

# Habitat Management



## PUTTING THE "WOOD" BACK IN WOODLAND



The habitats around Fritton Lake, the Golf Course and Woodland Lodges provide an important refuge for many native plants and animals. In some areas, the natural woodland of Oak and Hazel coppice can still be found. This gives rise to a large variety of plant and animal life, where plant species such as bluebells,

lesser celendine, red campion and hedge mustard survive. The dead wood in the trees and on the ground provides an invaluable habitat for over 60% of all woodland wildlife. Beetle grubs, woodlice, millipedes and many other insects can be found here, breaking down the wood into nutrients. Fungi and mushrooms can be seen growing on dead timber, and many species of lichen and mosses can also be seen. Bird life is very abundant, feeding on the large number of caterpillars, grubs and seeds, found in these "ancient woodlands".

However other areas on the Estate were altered in Victorian times, to create "Pleasure Grounds". These areas were planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, such as Rhododendrons, Laurel Cedars and Bamboo. More recently, in the 1950s large areas were planted up as Forestry plantations. These were planted for their monetary and timber value, as well as for a cover crop for game.





They are planted with a mix of softwoods and hard woods, with species such as Larch, Pine and Hemlock planted as nursery crop for the slower growing Beech, Chestnut and Oak. Forestry practice in the past was very much focused on the timber rather than the wildlife, hence woods were often cleared of under-story and dead wood, and as a result lacked any large diversity in wildlife.

In recent years, some of the plantations around the lake were thinned to enhance their value for wildlife. Last undertaken in 1983, the trees had grown too close to one another, resulting in their canopies shading the woodland floor. The lack of light reaching the ground restricts growth of under-story plants such as hazel, gorse and hawthorn. Only shade tolerant species such as holly favour such dark conditions.

Thinning the trees enables light to reach the herb and shrub layer of the woodland. This encourages and promotes growth, creating a wider age range of trees and shrubs. As the under-story develops, so suitable habitats are created for birds and insects. In time the woodlands will benefit from a greater variety of species.



Over 150 trees have been felled in the woods this winter, with the assistance of the Environment Agency. Native hardwood species such as beech, oak and chestnut have been favoured over the non-native pine and sycamore. However some areas of larch and Scots pine have been left. Three quarters of the trees felled have been extracted to be sold, however the remainder have been left for wildlife, in the form of Log Piles, brush heaps and chipped piles.

Within these "eco-piles", beetle grubs, woodlice and other small invertebrates can be found. These creatures are vital in a woodland ecosystem, because they break down the organic matter and decompose it into useful nutrients for the surrounding plants, shrubs and trees. To assist in this process, timber previously extracted for firewood, and which has now become too rotten to burn, has been returned to the woodland, rather than be burnt un-necessarily.

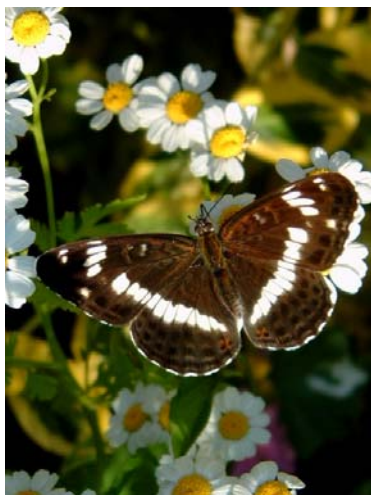


These log piles become important refuges for small insects and other invertebrates. As insect numbers increase, so will the abundance of small mammals and birds, which feed on them. These animals will bring with them seeds and berries from brambles, hawthorns, hazel and other species, to help repopulate the woodland.

In many areas of the woodland, natural regeneration will be allowed to occur. However, in order to create a more interesting woodland, some of the areas adjacent to the woods have been planted up with native hazel and hawthorn. This will grow to form a dense habitat, known as woodland edge, which will provide excellent habitat for breeding birds.

Already, self seeded, gorse, hawthorn and oaks have been found, and will be nurtured to ensure their continued survival. Sycamore, which was introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, has become a problem weed species, and over the next few winters will be selectively thinned to control its abundance. In areas of bare ground, a woodland seeds from established areas has been sown to give nature a helping hand. As these plants spread through the woodland floor, so butterflies and nectar feeding insects will increase.

In time the woodlands here at Fritton will become more species rich, in which both a high diversity and high abundance of wildlife will exist.



The White Admiral Butterfly's, larvae feed on honeysuckle



Fly Agaric Mushroom. Grows exclusively in association with birch



Spider webs glistening in the sunlight of an Autumn morning dew