

Lets party!

We do have a lot to celebrate as this is my 25th newsletter. I keep getting lovely emails saying you always look forward to getting the newsletter. As this is the 25th I wish to mark it by introducing you to some of the people that put in all the hard work. To list them all the newsletter would possibly be 25 pages long! But we do have a 10 page special.

In this issue we are going to look at the work we have been doing the last few months. One thing has to be said about the benefits of the Facebook page it really has got local people involved in looking after the hill, Cooper's Wood and Field. I must admit I am actually not a fan of Facebook with individuals own Facebook pages, but for a community group as ourselves it is a great tool and there is usually a different topic on there every day. As it is an open site you do not have to be a member to view it. So we are going to find out a little bit more about the people behind those names you often see posting on the page.

The newsletter will now be found in a printed format at the Tourist information centre as well as the Library for the first time.

March we will be holding our third A.G.M. The letters A.G.M can be quite off putting and not something that would excite me to turn out for. We do try our best to make it a party atmosphere with homemade cakes and cups of tea. We get the business part out of the way pretty sharp and then a slide show this year about Cooper's Wood and Field. Last year was very relaxed as people asked questions as we went along, which made the talk so much more interesting.

I have been receiving emails asking when the next A.G.M is because people want to come along. We have yet again booked St Swithun's Church Hall for Friday 6th March for a start time of 7.30pm. The hall will comfortably hold 50 people, so plenty of room for a good turn out.

Some are concerned about the amount of change in Coopers Wood and Field, so please come along and understand what the long term plan is. A three year plan for the area was produced in 2014 and a new management plan is being put in place for Cooper's Wood. It is a community area, so input from local people is always welcome.



Who's who?

Sal Robinson.....Treasurer.

Sal was the brains behind setting up the committee for the group as well as our constitution. She has successfully applied for many grants and very proactive in fund raising and raising the profile of the group within the local community. Very focused on ensuring as many people as possible are able to access the area and is championing our efforts to improve access to Cooper's Field. Through her knowledge we have thrived as a group and established great credibility amongst our peers.



Paul Bowditch.....Committee member

Paul has volunteered for the the hill ever since it has been managed by the Woodland Trust. He was one of the original fundraisers to purchase the hill when the farmland was put up for sale. The hill as well as Cooper's Wood and Field have been a part of his life since childhood.

Being a local Parish Councillor he has campaigned to protect the hill for the local community. He has cut the grass paths for many years to improve access for all. The hill has always been part of his life.



Chris Toombs..... Wildflower project manager

One of our most proactive volunteers. Organises the litter picking rota, empties the dogs waste bins, as well as putting in many volunteering hours each week. On top of that acts as my P.A and puts in many hours behind the scenes. Currently writing a book about the history of the hill.

Passionate about wildlife and the development of the flower meadow. Favourite hobby, she loves bramble bashing!



Cathy Harvey.....Co-ordinator

Well I try!. All it means is that there is a central database of email address's and I make an effort to keep everyone informed. I am one of the administrators of the Facebook page and also keep in contact with the media.

I produce this bi-monthly newsletter. I am passionate about wildlife especially butterflies and moths. I really enjoy the working parties improving and maintaining the habitat.



Who's who?

Kevin, Dee and Laura Trott.....Committee members and junior volunteer.

Kevin is a local thatcher and keen on countryside management. Has done a lot of work on restoring the field boundary.

Dee helps with our festivals and children's activities. Laura aged 12, often attends the adult working parties and spent many hours helping Chris prepare the flower meadow. Full of energy and often put us adults to shame.



Pat North.....Community Representative

Pat loves wildlife and concerned for it's welfare and especially dogs. Pat chats to local people and reports back to let us know what peoples concerns are. Pat is also on the litter pick rota, empties the dog waste bins and is our social secretary as well as Facebook admin. This is a new post and Pat is finding things a little slow. We want people to feel more at ease when talking to her, so is not an elected committee member. Perhaps one of the most important jobs of all.

Tim Smith.....Volunteer

One of the original campaigners of the purchase of Allington Hill and then later Cooper's Wood and Field. Finding that he has more time on his hands at the moment than he wished he has become an active member of the volunteer group on a regular basis. Very keen to promote the group. walks the hill at least twice a day, so is first to report back if anything needs doing.



Roly Boughton.....project manager

Roly is very knowledgeable about the countryside and it's management and is doing a course at Kingston Maurward to get the pieces of paper to prove it.

He will from now on be the project manager for Cooper's Wood and Field and working with A.O.N.B to manage the area. It will be great to have someone with more knowledge than myself to manage the area for the benefit of the wildlife.

Who's who?

Jon Harvey.....Volunteer

Jon often runs working parties during the week and possibly puts the most hours in of all the volunteers. He took on the task with Chris of maintaining Jubilee Wood. Several years ago he went on a scything course to help with the flower meadow project. So much better than a noisy brush cutter.

He is also passionate about informing people of what we are doing to protect and restore the habitats for the wildlife. He is also a very keen photographer.



Sarah Worner.....Volunteer

Our main Facebook administrator and also puts many volunteering hours in each week attending working parties two or three times a week.

Sarah also arranged the first dog training event by Jim Greenwood to be held in Coopers Field last year.

Sarah started working with rescues and fostering rescue dogs four years ago, owning sighthounds for the last thirty years.

Woodland Trust Manager.....

This seems an on going problem. Yet again Allington Hill is without a manager. Tim did not really have chance to have any input towards the management of the hill. I have been told that it is unlikely that we will have a new manager in place before late spring. The job entails managing over 40 woodlands, throughout the south west, with the hill being one of the smallest sites but most visited.



Situations vacant.....

We always have people say I wish I could help with out getting their hands dirty. Well you can. We are still looking for someone who would like to organise children events and a talented person who could promote the groups activities through the media. If you have an interest in wildlife why not become one of our wildlife watchers. Doing surveys throughout the year, from butterflies to fungi.

Selfish humans or.....

In January local people achieved 109 volunteering hours helping to reclaim the grass areas in Cooper's Field which has been lost to scrub. This is part of the project to improve the grass habitat in the field to the original field boundary. There is not much of the field left, when it has a 1,000 tree plantation in the middle of it. We have all come to accept Cooper's Wood in its own right, even though there was a lot of opposition when the trees were first planted. We have, as has the wildlife, adapted to its existence.

The grass is no longer cut for its value for animal feed due to the amount of dog waste found in it. Nor is it any good for grazing. This area would over many years slowly turn to scrub. The paths would soon become overgrown if not maintained and people would stop walking its paths. When people no longer visit the area, they lose interest in looking after it. This affects wildlife that relies on grassland habitats. So what comes first wildlife or people?

Every since man has lived within the shadows of Allington Hill they have used the land for their own benefit. For hundreds of years as a Quarry and later as farmland. It was local people who raised the money for the Hill and Cooper's Wood and Field to be protected against the developer. But did they expect it to be covered in trees? Yet again changing its habitat. As time past, wildlife learnt to adapt alongside the needs of humans. But it always has had a large area of grassland, especially within living memory.

With Allington Parish Council now leasing Cooper's Wood and Field, which boundaries were being lost to scrub. The site has open access to the public and we have a duty of care to provide the very best in wildlife habitat and educate people that grass is a habitat in its own right and not just something to walk on. This is why it is so important to preserve the remaining field grass areas before they are lost forever and develop it as a traditional grassland meadow.

One way of doing this is to encourage a diverse range of grasses and flowering meadow plants. Yes this will benefit us humans. Yes it will mean that the field and its paths will still be easily accessible and yes it does mean that we have to cut back scrub and coppice willow and hazel to achieve this.

A few, and thankfully only a few accuse us of destroying the habitat. What habitat, which habitat, who's habitat? To protect one you have to destroy the other. The grass habitat supports a diverse amount of wildlife at the bottom of the food chain. Without this there would not be the food larder for small mammals, bats, birds, badgers, foxes and deer, that all visit the field.

We will never get the balance just right. Sometimes we will be typical humans and put ourselves first. So will the wildlife. We provided the perfect habitat within the wild flower meadow test areas for soil born insects to thrive. Mr badger has had a field day, a banquet of juicy grubs, turning over the whole area. So who will have the last laugh, us or the badgers.? Who has done who a favour? Well lets just sit back and see. If the flower meadow is a blaze of wonderful colour this year we will take the credit!!!. If it is a total disaster, we will blame the badger.



Labour of love. The whole length of the boundary on the West side has been marked by the new dead hedge an instant wildlife habitat replacing the need for a living hedge or wall. Certainly better than the barbed wire fence we found buried in the undergrowth.

Other projects in the area

Many of you may not be aware of other small projects that have made a huge difference to wildlife in the area. As a group we have in a small way helped these groups or have links with them. I hope you make time to go and visit these areas during the year and see what other volunteer's get up to.

Gundry Fish Pass



The latest project to be completed is the Gundry Weir where a larinier fish pass and new footbridge has been installed. Now this project has been completed fish will, via the existing Alaskan fish pass at Pymore, be able to access new stretches of the Brit as far as Netherbury.

This seems to have been successful as for the first time several sea trout have been seen by residents at Pymore and one was actually seen swimming up the pass by local resident and Friends of Rivers trustee Richard Gillingham while he was cleaning debris from the pass. Part of

the Gundry Weir project included work on a nearby pond which had become overgrown and silted up and work has been done to install a new feeder pipe, deepen part of the pond and bring growth under control; there are plans to form a management group and volunteers will be sought to carry on the work needed. The project is aimed at improving habitat for water voles and other wildlife and was featured on the BBC national news.

Looking forward to the future, other obstructions on the upper catchments

On the whole though, thanks to the river authorities and now the Environment Agency, river systems have been dramatically improved. Water quality is good and supports a wide variety of species including minnows, stone loaches and a healthy brown trout population. This in turn supports other wildlife such as kingfishers and otters. Salmon and sea trout are now running the rivers, trying to make their way up-stream in order to spawn

Photo: by kind permission of Hilary Smith. Text: by Roger Guppy Friends of Rivers Brit Valley

Pymore Reed Beds

Pymore Reed bed is unique on the river Brit system and has been designated as a Site of Nature Conservation

Interest since 1998. It is a rare habitat and is the home of increasingly rare species such as water voles, harvest mice and water rail. In recent years otters have made a welcome return, living alongside birds such as kingfishers, little egret and reed bunting.

Dorset AONB approved a grant and the work started in January 2014. In spite of some horrible weather, 12 volunteers put in the equivalent of 34 working days on reed bed clearance and coppicing to complete the task, a remarkable achievement, and wow, what a difference it has made!

The work has meant that the reed beds are now a haven for wildlife, as well as making the reed bed wildlife more visible to the local community.

The Allington Hillbillies were able to supply the group with wild flower seed collected from the hill.

Text: by Richard Gillingham, Pymore Volunteer Group



The Chideock Society Tree Project at Seatown aims to replace an ancient hedge boundary on land known as Puddletons, which is on the east cliff. 400 saplings were planted in November 2012 (it was very windy and wet that day), and they are doing well. A further 400 were planted in November 2014, on a lovely day with blue sky, warm sun and a gentle breeze! All the saplings were free from the Woodland Trust, as part of their "More Trees More Good" project and on both occasions the planting was done by Chideock residents, including a number of children. Volunteers regularly monitor the trees and make sure that they are securely staked and remove excess grass growing round them. So far very few of the saplings have died.

Even with about 800 trees there is still a long way to go and so more Woodland Trust Tree Packs will be needed!

The land is owned by the National Trust and everything is under their guidance and with their help. Stock fencing has been erected by the NT to protect the saplings as sheep are grazed on the cliff (this was partly paid for by the Chideock Society). If you go down to Seatown and look to the left you will see the green netting which has been put on the fencing to provide protection from the sea wind - that's where the saplings are.

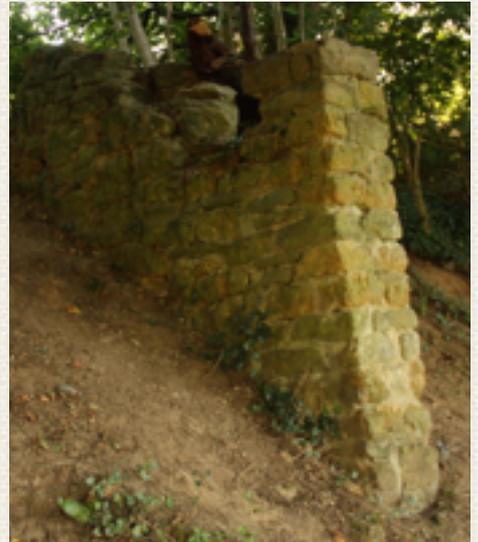
Text: by Sal Robinson. Allington Hillbillies have been able to help the society by giving them some of our tree saplings.

The wall

Some of you may remember my dismay at geo-cacher's ripping the wall apart in the name of fun looking for a small canister, a little bit like doing letter boxing on Dartmoor. I have no objections to people taking part, as it seems a great way of getting families out into the countryside and exploring, but don't damage what you have come to see.

Thankfully John Hinsley who has supported the group ever since the first working party back in 2011 came forward and offered to repair the wall.

He is repairing it as a dry stone wall and we hope that it will not yet again succumb to people pulling it apart. This is the best option for nature, but going back to us selfish humans theme, if it happens again we will have no option but to cement the stone in to place. It is the only part of the wall still standing that ran up and over the hill. Remnants of the wall can still be found, mostly as rubble. It is of historical importance, so we do not want to lose this remaining section.



It's my home

This poem was posted on to the Facebook page after we heard that the flower meadow area had been dug up by Badgers. Thank you Defoe Smith for allowing me to put it into the newsletter.

"No body hates me everybody loves me, I'm sitting up the hill eating worms.
Can't see the seed, I'm only acting out of need, I'm sitting on my hill eating worms.
I'm sure they'll still grow (with a few extra the humans will sow)
I'm sitting on my hill, eating worms"

Annual General Meeting

This years meeting will be held at St Swithun's Hall
(behind St Swithun's Church) North Allington on

Friday 6th March
7.30pm

There will be the customary short meeting at the beginning followed by homemade refreshments. I will this year be talking about Cooper's Wood and Field, with the usual array of photo's to help me through out the talk. We also have a special guest Ian Rees from A.O.N.B chatting about the Communities Living Sustainably project.

Everyone is very welcome and a good way to once a year show your appreciation for all the hard work the volunteers put in improving the natural habitats for nature. We do also provide a service to human kind as well, cutting the paths, children's play area, seating and keeping it a pleasant place to visit.

Springing back to life

Last year spring was late coming. This year the increased sun light with less overcast rainy days seems to have pushed spring forward a few weeks, even though it has been a cold winter.

These snowdrops were found by Mark Cope one of our Facebook friends, popping their heads above ground late January. This photo was taken on January 25th.

The celandines are also beginning to come out in to flower and the wood will soon be a carpet of yellow.

Yellow is the colour of spring with the primroses and cowslips that will bloom in the next few weeks.

Late March into April the Hill and Cooper's Wood and Field fill with tree blossom as well as wild flowers. It is a wonderful time to come and pay a visit. Please bring your camera along we are always looking for wonderful photos of the hill.



Our Coat of Arms



We felt as though we needed a coat of arms, or a badge that we could use on all our stationary and perhaps used to identify a volunteer.

Tim Smith started by putting a draft copy on Facebook and asked for comments and ideas. This is the end result.

We have received the seal of approval from Allington Parish Council and just need the Woodland Trusts opinion before we go ahead and print.

We choose the hay rake as this believe is our most used tool on the hill.

A sneak preview of a wonderful map that has been donated by local resident Sarah Smith.

This will be put on the main gate when the old one which is falling apart is replaced.

This will be timed to co-inside with the grass pavers being installed.

We are hoping to raise more money this year to improve access to the hill.



The winter weather

What a contrast in the weather compared to last winter. If you like cold dry sunny weather it has been a very pleasant start to the year, but will we pay for it later.

This month we will gain 1hr and 36 minutes of daylight and many days at the beginning at of the month were sunny all day. Temperatures were very varied during January with day time temperatures between 4.1c and 13.5c and night time temperatures -3.9 to +10.

For the first 40 days of the year we have had little rain, 89.5 mm in total. This has meant that the paths have stood up well so far and have not become a mud bath as they usually do. Another fact is that every Sunday so far has been dry. We know this as we have not had to cancel one working party yet this year.

Copping the Old Hazel

Many of you will not recognise where this is, only perhaps by the tree in the background, which some affectionately call the Mother Tree. The steep bank down to the left is where children often ride their bikes over ramps that they have made. On old maps this area is known as Dog Holes.

We are grateful that the Woodland Trust contractors have made a good job of copping the Hazel will grow strong new branches from the base.

The hazel stools will provide the perfect habitat for wildlife including the Dormouse.

This is the first major Woodland management project that the Woodland Trust have done on the site since the redevelopment of the area now known as Jubilee Wood in 2012. So this has been most welcome. We believe that Tim the last manager ensured that this work would be carried out before he left.



Chat on the hill

The amount of dog mess not picked up on the hill is disgusting.

Two dog waste bins have been placed in the field and are well used. Also the Town Council have placed one in Park road several hundred yards from the entrance to the hill which is emptied on a regular basis but often overflowing. We all need to put as much energy in to sorting the problem out as we do moaning about it.

Why has no work been done on the hill over the winter. You only seem to be interested in Cooper's Wood and Field these days.

We do not have a Woodland Trust manager to oversee the work we do, although we are continuing to maintain areas of projects already in progress. We have more volunteers interested in projects on the land leased by Allington Parish Council.

Who made the decision to rip out the scrub in Cooper's Field.

It is part of the three year plan that was put in place in 2014 to restore the hedge lines/field boundaries and is part of the lease agreement that these have to be maintained.

Local people don't seem to have a say in what happens.

The projects in Cooper's Field and Wood are community lead. There are many ways to have your say. Pat is your Community officer and will listen to your ideas if you do not wish to speak direct to a committee member. There are weekly discussions on the Facebook page and you can email us. You can also contact Allington Parish Council, if you wish not to do any of the above.

It is supposed to be a community area. I never see any events take place.

Well we are open to suggestions and people requesting to run events, as Sarah did last year. You can not expect the volunteers to arrange everything for you. "Community" means that we all get involved, not just the few organising all the events. If you would like to get involved in helping put on more events please get in touch.

allingtonhill@gmail.com

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/allingtonhillbillies/>

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