

Spinney Wood

A review of activity in 2021

Woodland management and wildlife

Over the summer, surveys were carried out to determine the presence or not of two of Spinney Wood's **most notable species**: the lady orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) and dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*).

Largely confined to the chalky woodlands of Kent, the **lady orchid** is one of the UK's rarest and most charismatic orchids and has historically been present in Spinney Wood; however, it has not been recorded in the wood for at least a decade. None were found on the survey



we carried out this year but, as the orchid can lie dormant for years, with appropriate management, i.e. coppicing to increase the light levels in the wood, there is a strong possibility the lady orchids will flower again. We will repeat the survey next year after a winter of coppicing.

Whilst surveying for the lady orchids, we discovered a large population of **white helleborine** (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) at the northern end of the wood. These orchids take eight years to develop and flower from seed and are designated as 'vulnerable' as well as being on the UK list of Biodiversity Action Plan species. The record has been added to the management plan.

White helleborine

The **dormouse** is our rarest terrestrial mammal and has seen its population reduce by half since 2000 due to a range of factors, including changes to woodland management, loss of hedgerows and climate change. Highly secretive, it can be difficult to tell whether dormice are present in a wood or not. One method is to search for nuts that have been opened by dormice, which we did in September, finding evidence of their likely presence. The next step is to confirm their presence by installing 'nest tubes' across the wood and monitoring them throughout the spring and summer; this is something we will aim to do in 2022.

The process of **coppicing**, cutting trees down to ground level to allow more shoots to grow, is a real benefit for lady orchid, dormouse and wildlife in general: increasing the amount of light reaching the woodland floor and diversifying the structure of the wood. We began this season's coppicing work with a volunteer task in November; the cut material was used to create an 11 metre long 'dead hedge'. The dead hedge defines the

edge of the footpath and creates good undisturbed areas of shelter for wildlife in the woods. We will continue coppicing in the wood throughout the winter until the end of February, using a mixture of volunteers and WCCP staff.

Following the **Tree Condition Report** from Tim Moya Associates, WCCP engaged contractors to remove or make safe the trees identified as requiring **urgent attention**. WCCP will continue to monitor tree condition within the wood in line with the report, engaging contractors to deal with any issues in discussion with the parish council.

Our rangers continue to visit the site at least once a week, responding to any queries or requests etc. from the public as they come in.

Access



Opened up: Spinney Lane entrance

We have been working to keep the paths maintained and opened up, with a particular focus on the entrances from Wilcox Road and Cooting Road to ensure **welcoming access for the public**.

We are currently seeking a quote for a vehicular barrier for the layby/access point along Spinney Lane.

Community engagement

KCC Foster Carers Social Committee Group (family group) were due to take part in a **tree planting** day on Saturday 27 November, but this has had to be postponed because the trees were unable to be delivered because of supplier issues (the Woodland Trust). The session is now planned for February 2022. The trees will be planted along Aylesham Road to help fill in gaps which will make the woods safer and reduce the amount of litter blowing in.

The local schools have been contacted to gauge interest in using Spinney Wood for curricular and extra-curricular activities, including **Forest School**, with Aylesham Primary showing a keen interest. We met with **Aylesham Primary** to discuss potential Forest School and guided walk activities at Spinney Wood, which WCCP could deliver. Funding would need to be found to facilitate this and discussions are taking place.

A relationship has been developed with the **ASPIRE project**, a project that supports people to make positive changes in their daily lives through wellbeing activities. This is particularly to tackle problems of obesity and unemployment with the aim to have healthy, skilled and working communities. A hub has been developed in Aylesham and participants are encouraged to join volunteer tasks at Spinney Wood. We are also supplying the project with coppice materials, such as pea canes, to be used on its community garden.

Articles on Spinney Wood have been included in WCCP's main publication, the **Green Gang**, as well as the Volunteer Newsletter for WCCP volunteers. The site has also been publicised on WCCP's social media and will be included on the new website. Volunteer opportunities have been advertised on the **Aylesham and Community Facebook page**. In addition, posters have been put up in the wood and visitors spoken to by the ranger about upcoming works and events etc.

We have been running **monthly volunteer tasks** since August. Tasks so far have focused on improving access to the site, coppicing and litter clearance – **21 bags of rubbish** have been collected and removed from site during this time.



What a load of rubbish! Ranger, Matt, and local volunteers clearing rubbish

Looking ahead to 2022...

Our aim for 2022 is to engage with a wide range of the local community in Aylesham village and (re)introduce them to a delightful patch of ancient woodland that's on their doorstep.

We will work more closely with Aylesham Parish Council, the community garden project, local schools and others so that we can provide opportunities for members of the public to learn about nature and their local area through activities, events and volunteering with the rangers.

Wildlife surveys

We propose to do the following wildlife surveys to get a picture of what we've got in the wood:

- Lady orchid survey and general orchid count.
- Breeding bird surveys to determine population trends and responses to management.
- Dormouse surveys to confirm presence or absence.
- Butterfly and moth surveys.
- Botanical survey.

Possible events and activities

We will look to run a range of activities and events throughout the year, including:

- Dawn chorus/ introduction to woodland birds (Green Gang).
- Nut gathering and growing – getting the local community involved to help grow saplings to plant up native hedgerows along open areas of the woodland edge.
- A big litter sweep - working with locals and volunteers to clear all litter from the woods.
- Foster group tree planting event.

Community engagement

We will aim to broaden and deepen our relationship with community organisations and local people:

- Work with local schools to get them using the wood for curriculum and non-curriculum activities, with the aim of setting up a Forest School.
- Work with other community organisations e.g. the Scouts to get them using the wood for activities.
- Develop the relationship with the community garden project (ASPIRE), so that we can support them by providing woodland materials, such as hedging stakes, bean poles, pea sticks, firewood, and other woodland crafts for their projects.
- Offering a range of community events and activities to engage the local community.

Site infrastructure and habitat management

There are many things that we can be doing in the wood. Here is a flavour of what we propose for next year:

- Improve and increase (?) interpretation and signage in the wood.
- Install vehicle barrier in the layby on Spinney Lane; hopefully this will reduce the amount of fly-tipping on site.
- Continue to monitor tree condition across the site, liaising with contractors as necessary.
- Seek to remove the large structure in the trees in the centre of the site.
- Coppicing between January, February, November and December to benefit biodiversity, keeping to traditional coppice rotational cycles.
- Create wildlife refuge areas in Spinney Wood after areas have been coppiced by dead hedging along rides and cut stools. This will benefit flora and fauna in these areas, reducing disturbance from people and dogs, especially in the breeding bird season.