

SUMMARY

	Species	Present 1953	Losses	Gains	Present 1971
Perennials	Trees	4	—	—	4
	Shrubs	13	-1	+1	13
	Herbs	33	-16	+5	22
	Sub-total	49	-18	+6	37
Biennials		3	-1	+2	4
Annuals		3	-1	+8	10
Total		55	-20	+16	53

FUNGI

A number of species was represented in the plentiful display during the year; the most noteworthy being the large Shaggy Parasol mushroom (*Lepiota rhacodes*) growing in very large rings. A detailed survey of the group will commence in 1972.

INSECTS

These received no particular attention, and there is considerable scope for field studies which will commence in 1972.

MAMMALS

The species represented were:

Mole (*Talpa europea*). Evident from the numerous runs.

Bat (? sp.). Small numbers of this group seen flying on several occasions at dusk along the western edge of the spinney.

Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). All too numerous.

Brown Hare (*Lepus capensis*). One disturbed from its 'form'.

Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus caroliensis*). Had several dreys.

Bank Vole (*Clathronomys glareolus*).

Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*). One caught in a trap in the hut.

Common Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). This gained access to the hut through a gap in the metal sheeting and buried the remains of a rabbit in the earthen floor.

Suppressive measures were adopted against the excess of both grey squirrels and rabbits. No detailed investigations were undertaken during the year, but it is intended to inaugurate a survey in 1972.

PUTNOE WOOD, 1971

The past year was one of great activity in the Putnoe Wood project, and one regrets, all the more, how few of our members have participated in it, so far. The amount of work of all kinds which is waiting to be done is so large that any offers of help would be more than welcome, and the wood now provides scope for field work in all branches of natural history for as long into the future as can be foreseen. This assurance of continuity is, perhaps, the most important aspect of the whole project.

CONSERVATION WORK

Although the Corporation workmen finished their work before the New Year, the Society's working parties continued until the end of March. The northern end of the Keeper's Path and the Diagonal Path were cleared throughout, a winding path was cut through the north-eastern corner of the wood in area E for use later on as part of the Nature Trail, and the Central Clearing was tidied up, following the removal of the large fallen Poplar in the previous November. Small parties of school-children and Boy Scouts also assisted in the uprooting of large numbers of sycamore seedlings in area A.

Members of the Society were given an opportunity of seeing some of the work carried out during the winter at a field meeting held in the wood on the morning of Sunday, 14th March.

The results of this conservation work after many years of neglect became very apparent during the spring and summer, and were very favourably commented on by many members of the general public using the wood, particularly the creation of the fine vista through the Long Ride, and the appearance of the newly coppiced acre in area B.

CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Society drew up further proposals for work to be carried out during the winter of 1971-72 and submitted them officially to the Corporation at the beginning of September; these were accepted almost in their entirety. They provide for the coppicing of a further area of about half an acre in area H, the clearance of a triangular area of scrub at the north-eastern corner of the wood in area E, and the beginning of efforts to replant the southern hedge. The cutting and laying of the northern hedge, which was sanctioned in the Council's estimates of 1970, will also be carried out this winter.

In common with many other parts of the town, Putnoe Wood has not escaped the dreaded Elm Bark Beetle, and the Society's working parties have been assisting the hard-pressed Corporation by felling and burning a number of young Elms, in area A, which had been earlier found to be diseased.

OPEN DAYS

Two Open Days had been arranged for Saturday and Sunday, the 12th and 13th June respectively, but these had to be postponed at very short notice owing to the state of the wood, following a week of heavy rain.

We were more fortunate three weeks later, on the 3rd and 4th July, when the weather was fine and warm throughout. The Corporation very kindly lent us a small marquee and erected it close to the south-western entrance to the wood; in this we arranged an exhibition of photographs by our first President, Oliver Pike, together with a display of natural history paintings, drawings, photographs and specimens. Refreshments were available at one end of the marquee. The exhibition was opened at 3 p.m. on the Saturday by Ald. Ron Sharman, Chairman of the Recreation and Amenities Committee of the Town Council, and the Mayor, Cllr. Winifred Fowler, and a number of Corporation officials and Councillors were also present; all subsequently went round the Nature Trail which had been laid out in the wood, and for which a special two-page leaflet had been prepared.

The event was our first experiment in public relations of this kind, and it was very well attended, particularly on the Sunday, despite an unfortunate and unavoidable clash with a similar event taking place simultaneously at the Beds. and Hunts. Naturalists' Trust reserve at Felmersham. We gained, as a result, the interest and goodwill of a number of local residents together with a record influx of junior members. Above all, we strengthened our already cordial relations with the local authorities.

EDUCATIONAL

Two talks on the wood and its contents were given to junior schools in the early part of the year by Mr. A. W. Guppy, with Mr. H. A. S. Key projecting a number of his colour transparencies. The first of these was on the 14th February, to an audience of over eighty children at Manton Primary School, and the second, on the 25th March, to a slightly larger gathering in the hall of Brickhill Junior School. In both cases the children were invited to ask as many questions as they wished after the talks, and there was no doubt of the tremendous interest which they take in the wood and what they see there.

A short Nature Trail was arranged on the 15th July for a party of children and teachers from both the above schools.

JUNIOR MEMBERSHIP

The growth of Bedford on its north-eastern side has, of course, made Putnoe Wood a favourite resort for many of the local children, and they formed a high proportion of those who came to our Open Days. As a direct consequence the Society enrolled a large number of new Junior Members, most of them living within a short distance of the wood and some within sight of it.

The experiment has therefore been made of forming a Junior Section at Putnoe and arranging a separate programme of field meetings for it during the winter of 1971-72. In addition our juniors have been invited to take part in the periodical Working Parties in the wood, and the response, so far, has been very gratifying, many of them giving remarkable displays of energy and enthusiasm.

THE SOCIETY'S BOOKLET

The Society's booklet entitled 'Notes on the History and Natural History of Putnoe Wood and Putnoe Lane' was issued at the beginning of November. It contains a section on the past history of the Manor of Putnoe, a general account of the vegetation of the wood as established by the Society's surveys, and lists of the various species of nesting birds, flowering plants lepidoptera and mollusca so far found. A map of the wood on a scale of 1 : 1250 is also included. By its very nature, this publication will require frequent additions and corrections as the wood becomes more closely investigated, and the results of further survey work will be incorporated as it becomes available. It should perhaps be emphasized that the booklet in its present form is not written for children, but is intended for the use of teachers using the wood, or for serious students of various branches of natural history.

FLOWERING PLANTS

The only additions to the plant list of the wood during the year were the Hemp Agrimony, *Eupatorium cannabinum*, growing on the banks of the stream along the north side of the wood, and the Aspen, *Populus tremula*, of which two specimens have now been identified and which have produced a number of seedlings in areas D and E.

The outstanding botanical event of the year, however, was the re-discovery by Mrs. Dymond, on the 15th May, of a number of fine plants of *Geum intermedium* Ehrh., the hybrid between the Wood Avens and Water Avens, *Geum urbanum* x *rivale*. This has been found only once previously in the wood, by J. W. Partridge in 1954, but it has presumably been present undetected throughout the intervening seventeen years. The Wood Avens is quite common in the wood, but the other parent, the Water Avens, has not been seen there for fifty years.

Dr. J. G. Dony, the Society's Recorder for Botany, visited the wood with Mrs. Dony on the brilliantly fine morning of Thursday, 20th May, primarily to see the *Geum* hybrid, but, between them, they recorded over one hundred and twenty species of flowering plants in the wood during their visit.

A preliminary survey of the flora of Putnoe Lane was carried out during the summer and, as a result, a list of about twenty-five species which occur there, but not within the wood itself, was compiled for inclusion in the Society's booklet.

FUNGI

There was a particularly striking display of various species of fungi during the warm and humid weather of late August, and Mr. Key was able to record many of them in colour. A Fungus Foray was held in the

wood a couple of months later, on the 23rd October, under the leadership of Miss Margaret Holden; this is reported on elsewhere in this issue. A first list of fungi has thus been established for the area.

THE RIDGE-AND-FURROW RIDDLE

Anyone who visits Putnoe Wood in winter, or after prolonged wet weather, cannot fail to notice the succession of miniature lakes that is formed in the Long Ride which runs from east to west through the middle of the wood. What is not so obvious is, that these water-filled depressions are formed by a series of furrows which cross the Ride at right angles from north to south and extend laterally on both sides into the wood itself. These are naturally more easily seen in winter, particularly if there is a light powdering of snow on the floor of the wood to throw the intermediate ridges into relief.

Immediately following the Society's field meeting at the wood on the morning of Sunday, 14th March a small working party stayed on to measure the position of the ridges and furrows throughout the length of the Long Ride, almost exactly 1500 feet. It was impossible, of course, to do this with a high degree of accuracy; in many cases the furrows have elongated into ponds six or seven feet long, and in others the intervening ridges are barely visible, or have vanished altogether.

However, plotting the readings on squared paper shows at a glance that over a considerable length of the Ride, the ridges and furrows fall into a number of distinct series, distinguishable by their spacing:

- Series (a) Between the Dry Ditch and the west gate Seven ridges, some indistinct, with an average spacing of 18.7 feet.
- Series (b) Between the Dry Ditch and the Keeper's Path. Twenty-six ridges with spacings varying from 18 to 34 feet, with an average of 25.5 feet.
- Series (c) To the east of the Keeper's Path. A number of short irregular sequences with spacings varying between 11 and 42 feet.

What are these ridges and furrows and how are they to be explained? Are they remains of ancient plough-lands, once cleared of woodland and then allowed to revert to their original condition? Or are they some form of drainage channels cut through water-logged woodland at a period when conditions were much wetter than those of today? We need to know much more of the earlier history of the wood and carry out a great deal of field-work before any realistic answer can be attempted.

OUR SOCIETY — TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN RETROSPECT

By F. G. R. SOPER

It was on a fine September day in 1946 that 28 enthusiasts met at the St. Johns Ambulance Headquarters in Bedford and decided to form the Society. Every branch of natural history was represented; an acting council was chosen, Oliver Pike the veteran bird photographer became first President, Keith Piercy Chairman, Henry Key, General Secretary and Ray Palmer Editor. The Council got down to work quickly, a public meeting was arranged in Bedford on 14th November when James Fisher spoke to a full audience on the functions of a Natural History Society, while on 6th December, the first meeting at the Luton end was addressed by John Gilmore of the R.H.S. Wisley who spoke on the History of British Botany. The chairman that evening should have been Sir Frederick Mander himself a keen botanist but illness kept him away and the Duke of Bedford readily agreed to take his place.

1947 was a noteworthy year. It says much for the enthusiasm of the members that in spite of the snowbound roads and arctic conditions which prevailed until the end of March, council and ordinary meetings held