

Carymoor Volunteer Newsletter

Autumn 2023



Introducing...

My name is Chrissie Stacey and I have just taken up the role of Volunteer Coordinator at Carymoor.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and to say hello and a big thank you to all of the volunteers who help and support Carymoor. During my first few weeks at Carymoor I have been overwhelmed by the incredible enthusiasm, commitment, knowledge and expertise that the volunteers bring to the Trust.

I have been working with Carymoor for nearly 3 years; both volunteering and leading a Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme group from a local secondary school. My background is in education, working as a teacher in schools for 29 years. More recently I have led forest schooling, working with teenagers in an Alternative Provision centre and as an Education Officer in a local environmental education centre.

I am passionate about the outdoors, nature and the environment. As a keen canoeist and walker I love exploring different environments and immersing myself in nature. At home I am at my happiest when gardening. Here I am trying to establish a wildlife garden and am experimenting with the 'no-dig' method for the first time this year.

I would love to try to meet or speak with you all over the next few weeks and endeavour to support you where possible.

If you have any questions, suggestions or ideas please contact me at:

chrissie.stacey@carymoor.org.uk



Vacancy



Carymoor has an exciting new vacancy for a **Conservation Trainee**.

This is great opportunity for anyone looking to start a career in conservation and would like to be part of the small team at Carymoor. Working alongside our conservation and education team the successful applicant will learn a range of traditional nature conservation skills and gain experience of ecological management.

This is a 1 year contract at 30 hours p.w (£19,800 pro rata).

Full details about the post and a recruitment pack and application form are available on our website:

<https://www.carymoor.org.uk/conservation-trainee-vacancy>

Deadline for applications is 9.00am on Monday 20th November

Conservation volunteers

Our conservation volunteers have been very active and busy this autumn, working hard to prepare the site for winter. Having a tractor out of action and the recent wet weather conditions has kept everyone very busy!

One area of focus has been Long Pond where various volunteer groups have worked hard to cut and clear the reeds before the vegetation dies back and begins to rot down. Donning waders and full length gloves, some of the hardy volunteers bravely climbed into the pond to cut the reeds, stacking these at the side of the pond to allow any wildlife to disperse and crawl back to the water. Clearing the reeds and surrounding vegetation is an important seasonal job which helps maintain a healthy and diverse mix of plant life around the pond as well as helping to balance the water quality and clarity.



Photo credit: Adrian Lanfear

Another area of focus has been the Translocated Bank which the volunteer groups have scythed, raked and cleared. Cutting and clearing this area before the vegetation has a chance to die back and rot, returning nutrients to the soils, enables many important native wildflower species which prefer low-nutrient soil to thrive.



Usually the tractor would collect the cut grass in the Upper Dauncy Meadow and the Bee Meadow but this autumn the task has had to be done by hand. It has been a race against time to clear the cut grass before the wet weather (Storm Ciaran) soaked the ground too much, causing the grass to rot and making it difficult to collect.



Attention has recently turned to clearing the 'Dragon'. A number of different groups has been hard at work, scything and raking the grassland as well as pruning and tidying the hedgerows.



Woodworking shelter

The woodworking shelter is taking shape. John, in particular, has been working hard to install the tarps, create working spaces and set up the new area. This will provide a lovely space for the volunteers to work in, keep dry but still enjoy being outdoors.



Able 2 Achieve

Our Thursday group, like our Monday and Tuesday conservation groups, have literally been moving mountains over the past month. Mountains of grass that is! The monumental challenge of clearing 2 ha of grassland by hand was no small task but the A team set to it with typical enthusiasm and sheer hard work.

In recent years Graham has single-handedly taken on this task; cutting, raking and clearing the larger grassland fields with the McCormick tractor. Unfortunately, our (not so) trusty tractor has been out of action due to a major mechanical issue. Never ones to shirk a challenge here at Carymoor, the decision was made to roll our sleeves up and clear the grass by hand. Fortunately, our old faithful John Deere is still plodding along, which allowed Graham to cut and rake the grass into rows. Then over to volunteer power, pitch forks at the ready!

We started by clearing our experimental grassland plot 'Bath Spa', named after the University that established the long-term study of how wildflower meadows could be recreated in soil with different levels of nutrients. Students from Bath Spa still visit once or twice a year to measure the composition of the sward against the nutrient levels in each research plot.

Then onto Upper Dauncey. As our main education area it's important to keep a diverse meadow area for school activities like sweep netting, bug hunting, and trails. The grass collected from the top meadow was then taken to the old willow plot which had been infected with Silver leaf fungus. Here the grass was spread over the infected stumps as a mulch to prevent the spores of the fungus from spreading to the other willow beds. We will be trialling grass as a mulch, clay/turf covers, and leaving the stumps uncovered to monitor how the stumps react.

Thankfully, it's not all hard work on a Thursday. We also aim to introduce the use of new tools and conservation techniques to build skills and confidence within the group. One of the highlights this season has been clearing an overgrown path in Dauncey using loppers, pruning saws and a long reach/extendable pruning saw. It was great to see how much the team enjoyed using the long reach pruner to cut back over hanging willows. Now that the bulk of the grass clearing is complete we will be looking forward to learning more skills with scything and coppicing work on the agenda in the coming months.

Neil Gemmell



Reaching Communities Project

Following on from the success of our recently completed Heritage Lottery Fund Nightingale project, we're thrilled to announce we have a new Lottery funded Reaching Communities project up and running. The new project was born out of the progress we made in our volunteering provision during the HLF project.

Being able to offer regular conservation and gardening activities for groups of adults with learning difficulties was a new venture and we soon discovered the learners absolutely loved working at Carymoor and we absolutely loved working with them. As our links developed with local community groups, Able 2 Achieve (A2A) and The Hub, we found a strong demand to continue our work together and thanks to Reaching Communities we now have the funding to do that for the next 5 years.

Both A2A and The Hub are based in Yeovil and support individuals with learning difficulties, mental health and other associated disabilities. A key feature of the new project is being guided by the needs of the local community, and working together to provide the opportunities they need. A steering committee was formed to guide the project consisting of A2A staff, The Hub staff, Carymoor staff, and Carymoor volunteers with lived experience of the learning-disabled community. An initial meeting designed the outline of project and have produced the following outcomes:

- Achieve in Nature - a weekly session for Able2Achieve that will teach conservation skills, gardening skills, tool use, surveying wildlife, and more.
- Rural crafts – 4-day craft courses, spread over 4 weeks, that teach a range of rural crafts, including willow weaving, pottery and green woodworking. The learners will learn new skills and make items that can be sold to generate income for the project.
- Wellbeing at Carymoor – 4-day wellbeing courses. These sessions will be sensory, engaging groups with the amazing wildlife on our site, helping to boost wellbeing. These sessions will be aimed at those who are less able to use tools or take part in craft sessions.



the Hub

We also want to improve our facilities to make Carymoor more accessible and inclusive for adults with learning disabilities. This includes:

Providing a new toilet block with an accessible toilet. Our main visitor centre has an easy access toilet but it is often in use by school groups and we need to provide an additional facility. We have an existing portaloo block but it is in poor condition and has steep steps which make it unsuitable for anyone with mobility issues.

We want to provide a new workshop space. Many of our activities take place outdoors but we want to provide an indoor space that we can use for a range of craft and maintenance activities. This will also enable us to cater for individuals who prefer to undertake indoor activities and for poor weather.

Karen has got us off to a great start delivering the first of our Rural Craft course with 5 learners from The Hub; and our regular Thurs team from A2A have been helping out with our autumnal conservation tasks. As with many new projects, we have had a few hurdles with the prospective building works, but thanks to some super-human patience and persistence from Rupert and the Trustees we're back on track.

Many of you will have noticed the shiny new toilet block has arrived – just need to get it in the right place next! It is a considerable upgrade over the current facility and it will make a real difference.

The planning stage of the workshop build has also started to move again and we'll begin to focus on this in the New Year. It looks like the extra space will be much needed as we have had interest from several local LD community groups that are keen to work with us. Looks like it will be an action packed few months!



Gardening Team

The gardening volunteers have been working hard maintaining the Sensory Garden and the Wildflower Collection. It is a year-round job looking after these areas; pruning, weeding and managing these spaces for the school groups to enjoy.

The autumn produce from the vegetable plot has now been harvested. The gardening team have kindly put this produce in the Strawbale House for the volunteers to take home and enjoy. More recently the team has also cleared and weeded the vegetable plot in preparation for winter.

After a discussion with some of the gardening team it would be lovely for Neil, myself and the gardening team to get together to discuss and plan for the year ahead. Hopefully, we can establish a programme of planting that will benefit both the education team, visitors and the volunteers over the next 12 months.

Monday 20th November at 10.45am in the Strawbale House.



Adam has been working hard to establish a new compost area close to the polytunnels. Whilst still in the early stage, hopefully this new resource will yield lovely rich compost in a few months time for the gardening team to utilise.

Dave Strickland (our lawn mower man) very kindly donated a Hayter lawn mower to us which has vastly improved the task of cutting the lawn, Wildflower Collection, and around the round house as it is able to handle longer grass and still make a tidy job of it. Dave has been super busy with his other volunteering commitments but our new Mon/Tues volunteer Adrian has stepped up to cover the mowing duties. Huge thank you to you both in what is a very time consuming job – time to enjoy the winter break!

Education & Resources Volunteer Team

We have a small team of regular volunteers who are invaluable to the running of our education visits at Carymoor. During the autumn term we have been very busy with a wide variety of visits both on-site and out in schools across Somerset as part of our outreach service.

Supporting school groups

Katie, Kathy, Anna, Melly, Hils and Sam have all helped support our school visits and toddler sessions this autumn. With topics as varied as 'The Three Little Pigs', 'Happy Hedgehogs' and 'The Vikings', as well as our Schools Against Waste outreach days, they have been amazing at knowing just what's needed to help our activities run smoothly. From handing out clipboards and hi vis jackets, hiding hibernating hedgehogs, supervising the fire in the roundhouse, to being 'back-stop' on our discovery walks and helping tidy up at the end of the day, we are so grateful for all they do!

Resource Preparation

Alison and Val have again been working wonders in preparing many of the weird and wonderful resources needed for our school and toddler groups. This term this has involved: willow withy cutting and shaping ready for weaving 'plates' as part of our popular Anglo-Saxon days; making journey sticks and whittling marshmallow roasting sticks for our survival and adventure days; making up dough balls for our little Vikings to cook on the fire; shaping clay balls for a variety of clay crafts including hedgehogs, squirrels and houses for the 3 little pigs; cutting out badger masks; and making up kits for children to make recycled parrot-shaped plant pots as part of our Eco Pirate days, to name a few! We really couldn't function without all their support with these tasks and would like to say a huge 'thank you!'



Mark and Kit have been busy each week making wooden medallions, cutting willow, preparing firewood and a host of other jobs. Many thanks to them for all of their hard work.

Val has also been working hard to give the fabulous Mr Wiggleburt a new lease of life. Mr Wiggleburt has been educating children about the wonders of composting for years but recently has started to look a little threadbare and felt that it was time to retire. Thanks to Val's time and skills a new Mr Wiggleburt has been created. We look forward to introducing him to school groups in the weeks ahead.

Beth Coleman



Corporate volunteer groups

This autumn we have had a number of companies and organisations volunteering their time and hard work to help us at Carymoor;

- British Solar Renewables
- Nutricia
- Somerset Council
- Coca Cola group
- The Environment Agency



A recent group from Somerset Council were excited to discover this toad hiding in the long grass as they were scything. They were relieved to find it in time and be able to safely move it on.



Wildlife update

As the seasons change and we move into autumn the wildlife recording onsite starts to slow down. Our busy spring and summer months of regular transects for Butterflies, Bumblebees, Dragonflies, Reptiles, and Plants come to an end in November. Of course, no-one tells the wildlife about this though and there are still plenty of Red admirals, Queen Bumblebees, late flying Dragonflies, and very cold slow worms moving around the site! Huge thank you to Julian, John, Harriet and Claire for your commitment and enthusiasm this survey season.

Bucking the trend to this seasonal slow down are our bird recorders and fungi hunters. Sharon, our onsite fungi expert, has been zig zagging her way across the whole site in search of meadow mushrooms like waxcaps, wood loving fungi in their various shapes and sizes, and our old friend Silver leaf fungus. Ably assisted by Steve Parker on two occasions, the County Recorder no less, they were also able to record various plant galls that had not previously been recorded onsite. This is Steve's area of expertise (one of many!) and we were delighted to confirm that we still have an uncommon Pepperpot Gall, created by a tiny fruit fly found in the flower head of Common fleabane. Steve last visited the site back in 2016 with the Somerset Archeological and Natural History Society to conduct a bioblitz (record as many species as you can in 24hrs) of the site and is keen to return next year – it will be very exciting to see what else we can find 8 years since the last one!



Blackening waxcap



Slender club fungus



Yellow Brain

(Photo credit: Sharon Cooper)

Waxcaps have been of particular interest these last few weeks. Waxcaps are familiar-shaped fungi that are often brightly coloured and often have a waxy or slippery-looking cap. They are found in grasslands that are generally poor in nutrients – such as the clay cap of the landfill site – alongside other fungi, such as club and coral fungi, pinkgills and earthtongues. A “waxcap grassland” is a pasture, meadow or grassy area where these fungi are found. The grasslands of the UK, particularly those found in Wales and Scotland, are amongst the most important in the world for grassland fungi. Their preference for ancient, unimproved pastures and grassland that has not been agriculturally improved means that many species are rare and declining (Plantlife UK).

Our Bird Recorder Nick has also been busy this autumn - in fact it would be fairer to say he is always busy as the bird transect never stops! During the transect Nick covers the Carymarsh reserve, Dimmer 2 (the area managed by the landfill operator Valencia) and the Carymoor reserve. Some of our winter visitors are returning in good numbers, particularly Common Snipe and Jack Snipe which are clearly enjoying the recent heavy rains which have created numerous puddles in their wetland habitat. I have also noticed the return of small flocks of Redwing utilising the heavy crop of Hawthorn berries in the hedges across the field system. Their numbers are bound to grow as we move through autumn.

However, for me, the spectacular highlight for this season has no rivals. I was delighted to get an email from Nick at the end of the day Friday 29th September when he had just seen a Short Eared Owl hunting over the open grassland on Dimmer 2. I raced down there with binoculars in hand hoping to catch it and I was treated to an awesome hunting display by not just one but two Short Eared Owls. The last time we recorded this species onsite was 2012 so it's fantastic to have them back. Nick has attributed this to the uncut grassland on the now closed Dimmer 2 landfill site, previously this grassland was cut every summer/autumn whilst it was an open landfill site.



Finally, and with huge sadness, I am sorry to tell you that our Bumblebee recorder John Butler has passed away. John had been recording Bumblebees onsite at Carymoor since 2014 and had played a big role in creating the transect that he walked once a month as part of the national recording scheme Bee Walk for the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Some of you may also know John from his work at Lytes Cary, where he was a conservation volunteer as well as their Bumblebee recorder. A key part of John's mission was to record and find out more about the nationally rare Shrill Carder Bumblebee. With a small population at Lytes it was hoped that by connecting surrounding habitat the species could increase their range and increase their chances of survival. John was passionate about trying to rescue this struggling species and was ever present at meetings and workshops. His expertise will be greatly missed. Those that bumped into him on his transect would also agree that his enthusiasm and willingness to share his knowledge will also be much missed. He was just a lovely guy to chat to.

Neil Gemmell



Wildlife @ Carymoor

Recently, whilst surveying and monitoring the long grass near Long Pond, some of our wildlife volunteers were rewarded for their hard work and vigilance by finding a number of Harvest mice nests during our annual survey. This survey can only take place between the months of October and March to ensure that the mice are not disturbed.

The Harvest mouse is at risk of extinction in Britain. They are very shy creatures and rarely seen. They are also the smallest rodent in Europe, weighing the same as a 2p coin.

Their favourite habitat is long tall, tussocky grassland, reedbeds, hedgerows and woodland so the area where their nests were found was a perfect habitat for them.



Harriet has been out and about with her camera, capturing some amazing shots of the wildlife around the site. Thank you to her for sharing these wonderful photographs.



Current volunteer Opportunities

Conservation volunteers

Mondays: 10am - 1pm

Tuesdays: 10am - 4pm

Gardening Group

Monday: 10-1pm

Education & Resources Volunteers

There is no set day for this help but we sometimes need people to help with supervising the school visits and other children's activities. Additionally we always need help with preparing materials for the activities. Sewing and maintenance of children's History Day costumes, cutting sticks to make stick people, making gingerbread men card templates and 'sticky caterpillars' are just a few of the potential jobs.

Event Volunteers

This year we are supporting the South Petherton Christmas lights switch-on event on Sunday 26th November. The Brewers Arms is having its annual Christmas fair (2.00pm to 4.00pm) and we have a table booked to promote our volunteering opportunities, courses and events and to sell some of our crafts.

We would also like to have a more regular pitch at the Castle Cary market each Tuesday to sell, promote and advertise the numerous opportunities available at Carymoor.

If you would like to help at any of these events or can suggest any other relevant promotional opportunities, please let me know.

chrissie.stacey@carymoor.org.uk

<https://www.carymoor.org.uk/volunteer-with-us>

Tel: 01963 350143

Thank you

