

# Bursting with life

When spring finally arrives we look for those tender shoots of growth. The two things we immediately think of which contribute to everything springing in to life is longer day light hours and warmer weather. How often do we stop and think what is going on underneath our feet?

Another subject we will be looking at is how the nature on the hill is surviving in such cramped conditions. It seems that every millimetre is full to overflowing. With very few winter storms and a dryer winter than the norm, the amount of birds insects and mammals that made it through the winter months greatly increased.

The flower meadow is also the best we have ever seen it, with more flowering plants self seeding. We continue to push ahead with this project and are now beginning to see the rewards.

Human activity has also increased in Cooper's Wood and Field, with the family activity events being a huge success. Cooper's Circle has already been used by groups and individuals, with the first bookings back in May. At the moment the group are just taking a quiet breather allowing nature to do it's own thing, with the minimum of working parties. Paul and myself have had little work to do cutting the grass paths, with so little rain.

*Photo Lisa Butchart.*

This does not mean that we have not been busy behind the scenes. We have updated our information on Volunteer Connect, Bridport Town Council web site and liaising with Care Bridport an umbrella group for the wellbeing groups in the area. Sarah Worner who is managing Cooper's Circle is also putting together a folder of information to circulate to schools and clubs.

We of course do have our critics, who do not appreciate the increase in people using Cooper's Wood and Field. We have been asked to remove all the dens, brush piles, ropes and swings as it looks very untidy, not natural and unwelcoming to visitors. Our argument to that is that most of the activity is in Cooper's Wood approximately a four acre site. This area is used to encourage children to play outdoors and experience nature close up. Our woodland events include activities that families can replicate with their children. The brush piles are a wonderful wildlife habitat. There are another 40 acres of grass and woodland that is left almost untouched for everyone else to enjoy.

There is so much to cram in to what is relatively a small site. We are never going to get the balance just right. Nature usually gets it's own way, such as the Thrush who built a nest at the entrance to the willow bird hide. So that's out of bounds then!



# A city in the trees

Our cities are becoming more and more crowded, as people want to buy into the best real estate, which offer the best facilities around. Lets imagine that Allington Hill as a city, full of homes ( trees ) gourmet restaurants ( good insect and wild life habitats ) transport hub ( wildlife corridors and migratory routes,) so it is the perfect place to live. Well almost, of course you do have to deal with the odd unruly human!

During the boom years people started to move out of the city into the suburbs. New built homes ( Cooper's Wood ) became very fashionable, with transport hubs become more important. So what am I getting at? Cooper's Wood is still really a plantation of trees although it is beginning to mature and you do get the sense of a woodland environment. Last year was the first time that we had noticed birds nests appearing and the bird boxes being used. This year there has been a huge increase in bird activity, including a Thrush building a nest only three feet off the ground. A bit of a risk considering the amount of human and dog activity. So birds mammals and insects are beginning to migrate into the new suburb ( Cooper's Wood.) Not really yet suitable, but if the city is full ( Allington Hill ) you need to make the most of every opportunity.

Everyone this year has commented on the very loud bird song, as you walk around, even during the day it sounds like a dawn chorus. Why is this? They are not singing louder, but with the benign winter more birds survived. So many in fact that they are singing their hearts out protecting their little bit of real estate. As with big cities we are going to have a population explosion, with each parent raising 5 to 7 young and some having two broods, the noise will possibly be deafening.

Will there be enough food for them? That will mainly depend on the seasons and weather. The rain has been very welcome, the flower meadow habitat for insects is improving, the mammals also seem to be thriving. I certainly believe there are more bats this year, also rabbits. fox and cubs have also been spotted, so all the way down the food chain it seems that all is well.

Is there more that we can do to improve the living conditions for the residents of the hill? The Woodland Trust are looking at ways to manage the grass land on top of the hill after our success with the meadow. We are controlling the spread of bramble in key areas where it will destroy unique grassland which is already established such as in Devils Bowl.

I think life is getting a bit congested underground too. The soil must be crammed full of insects, bugs and other tasty morsels by the amount of mole hills we have. I wish someone would tell them to stop digging up the paths, Duncan ( the tractor ) does not like mole hills and this is making it hard to cut the paths. But they are great for planting out plug plants in the meadow, so much easier to dig where a mole has been.



The Thrush nest at the entrance to the bird hide.



The entrance to Cooper's Wood now looks less like a plantation.



One of the boxes used last year. I like the colour scheme, obviously a bird with taste.

# Aiden's Amble

Allington Hill  
Sunday July 30th  
2pm

"Please help me raise £500 to fund  
**FREE**

Woodland outdoor activities for local children  
encouraging outdoor play and to connect with nature"  
Aiden Cooper,

Entry fee, Minimum £2 donation per person.

In association with Allington Hillbillies

Cooper's Field  
Main entrance, Hospital Lane,  
North Allington, DT6 5DR  
email: [allingtonhill@gmail.com](mailto:allingtonhill@gmail.com)  
Facebook: Allington Hillbillies

With kind permission of  
Allington Parish Council



We would really like to see the community get behind Aiden and help him raise the £500 to provide more family activity days. These are not just aimed at the children, it is also to give the adults confidence to find ways for the whole family to enjoy the big outdoors.

The most heart warming events were where Grandparents came too. They can remember as children they use to play outdoors, only going home when they were hungry. Many retired locals have wonderful memories of playing on the hill and now volunteer to look after it. We need to encourage the next generation.

Please pack up a picnic, bring the extended family and have a ramble around the hill, you do not have to race, but we are looking for some keen adult runners to race with the children who are faster than their parents. Not that they got lost last year, it was just the sheer panic in parents eyes as they disappeared over the hill!

# More Dates for the Diary

## St Swithun's Church Festival

We are very proud to announce that we have been invited to take part in this years festival. The church will be open from Friday 14th to Sunday 16th of July with a coffee morning on the Saturday. We will be there with our stall and you will be able to speak to the volunteers about our latest projects. We will have a display about our flower meadow and information about our up and coming events.



## Melplash Show Thursday 24th August

This is a first for the Hillbillies and we are really looking forward to launching our new projects for the coming Autumn Winter months. We will have our stand packed with goodies and activities for the children.

It will a good time for us to all catch up so please do come along and say hello, I often wonder who is on the other side of all these email addresses!

## Family Activity Day

We have just got enough funding to do one family activity day in the summer holidays. We may have to charge a small fee or have restricted free places.

To register or find out more, please email [allingtonhill@gmail.com](mailto:allingtonhill@gmail.com) or go on to our Facebook page Allington Hillbillies.

**THURSDAY 17TH AUGUST  
10AM TO 12PM  
COOPER'S FIELD**



## Working the land

*This year we were invited to link up with Bridport Museums Heritage events and Bridport Food Festival. For several years now we have been able to welcome Kate, Will and their horses on to the hill to brash the bracken. It seemed the perfect opportunity this year to ask Kate to stay and help us remove timber from Cooper's Wood.*

*Many would argue that this was not a cost effective way for us to remove the timber and I would have to agree, but it is not always about the money. We were able to sell the timber that we had extracted and the horses were able to work within the wood where vehicles are unable to reach. Last year we had to log the wood on site and physically carry it out.*

*Kate was also very keen to promote a traditional ( heritage ) way of working the land. Wherever possible we only use hand tools and no chemicals have been used since 2011 on the hill after the group requested that the Woodland Trust stopped using them on the site.*



This year Kate and Will had been working up in the Oxford area before coming to us on their way home. This meant we had four horses this year. Kipp, Sol, Beano and William, much to the delight of the crowds that came to watch them work.



# Busy time on the hill



Over the last few months we have put in over 8 trays of wildflower plug plants in the meadow. We have found this to be the most successful way of introducing wild flowers to the area. The flower meadow has done exceptionally well this year, with many plants beginning to self seed, which is very encouraging.

The harvest of yellow rattle seed started at least two to three weeks earlier than last year. This is an important source of income for the group.



The sunglasses were to protect us from the gleam after Duncan's wash and polish. We felt he needed pampering after all his hard work.



Paul Allen has taken over from Joe Middleton as our Woodland Trust Manager. His wife works for Plant Life so he is keen to protect the wild flowers we have on the hill.

The Trust through his guidance will be looking at the best way to manage the grassland on top of the hill.

There will also be some path maintenance done through the summer months as well as the seasonal cutting of the paths.



# More fun had by all

Cooper's Circle has already been a popular venue. Several birthday parties have taken place, two local schools have used the venue as an outdoor classroom and more children's activities will be happening during the summer. Individuals and family groups have had picnics and cooking on the camp fire. The area is being well respected and kept clean and tidy by all. [CoopersCircle@gmail.com](mailto:CoopersCircle@gmail.com)



Our family activity egg challenge event at Easter was a huge success, with some very inventive games that the whole family enjoyed. We were over subscribed for the event and had to turn families away who had not booked.



Never too young to learn the vital skills of becoming a Hillbilly. Some of the Mums also enjoyed being allowed loose with a drill while the men folk weren't around. It is amazing what skills you can learn at one of our events.



At every event there are different activities for all members of the family to enjoy. We must thank Dan and the volunteers especially Emma Burt who is also forest school trained, that gave up their time freely to allow these events to go ahead. This meant that we were able to increase the numbers attending the events, which we are extremely grateful for.

# NATURE AT IT'S BEST



I really felt for this guy when I first saw him, either not well or dead. To my shock as soon as he saw me he flew up into the oak tree. I waited for several minutes and he flew down and rolled over yet again. He was sun bathing! I thought I had seen it all, but further on my walk I saw a male and female blackbird doing the same. They would have a dust bath, sunbath for several minutes and then preen. You never know what you are going to see next.

I was so excited when I saw photos it nearly made me get out of bed early to go and see them myself. This is the very first sighting of Red Kites on Allington Hill. Well done Lisa for catching them on camera. She walks with her dog Dave first thing in the morning and saw them three days in a row.



A keen nature watcher asked me to put the wildlife camera out as they believed there was new badger activity near her tree. On my way carefully trying not to get stung by nettles, I suddenly heard this very loud munching noise. I looked up and there was a deer right in front of me. Wildlife camera not activated and my other camera in my pocket I stood and watched for a while. I did eventually manage to reach for my camera. I believe she must have had a fawn with her as she eventually laid down in the grass and I slowly crept past. A magical ten minutes.

## Chat on the hill

How does this work? It would be extremely hard to write full conversations and so I do have to edit the topic to several sentences. To do this without losing the context of the subject sometimes can be very hard. Also some subjects can be sensitive to the persons concerned and so names or dates are never mentioned. I do take great care that no one person should take offence but these points are of concern to local people and should be raised. I am not one to brush things under the carpet. I would then appreciate if you feel that you would like more information on the subject or feel you have been misrepresented, please contact me direct to have a one to one conversation either via email, messenger or arrange to meet up to discuss any misunderstanding. I go out of my way to deal with subjects with respect and sensitivity, so would appreciate some respect back in return. I have been told by quite a few it's the best bit of the newsletter, but may not feature in future if not respected. Thank you.

## The weather

I always joke when sending out the newsletter, saying I only do it when it rains. Well this is sort of true, but due to the lack of rain I have gone beyond the call of duty and have been getting up very early in the morning to get the job done. In the last three months April has been the driest month with 26.4 mm of rain. May and June only had a few days of rain, both had 65mm. With clear sky's we have had some chilly mornings the minimum temperature for April 0.6c, May 4c, June 1.3c. I did hear that some people were putting their heating back on in June! The weather has caused high UV, and pollen counts with an increase in sun burn and people who never suffer from hay fever also having symptoms. We were unable to record the highest temperatures in Bridport for this year, as it was the three days we were away. If anyone else keeps weather details near the hill we would be interested to record how hot it got.

### **Chat on the Hill**

#### **Why do you have to book Cooper's Circle to use it?**

You don't have to book it. If you wish to use the circle for a special event or time, we recommend that you book it so we can advertise the fact that it is in use. You will receive confirmation of your booking. At any other time it is first come first served, or perhaps share and make new friends.

#### **You keep showing pictures of flowers in meadow on Facebook, but where are they?**

We have had the highest count of wild flowers in the meadow since we started the project. We are aware that people are unsure about walking through the meadow, so we plan next year to make narrow winding paths through the grass and hopefully make it more accessible.

#### **What happened to the wood that the horses removed from Cooper's Wood?**

We were able to sell the wood to help cover the costs of the thinning of trees in Cooper's Wood as part of five year management plan.

#### **Are the volunteers still working?**

We enjoy having a break during the nesting season and except for the meadow area and cutting the paths in Cooper's Field there is little to do. The maintenance of the paths and grass on the hill is done by Woodland Trust contractors. I feel the volunteers never get enough praise for the hard work they do.

#### **The Bluebells were lovely this year, it seemed more than ever.**

We have uncovered about 200yds of Bluebells last year as part of a path clearance scheme, clearing scrub away from the sides of the path. We are talking to W.T to ask if we can clear more scrub further up the bank as bramble is quickly taking over the area.

#### **Can we have another rubbish bin on the East side of the field?**

We will look in to that for you.

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