

Carymoor Volunteer

Newsletter

Summer 2022



Volunteer activities this Summer

Conservation Volunteers



Unearthing and moving hundreds of tyres from an area on the far side of the landfill was a task undertaken by both our local regular volunteers and also a few corporate groups over the early summer.

In 2010, in an attempt to repopulate this part of the site with trees, a mix of tree species were planted within old car tyres filled with compost (as there was little topsoil here at the time). Some of the trees grew well, but unfortunately many didn't and nearly all of the ash trees that did grow now have ash dieback. This same area has also been identified by our local ornithologists as potentially good breeding habitat for nightingales and this winter we will be planting an additional 7000 hawthorn and blackthorn trees to create the dense scrub that they need. Before planting can take place, the old tyres needed to be removed, along with the tree guards and stakes that were no longer needed.

Volunteers have also been sorting the timber that had been collected after the coppicing and hedgelaying activities during the winter. Some of the wood was cut and stored ready for use in the woodburners in the strawbale and main centre building and some was cut into lengths for use as poles and stakes.





The area around the tool sheds was also tidied and the various bits of salvaged and recycled timber was sorted. We made use of some of the volunteers construction skills with salvaged timber being used to build a new outdoor workshop and woodworking area. Repairs were also made to the steps and handrail leading to the tool shed and the 'boot shed' was also cleared.



The bee-shed which houses the observation beehive was given a fresh coat of paint, the windows were cleaned and a new willow hurdle entranceway was constructed. The hive here and the two hives in Upper Dauncey are looked after by our volunteer bee-keeper Stewart Holden, and he's done so for many years. The honey bees within the observation hive are visited by many of the school groups who can see the colony in action, learn about their complex life cycle and the importance of pollinating insects.





The sensory garden and the wildflower collections grown in the tyres are looking lovely, thanks to the efforts of our gardening volunteers. Weeding, watering, putting in new plants and keeping the paths around them accessible and tidy are constant jobs at this time of year. We have also had to refill some of the tyres with compost after they were dug out by the resident badgers! The education team have been using the garden areas as a base for pond dipping and to teach children about plants and pollination.

The volunteers have also made a start on repairing and replacing some of the signs identifying the varieties of apple trees in the orchard.

The public footpaths that run along some of the boundaries of Carymoor were also kept accessible by some of our Monday group volunteers armed with scythes and loppers.



The vegetable plot has been really productive this summer and we've had good crops of cauliflowers, lettuces, spring onions, beetroot, peas and rhubarb, with carrots, parsnips, tomatoes, sweetcorn, radishes and runner beans ready for picking soon.

Space in the veg plot was getting low so the tomato plants found a home in the recycled bathtubs by the polytunnels!

The vegetables are for any of our volunteers to help themselves to and it's the least we can do to thank you for your help.





Our able2achieve volunteers have been involved with many activities this summer including tidying and sorting the timber piles, weeding the area around the polytunnels, raking the meadows, watering and potting the wildflower seedlings and cuttings and continuing to make new work benches from old pallets and salvaged timber. The group also very kindly donated some plants for the sensory garden.



The able2achieve learners and staff have also been out with ID sheets and sweep nets looking for and recording key wildlife species such as marbled white and common blue butterflies, slow worms and birds-foot trefoil plants as part of the Somerset Big Count. They have also photographed and recorded many different invertebrates in the reserve on their weekly visits.

Our Saturday volunteers helped with the honey extraction from the frames of honeycomb collected from both Carymoor and another hive near Somerton under the expert guidance from Stewart our beekeeper. The wax cap to the honeycomb cells was removed with a knife and then the frames were suspended lengthways into a metal drum, called an extractor. The drum was spun by hand until the honey had pooled at the bottom, after which it was removed through a tap and filtered into tubs, ready to be put into jars. A fascinating and enjoyable day.





In addition to the help from our regular volunteers, we have also had employees from the Civil Service, Merck Life Sciences and SUEZ assisting us this summer. Moving tyres, re-potting the wildflowers ready for planting into the reserve and raking the meadows were some of the activities that they got involved with as well as having a guided walk of the site.

These organisations give their staff the opportunity to volunteer for charities such as ours, which not only helps us with our work and spread our message of protecting the environment and sustainable living, but also promotes their well-being and team building. This is especially important after a difficult few years and many more people working from home.



Update from the Education Team



The 'Wild Days Out' are proving really popular this summer—pond dipping, sweep netting the meadows for invertebrates, visiting the bee observation hive and making clay animals were just some of the things the children have been doing to learn about the wildlife that lives here.

Some of the school children have been visiting Carymoor to learn about different periods of history. The history days focus on sustainability and highlight how our ancestors lived much simpler lives with fewer resources and less impact on the world. The children learn how to light fires, build shelters from willow and forage for food!



John Muir Awards - report by Karen Boswell

This academic year we have had two groups completing their John Muir Discovery Award at Carymoor—a total of 44 students in all. It has been lovely to take part in this Award again and to see the children connecting with, and caring for, the Carymoor nature reserve.

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild spaces. The Award encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment, in a spirit of fun, adventure and exploration. As part of their Award at Carymoor, the students have:

- found out about the life of John Muir
- visited the landfill and Waste Transfer Station and discovered more about the history of the site
- Explored different habitats and discovered what lives there from the meadows (sweep netting for invertebrates), woodlands (minibeast hunting) and ponds (OPAL pond surveys).
- Looked for signs of life e.g. tracks, feeding activity, holes, droppings and bones and built up a picture of the wild space and its inhabitants
- Played games that aided the understanding of different concepts e.g. owl and vole/sparrow and sparrowhawks to demonstrate predator/prey relationships

- Experienced opening the moth trap and holding the moths on their hands



- Taken part in orienteering, den building, fire lighting and other challenges
- Visited the orchard looking for different types of grass and flowers
- Made willow plates



The education team are helped by a dedicated core of regular volunteers including Chrissie (left) and Alison.

Chrissie helps to lead activities for Ditchheat school who visit every Friday and Alison helps with preparing the materials needed for the various educational activities, including making stick men!

We have also had a number of students doing work experience at Carymoor this summer, helping the education and the conservation team.

Wildlife News

Roe Deer

It's difficult not to be enchanted by these animals when you see them at Carymoor.

At this time of year, they are a reddish brown and they tend to be solitary (other than mothers with young in May and June). In the winter they are a greyish brown and tend to live in small groups.

Roe deer are the most common native deer in the UK and although primarily a woodland species they venture out onto fields and farmland to browse on

buds and leaves from trees and shrubs and woody plants. If you don't see the deer themselves their presence is evident though their hoof prints on the paths, droppings, small circular areas of flattened grass where they have rested and bark rubbed off young trees where male deer have marked their territories and cleaned the velvet off their newly grown antlers. We are also aware of their presence when they nibble off the tops of our newly planted trees if they haven't been sufficiently protected!



Silver-studded blue butterflies



In June, on one of his weekly butterfly surveys at Carymoor, volunteer surveyor Julian Rawlins recorded what might be our first silver-studded blue butterfly. Originally he thought that this was a mutation of a brown argus or a female common blue, both species already found here, but on further consultation with a lepidopterist at Exeter University they confirmed that it was definitely silver-studded blue. The photo is of a female (only the males are blue). Further searches will be done to establish if more of these butterflies are present.

This tiny, rare butterfly is generally found in heathlands where the caterpillars feed on young heather but can also occasionally be found on limestone and chalk grasslands such as those at Carymoor where the larvae feed on birds-foot trefoil and common rock rose.

This butterfly also has a strong association with two species of black (*Lasius*) ant. The female butterfly lays its eggs close to a black ants nest and the hatched caterpillar is carried by the ants into their nest where the ants 'milk' them for sugars and amino acids. The caterpillar benefits from this relationship by being protected from predators and parasites.

Barn owls at Carymoor and Carymarsh



This lovely photograph of a barn owl, by volunteer photographer Carole Britton, was taken flying over our neighbouring nature reserve Carymarsh in early June.

Barn owls tend to have home ranges rather than territories. Their home range is where they will hunt, roost and breed and this can be anything from a 1km radius from the nest site in the summer to a 4km radius at other times of year.

Barn owls don't defend their area from others of the same species (as tawny owls do) and it's not uncommon for barn owls to have overlapping ranges, especially where food is plentiful, and they may also share roost sites. Staying in a home range, enables a bird to develop a good mental map of the area and to learn where the best hunting grounds and roost sites are and the flight paths between them all.

Barn owls live on average for about 4 years but 70% of them will, unfortunately die in their first year, mainly due to starvation, especially over their first winter when their main food prey of small mammals, especially field voles is at its lowest and the juvenile birds will be less experienced at hunting. Prolonged wet weather can also be detrimental to barn owls as their feathers are not particularly waterproof compared to other birds. Their soft feathers and incredibly sensitive hearing allows them to be very efficient, silent hunters at night, but wet feathers increase the amount of noise and will therefore reduce their ability to catch their prey.



Their favourite food is field voles, but they will also catch common shrews and wood mice (pictured above) and they will on average, eat 4 small mammals a night!

Roger Dickey, from Somerset Ornithological Society has been volunteering his time at Carymoor and Carymarsh for many years now and rings some of the adult birds and chicks from the bird boxes we have on site, including the owl boxes. This summer we have 4 barn owls at Carymarsh (2 adults and their 2 chicks) and Roger, assisted by Mark Winsloe carefully ringed the chicks in mid-June.

Bird ringing is an important surveying method as it generates information on the survival rate and where and how far the birds move, as well as helping to understand why a population of a species may be increasing or declining. Some of the blue and great tit adults and chicks from boxes at Carymoor were also ringed in early May.



All wild bird species in the UK, including their nests and eggs are legally protected but barn owls are afforded another level of protection to prevent any disturbance to their nest site and a separate licence is needed to survey the barn owl boxes. Ringing is also a very skilled activity and it takes many months of training to be able to qualify for a licence to do this.



The Carymoor Environmental Trust was also very kindly donated a barn owl box that was made by a local resident.

Roger was keen for this box to go up somewhere in the north of the Carymoor reserve and he has found a suitable tree near the orchard, where there is plenty of open tussocky grassland and an abundance of field voles.

Plants

The abundance and diversity of flowering plants during the summer, is amazing. Every plant has its place in the ecology of the site, providing a source of food through their nectar, pollen, leaves, seeds, fruits or roots for a whole range of wildlife and some invertebrate species are totally dependent on specific plants for all or part of their life cycle. The larvae of the thick



legged flower beetles live and feed in the stems of thistles and brooms, whilst Sheep



fescue and red fescue grasses are an essential part of the diet of caterpillars of the marbled white butterflies. The small skippers almost exclusively use Yorkshire Fog and occasionally Timothy and creeping soft grass. Willowherbs provide the food for the caterpillars of the elephant hawk-moth and those of the footman moths feed on lichens on tree trunks.

There are 3 species of orchid found at Carymoor: pyramidal orchid , bee orchid and the common spotted orchid.

The common spotted orchid is found throughout the UK and in many different habitats from damp grasslands and fens to open woodlands, dunes, quarries and wasteland. Bee orchids are unmistakable and the 'furry' flowers not only look and feel like bees but they also emit the scent of a female bee in the hope of attracting a male bee to mate with it and aid pollination. However, in the UK, this mimicry is unnecessary as the bee orchids largely self-pollinate. It's latin name is *Ophrys apifera*– apifera meaning bee bearing and Ophrys is from the Greek word for eyebrow. According to the Roman historian and naturalist Pliny the Elder, the plant was used by women to darken their eyebrows!

The pyramidal orchid, so called because of the shape of its flower spike is found in drier habitats of chalk grassland, and also dunes and quarries.



Current volunteer Opportunities

Conservation volunteers

- Mondays: 10am - 1pm
- Tuesdays: 10am - 4pm
- Last Saturday of the every month: 10am - 3pm
(Saturday 30th July, Saturday 27th August, Saturday 24th September)



Gardening Group

Monday: 10-1pm

Grass Mowing

We're looking for someone to mow the grass in front of the Carymoor Centre and also around the tyres of the wildflower collection. Ideally, we need someone for a couple of hours every fortnight during the summer but even if you can help occasionally please let us know.

Education Volunteers

There is no set day for this help but we sometimes need people to help with preparing materials for courses and school visits. Sewing and maintenance of children's History Day costumes, cutting sticks to make stick people, making gingerbread men card templates and 'sticky caterpillars' for our 'Wild Days Out' are just some of the things you could help with.

Events

We are having an Open Day on Saturday August 20th and help with manning the gate, preparing and serving refreshments and just being a friendly face to chat to new visitors about Carymoor would be really helpful.

We have another Mini Explorers session on Monday 18th July for toddlers and their parents/carers: [Mini Explorers - Monthly sessions - Carymoor Environmental Trust](#) and then two 3Rs family mornings on 16th and 17th August [3Rs Family Fun at Carymoor - Carymoor Environmental Trust](#).



Our website also has updates on the latest projects and volunteer opportunities.

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

Thank you to volunteer Carole Britton for providing many of the lovely photos used in this newsletter and the Carymoor Facebook and Instagram pages.