

Tree Champion Activity Report 2019-2020

I must apologise for being out of action for a large part of the year due to medical issues. For this reason, the Brightling Tree Group and planned walks in Dallington Forest did not materialise.

However, in April I visited Rounden Wood in the company of a knowledgeable long-time parishioner whose property adjoins the wood. This extended my knowledge of the parish's woodlands and led to my discovery of some of the oldest and biggest honeysuckle plants I've ever seen and an Ash stool probably once a 'stump cut' tree marking a corner of a landholding in the woodland and which could be many hundreds of years old. These findings will be included in future Brightling woodland walks.

I also assisted a Brightling parishioner by putting them in contact with Anthony Becvar (Dutch Elm Disease Officer and Tree Warden Co-ordinator, East Sussex County Council) who visited and provided advice on branches being shed by a neighbour's Cupressus trees.

In recent weeks I've been contacted by a local woodland practitioner whose work in clearing an overgrown coppice for regeneration had attracted complaints from walkers. The evident public lack of appreciation of coppicing is worrying and is something that I have been trying to address through woodland walks and the talks I have given (see below).

Eucalyptus at Little Hoaths Wood

During the year I made numerous enquires to the Forestry Commission to find out what was being done about the landowner's non-compliance of the terms of the felling licence they obtained to clear-fell this ancient woodland. The licence had stipulated replanting with native broadleaves but instead the woodland was replanted with Eucalyptus and Norway Maple.

Late in January this year I had a phone conversation with the Forestry Commission's Woodland Officer for East Sussex who confirmed that the matter has now been passed to their enforcement team to get the non-native plants removed from the ancient woodland site. I'm still waiting on promised updates on progress, despite further phone calls, and will report to the Parish Council in due course.

Black Poplars

Last spring the parishes were gifted rare Black Poplar plants which were heeled-in by Dan Lambert-Goring and myself until they could be planted-out this spring. These trees are now nationally very rare, there being only some 10,000 left in the UK. Centuries ago, the Black poplar would have naturally occurred in winter-flooded riverine woodlands.

Many of the remaining trees in Britain are of an even age and approaching the end of their natural life spans. These trees are genetically very closely related. This makes them particularly vulnerable to chance extinction events. There are only 5 'genetic' clones within the 38 surviving Sussex trees.

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I heard about work at Wakehurst Place (an outstation of Kew Gardens) to cultivate cuttings from the 38 Sussex trees and managed to secure a further 18 plants including all 5 Sussex clone lines and sought planting locations in Brightling and Dallington parishes.

During February and early March with the help of the various landowners, Andrew Wedmore, Dan Lambert-Goring, Jamie Simpson and Peter Robotham a total of 27 trees were planted-out and protected from deer and rabbits.

Details of the locations and genetic clones are being put in reports to both parish councils.

Talk on the History of Dallington Forest

On March 10th I presented a talk to the Dallington History Group on the history of Dallington Forest – from the Late Jurassic to the present day – attended by Brightling and Dallington parishioners.

Included in the talk were explanations of coppicing, pollarding and hedge-laying, all important management techniques that have defined the forest and the woodlands of the parishes and are vital for their ongoing management if we're to keep the spectacular ecology and biodiversity we are fortunate to enjoy in this part of the High Weald.

Doug Edworthy