

## April, 2007

### Weather Report

A record-breaking month, officially announced as the warmest April for over three hundred years. Average daily temperatures were 3.1 C higher than expected for the time of year. Breezy, sunny days with a maximum of between 17 and 20 C became the norm, and a national record of 26.5 C was experienced in Herstmonceux on April 15<sup>th</sup>. The south-east of England only received 6% of the usual rainfall for the month, the total of 4mm making this the driest April since records began. These photographs show the level of water in the pond at the



beginning and end of the month. The moss-covered log in the foreground that was surrounded by water was left high and dry by the 30<sup>th</sup> April.



## Extracts from Rodney's Diary

**1<sup>st</sup> April**

*One more hemlock downed as right alongside tall spindly oak, to give more daylight to oak.*

*General clear up from felling and stiffeners fitted to trailer suspension. Buzzard seen wheeling above conifers, being harassed by two crows.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> April**

*Continued clearing and burning brash from felled hemlocks and several trunks towed to pile out of the way. Lone buzzard seen circling again just before we left.*

**17<sup>th</sup> April**

*Continued clearing felled hemlocks and burning brash. Seeing light at the end of the tunnel now. Dragged trunks to clearing for sorting.*



**18<sup>th</sup> April**

*Still clearing felled hemlocks and several more pulled forward to ease access. Two long, small diameter trunks laid parallel on ground and started transfer of 'sawn to length' trunks as wood store. New trees watered because of prolonged dry spell.*



*Storing logs off the ground*

### **Achievements to date (April 2007)**

**All unstable trees in dangerous position felled.**

**Main access track cleared of overhanging trees.**

**Small clearing made part way along main track, which is now attracting butterflies and a greater assortment of ground cover plants.**

**Felling licence granted to remove western hemlocks from western end of wood, and start made over winter with first area cleared.**

**Several broadleaved trees now exposed in this area have been coppiced, as too tall and spindly to survive wind blow.**

**Ground almost completely bare in this area with only a few male fern plants as previously too dark to support ground plant growth.**

**Soil is deeply covered with needle litter so will be interesting to record the process of natural regeneration of this area before decision made on size and position of next hemlocks removed.**

**Large section of boundary track cleared (M25) but now submerged in bluebell plants.**

The incredibly warm, sunny days of April encouraged Long Wood to explode with new growth. It was exhilarating and exciting. Everything happened so rapidly.

At the beginning of the month the woodland was a true picture of early spring, delicate anemones carpeted the floor, soft and pretty, nodding demurely in the breeze or petals open facing the sun – thousands of tiny, white, dancing stars.



In response to the warmth the robust, fleshy, strap- like leaves of the bluebells forced their way through soon followed by spikes of pale, unopened buds. The bell- shaped flowers matured quickly and the tops of the stalks arched and drooped. The massed blooms formed shimmering seas of blue, their pearlescent surfaces reflecting and scattering light more expertly than the most expensive cosmetic

preparation. Every shade of blue and lilac and even metallic turquoise gleamed amongst the trees and alongside the tracks, whilst a warm, subtle scent wafted through the air and bumblebees hummed constantly as they went about their business pollinating the plants. Down by the stream dense stands of Ramson crowded the banks beside the meandering



waterway. Above the broad, bright green leaves, spherical flower heads burst open like fireworks into balls of snow-white stars to celebrate the event of spring. An unmistakable, pungent aroma was released as some of the plants were inevitably crushed when a pathway was forged through the vigorous growth.



*Yellow Archangel*

Patches of bright custard- yellow Archangel trailed alongside and threaded their way through the profusion of blue and white in the eastern section of the wood.

Groups of purple Bugle stood to attention, handsome Pendulous Sedge plants with their tall, gracefully drooping flower spikes towered above the patchwork, and tiny violets added dots of mauve along the edges of the tracks. The fresh new growth of numerous woodland plants finding their space and building up energy to bloom later in the year augmented the already extensive palette of green.



*Pendulous Sedge*

The trees also reacted to the heat felt in the rays of the sun. The season's brand new leaves that had been so carefully and economically folded within their protective cases, emerged like butterflies from chrysalises, opened and flattened themselves and whilst still silky- soft and fresh responded to every breath of wind. Their vibrant colours and eye-catching near translucency transformed the stark angular outlines of the trees in their dormant state that we had become familiar with over the winter months. At every turn we were met by scenes reminiscent of those featured on the front of National Trust greetings cards. On warm, sunny, late April afternoons, Long Wood was so very beautiful.

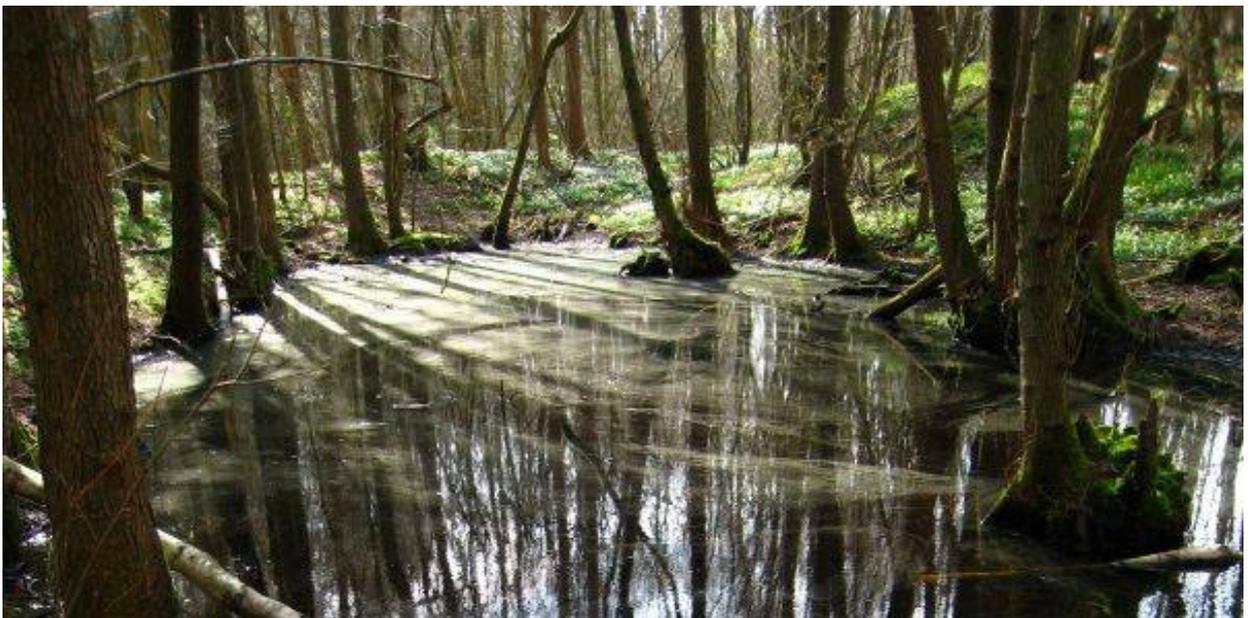
Underneath the explosion of spring colour, that together with sounds and scents has the ability to induce a state of euphoria, the woodland with all its inhabitants still needs to function and survive. The beautiful flowers are a transient stage in the cycle of life. The feathers of a hen pheasant jut above the dainty, pretty anemones –one of the foxes has been fed and nourished, but the bird has failed to pass on her genes to the next generation.



Painting of shrew we found

Nearby a common shrew lies motionless surrounded by nodding, white-petalled blooms, the sun warming the fur from the outside but there is no longer any warmth from within. Amongst the shimmering bluebells, a spider has spun a lethal trap and ensnared a veritable feast.

These same flowers demarcate the rim overlooking the pond. They tumble down the slopes to meet the dark, murky water expertly disguising the edges of what had been, centuries ago, an industrial site where the mining of ore and the smelting of iron was strenuous, hot and laborious work.



The path through the 'wolf end' conifers, zig-zagging between numerous animal burrows, is easy to follow because the ground is almost devoid of vegetation. The evergreen canopy ensures perpetual gloom and a deep layer of acid needle litter covers the woodland floor.



Approaching the western boundary a horizontal band of brilliant light is visible beyond the enormous trunks of the ancient, once-coppiced maple, hornbeam and oak trees that stand guard beside the historic woodbank. The sun shines down on the pale, dry, tilled earth of the adjoining field. I do not know how old these majestic, magnificent trees are. It has possibly been several hundred years since they were first planted, tended and regularly felled, then eventually left to grow unrestricted. Now they rise up like one huge wave, with their crowns curving over in response to endless battering by prevailing south-westerly winds.

They are all in the final stage of their life. Some heavy, decaying branches still tenuously attached, are much appreciated and well used by woodpeckers. Others have snapped but remain suspended, precariously balanced, held on to by surrounding bony limbs. Several have already crashed to earth and now languish as they rot amongst the spring flowers.

In stark contrast to the death and decay that are so clearly visible, this year's vigorous new growth unfurls, expands and starts to stiffen. The healthy, thin, pliable leaves flutter in the breeze making soft rippling sounds and motions and as they do so the sunlight is bounced and reflected around so many shades of green and yellow, constantly moving and changing, that I become mesmerised.

It suddenly seems so simple to leave one's ageing, physically -challenged body anchored to the ground whilst the spirit follows the curves of the trunks and branches up into the wild, random kaleidoscope of colour and pattern that the trees and the elements have produced, to be wafted by the gentle wind and bounced amongst the leaves. Perhaps this is what it means to 'be at one with nature'

