

Outwoods Quarterly Report July – September 2023



Summer at the Outwoods has been consistently busy with the car park getting close to full most week days and filling up early on weekends – the wet summer does not seem to have kept visitor number down.

We began July in the Outwoods by preparing for Loughborough in bloom. The glade area was mown and strimmed along with the grass around the café barn and car park. We also gave the charcoal area a good clear around and put down some reptile tiles, which the slow worms seem to have enjoyed as we have had many sightings since, sometimes as many as 3 under 1 tile.



Woodchip was re-applied around the picnic area, noticeboard, and seating areas near the café. This brought the rest of the area up to spec with the recently serviced play area chip.



We hosted the presentation at the beginning of the Loughborough in bloom judging day and then gave the judges a tour around leading from the back of the barn past the recently felled softwood plantation. The sea of foxgloves framing a view of Loughborough in the background impressed the judges and highlights the importance of the Outwoods restoration project. What was previously dark softwood plantation is now a bright open area supporting our precious bees and butterflies.



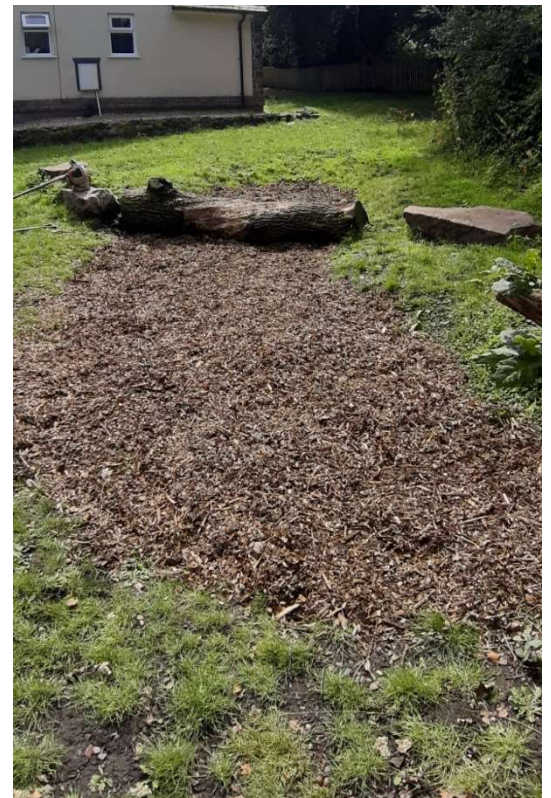
The tour continued through the woods and into the glade area where we talked about the kiln and sculptures which remained. We also talked about the upcoming work in the glade before finishing the tour with a truck ride up to the car park.

We went on to get awarded gold so the judges must have been happy with what they saw in outwoods and the rest of loughborough.

Just a couple of weeks later we began work pulling bracken in the glade with the help of BT openreach, who had given us a strong number of 11 volunteers. They worked diligently through the persistent rain that we had all become accustomed to this “summer”. A large area was cleared in the glade letting light back down to the floor to give some other ground flora a chance. There has of course been re growth since the session, however it is short and weak, so if we keep on top of the same area every year then we should see reduced strength and spread of re growth and other species should begin to flourish.



We decided to remove the gravel from the pits in the outwoods lawn area next to the barn due to an incident last year where a piece of gravel was fired into a café window by a strimmer! We didn't want to risk this happening again so the gravel was all removed and taken to mountfields communtiy allotment where it was used for topping up the paths. We replaced the gravel with wood chip which we think fits the aesthetic of the area better and can be topped up when required.



Dry stone walling has proven to be a particularly welcomed activity for the green gym group. We have run a number of sessions over the summer and the volunteers have really enjoyed learning a new skill and the great satisfaction that comes with stepping back and looking at a finished wall. The outwoods dry stone walls are a really important habitat as they provide fantastic habitat for our reptiles. Slow worms and common lizards will use the walls as safe places to bask in the morning and then also hunt the invertebrates that reside within, lastly, the dry stone walls provide safe and protected areas to hibernate over winter. It's also great to keep this dying art alive through passing knowledge to more people. I'm sure the neighboring farmer also appreciates us helping to keep dogs and walkers off his land!



Not bad at all for wallers in training



New “No fire/BBQ” signs have been put up around the barn and car park entrances into the wood due to a couple of camp fires which had been started in the barn earlier in the year. Fortunately no damage was done to the barn despite one being right next to a column.



In september, we held a volunteer session in conjunction with the Trent Rivers Trust as part of their natura flood management project. The idea of the project is to undertake flood management work around the river soar catchement using natural methods. This both reduces local flooding and creates habitat diversity by holding water in places during high rainfall events. The guys at TRT had highlighted some areas to do the work where channels exist in the wood due to high water flow during heavy rain. Some of these were also causing damage to the paths where water was flowing across them. We have laid natural dams across the channels made of sticks and brash. The idea is to hold the water in these areas rather than let water just flow away.





It was good for both staff and volunteers to learn this skill and we will be putting the skills to use in an upcoming project improving habitat for willow tits (Red listed for conservation concern) which have been reported next to the outwoods...watch this space.

Wildlife Spots:

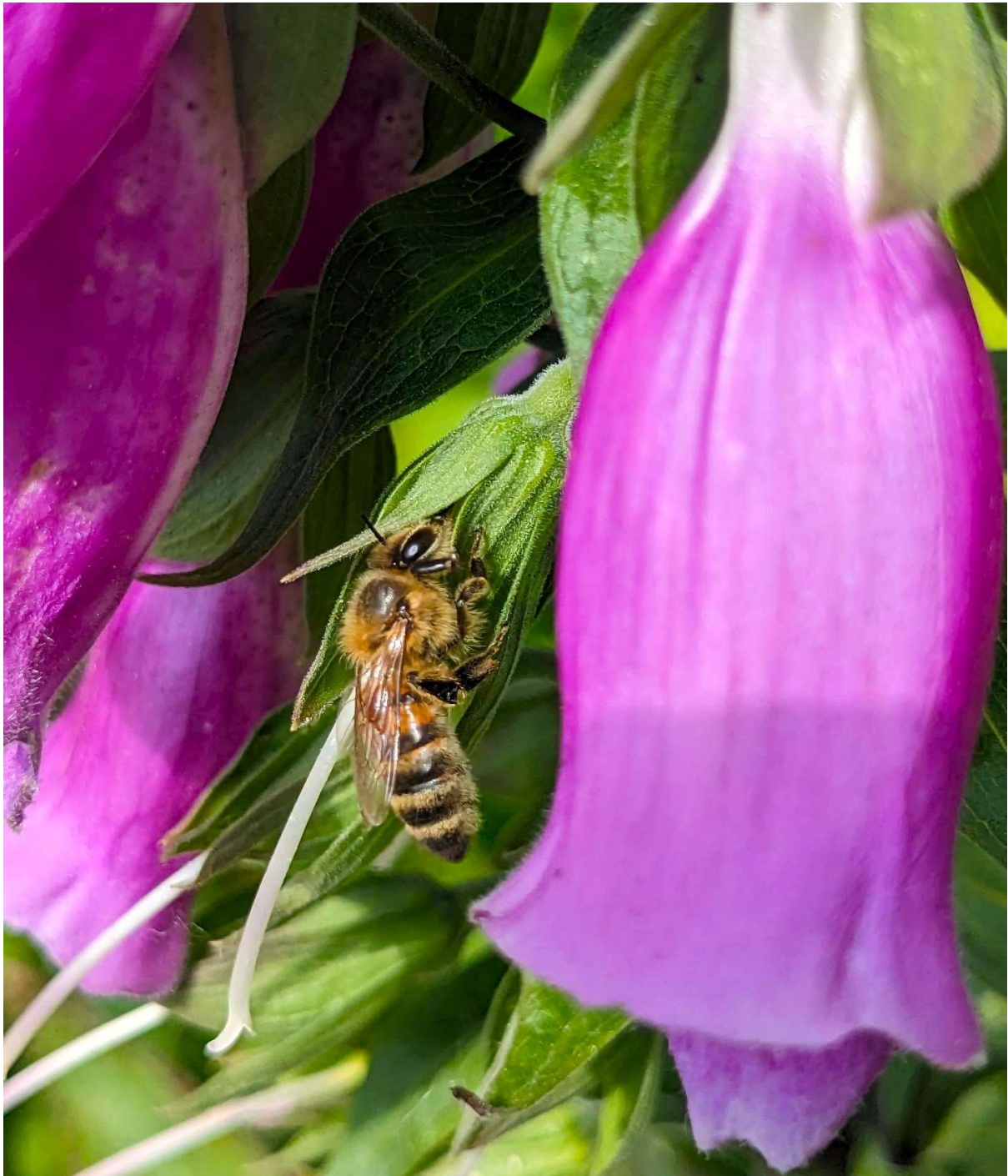


This lovely scorpion fly came to visit us one lunchtime at the outwoods garage. Although the tail looks like a sting its actually entirly harmless and just a clasping device used for mating.

This rather photogenic toad was found around the charcoal kiln area, co habitating with a colony of red ants!



A honey bee enjoying this years bumper crop of foxgloves in last years felled area



Buzzards and Red Kites have also regularly been spotted over the outwoods. We have also seen both species at once fending off a clattering of jackdawns!

Regular work in the outwoods:

- Daily cleaning of toilets and replenishment of soap / toilet roll
- Daily playground checks
- Twice – weekly emptying of bins
- Daily Primary route inspections
- Twice – weekly litter picks of carparks and primary route
- Closing of the woods during high wind events
- Checks of all paths after high wind events and removal of fallen branches / unsafe trees.
- Removal of sycamore saplings
- Mowing and strimming of café / barn area
- Strimming of grass areas around car park
- Removing encroachment around paths