on habitat management and biodiversity'. However it is also included in a group of parks in the Borough which is reserved exclusively for pedestrians. The byelaw for governing these areas clearly states (paragraph 8) that no one 'should ride a bicycle or any similar machine in any part of the area'. Barnet insists that the main internal path in the wood should be tarmaced to permit access for prams and wheel-

chairs. Unfortunately there are a small number of cyclists who ignore the restrictions even though there are 'no cycling' signs at every entrance. It is unlikely Barnet will prosecute when the byelaw is infringed due the cost and time in taking legal action especially when the fine is likely to be a proportion of one pound! Therefore we need to use argument and persuasion to point out that it is a small oasis for pedestrians where there is no traffic of any kind. It would not matter greatly if bicyclists slowed down to the speed of pedestrians, which some do when it is pointed out that it is a pedestrian area only. But there are a very small minority who insist on ignoring the signs and cycling at speed. Two people have fallen over in the last few months, not because they were hit, but because they lost their balance when a bicyclist sped past. People with wheelchairs or who are unsteady on their feet are being deterred from using the wood. Please can you all put friendly pressure and argument on anyone you know who is causing these problems.

PETER FALK



MEMBERSHIP FORM

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PLEASE USE CAPITALS THROUGHOUT

Name _____

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(Giving your Email address helps us keep in touch and reduce costs)

Phone _____

Subscription amount: £ _____ (Suggested minimum payment £15)

Fellowship donation: £ _____ (To support Fellowship, a Suburb charity, in its work for Suburb senior citizens)

Total: £ _____ (Total amount for cheque, standing order, PayPal or credit card via www.hgs.org.uk.)

Standing order is best - stays unchanged unless you alter/cancel it!

BANK STANDING ORDER FORM To the Manager:

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Post Code _____

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Account Name _____ (If different to name above)

Please pay the 'Total' amount entered above now and then annually on 1st February until further notice to:

The Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association.
Account number: 91605747, Sort Code: 40-03-11
at HSBC, 40 Temple Fortune Parade, London NW11 0QU
Quoting Reference (leave blank, RA to complete) _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Please return this form with the bank standing order section completed or your cheque made payable to HGS Residents Association to: **HGS RA, 40 TEMPLE FORTUNE LANE, NW11 7UE**

A Pets Corner for Suburb News?

Back in the winter of 2011 we featured Tudor, a cat, in Deborah Warland's Suburb Style section of our paper (SN issue 105, p7) and we decided to go back and find out how he's getting on. You can now do so by reading below. One thing's certain though, he's grown.

Suburb News was wondering if there were any other pets with profiles who could share with us. It doesn't matter from whose point of view the piece is written - pet or human. If any of you would like to share your pet this way with our readers,

please send about 300-400 words with a couple of fetching photos, high resolution please, to us at rapublications@hgs.org.ok and we'll consider it for publication.

Photo taken in St Petersburg in May; it takes all sorts!



Still master of the house

It's four years since my mistress, the elderly Geri Atrica, helped me write about my life as a kitten. Now I'm a five-year-old fully grown cat, she has taken up her pen (actually, I think it's called a computer) again to update you on my progress, in the hope that other pet owners on the Suburb will be inspired to write about their animal (or fish or fowl).

Luckily, we're still both alive and well, but she's slowed down quite a bit and I really enjoy setting off from the bottom of the garden and racing past her into the house via the catflap. I did have a few problems learning how to use it, but now I manage it quite easily. A black and white cat who lived quite near used to follow me home and made awful wailing noises outside - but luckily for me, and sadly for him, he got run over, so at present no other cat can come in the house.

I lead quite a regular life these days - much more fun in summer when I spend a great deal of time outside, in Geri's garden, and in other people's. I often wander quite far but my owner has no idea where I go and I'm certainly not going to tell her. When I was a kitten, Geri used to blow a whistle when

she wanted me to come inside and would reward me with a biscuit. She still does it at night if I haven't come home, but I don't get a biscuit any more! In winter, though I can sleep for over 20 hours day - what else is there to do but eat and sleep?

I've also honed my hunting skills and occasionally bring in a live mouse or bird. Geri never seems very pleased with me and if she can, she opens the back door and chases me out into the garden so that I can finish off the mouse outside. Before I kill it, I really enjoy playing with it. I let it run a short distance before pouncing on it but then my paw hits it too heavily and it stops moving. I must say, there's a bit more to eat on a mouse than on a bird. I don't like feathers and the beak is quite indigestible. I wouldn't mind catching a rat, which I reckon would have more meat on it, but I rarely see one.

Geri tells me that some cats eat only dried food, in the form of biscuits, which I think must be very boring, but I have so-called wet food, from tins. There is a large choice of flavours, rabbit, chicken, salmon and more, and I enjoy them all. I'm

not allowed to drink milk, but Geri often lets me lick cream or fruit yogurt off her fingers. My very favourite food is dried catnip which I adore. I have successfully bitten into two packets which my mistress bought for cats of her friends (why didn't she buy me a packet, I wonder?). There is a catmint plant in her garden, but I think it's stronger when it's dried and I feel so happy when I eat it!

One of the most memorable things I did this year was to travel in a car. I had to go to the vet so Geri put me in a special cat cage and left me on the front seat while she went back to the

house to fetch something. However, I discovered she hadn't shut the cage door properly so I crawled out and had a lovely time exploring the car. She was not pleased to find me sitting on the dashboard when she came out, but let me be free in the car for the short trip and I loved it!

I think I am a lucky cat so far, as I get fed regularly, have a warm house to live in and a mistress who is devoted to me. Perhaps I should scratch and bite her less often, but I do like the feeling of power, and still need to show her who's Master of the House!

