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Kent Wildlife Trust's Blean Project is currently undertaking essential, large-scale conservation work in the woodlands around Canterbury, with thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Out of the Dark and into the Light: The natural regeneration at Joan Beech Wood.

Anybody who has visited Joan Beech Wood, part of the South Blean Woods complex, over the past couple of years will have noticed an extraordinary transformation.

Over the past two years Kent Wildlife Trust's Blean Project has been working hard to restore Joan Beech Wood from a dark, dense conifer plantation to a more natural, open area of native heath and deciduous woodland. The restoration project required clear felling and extensive thinning of the conifer plantation, which began at the end of 2009. Sunlight flooded the forest floor for the first time in approximately 25 years, waking dormant seeds within the 'seed bank'. Two years on and the regeneration of natural vegetation has been staggering.

Areas that were once dense conifer plantation are now awash with a purple haze of foxgloves.

Newly opened rides and paths are adorned with flowering plants such as scarlet pimpernel, fairy flax and common spotted orchid. The breeze across the top of the hill carries with it common blue butterflies and the call of the skylark which now sings above the areas of recent clear felling. Now, as part of the ongoing management, we have introduced 20 highland cattle into the wood. These grazing cattle are a traditional way of managing the re-growth of scrub species such as gorse and silver birch, which can smother smaller plants. This will help to maintain the open rides and cleared areas, encouraging more flowering plants, insects, birds and mammals.



Foxgloves at Joan Beech

What to look out for in June / July

Nightjar may be heard in West Blean and Thornden Woods at this time, as they arrive after migrating from Africa. Listen out for their jarring calls after dark. Dragonflies are putting on a great show over the country's waterways, and a number of different species can be seen over the ponds at Hunstead Wood. Distinctive white admiral butterflies can also be seen in some of our reserves at this time of year, particularly in East Blean Wood. Foxgloves, a welcome plant for bees and other insects, are bursting into flower in sunny woodland glades and rides in the Blean, with a particular hotspot being Joan Beech Wood near Selling.



Azure Damselfly © Paul Hayter

Summer Volunteer Task Days

There will be a variety of task days at our reserves over the summer (now until end of August) including fencing, ragwort pulling and bracken bashing. These will occur every Tuesday from 9am, and will include a compulsory tea break! For more information please contact Dan Fagan (07747474365), Emilie Mitchell (07747474363), or the Blean Project Office (01227 719506).

FREE Guided Walks!

Crepuscular Encounter

Friday 24th June, Evening (Time and venue to be confirmed).

A night walk in search of bats, Nightjar and other creatures of the night. Led by John Wilson.

A Moth Evening in West Blean & Thornden Woods

One night in July (to be arranged nearer the date according to weather) at West Blean and Thornden Woods.

A chance to see moths attracted to a mercury-vapour lamp on a white sheet.

Led by Mike Enfield.

The Ever Changing Wood

Sunday 17th July, 10am – 12:30 at Joan Beech Wood.

A guided walk around Joan Beech Wood to see the changes made over the years.

Led by Dan Fagan.

Grazing Animals in the Blean

Sunday 31st July, 10am – midday at West Blean and Thornden Woods.

A chance to see and learn about the grazing animals the Trust has managing rides, glades and developing heath in West Blean and Thornden Woods. No dogs please. Free but Booking essential. Led by John Wilson.

For more details or to book a place on any of our guided walks please call the Blean Project Office on 01227 719506

Blean News

•Two new features have been added to the wild art trail in Thornden Wood. Two wooden posts carved with images of animals found in the woods, drawn by children from Herne Junior School, have been put in place at the entrance to the trail, and on the trail itself, similar images have been routed onto coppiced tree stumps.

•There are still good numbers of Heath Fritillary being seen in our Blean reserves, but these are still slightly lower than numbers recorded in previous years.

•Livestock have recently been brought on to two of our reserves to aid in managing the vegetation. 9 goats and 10 cattle are grazing on Bigbury Camp to keep the side of the scheduled monument clear, and 20 cattle have also arrived at Joan Beech Wood to manage the habitat in a natural way.



A routed coppice stump on the Wild Art Trail

Wanted - Information on History of the Heron in the Blean!

As part of our new Wild art Trail in Thornden Wood, we will be installing a woven heron's nest to celebrate the rich local history surrounding this distinctive bird. We would like to gather as much information as possible, and we would appreciate any information on this subject. Whether it's a local legend or a paragraph in a local history book, your input will help us to build a picture of this important piece of local history. If you think you can help, please call our Blean Project Office, Mayton Oast on 01227 719506, or email Catherine.Churcher@kentwildlife.org.uk

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