

The best laid plans ...

Gwent Ornithological Society has owned Goytre House Wood since 2001 and manages it as a reserve for birds and other wildlife. In 2013 the wood was designated a Local Wildlife Site (an area of high conservation importance in Monmouthshire) for its range of flora and fauna. The site is a mixed deciduous woodland consisting mainly of oak, beech, ash, sycamore and silver birch. In spring the woodland floor is carpeted with bluebells and wild daffodil are also present. Nesting birds are encouraged by the erection of nest boxes which are used by Blue and Great Tits, Nuthatch and Pied Flycatcher. Spotted Flycatcher return every year with one or occasionally two pairs present. All three woodpeckers are present most years with Great Spotted Woodpecker using the old trees with holes for nesting but Lesser Spotted Woodpecker preferring to nest in the alders along the canal. Raven and Buzzard are seen and heard in the area and Tawny Owl has bred there in the past. Mallard and Moorhen use the pond. Other birds include: Bullfinch, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Treecreeper, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Wren and Jackdaw. The Gwent Bat Group has put up bat boxes, which have been used by both common pipistrelle and noctule bats. Wood mice use the nest boxes to hibernate in winter.

Following a survey last year (2013) we planned this winter to prune two of the old beech trees to reduce the weight of branches stressing their increasingly fragile trunks. That way we intended to keep the trees alive and standing as good sites for bird nests and bat roosts while leaving the cut branches on the ground as a habitat for fungi, insects and mammals. We were awarded a grant from Monmouthshire County Council under the Monmouthshire Natural Assets scheme (administered by Gwent Wildlife Trust) to support the project.

The first tree was completed in late January as planned but the second had to be postponed due to forecast bad weather making it unsafe to work. That weather turned out to be February's gales, which blew down the beech tree that was awaiting pruning, blocking the footpath, and snapped much of the top off another. After the storm, we modified our work plans to make the best wildlife opportunities out of the damage. So we've now ended up with one reduced beech tree and the other left safely lying on the ground as an insect hotel. A neighbouring oak suffered a similar fate leaving us with rather more decaying wood habitat on the ground than we intended. Given the severity of the storm, we will conduct another safety survey this summer when lack of re-growth may reveal any further damage. Working with nature isn't always straightforward, but compared with some of the county's woods we escaped from the storms quite lightly.

If you intend visiting the wood, can you try to keep to the footpath, particular during the nesting

