

It's all about trees

I can't say that our project to survey the wildlife on the hill for twelve months of the year got off to a very good start.

The project involves people surveying a tree and surrounding area every month of the year. We are pleased to have signed up 12 people in the first month, but when you think there is about 5,000+ trees on the hill, twelve trees is not a lot.

It does take a while for people to get used to a new idea. The other disadvantage was the weather, rain, storms, more rain and high winds, which did not really encourage people to go and spend 15 minutes with their tree.

People can start doing the survey at any time. Surveying a tree and surrounding area just once will give us 100% more information than we have already.

As far as we are aware there has been no nature survey of the hill, except when the hill was purchased by the Woodland Trust.

This is a golden opportunity to study how our trees affect the wildlife surrounding them and how we can keep improving the area for wildlife.

We are going to hold special events throughout the year, starting with our event which happened on Sunday 14th of February. This was the start of National Nest Box week. One of the many national nature events we will be taking part in.

There will also be other events that we hope to hold during the year. We would like to get ideas from the local community on how they can get involved.

A.G.M FRIDAY MARCH 11TH 7.30PM ST SWITHUN'S CHURCH HALL North Allington

The meeting will start with an interview with Ian Rees *from A.O.N.B. Through a lottery grant, a management plan for Cooper's Wood and Field has been funded. This is your opportunity to find out more about the need to thin Cooper's Wood and how it will be done. The overall management of the field for the benefit of the wildlife and use as a community area will also be explained.*

The A.G.M will follow with a break for refreshments and raffle. We will then have an entertaining slide show and talk by David Hutchison on painting of trees and forestry work. For many years he has been a guide at the Tate Gallery in London.



Photo taken by Joe Middleton our Woodland Trust Manager

Survey a tree 2016

We are pleased with the response to our "Your Tree" survey, even though the weather has been awful for the start of the year. We now have 15 trees and a 5 meter area around them being surveyed so far.

There are no records of wildlife on the hill. The last survey as far as we know was done back in 1980's when the hill was purchased by the Woodland Trust.

We need to start somewhere and many surveys tend to specialise on either plants, flowers, birds or insects. Our survey follows the life cycle of the tree and the area around it. We have hardly started and yet we have already recorded some interesting sightings. This group of naturalised snowdrops for example had not been noted before.



Mid February and with all the mild weather, bluebell leaves have shot up. Usually they would only just be breaking the surface.



Elaine Sycamore tree



Daisy surveying her Field Maple



Jon with his Oak tree

A Christmas Tree is for Christmas!

This time of year we have the same old problem. We get caught up in the reasoning that a rooted Christmas tree is so much better than a cut or artificial tree. We pay a premium and then several months later we suddenly realise that in fact we have no room in our garden for it. Many people think they have found the perfect solution. Plant it out with lots of other trees and it will benefit the environment. PLEASE DONT.

- *They are not a native tree.
- *You do not have the landowners permission.
- *Only trees from certified english nurseries can be planted on Woodland Trust land.
- *Many are potted in conditioned soils or soil which is not local to this area.
- *They can be carriers of many diseases which can affect our native trees.
- *Firs that are allowed to establish will change the environment they are living in and destroy native plants and the eco system the wildlife in that area depends on.
- *ALL trees planted without Woodland Trust permission, will be removed. Seven trees were removed last year and four Christmas/pine trees have already been removed this year.

We do not like doing this, as there is no joy in destroying a tree, especially if you are aware someone has taken great care in planting, staking and protecting the tree. It also takes up a lot of volunteers time and a waste of effort on behalf of the person who planted it. Much better spending an hour helping the volunteers look after the trees we already have.

Restoring the hedge line

It seems only a few weeks ago that the Countryside Management Team cleared the hedge line on the eastern edge of the field. We have over 100 hedge saplings being donated by the Woodland Trust to help re-establish a wildlife hedgerow. They will be delivered the week of March 9th. Dan from Magdalen Farm will be helping us hold an event to create a new hedge line and provide woodland activities for the children.

We need your help not only to clear the remaining undergrowth, but also plant, stake and protect them. Please come along and help out. Dan makes the most wonderful hot chocolate and I'm sure we can provide some goodies too.

**MARCH SUNDAY 13TH FROM 10AM.
PLEASE, WE NEED YOUR HELP.**

COOPER'S FIELD, HOSPITAL LANE, NORTH ALLINGTON

The felled Beech tree

Specialist tree surgeons needed to be called to deal with this Beech tree which was literally splitting in two.

The split in the tree was caused by a natural fault where the trunk divided into two.

Once cut down you could see that actually it was originally two trees that had grown so close together it became one. The bark encasing the trees, as shown in the picture below.



The Beech trees were planted over 100 years ago to provide a wind break for the hill. We believe that the conifers were also planted about the same time. These have a life span of usually only 80 to 100 years, where as Beech can live for many hundreds of years. Like many other native trees they are also prone to disease.



Bird Box event



New Marquee.

All the hard work fund raising has paid off. We heard via the local jungle drums that Heavers were keen to sell this marquee for a very reasonable price, (well it was after we finished a bit of bartering.) Although we are very grateful to Paul for the loan of his marquees and we will use them again in the future. This one only takes four people less than twenty minutes to put up. Paul's takes the minimum of eight people over an hour.

The event was attended by over 30 people. Blue Tit boxes and Robin boxes were placed in Cooper's Wood once the families had made them. Afterwards they helped the volunteers to make a bug hotel. Dan from Magdalen Farm (holding the bird box) was sponsored by funding from a lottery grant administered by A.O.N.B. I would highly recommend Dan's hot chocolate. He will be back for our next family event on Sunday March 13th from 10am.



FELLED TREES

There has been much debate about felled wood and I have listened to all the differing opinions. We keep coming back to the issue, have another little debate and so it goes on. Felled Wood is not something that we are used to seeing on Allington Hill.

The first large tree that fell was in 2012 when the Grandparent tree fell during a storm. Very sad, but very few people were concerned about the timber itself. 2014 saw this time a Beech tree fall on the south side of the hill. More concern this time over the waste of wood, as it was brought to your attention every time you walked past. Now within a space of several months, three Ash and a Beech tree have been felled. The Woodland Trust were keen to have the Ash taken away as soon as possible. There are many regulations in place and the several people that we did contact were not interested. Viability, damage to surrounding areas and vehicle access, were a few of the many problems. The wood is of poor quality, only fit for fire wood and has minimal monetary value. The Woodland Trust need a good return on any wood which is removed from their land to support the charity. Any wood harvested from the hill would need to generate income to support the charity as a whole, not just Allington Hill, or the volunteer group.

This is my point of view and many of you may disagree. It has a value in educating us all that trees have a life cycle, just like us. We are not used to the concept of seeing felled trees in our little wood. Over many decades, pre Woodland Trust, locals have busily helping themselves to kindling wood, a few stakes for the garden. Now in return for volunteering labour, or borrowing machinery, we have bartered the odd wheelbarrow of wood from Cooper's Field. All which is giving local people a connection with the area. The local children are also having a field day clambering all over the felled trees.

Dead wood continues to hold a mass of carbon, which over many years of decay, is slowly drawn up by the new trees around it. Dead wood actually supports more life as it decays than a living tree. We should not just look at a trunk of a felled tree and just see £ signs.

If there could be a monetary value put on rotting wood and the benefits to wildlife, I would say it would be 10 to 1 in favour of nature over our human needs if not more.

We do though have a wonderful opportunity to harvest wood sustainably from Cooper's Wood, because of its accessibility. We would be able to help local people that are in fuel poverty, and the practice of traditional woodland activities such as pollarding, coppicing and woodland crafts could easily be accessed by all.

I am a little bit like piggy in the middle. Listening to local opinion, the landowners, nature experts and taking into account what I believe. Perhaps you would like to write into the newsletter and give your opinion. allingtonhill@gmail.com

Butterflies during winter

Different butterflies overwinter in different stages of their life cycle. Of the species native to the UK, nine spend the coldest months as an egg; 31 spend it as a caterpillar; 11 as a chrysalis; and five remain in adult form. The Speckled Wood is unique in its ability to survive the winter as either a chrysalis or a caterpillar.

Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Brimstone spend the winter in their adult form. These butterflies will tuck themselves away in outbuilding crevices, log piles or evergreen vegetation and spend the coldest days in a dormant state.

More amazing facts can be found on the Butterfly Conservation web site

Bird count

Several of us armed with clip boards decided to do a bird count on the hill, the weekend of the national bird count weekend. We started in Cooper's Field and were quickly building up a tally of common woodland birds. The long tailed tits entertained us with aerial displays of catching insects mid air.

Once we reached the hill itself all seemed quiet and then we suddenly realised why. There was a bird of prey on the wing. We saw a kestrel several times, but are sure the culprit for the lack of birds was in fact the sparrow hawk. A few days later he visited our garden bird table for his lunch. We are not sure what small bird he caught, possibly a gold finch.



Photo by Jon Harvey

Owl boxes

Thanks to Jon and Tim the owl boxes that were donated to us by Dorset Wildlife Trust have been cleaned out and repaired ready for this years nesting season. One had been used, but by what? It was stuffed with moss almost a carrier bag full. Someone had a nice warm home at some time.



Grant funding

We are grateful for A.O.N.B in supporting us in applying for a grant from The Local Postcode Lottery Trust. Funding if granted, would help us purchase a second hand quality ride on mower. Jon Harvey has also applied for a grant through Napro, (retired police association) also to help fund the purchase of a mower. If anyone knows of a quality ride on mower for sale, we would love to hear from you.

Dates for your Diary

Friday 11th of March 7.30pm A.G.M

St Swithun's Hall, North Allington. Guest speakers Ian Rees and David Hutchinson

Sunday 13th of March 10am. Create a wildlife hedgerow.

Family event with children's activities, Cooper's Field.

Sunday 12th of June. Picnic event to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday, Cooper's Field.

Chat on the hill.

Cooper's Field is full of dog mess, can't you do something about it?

The field is leased by Allington Parish Council. Anyone who wishes to comment on any aspect of Cooper's Wood and Field are welcome to contact the A.P.C direct. Please remember we are a group of volunteers whose main aims are, to include the local community in the upkeep of the area and protect and improve the area for the benefit of the local community and wildlife.

*We are **not** dog wardens. It is an open access site and it is the whole community's responsibility to encourage local dog owners to be responsible in every aspect of the use of the field, as well as picking up after their dogs. No volunteer should be put in the position of being expected to confront people who do not pick up after their dog or being unable to control their dog.*

I would like to volunteer, but I never know when the working parties are?

We have tried many different tactics with alerting people of working parties. The Facebook page is the most popular, we also try and put notices up on the main gates with at least 48hrs notice. We do offer a text message service or email, but you need to inform us you wish to be contacted this way. Sorry but we can not offer a phone call service.

I would like to come to more of your events, why do you not have an events calendar for the year?

I tried that last year for the events over the summer. We are so weather dependant and dependant on other organisations, two out of the three events were cancelled or timings changed. I do try and advertise events as soon as we have confirmation. Sadly this is often after the newsletter has gone out.

Is there any other way of receiving the newsletter, my friend does not have a computer?

At the moment I print off two letters that go to local people in my area, who also help with the volunteer group. I am happy to print newsletters and post them, but we would have to charge a £5 a year admin fee, as our funds would not be able to cover the cost.

I saw your new marquee at the event last week. Will you be hiring it out?

We are very tempted. We are not sure of the logistics of doing so, but it would be such an easy way to raise money. We thought perhaps a donation of £25 per day?

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