

*Carymoor Volunteer
Newsletter
Autumn 2022*



What have our volunteers been doing this Autumn?

Conservation Volunteers



It has been a really busy time for all of our volunteers with a whole variety of activities taking place over the last 3 months. The regular tasks such as keeping the paths accessible and chopping logs for the wood pile have been ongoing but autumn is the ideal time for doing pond maintenance work as it is less likely to cause disturbance to wildlife, especially the great crested newts. Some of the smaller ponds have been desilted and the marginal vegetation has been cut back. The reeds alongside Long Pond have been cut and raked up and in the next few weeks we'll be donning waders and getting into the pond to cut the reeds in the middle.

Water mint has been planted alongside the pond as they are especially beneficial for newts which like to lay their eggs in the folded leaves of these plants.



Three 'hibernacula' have been constructed to provide a winter refuge for reptiles and amphibians. They were made from logs, branches and rocks and covered with soil and turf, making sure that there were entrance gaps at the bottom.

Small mammal surveys have also been carried out by some of the volunteers this autumn. Claire and Sharon set up 'Longworth' mammal traps within the long grass and hedgerows. The traps were filled with hay and baited with food, left

overnight and checked early in the morning. A wood mouse and 2 bank voles were recorded and some of the other traps had signs of habitation with soil and leaves been pushed into the entrance of the traps.



Autumn is an ideal time to survey for harvest mice and this was done by searching for their old summer nests. The harvest mice weave a nest from stems of grass, usually about 30cm height above the ground and within tussocks of long vegetation. At this time of year, the nests are no longer being used and they are easier to see once the vegetation has started to die back. The stretch alongside the road near to the pond was checked and 7 nests were found, logged and photographed and all the information will be sent to the Mammal Society so that the records can form part of the national database. Annual surveys like these are really important to help to determine population trends and to make sure that our habitat management is working.



Another end of summer/autumn job was cutting and raking some of the wildflower meadows and road verges and this was undertaken by our regular volunteer groups and also by some of our visiting 'corporate' groups from organisations such as SUEZ, Southern Co-Op, Danone, Somerset County Council and Bristol Renewable Energy.

Some of the wildflower plugs of ladies bedstraw, kidney vetch, rough hawksbit, black knapweed and cowslip that were grown from seed over the summer were also planted out into the bee meadow.

Collecting wildflower seeds has also been a regular autumn task. Some of the seeds have been sown in trays and will be grown on and planted out on areas of the landfill where there is less plant diversity. We are also creating small packets of 'wildflower mixes' which we are hoping to sell at the centre and possibly at a few local markets. The fruits of hawthorn, blackthorn, spindle and various other shrubs have also been collected—preparing these seeds is more complicated as the fruits have to be removed and the seeds rinsed and ideally stored before sowing.



The regular volunteer groups have been busy doing all the maintenance jobs that keep the site ticking over. Keeping the paths cleared of brambles and nettles is a weekly task and they had a good clear out and tidy up of the polytunnel and created a new compost area. Our new barn owl box, kindly made by and donated to us by a local resident, was put up in the tree near the orchard and we hope that one of the barn owl chicks that fledged from the box at the Carymarsh reserve this year might decide it likes it!

A new water butt has been installed to collect rainwater from the strawbale roof, rakes have been repaired and billhooks have been sharpened ready for the winter hedge laying and coppicing. Dave from the Roots and Boots group very kindly donated us some old bird boxes from his garden and we have been repairing and painting them ready to put up in the early spring.



A shelter was constructed in the woodland copse at the north east corner of Carymoor and has been used as a space for some woodland craft courses.

Kroo Bay, our replica shanty town, was in need of some repairs and our regular team of volunteers from able2achieve really enjoyed this challenge!



We were joined for 12 weeks over the late summer and autumn by trainees from the Hub, in Yeovil. They were interested in woodworking projects and made some coffee tables and stools for the Strawbale house and also a willow support for our narrow-leaved everlasting-peas in the wildflower collection.



Our gardening group have been as busy as always and spent a morning picking the apples from the trees in the orchard. The apples were bagged up and taken to The Newt estate near Bruton where they have the facilities to press and bottle the apple juice. We are going to produce a joint Carymoor/Newt label for the juice and it will then be sold at the Centre and elsewhere. The gardeners have also been helping to look after the vegetable plot, wildflower and sensory garden. The kale looked as if it had succumbed to the hundreds of caterpillars that emerged on their leaves but it has made a remarkable recovery! The kale and leeks are there for people to use so please help yourselves. We have ordered some new seeds and sourced some new plants for the wildflower collection as there seemed to be quite a few 'empty' tyres this summer. The group have also been helping to collect and sort wildflower seeds from the reserve.

Education team update

The team continues to be well supported by our education volunteers and have been helping to supervise the children here on school visits, mini-explorers groups, or with the various craft courses that have been held at Carymoor. Some of the volunteers also help with preparing the materials for the activities. Val (opposite) has been busy cutting out badger masks for school groups and repairing and washing the tunics worn by the children on their History Days.



Funding from the Bernard Sunley Foundation and Clark Foundation has enabled us to convert our storage building into a new classroom space. New windows, doors and floor have been installed and it has been turned into a really beautiful space which will be used for craft and wellbeing courses.

It has been named the JP Studio, after Julia Percy, a member of staff at Carymoor for many years who continues to help out as a volunteer.

Over the autumn we have been running a series of rural craft courses funded by the Petroc Community Fund. The courses ran over 4 days and the students learnt how to make bird baths, pinch pots and spoons from clay, learnt about the history of willow growing in Somerset and used willow to make baskets and plant supports. They also spent a day at the outdoor workshop in the woodland making wooden rakes. These courses are aimed at people who are looking to return to employment.



Wildlife Recording

We have now made over 285 observations and identified and mapped 198 species on our nature reserve through the iNaturalist project that we have set up and this has contributed greatly to our wildlife records especially for invertebrates and fungi.



We are really keen for more people to record the wildlife they see whilst visiting or volunteering at Carymoor. The (free) iNaturalist App can be downloaded into a smartphone of you can access it via their website.

iNaturalist is a network of naturalists ranging from experts to beginners built on the concept of mapping and sharing observations. Once you have registered with the site, you can upload your wildlife photos, along with the location and what you think the species is. You can also upload historical wildlife photos if you know the date and location of the photo. As well as making and keeping your own records you can add them to various projects and we

have set up the Carymoor project here: [Carymoor Environmental Trust · iNaturalist](#)

You don't need to be a good naturalist to be able to contribute to this project and similarly it isn't a replacement for formal surveys. If you aren't sure of the species, iNaturalist will list suggestions based on your photo and as the photo will be shared between other users, it can be verified by them. Your observations are graded from 'Casual' to 'Research' Grade depending on how many other people have made similar observations. If you can't identify the species, you can record the genus, family, class or order etc and hopefully someone within the network of naturalists will be able to identify the species.

Biodiversity Board

Our biodiversity art and wellbeing board is coming along well. We still have about a quarter of the board left to fill so please help yourself to a square of paper in the strawbale house and use it to create a picture or write a few words that represent the benefits of being involved at Carymoor. There are glue dots that you can use to attach your square to the board. When it's finished it will be hung on the wall in the main centre.

This project is based on the style of the work of British painter Kurt Jackson whose art reflects a concern with natural history, ecology and environmental issues.



[Kurt Jackson: Biodiversity \(2021\) – Kurt Jackson Editions](#)

Wildlife News

Wasp spiders

These amazing beasts were found frequently in the long grass of the meadows this autumn. They have been found in the south of the UK for the past 10 years and are spreading northwards but they are originally from the Mediterranean. The distinctive yellow and black stripes are only found on the females—the males are predominately brown and are much smaller. The web of this spider is found near to the ground where it mainly catches and feeds on grasshoppers and crickets but also occasionally beetles and large flies. The web also has a distinctive zig-zag shape within it and this is thought to reflect UV light and help attract insects.



Redwing

This bird was captured on a trail camera set up at Carymoor by Joe Knights. Redwings breed in Iceland, Scandinavia and the Faroes and will often be seen in flocks along with fieldfares feeding on the berries in the hedges during the winter. However, this redwing was photographed in June! There were apparently only two other records of redwing in June in the UK—Bempton Cliffs on East Yorkshire Head and the Orkney Isles!

Foxes

It's always an amazing experience to see a fox and even more amazing to be able to capture such a lovely photograph of one as Carole Britton did recently. We're not sure how many foxes live at Carymoor—there's possibly one den on the reserve as cubs have been seen.

Foxes are omnivores and will feed on almost anything but will mostly eat rabbits, field voles, worms, beetles and fruit, and their scat is often found on the footpaths and around the Centre.



Photo by Carole Britton



Shaggy Parasol

This was seen in the woodland edge near Ron's Pond and it is one of the fungi that often grows in rings. The rings are formed as a result of the underground mycelium growing out from a single point, in a circular motion searching for nutrients. Over time the fruiting bodies above the ground form in ever widening circles.

Unsurprisingly, these circles have been the focus of many myths ranging from the belief that these fairy rings are where fairies, pixies or elves come to dance, to them being the portal between the fairy world and the human world!

Bumblebee Monitoring by John Butler

Once each month from March to October you might spot me walking around the Carymoor site and out into the landfill armed with a clipboard, net and small plastic pot. Bumblebees are my target species. I have been monitoring bumblebees at Carymoor since 13th August 2014 when I first walked a transect route set up following the guidelines in the BeeWalk scheme run by Bumblebee Conservation Trust. In short, BeeWalk asks for volunteers to walk the same walk each month but only in good weather, during the bumblebee season, and to record details of all bumblebees seen. Ideally this means identifying them to species and caste (i.e. queen, worker or male) and if seen on a flower, also identifying the flower species.

Everyone is aware that bumblebees are seasonal. However regular monitoring of their populations can reveal variation in abundance from year to year, and help identify long term trends in abundance. My records from Carymoor feed into the national recording scheme to help inform the debate about insect declines.



Photo by Carole Britton

At Carymoor, the peak recording months are usually either June or July, with almost all activity having tailed off by mid September. For example, on my Carymoor September transect this year I recorded just one bumblebee, a common carder which is a species noted for late season activity. This year bumblebee numbers have been down on recent years and well behind the large numbers recorded on my Carymoor transect in 2019. Remember though the weather conditions in 2022 with little rainfall and unusual heat during Spring and Summer, both factors which are likely to have a negative impact on bumble numbers.

No prior expertise is required to begin bumblebee recording as there are just a few common species, the identification of which can be mastered with only a little effort. If any Carymoor volunteers would like to try their hand at bumblebee recording at Carymoor or elsewhere, then do get in touch as I can provide support and assistance to get you started.

Butterfly Report - October 2022 - by Julian Rawlins

Which golfer was it who said 'the more I practice, the luckier I get?' Well so it is with butterflies—the more time I spend looking for them, the more interesting specimens I find and this year something special turns up at Carymoor Environmental Centre.

This year I noted in my diary on 20th June that I had walked my transects and counted 234 butterflies; I had seen a Comma butterfly caught by a spider; and I had seen an 'interesting Brown Argus' - it was an exquisite little butterfly in mint condition, sitting on a blade of grass enjoying the late afternoon sunshine and I was lucky enough to get just one photograph before it flew off. Later, when I examined the photograph, I found, firstly that it was not quite as sharp as I had originally thought and, secondly, that it was indeed interesting—the orange sub-marginal wing markings were not typical of a Brown Argus and it lacked the black spots on the forewings.

After spending considerable time looking at my books and other images of Brown Arguses I began to believe that my Brown argus could possibly be a female Silver-studded Blue. I sent the photograph to the Somerset County Butterfly recorder, who not surprisingly and for very good reasons, not least of which is that the Silver-studded Blue is not listed in the latest Somerset butterfly Distribution Atlas, thought it was a Brown Argus but he kindly agreed to send it on to a friend at Exeter University who is studying for a PhD on the Silver-studded Blue. To our great delight, it was his opinion that this was indeed a Silver-studded Blue. This is normally a butterfly that lives in colonies, so a search was subsequently made to see whether any more could be found; and I reviewed my photograph collection to see whether I had missed any previously but without success in either case. There remains the possibility that the butterfly may have been bred in captivity and released, a practice which is frowned upon because it makes it more difficult to determine how wild populations are faring.



So how are they faring? At Carymoor they appear to be holding their own over the last few years;

Brown Hairstreak



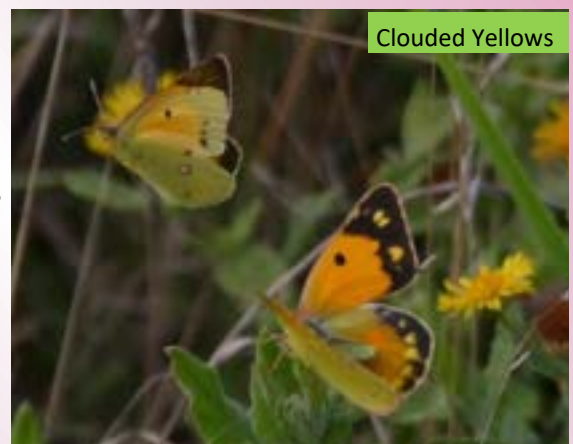
numbers fluctuate but are roughly stable and although average numbers per count may be declining these averages are inconclusive, as they are so dependent on when a count is made—a count in early April may produce 25 records while one in mid-July could produce 350. This year 27 species—one more than last year were recorded, 14 of which increased in number over last year or reappeared after an absence, and it was especially pleasing to have the Brown Hairstreak back on the list after an absence last year.

Once again, the Meadow Brown was the most abundant species, despite a small fall in numbers. Last year the Marbled white was in second place but the count this year was down 36% and second place was taken by the Ringlet which increased by 45%. It is worth noting that the Marbled White has a relatively short flight period, and a missed count in this period could well distort the numbers; the 36% fall is in the numbers counted, not necessarily in the population itself. The Gatekeeper was a short head behind in 3rd place with an increase of 80%.

Two Carymoor rarities, the Grizzled Skipper and the Dingy Skipper both fared well this year with increases of 61% and 19% respectively, although the latter, which occasionally has a second brood, did not do so this year.

There is little doubt that the hot weather coming in from the continent brought some butterflies with it. Large White numbers increased by 100% this year, some of which can almost certainly be attributed to immigrants from Europe, but surprisingly both Small and Green-veined White were slightly down.

However the principal beneficiary of the hot weather was the Clouded Yellow, an annual migrant which breeds in this country but cannot survive the winters; 25 were recorded, the highest number since 2014 and none were recorded last year. The Clouded Yellow always settle with its wings closed and it is a powerful flier so it is difficult to see the topside of the wings but I was lucky enough to see this male trying his luck with a reluctant female so was able to get a reasonable photograph of the topside of this most beautiful butterfly; for all these reasons this has to be my Butterfly of the Year.



Clouded Yellows

The Common Blue had another good year with an increase of 21% but still has some way to get back to its last peaks of 2018 and 2019. Likewise, the Holly Blue, whose population is ravaged from time to time by a small parasitic wasp, is coming out of a trough –7 were recorded after a singleton last year.



Small Tortoiseshell

On the debit side, last year's Butterfly of the Year, the Brimstone, fell back to more typical numbers with a drop of 25%. The Small Tortoiseshell has caused concern for several years now; its numbers at Carymoor have ranged from 973 in 2014 to 26 in 2018; since then it has come back to 110 last year but this year fell back to 73. Normally there are 2 broods each year but this year only 16 were recorded after the end of June; last year 78 were recorded in the same period. The reason for the failure of the 2nd brood may be that the larvae / pupae were baked by the hot weather.

The Orange Tip, that lovely harbinger of spring was down by 31%.

And finally, to complete the circle and come back to our starting point, the Brown Argus sadly continued a downward trend and had its worst year since 2016 with a fall of 54%.

In conclusion, 2022 has been an exciting and generally satisfactory year for the butterflies of Carymoor. It will be most interesting to see the numbers next year; very hot weather may have damaged larval food plants at critical times and experience shows that some species suffer sharp declines after severe heat and drought.

Current volunteer Opportunities

Conservation volunteers

- Mondays: 10am - 1pm
- Tuesdays: 10am - 4pm
- Last Saturday of the every month: 10am - 3pm
(Saturday 28th Jan, Saturday 25th Feb, Saturday 25th March)

Gardening Group

Monday: 10-1pm

Education 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' for our 'Wild Days Out are just some of the things you could help with.

Event Volunteers

We are hoping to attend some local fairs and events to promote volunteering and our work at Carymoor and also sell some of our produce and crafts. .

Two local events in particular we'd like to attend are the Castle Cary Market on Tuesday mornings and the Castle Cary Vintage Market on the first Saturday of every month.

If you are happy to man a stall and chat to the public about what we do or if you hear of any opportunities where you live to advertise our work, please let us know.

Crafts Volunteers

We are looking for people to make willow hoops in preparation for Karen's basket making courses this winter.

We'd also like to make and sell some of our willow crafts at local fairs—if you fancy learning how to make willow bird feeders and willow planters that we can sell we are hoping to run a few sessions for volunteers.



Photo by Carole Britton

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

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

Thank you !