

Coed Caeau-gwynedd, Llanfyllin 20/4/22 version 2
Organiser Jane Hudson

Just north of Llanfyllin off the Vyrnwy road a turning left took us up a narrow lane to Coed Caeau-gwynedd. Keith and Decia Blacker welcomed 27 of us as we manoeuvred our vehicles into their pristine wood yard. Keith gave us a brief introduction to the wood. It is an ancient woodland site recorded from 1800 but likely to be much older as the Blackers were able to trace owners back to 1665 of which they are only the fifth. 350 plant species including slime moulds have been recorded and 35 varieties of trees, most woods have only a handful .

Nothing is thrown away at the wood. Large felled trees are milled and used to make the bespoke log stores, their speciality, in sizes varying from a "sentry box" to a 16m store. Offcuts are used to build nest boxes for the many birds on site. Smaller logs are used for fuel and sawdust for animal bedding. All this work is carried out on site at the wood yard. When the Blackers bought the wood in 2001 one of their first tasks was to create 4miles of roads which allow access to any part of the 70 acres with winch equipment without taking heavy machines off the roadways for felling and moving timber; an essential strategy for a steep site which ranges from 650' to 1013', both for protecting the soil structure and for safety reasons. Coed Caeau-gwynedd has won the Royal Forestry Society's Excellence in Forestry competition for Resilient Multi-purpose Forestry and received the Duke of Cornwall's Cup. There are awards for England, Wales and Northern Island and Coed Caeau-gwynedd is shortlisted for the Champion of Champions award this year. We wish them good luck.

The day was perfect, warm sun, very little wind and blue skies. The trees were only just beginning to leaf and this allowed for grand views and enabled us to detect even small birds in the tops of the trees. We set off uphill and almost immediately spotted a male Pied Flycatcher in his smart black and white livery. Sue then heard a Willow Warbler with his 'coming down the stairs' sweet song. A small blue butterfly fluttered across the track and was followed long enough to confirm that it was a Holly Blue rather than a Common Blue because the underside had no orange lunules at the edge, and the Common flies a little later in the year. Every few minutes we spotted a Robin or a Wren or heard a Chiff-chaff. We saw a Red Kite over the adjoining field and more Pied Flycatchers both male and female. We first heard and then saw Coal Tits with their white napes. Passing some conifers again Sue's sharp ears heard Goldcrests although we couldn't see them so high up. As the roadway made a sweeping turn two Bullfinches were seen.

From here our route took us to a lower level where the Veteran Sweet Chestnut Trees looking all of their 200 years, rose twisting skywards, but they had fresh shoots and leaves just emerging so still viable. A little further on we met Nick Maddocks who was proudly telling us he had seen a Wood Warbler, this being Sue's favourite warbler we hurried on past a huge Douglas Fir planted in 1951 and reputedly weighing 5 tons until we could hear the lovely warbler song, the second part of which is reminiscent (to me at least) of parts of the nightingale's repertoire. We lingered here long enough to listen again and again and Sue managed a couple of photos. The path that took us down to the lower level of the wood threading round the head of a spectacular steep-sided valley formed by a geological fault. As we descended there were Common Dog Violets, Dandelions, Bittercress, Foxglove rosettes, Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage and Hard Fern on the banks. As teatime was beckoning we followed the advice of other members and took a short route back up to the Wood yard, puffing a bit by now. Jane had arranged for the Wynnstay Arms Hotel to provide sandwiches and cakes which were laid out in the wood store and Decia provided much needed tea. We sat in the sunshine at trestle tables, on benches, logs and stacks of milled timber and enjoyed a very generous spread. At the corner of the Wood yard was a fine Nobel Fir which was planted by Marjorie Wainwright's husband Ralph in 1951. What a splendid connection with the MFS.

Lizzie Beare