

I have to tell you about our day in the wood. It was the first Sunday in May, a regular Volunteer Day. But it wasn't a regular day at all, it was wonderful. I think we all felt it when we arrived at around 11 in the morning, our usual gathering time. The weather was better than the forecast had predicted; instead of cloud and rain, we had warm sunshine; the air was soft and clean, perfumed with hawthorn blossom. The trees were newly clad in varied hues of vibrant greens, fresh young leaves slightly damp from the previous night's rain. Just breathing felt wonderful. There were flowers everywhere. Bluebells carpeting wide areas and spreading into places where we've never seen them before. White blossoms on wild strawberries and wild garlic, attended by fat furry bumblebees, buzzing as they gathered the rich harvest of pollen. A symphony of birdsong – blackbirds, robins, chaffinches, tits, gold crests, wrens – too many to list.

We discussed what we needed to do and split into groups, according to interests and fitness levels. Some of us concentrated on finding and dividing plants that people might like to take from the plant nursery: we'd been asked for primroses, for example, and there were plenty available if you knew where to find them, to be potted up or replanted on grave sites. Having known and loved that wood for over twenty years, I can usually locate plants, compost, tools and pots, so I could guide the other volunteers.

The plant nursery was tidied up, and what a pleasure that was, to see such a range of wild flowers and young trees, available for people to plant in places that hold special meaning for them.

Another group – the strong workers – transformed one of the overgrown paths, clearing it to make it safe for people in wheelchairs and wide enough for funeral parties.

And a third group cleaned the shelter, sweeping out cobwebs and crumbling leaves, cleaning the windows and polishing the chairs, removing every trace of bat poo. Nobody wants bat poo on their seat!

After lunch – my big vegan apple pie and Sarah's sausage rolls, freshly baked to share – we went in search of more plants. People like to plant flowers in bloom and foxgloves will come out next, so we went searching for foxgloves to pot up for the wild flower nursery. Stopping to consider some on the Daffodil Path, I happened to look to my right – and was surprised to see a rounded grey shape at the foot of a scrawny birch, about the size of a butternut squash. I had to investigate. I thought I knew what it might be... would we be so lucky?

Yes! Oh frabjous day, callooh callay!

It was a fluffy young tawny owl, standing still as a statue, its back to the path. This is what they do: they climb down from the nest using their strong beaks and scary claws, and



when they reach the ground they play dead so that predators won't notice them. Then they'll choose another tree to climb and stay high off the ground with their parents feeding them until their feathers have grown enough for them to fly. No other members of our little group had ever seen a baby owl before so of course we all gathered round to marvel and take photographs. The hoolet opened one eye, looked at us, closed it again. They're very philosophical, are owls, even baby owls.

Baby Owl

It was a big baby, as baby tawnies go. We didn't see another, so I guess it was there was only one; and it was clearly well fed. I explained (having had the privilege of seeing baby tawny owls in the wood some years ago, and being taught about them by the local owl expert) that its mother would be close by, making sure her chick was safe. Later that afternoon, Ela, our youngest volunteer, saw an adult tawny flying through that part of the wood. "It was huge," she said, astonished. They are: their wingspan is

about a metre across. Formidable birds! Every member of our little group had the widest happy smile. Mine stayed glued to my face all day, and it's back now as I remember. It was such a special experience. So... maybe you will join us next time? Though it's very unlikely we'll see a baby owl again this year, you never know what else you

might see. We have three dates for your diary. The next Volunteer Day is an extra one, on a Saturday by special request. That's 16th May from 11 o'clock, and everyone is welcome. The next regular Volunteer Day will be Sunday 7th June. And then, on the Summer Solstice, 21st June, we're holding a party, gathering at 12 noon to enjoy the sun at its highest point in the sky. Do come! Bring food and drink to share, instruments if you're a musician, and wear your bright happy clothes. We'll be proudly celebrating twenty years of being able to provide woodland burials for members of the public, in the wildest and loveliest burial site in Wales.

Bella, 4th May 2026



Daffodil — After



Blossom



Bluebell Carpet

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