

WALLACEBANK WOOD WILDLIFE RESERVE – 1986/99

Angus Smith

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) reserve at Wallacebank Wood, the location of the legendary gigantic hollow 'Wallace Oak' in which Sir William Wallace of Elderslie reputedly hid from the English soldiers after his defeat at the first Battle of Falkirk in July, 1298, has been well documented historically, but little or nothing has been written about its current status and the purpose of this article is to give an up-to-date account of what has happened to it in the last decade or so.

Wallacebank Wood (OS Grid Ref NS 847 847) is an ancient semi-natural deciduous woodland, extending to 16 ha (39.5 acres) situated on the east side of the A9 (T) road approximately one mile north of its junction with the M876 road in the Torwood area north of Larbert (Figure 1).

The wood is on fairly level ground and its central part is a fine example of lowland oak wood with relatively few non-native species. The predominant tree species is Oak (*Quercus*) of fairly even age; between 180 and 200 years. The non-native species, Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Larch (*Larix decidua*), Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) and Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) are in distinct groups or scattered throughout the wood and were probably planted in the 1830's.

Glenberrie Golf Club are the owners of Wallacebank Wood and on 1st May, 1986 (at the instigation of Mr Forbes Howie who was then the Chairman of the SWT Falkirk Group and a director of the Golf Club) they entered into a 25-year agreement with the SWT to manage the wood as a Wildlife Reserve. At that time large areas of the wood were infested with Rhododendron species (*Rhododendron ponticum*), probably planted by a former estate owner some 70 or 80 years ago as cover for game. This was growing in thickly tangled areas extending in clumps up to 6 metres high by some 50 metres in diameter inhibiting natural regeneration of other species.

Members of Falkirk SWT group started work clearing the rhododendron and cutting out beech saplings in October 1986 and by 1997, with some assistance with locally based SWT Environment Teams over a two-year period, the rhododendron had been cleared and burned on site. It was found that by raking up and burning the leaf litter from the areas covered by the rhododendron regeneration of other species occurred within two or three years, while regeneration took considerably longer in areas not cleared of litter. Initially the stumps were treated with glyphosate when they were cut, but this was not totally effective in preventing regrowth and stools which are sprouting new leaves are being uprooted with the aid of a winch. Rhododendron seedlings germinating in the cleared areas are being removed as they appear.

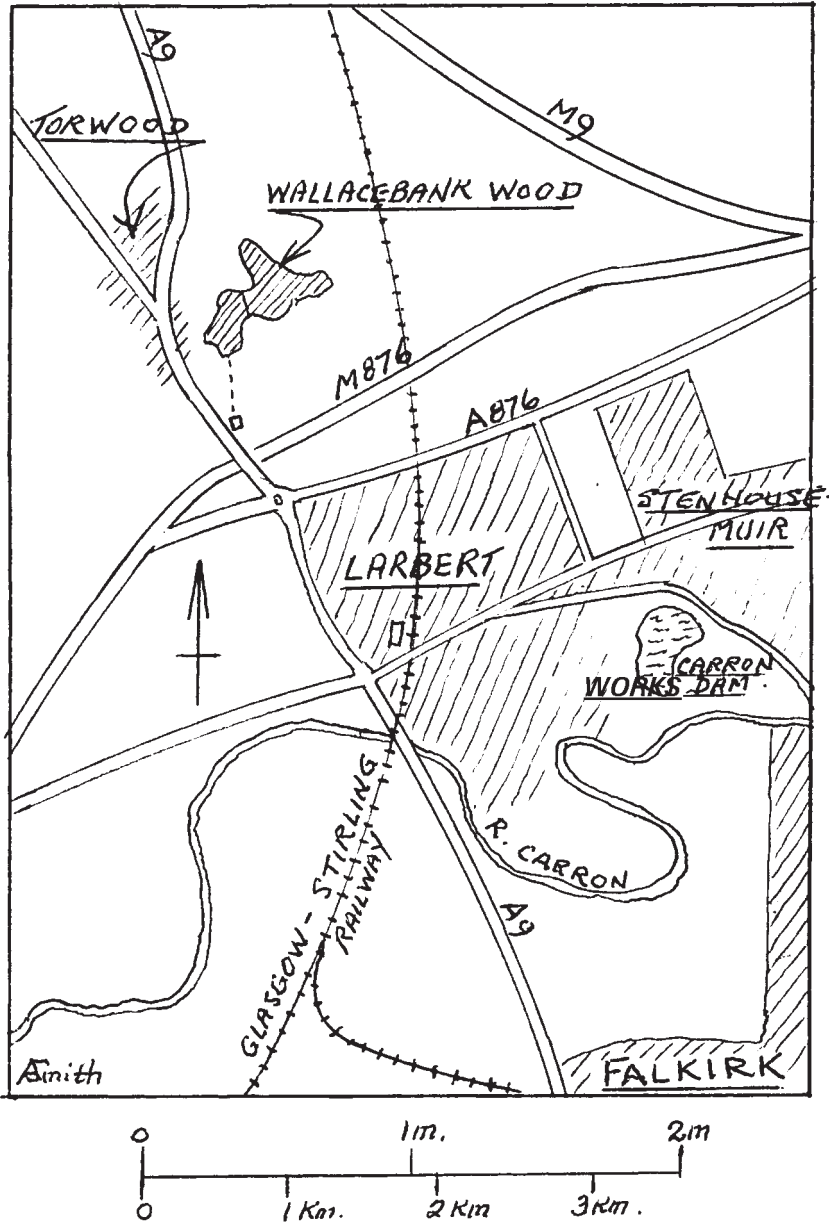


Figure 1 Wallacebank Wood.

Before work on the removal of the rhododendron started it appeared that all of the oak trees had been planted about the same time, but as clearing progressed it became obvious that a majority of the oaks in the north section of the wood had been coppiced. The stools of the original trees were some six metres in circumference (Figure 2) indicating an age in the region of 500 to 800 years – adding to the probability that “a hollow tree of gigantic proportions” did exist in the time of Wallace.

Shrubs in the reserve include Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), and Hazel (*Coryllus avellana*), all of which are well scattered throughout. Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*) is found at the edge of the wood in one or two places. Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*), and Golden Saxifrage (*Chrysopenium alternifolium*) grow in a damp area at the west side of the north section of the reserve, where old drains appear to have collapsed or have been clogged up by the passage of time. Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*), which is considered rare in the Falkirk area, is abundant throughout the wood.

In spring and early summer the reserves' display of flowering plants is impressive, with Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) found growing on the banks of the stream at the south end of the wood, Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and Bluebell or Wild Hyacinth (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) in particular carpeting the ground. Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) are abundant in various parts of the wood, as are Honeysuckle



Figure 2

(Angus Smith)

(*Lonicera periclymenum*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg). Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*) is common throughout while Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) and Wild Rose (*Rosa*) are less frequent. Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) was one of the first plants to appear after clearance of the Rhododendron and it is now widespread. (A full plant list, the names of which have been checked against The New Consise British Flora, 1982, W. Keeble Martin, and Collins Guide to the Grasses, Sedges, Rushes and Ferns of Britain and Northern Europe, 1987, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter, is given in the Appendix.

Oak seedlings suffer from grazing by Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), but where there is open canopy selected seedlings are being protected by tree shelters or 'Tuley Tubes'. Acorns are collected and grown on by members of the local Group for subsequent planting in areas where fallen limbs of the older beech trees create openings in the canopy. Other native tree species, Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Gean (*Prunus avium*) are also being planted in these areas to create a natural mix. This management regime will continue to create a varying age structure.

Rabbits in the reserve can be a problem on the golf course, but from time to time the population is decimated by recurring myxomatosis. Sightings of Weasel (*Mustela inalis*), Wood Mouse (*Mus sylvaticus*), Mole (*Talpa europea*), Hedgehog (*Erinaceus eropaeus*) have been reported and Stoats (*Mustela erminea*) are seen regularly, particularly in winter when they are in ermine. Badger (*Meles meles*) are not resident but, on one occasion during the summer of 1996 clear evidence of badgers visiting and digging up the nests of Bumble Bees (*Bombus* sp.) was found. Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) occasionally den in the north section of the reserve where Roe Deer and Brown Hare (*Lepus capensis*) are regularly found. Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is abundant throughout. A report by the Golfcourse Manager in November 1998, of the presence of Mink (*Mustela lutreola*) gives grounds for some concern. It is a distinct possibility that the Mink may have been following and feeding upon Salmon (*Salmo salar*) Sea Trout or the conspecific Brown Trout (*S. trutta*) spawning in the small streams crossing the golf course, which eventually flow via the Pow Burn into the River Forth. It is to be hoped this animal's visit was, indeed, just a visit and it does not take up residence in the reserve.

Reported sightings of birds include Blackbird (*Turdus merula*), Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), Jay (*Garulus glandarius*), Magpie (*Pica pica*), Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*), Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*), Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus*), Yellowhammer (*Enberiza citrinella*), Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla yarrellii*), Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*), Siskin (*Carduelis*), Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), and Swift (*Apus apus*) – flying over. Green Woodpecker (*Picus Viridis*) is seen regularly on the golf course and Barn Owl (*Tyto Alba*) hunts over fields on the east side of the wood. Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) are also seen more frequently over the northern section of the reserve and Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) can be expected at any time.

Breeding birds include Rook (*Corvus feugilegus*), with a rookery of upwards of 150 nests, Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelaba*), Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*), Coal Tit (*Parus ater*), Great Tit (*Parus major*), Tree Creeper (*Carthia familiaris*), Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), all in fairly large numbers while Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*) and Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) have their own distinct nesting sites.

Lepidoptera were recorded by Dr C. W. N. Holmes, a member of the local group during 1987. The species then recorded includes only two species of Butterflies, Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*) and Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*). During August, 1997, however, the author found Purple Hairstreak butterflies (*Quercusia quercus*) to be well established in several colonies throughout the reserve.

During monthly visits to the Reserve between November, 1986 and October, 1987, Miss S. I. Baldwin, Natural History Dept. Royal Museums of Scotland, recorded the Spiders found on the reserve. Seventy-seven species were recorded including one new to Scotland (*Cicurina cicur*) and eight others new to Stirlingshire (VC 86). This was fully reported in *The Glasgow Naturalist* (1991).

Access to the reserve, which is surrounded on two sides by Glenberrie Golf Course, must of necessity be controlled. The route into the reserve entails a walk of 500 metres and the directions given on the attached large scale map (Figure 3) must be closely adhered to. Care should be taken not to disturb golfers playing on the course. Dogs are prohibited. Parking is available for SWT members and visitors at the east side of the main Golf Club Car Park.

In July, 1999, the Scottish Wildlife Trust published a Reserve Leaflet for Wallacebank Wood, which can be obtained free of charge from the author or the Professional's Shop at Glenberrie Golf Course.

References, Notes:

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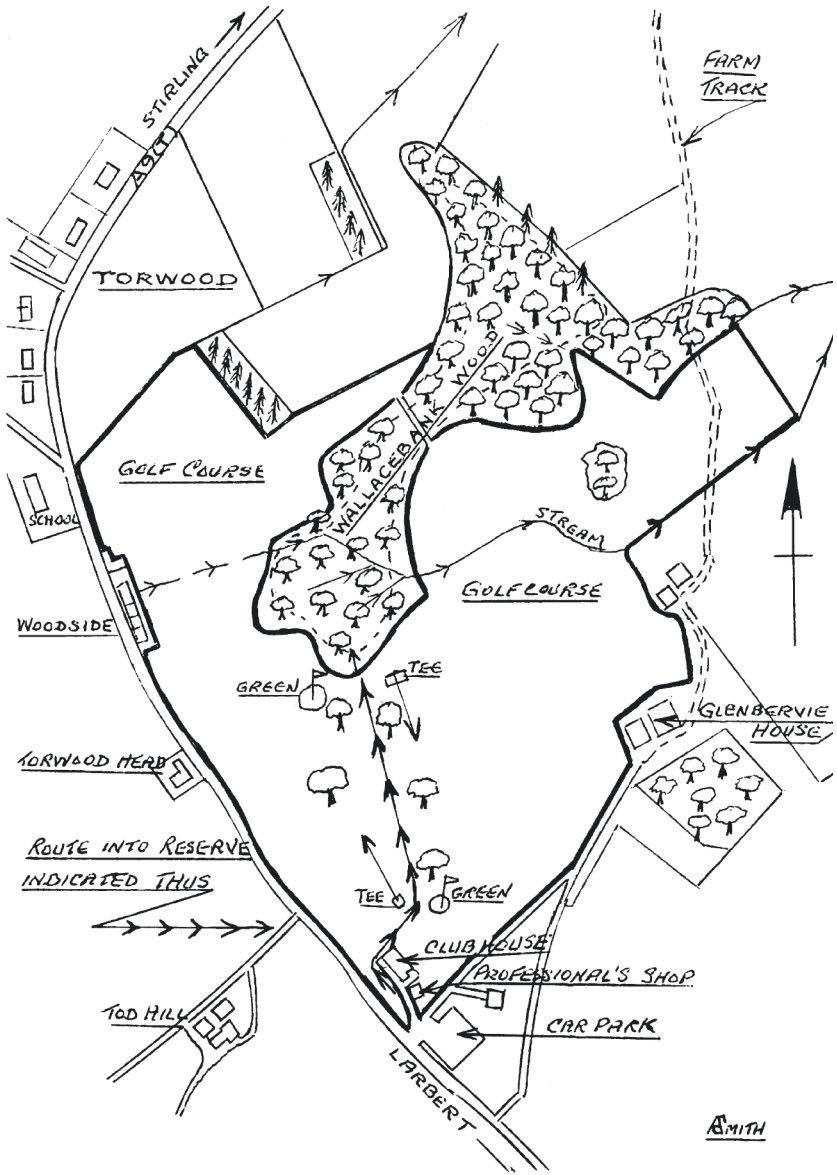


Figure 3

Appendix

SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST FALKIRK GROUP

Wildlife Reserve

Plants recorded at Wallacebank Wood 1986/98

TREES & SHRUBS

Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Downy Birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Norway Spruce	<i>Picea abies</i>
Scots Pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
European Larch	<i>Larix decidua</i>
Aspen	<i>Populus tremula</i>
Gean	<i>Prunus avium</i>
Bird Cherry	<i>Prunus padus</i>
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Guelder Rose	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>
English Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>

HERBS & GRASSES

Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Sneezewort	<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>
Ground-elder	<i>Ageopodium podagraria</i>
Velvet Bent	<i>Agrostis canina</i>
Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>
Bugle	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>
Wood Anemone	<i>Anemone nemorum</i>
Wild Angelica	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>
Sweet Vernal Grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>
Cow Parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>
Tall Oat	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>
Harebell	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>
Lesser Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>
Common Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>
Rosebay Willowherb	<i>Chaemerion angustifolium</i>
Golden Saxifrage	<i>Chrysosplenium oppositifolium</i>
Creeping Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>

Marsh Thistle	<i>Cirsium palustre</i>
Climbing Fumitory	<i>Corydalis claviculata</i>
Cocksfoot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Tufted Hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>
Wavy Hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Wild Hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>
Broad-leaved Willowherb	<i>Epilobium montanum</i>
Wood Horsetail	<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>
Large Hemp-nettle	<i>Galeopsis speciosa</i>
Common Hemp-nettle	<i>Galeopsis tetrahit</i>
Goosegrass	<i>Galium aparine</i>
Heath Bedstraw	<i>Galium saxatile</i>
Ground Ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Yorkshire Fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>
Creeping soft-grass	<i>Holcus mollis</i>
Slender St. John's Wort	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>
Common Catsear	<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>
Yellow Flag	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>
Soft Rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>
Nipplewort	<i>Lapsana communis</i>
Meadow Vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>
Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>
Birdsfoot-trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Greater Birdsfoot-trefoil	<i>Lotus uliginosus</i>
Heath Woodrush	<i>Luzula multiflora</i>
Hairy Woodrush	<i>Luzula pilosa</i>
Greater Woodrush	<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>
Common Cow-wheat	<i>Melampyrum pratense</i>
Dog's Mercury	<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>
Wood Millet	<i>Milium effusum</i>
Wood Sorrel	<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>
Reed-grass	<i>Phalaris arundinaceae</i>
Timothy-grass	<i>Phleum pratense</i>
Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>
Downy Rose	<i>Rosa mollis</i>
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.
Raspberry	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>
Common Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>
Sheep's Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>
Broad Dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>
Knotted Figwort	<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>
Ragwort	<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>

Hedge Woundwort
Lesser Stichwort
Greater Stichwort
Common Chickweed
Devil's bit Scabious
Tuberous Comfrey
Wood Sage
White Clover
Stinging Nettle
Common Valerian
Germander Speedwell
Heath Speedwell
Tufted Vetch

Stachys sylvatica
Stellaria graminea
Stellaria holostea
Stellaria media
Succisa pratensis
Symphytum tuberosum
Teucrium scorodonium
Trifolium repens
Urtica dioica
Valeriana officinalis
Veronica chamaedrys
Veronica officinalis
Vicia cracca

FERNS

Lady Fern
Broad Buckler Fern
Male Fern
Bracken

Athyrium filix-femina
Dryopteris dilatata
Dryopteris filix-mas
Pteridium aquilinum

BOOK REVIEWS

Species History in Scotland. Introductions and Extinctions since the last Ice Age. Robert A. Lambert (ed), Scottish Cultural Press, 1998, 160pp. ISBN 1-84017-011-5. £14.95.

This fascinating review of the fortunes and misfortunes of various plants and animals in Scotland gives a clear insight into the impact of human societies over the last ten thousand years. Roy Dennis sets the scene with an appeal for greater tolerance for the reintroduction of some of Scotland's vanished animals and birds, notably the European beaver. The book then delves into the ancient past, examining the former distributions of woolly mammoth, aurochs (wild cattle), lynx and the like, from caves and other archaeological sites.

The more recent past is better recorded in the literature, and there are some extraordinary accounts of the intrepid hunters of great auks throughout the North Atlantic and up until very recently, of basking sharks off the Scottish west coast. These chapters reveal the excesses of our past greed and lack of concern, which unfortunately remain a problem for modern ecosystems and species.

As a contrast, the final chapter reminds us of some of the problems of species introductions, focusing on the severe impact of red deer and other species on the native fauna and flora of New Zealand. There are literally hundreds of references in these chapters to enable the enthusiast to follow up both the errors of the past and the problems facing our current flora and fauna.

W. R. Brackenridge

Glasgow Naturalist. 23 (4) 1999.

Loch Lomondside depicted and described, 2. Early maps and map makers. John Mitchell pp.2-8.

Scottish Insect Records for 1997. E. G. Hancock. pp.55-58.

Extension of the Ringlet butterfly's distribution in southern Lomondside. John Mitchell. p69.