

Friends of Oxleas Woodlands

AUGUST 2021 NEWSLETTER



Hello Friends,

Apart from being a wet month, this has also been a busy time for the Friends with the growing interest in FOW's conservation activities and walks; and the ongoing campaign against the Shepherd Leas development.

Unfortunately, the Family Explorer in July did not go ahead as there were too few families to make it an exciting experience for them. These sessions offer the opportunity for families to discover mini beasts, learn about plants and animals, play nature games and listen to birds and other forest sounds. The next session will be in October, with the details advertised in next month's newsletter. Inspiring the next generation to love and respect the woodlands is a wonderful gift.

The Shepherd Leas campaign continues, raising awareness of the proposed development, the harm it will cause and how people can get their views heard. The Planning application has not yet been submitted by the Developers but when it is, we must step up our opposition, being seen as well as heard. This is a significant threat to the woodland we love and we need more FOW members to join the campaign. There are many different ways that you can help including sharing any expertise you may have in such campaigns, so please contact us at oxleas.friends@virginmedia.com

After more than a year of zoom meetings we are looking forward to meeting FOW members again in person at the next General Members' Meeting on 30th September 2021. In addition to the usual business part of the meeting we hope to welcome our first guest speaker in almost two years. More details next month.

Sue Reeve, Membership Secretary

Need to Know

For £5 a year you can be a Friend of Oxleas Woodlands, a volunteer-run community organisation. For more information see our website or email oxleas.friends@virginmedia.com

www.oxleaswoodlands.uk

For More Information

@OxleasFriends

Friends of Oxleas Woodlands

Nature Notes: Wild Service Tree

Sorbus torminalis
Nature Notes by Marketa Koskova

There grows, in Oxleas Woodlands, a lesser known and easily overlooked native tree with long forgotten links to our past. The tree's deeply toothed leaf may already be familiar to you as the Friends of Oxleas Woodlands logo.

Where it grows naturally it is considered to be a sign of ancient woodland and is highly valued. Yet many questions about it remain unanswered. In particular, why is it so rare when it thrives in both light chalky soils and stiff clays?

In medieval times, The Wild Service Tree was held in high esteem. Its beautiful fine-grained wood with shatterproof quality was particularly valued by the makers of crossbows, lances and pistols. The hardness of its wood was appreciated in axles and wheels for carts, cogs in mill machinery and agricultural striking tools and even for grave headstones. Makers of harpsichords were also especially fond of it. The ones once growing in Epping Forest were, so the legend says, made into furniture for the Royal household. Perhaps its declining numbers speak of vanishing craftsmanship and the emergence of cheaper substitute materials.

The fruits of the Wild Service Tree, decomposed to rid them of a bitter astringent taste, were sold in medieval markets as sweets with a date-like taste.



The Chequers, Eltham
(now Draughts) image from
www.dover-kent.com

Before the arrival of hops in this country the berries, also known as 'chequers', were used in the brewing of beer – particularly in the South East of England, where the tree once grew in abundance. There is speculation that many a local pub owes its name to these berries - although an ongoing debate cannot decide which came first. Perhaps, one day, if we continue to protect our Wild Service Trees, we might revive this old recipe. Not just out of historical interest but also to take advantage of the health benefits of *Sorbus torminalis*, whose second name translates as "good for colic".

September Walks & Talks

Bat Walk - Friday 3rd, 8pm

Houses in the Woods Walk - Saturday 4th, 6pm

Members' meeting & talk - Thursday 30th, 7-9pm

FOW Walks

To book a place on any of the above walks, or for more information please email suereeve@virginmedia.com Due to the high demand for places please book your place as soon as possible and be aware that priority may be given to FOW members and those who have not previously attended the walk. Walks are free to members and children, or £3 for over 16s. Please dress appropriately for a woodland walk.

Volunteering Dates

September

Rose Garden - Friday 10th, 2 - 4pm

Saturday 11th, 2 - 4pm

Shooters Hill Woodland Working Party -

Saturday 11th, 10am - 1pm

Weekday Working Party - Friday 17th, 10am - 1pm

Litter Picking - Wednesday 15th, 10am - 12noon

Saturday 25th, 10am - 12noon

For more information email

oxleas.friends@virginmedia.com