

# LISTENING TO NATURE

Firstly I would like to thank all of you that emailed me after receiving the last newsletter. I gently had my knuckles wrapped over my decision to reduce the number of newsletters throughout the year. Perhaps it would be best to do them randomly so that every now and again you get a nice surprise!

Within the busy lives we all live, how often do we listen to nature, stop and look or even note down what we see and research our findings? Listening has almost become an art after we spend all day trying to block out sound. Tinned music in shops, the roar of the traffic and endless chatter. Quiet time is so precious and hard to find. I often like to walk under the trees and listen to nature. A blackbird turning over leaves, the thrush singing high in the tree, or branches acting as wind chimes in a strong breeze. So excuse me if I tut at that person walking along oblivious to all that is around them, hugging their mobile phone to their ear as if their life depended on it. Turn it off!!!

This is the main problem, the loss of connection with nature. Most people would not be able to tell you one different thing that they have observed or heard when they get home, even if they do the same walk twice a day. They may be able to comment it rained, the sun was out, it was windy or cold.

Many children are so removed from nature and parents are out of their comfort zone in the big outdoors, exploring off the beaten track is unheard of.

I grew up with jack frost on the inside of my bedroom windows. Blessed by no double glazing, I woke every morning to the dawn chorus. How many children can say that? They are woken by their mobile, are ferried to school by car. They spend most of the day indoors and ferried home again to spend all evening in front of screens. I had to laugh at one suggestion that you should have a picture of a tree as your screen saver. The benefit being the green colour stimulates the brain and is as beneficial as seeing the real thing!

It does explain why for some being outdoors, the unknown, unexplained and unexplored is well out of their comfort zone. We quickly changed our children's activity events to family activity events, as many woodland crafts had not been experienced by the parents either. The breakthrough was when granny and grandad joined the family gatherings and spent two wonderful hours having the time of their lives showing their children and grandchildren long lost skills.

If the grandchildren ever come to stay, open their bedroom window before they go to sleep and let them hear the wonders of the dawn chorus. why don't you listen too?



# Den building



We had just spent some of the winter months topping up the dead hedges in Cooper's Wood from the brash left over from thinning the trees in the spring.

The management plan for the wood states that a certain amount of thinning should be done over a five year period.

We also needed to clear an area to install a story telling circle/forest school area. This area will now be known as Cooper's Circle.

This meant more tree felling, more logs and brash. So what to do with it all? Have a den building competition was one idea, use the wood and brash to create Cooper's Circle and sell the remaining logs, with Kate and Kipp doing a logging demonstration in June, to extract the wood.

The den building competition was well over subscribed. I had already done my sums wrong and was expecting a few more than 40 to turn up. On the day although snow was falling from the sky 58 people aged from 3 and 70+ enjoyed the event. The biggest smiles were on the grandparents faces, who were having the most amazing time.

We did also manage to get a few more bird boxes up and clean those from last year, four of which had been used.

Our next event was to be fully booked within a few days of it being advertised on our Facebook page.

# Cooper's Circle

We call ourselves a community group because that is what we are. The proof of this is when someone comes to us with an idea that would benefit the community, we listen, then investigate the possibilities. If approved we support the idea as work progresses. Defoe Smith suggested a story telling area within Cooper's Wood. We felt that the area could also benefit local schools as well as forest school groups.

Defoe sketched out a plan, we did some fund raising and cleared an area for the circle. Tom Newtron helped by Defoe defined the circle by installing 7 chestnut posts. He then staked out where a circular dead hedge should go as a boundary. The volunteers are like kids with a new toy when you mention dead hedge. Defoe could not stop us shaping up a rather good looking boundary hedge. We also attracted a new volunteer in Oscar. Mum had decided to go for a nice woodland walk, but Oscar was having none of it. With his imaginary tractor, he was soon carting branches backwards and forwards and sticking them in the hedge. Next time he is going to bring his blue tractor with him.



The next stage will be to put in the fire pit and the benches. We hope to have an on line calendar where people can book the space for a nominal charge to cover the up keep of the area and admin. Defoe is very keen to teach youngsters the art of story telling and poetry.

## Winter working parties/ Jubilee Wood

More by accident than design we have concentrated on three areas over the winter months. Jubilee Wood, Bluebell Walk and Cooper's Wood.

It will be a few years yet before the trees in Jubilee Wood will shade the undergrowth, which will naturally reduce the growth of bracken, brambles and nettles. In the mean time this area which was planted only four years ago will need to be maintained. Last winter with constant bad weather this was not done. Due to this we lost about ten trees smothered by bramble. These have been replaced and more dogwood planted, which also will help shade out the evasive plants we don't really want growing there.



## Winter working parties/ Bluebell Walk

For better or for worse! How much do you clear away and how? This was not a clear cut project. The need to clear the vegetation back to allow more light and wind into the area, to help dry the paths out quicker was the main aim. The path in this section becomes very dangerous when wet.

We also knew that the bramble had already smothered several trees and a whole bank of Bluebells had also been lost. To the South side of the path we cut back from the edge about a metre to a metre and a half, to the North side once you start cutting back bramble where do you stop?

One area where three paths meet we cut back the whole area, releasing three trees from the grips of the brambles and at the same time opening up the area. Some would say that it was not the neatest job, but armed only with loppers and saws the volunteers are limited. If you can do a better job then please join us. Although the comments were correct, we are in no way professionals. Other comments were less constructive, but very encouraging and praised the tireless work the few volunteers had put in. If we do make mistakes, nature can be very forgiving. It soon grows back with a vengeance. We have always managed to do more good than harm and learn as we go along.



## Winter working parties/ Cooper's Wood

This is the second year of the five year management plan for Cooper's Wood. The main focus is the health of the trees within the wood with 50% of the trees being Ash. This winter we saw the second phase of thinning. Removing the weaker Ash trees to allow more room for the stronger ones to grow. No one likes cutting down trees, it has given us the opportunity to plant other tree species on the outer edges of the wood. We were given a tree pack by the Woodland Trust and have planted native Cherry, Rowan and Silver Birch.



The other projects were to help speed up the diversity of woodland plants which will naturalise over time, and they are beginning to do so. Celandine have naturally self seeded and a few bluebells were seen for the first time last year. This spring we could not believe how much the snowdrops have multiplied. The successful introduction of wild daffodils also was heart warming to see.

The dead hedges and the willow arbor over the winter have also been restored.



### Wild Flower seed

Thanks to Alan Ashpool who collects wildflower seed for us, we yet again have a wonderful selection for our flower meadow. We need people to propagate the seed for planting out late spring. If you could help please let us know. [allingtonhill@gmail.com](mailto:allingtonhill@gmail.com).



### Yellow Rattle

Bridport rarely gets frosts, but we have had a succession of frosty nights this winter. Yellow rattle will not germinate if it has not been frosted. We do not usually see it germinate until the last days of March, so were very surprised to see these seedlings on the 6th of March.



## Weather update

We had fewer winter storms this year, which meant that we did not lose any trees as we have done over the last few winters. For Bridport we have had more frosts than I can remember, but the cold winter spells only lasted a few days. With light winds we have had many foggy days and not so much sun.

We do seem to have had a mixture of extreme temperatures, penduluming in January between -3.2c to 11.6c with the maximum temperature reaching 15.6c in February.

January we had 113.5 mm of rain. We were promised rain many times in February, but it rarely appeared with only 29.5mm of rain for the whole month. This does seem to have affected the growth of celandine in the woods, with the carpet of yellow we usually see a bit thin on the ground.

## Adult education

I do feel as though I am preaching to the converted, as you are obviously interested in nature. I am self taught and spend time researching new things I see in wildlife, because I am interested.

It does worry me greatly the things I overhear when walking past people, I may be in a garden, at a tourist attraction or over on the hill. "Oh look at that lavender." No, actually it was heather. "Oh look a Thrush." No, actually it was a Dunnock. "Watch the pigeon." It was a seagull! Now, do I embarrass the parent and put them right or just look at them in disbelief? It is not that any of the above are rarely seen, surely they should know the difference?

How can we expect children to be inspired by nature when their parents know so little. Locally we hope that we are making a difference and through family activity events they can learn together. It is often the adults who need educating. Several generations including mine missed out on any form of wildlife education. We possibly were taught more about Dinosaurs than the nature around us.

I also do get it wrong. Twice recently people on Facebook have put me right. I called a shovel a spade and a Shovelholer a Holeshoveller. Common sense of course, the shovel has to come before the hole. Whoops!

## Bridport Soup

We were very honoured to be invited to pitch at Bridport Soup crowd funding event. Sadly for us our pitch was not quite strong enough and came a very close second.

All was not lost as after the event we received a £100 anonymous donation and an offer from the organisers to look for alternative funding for us.

The money was to help us complete the story telling area/ forest school area, which is going to be a huge asset to the community. We will continue to seek funding and wish to thank the organisers for their support.



## More fun in the woods

Another fun event in Cooper's Wood. On Sat March 11th Dan Ashby of Magdalen farm helped families build an assault course with the brash left over when trees were thinned several months ago. These events have been so well supported that Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty have increased the funding to allow us to put on two more events.



## SUMMER EVENT SATURDAY 17TH JUNE

We are linking up with Bridport Museum Heritage Event and Bridport Food Festival for our annual summer event. This will include our annual picnic, summer sports and Aiden's Amble fund raising event.

Kate and Kipp will be the main attraction doing a logging demonstration as well as local craftsmen that mostly work in wood demonstrating their skills. If you know of any local craft men that may wish to come along and demonstrate their skills please let us know.

# Family Event on Allington Hill

Activity leader: Dan Ashby of Magdalen Environmental Trust

**Wednesday 12th April**  
**10am-midday**

**EGGciting EGGxperiments**  
and

**Woodland Activities**

**All ages of the  
Family welcome.**

**£2 per person**

Payable on entry



**Booking essential:** Contact Cathy Harvey on 01308 423202 ( evening only )  
Email: [allingtonhill@gmail.com](mailto:allingtonhill@gmail.com) or via Allington Hillbillies Facebook page.

**Entrance: Hospital Lane, North Allington, DT6 5DR**

Hosted by Allington Hill, Coopers Wood and Field Community Group with kind permission of Allington Parish Council. Funded by Aiden's Amble and Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sustainable Development Fund



# Come and meet the Hillbillies

Due to circumstances out of our control we have had to move the venue, date and time for our A.G.M.

This have prompted us to do things a little different. We will be holding a coffee morning where the public can pop in and have a chat over a cuppa and find out more information on all our ongoing projects. You can find out what we have been up to, why and what is going to happen next.

We hope that this will give the opportunity for busy parents and grandparents to come along while the children are at school. We will have information on our family activity events and Cooper's Circle. The audited accounts for the group will also be on display as well as the annual report.

## BRIDPORT TOWN HALL WEDNESDAY APRIL 5TH 10AM - 12.30PM

### **Chat on the hill**

#### **Do dog owners not realise their dogs need to be kept under control?**

*We are aware that there has been a sudden increase of puppies and juvenile dogs being walked in the area. Some owners seem to have no control over their dogs at all. We have been looking at positive ways to address the problem.*

#### **I will no longer allow my son to play on the football pitch as I have repeatedly seen owners exercising dogs in there.**

*Again we are aware of this and several people have been spoken too, with little effect. This is the only area where it does clearly state NO DOGS. Children should be able to play here safely at any time. Dogs and their owners have 40 acres to walk, it's very selfish of them to deny children this small area.*

#### **Why are some individuals so thoughtless? One person seems to throw their water bottle in exactly the same place repeatedly.**

*Over the last few months several volunteers have removed over thirty water bottles from one place. We believe it is a runner. We have cleared the area of bramble and overgrowth hoping this would stop them. Again we are doing our best to catch the culprit. Why should we clear up after this thoughtless person.*

#### **Thank you for clearing the area along Bluebell Walk. It had become so overgrown near Cooper's Field entrance you could not see others coming towards you.**

*Many walkers are wary of walking along pathways where they do not have a clear view of who or what is coming towards them. I am glad that you will now have the confidence to walk along there again.*

#### **Volunteers always seem to be working throughout the year. Surely you are disturbing nesting birds?**

*We are very careful about what work we do within the nesting season. If we need to work in what may be a sensitive area, we first do a survey of the area to ensure there is no activity or nests where we require to work. Many jobs are done in open areas away from trees. The flower meadow for example is our main focus during spring and summer. Jobs that we have been unable to do this winter will be priority next Autumn. We do though need more volunteers to help us with the work load.*

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