



Carymoor Volunteer Newsletter

WINTER 2025 / 2026

It has been another busy season for the volunteers. However, it has been a very wet season this year! December was wet. January was exceptionally wet with three named storms (Ingrid, Goretti and Chandra) rolling in, one after another, bring heavy rain, strong winds and disruption. February felt equally as wet with many people deciding not to venture out onto the flooded roads. The rain and subsequent mud has certainly hampered the amount of work that we could achieve around the site. As we approach the end of the winter season, it is reassuring to note the lengthening days, warm temperatures and spring flowers and to dream of brighter and sunnier times ahead...

I hope you enjoy looking back at all that has been achieved over the past 3 months.

Chrissie

Thank you for all your time, help and support.

Carymoor could not exist without you!

GARDENING TEAM - December

The forecast at the start of December predicted rain (lots of it!). However, on the day we were blessed with a dry morning where the gardeners were able to make good progress in the sensory garden and the wildflower garden. Ros cut back dead stalks and weeded and Sue cleared a section of the sensory garden to plant some creeping comfrey.



December is a tough time for nature. Sadly the resident rabbits discovered the purple sprouting broccoli seedlings growing in the polytunnel and enjoyed a feast. Sarah was determined not to be defeated though. She constructed this elaborate defence in an attempt to limit their destruction.

Sarah and Sadie have also added new defences to protect the veg growing outside the polytunnel as well.



GARDENING TEAM - January

The sub-zero conditions at the start of January made gardening difficult. Many of the team waited for better conditions before returning in mid January.

Sadie and Sarah tended the veg plants in the polytunnel, reviving them after the severe frosts and protected them from hungry rabbits. Thankfully, most plants had survived.



Sue pruned the apple trees growing by the veg garden while Judith weeded the veg beds and cut back the borders. Viv tackled the buddleia bush.



6 PLACES TO LEAVE UNDISTURBED IN JANUARY



Leaf piles under shrubs



Standing dead stems



Brush pile



Unmowed grass clumps



Log pile



Messy corner



Ros continued her hard work tidying the tyre beds in the wild flower garden, mindful of keeping seed heads and stalks for over-wintering insects. This area is looking really good this year. Ros's efforts over the autumn and winter will make sowing and tending much easier once the Spring arrives.

GARDENING TEAM - February

At the start of February, the Gardening Team met for their annual planning meet to discuss their hopes and ideas for the year ahead.

First we discussed plans for the veg garden, deciding what to plant where. The hope is to develop a soft fruit bed, to grow pumpkins and squashes, beans and courgettes and to continue to develop the rhubarb and herb beds. These will be supported with companion plants including marigolds and nasturtiums.

Sarah hopes to be quite adventurous in the polytunnel and is eager to try some new planting including melon, aubergine and chillis. These will add to the different variety of produce already growing under cover.



Sadie will be managing the tyre avenue, to help support the Pollinator Project, aiming to create a colourful and insect-friendly link between the wildflower garden, the orchard and the Mump. She already has a number of seeds on their way under cover in the polytunnel.

The Sensory Garden has been mapped and over time we will plot the location of each new plant. We also discussed potential new pond plants but will wait to see how the new pond settles and establishes over the next few weeks.

Lots of manure has been collected and compost has been delivered. Ros is keen to top up each tyre bed with fresh compost before Spring. Nick has built a new compost bin for the gardeners to use close to the wildflower garden and polytunnels. Neil will be joining the gardening team over the next few weeks to endeavour to label as many species as possible. This will be an ongoing mission!



The snowdrops and daffodils are in bloom in the wildflower garden, adding some much needed cheer and optimism to combat the relentless rain that has been a signature of this winter, sadly. Spring is just around the corner...

IT'S THE LITTLE JOBS THAT COUNT!

At the start of December the Monday team did their annual forage around the site in search of foliage to use in Christmas wreaths. We scoured the Tree Trail then wandered down to Nightingale Woods looking for greenery, berries, cones and interesting leaves. We managed to fill three wheelbarrows. We look forward to seeing the seasonal creations later in the month.



Another valuable task that often got pushed to wet and stormy days was seed sorting. This is such an important job which supports the Pollinator Project. However, it is quite a fiddly and time consuming job. The DofE girls also took a turn at seed sorting to help out.



When the weather seems too inclement for working outdoors the team retreated to the woodworking area to make hurdles. These were installed in early January to cordon off the ditch by the Dauncey gate.

In January the permanent orienteering control markers that Nick had made last year were placed around Dauncey. The bramble was cleared from around each post to enable clear access. These control markers will be used by the Education Team throughout the year.



IT'S THE LITTLE JOBS THAT COUNT!

Fred and Nick inspected the archaeological sand pits in Dauncey which the Education team use during their school visits. They constructed three new robust lids from materials sourced from around the centre to protect these resources.



Nick carried out numerous repairs around the Centre, including adjusting doors and locks, replacing window panes and repairing notice boards.

A new gate was made and hung next to the Story Circle in Dauncey and repairs were made to the shed in Nightingale Woods.



By February the team had moved to ditch clearing, working hard to remove the intruding brambles and ensure that the water could flow freely. We certainly have had enough water this winter!



The apple trees in the orchard were pruned. The aim was to remove diseased or damaged branches, any branches that were rubbing and to create more space and 'air' in the heart of each tree.



TIDYING THE CENTRE

In January, Carymoor was shortlisted for the Environmental and Sustainability award for the Somerset Business Awards. The team had 2 weeks in which to prepare the Centre and make the site look as neat and as welcoming as possible, hoping to impress the judges. The judges from Agratas, (an international battery manufacturer who have a large factory near the M5 near Bridgwater) spent a morning talking to staff as well as to Adrian who was kind enough to come in to share his experiences.



Neil installed 3 new hurdles which he and many of the volunteers had made. These look fantastic and add a rustic charm to the site.



Angela, Di and Harriet pollarded and tidied the willows to help tidy up the area behind the Centre.



The DofE group also joined in and did lots of weeding and sweeping around the Centre.

TIDYING THE CENTRE

Fred and Jake repaired the gate and fence next to the reed bed.



Max and Angela weeded around the buildings



The DofE girls also spent a morning weeding, sweeping, scraping and tidying around the Centre. They did a great job!

Di, Adrian, Harriet and Max cleared the brambles and blackthorn behind the polytunnels. This has created a lot more light and space, and should, hopefully, keep the brambles a bay. Neil is hoping to lay some of the blackthorn to create a border behind the tyres.



SENSORY GARDEN POND

Work continued on the sensory garden pond throughout December. The pond was drained more than once to enable digging to continue. The team managed to increase the depth of the pond significantly as well as establishing different depth shelves for plants and wildlife to enjoy.

Harriet had a rather close encounter with the very slippery clay!



A French drain was dug to help direct rainwater away from the pond and (hopefully) into the car park. We experimented with an off-cut of liner to assess sizes and thickness required. This section was too small, sadly, but it helped us to gauge what was needed.



January was exceptionally wet with three named storms rolling in, one after another. The pond filled up, even without having a liner!



SENSORY GARDEN POND

By February, with the spawning season rapidly approaching, we finally managed to line and fill the pond. Neil and Graham manoeuvred the heavy liner into the car park, ready to install.

The first step

VOLUNTEER CHRISTMAS LUNCHEAS

On December 15th and 16th we collected together to celebrate the end of the year and thank our amazing volunteers for their hard work and commitment throughout 2025. Craig Hall was decorated in nature's seasonal bounty with Christmas lights and greenery adorning the tables and around the room.



The volunteers enjoyed mulled Carymoor apple juice that they had made last autumn from the bumper orchard harvest. We hope the wassail in February will help boost the harvest for this year.



A special thank you to Jon Pring for the delicious cheese selection, crackers and chocolates.

Thank you to Barb and Di for the cheesecake and chocolate cake.

All of these were greatly enjoyed by everyone

WOODWORK

John's bench in 'Cogitation Corner' was unveiled in December. This beautifully crafted elm has been lovingly shaped and decorated by John as a seating / thoughtful area for everyone to enjoy.



GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT (scything)

Much of December and early January was spent scything and raking the dragon. This annual grassland management task took up a number of weeks but, with the ever growing hay stack in the middle of the dragon, always earns a sense of achievement by the end.

Nate continued to maintain the lawns around the Centre using his incredibly efficient push mower. A number of visitors have commented on how neat and tidy the Centre grounds are looking as a result.



HEDGELAYING

Each year Neil selects a new section of hedge to lay on the capped area of the nature reserve.

Initially the volunteers cleared the brambles and undergrowth to expose the trees and prepare the area for Neil's hedgelaying course with Step up Somerset. Two of our regular volunteers, Sarah and Harriet, joined Neil on this course to hone their skills.

Properly laid hedges provide so many benefits, from capturing air pollution, reducing wind speeds, creating stock proof barriers and reducing flooding as well as providing such a valuable habitat for our wildlife, including potentially dormice, bumblebees etc.



COPPICING & POLLARDING

Coppicing and pollarding is an ongoing job at Carymoor. This winter the DofE groups and A2A group have been coppicing and pollarding in Dauncey, close to the Story Circle. Much of this willow has been harvested for weaving.



The hedges circling the edge of Dauncey have also been cut to create a thicker and more varied habitat for birds. Data from our bird surveys show that Dauncey is an important habitat for our birds.

Both the Monday and Tuesday teams worked on this task, as well as the DofE boys. Neil also employed the chainsaw to tackle the larger willows, while the volunteers used the new pruning saws to tackle the larger cuts. Once felled, the material was added to a dead hedge to create a boundary as well as a habitat for wildlife.



EDUCATION PREP TEAM

Over the winter months lots of different teams have been involved in seed sorting from the multitude of seed heads collected across the site.

In January the DofE groups made seed bombs using a varied seed mix.

These were then packaged by the DofE girls as well as by Alison and Jane. Jane was kind enough to do many of these at home!



EDUCATION PREP TEAM 2026

Our wonderful education prep volunteers Alison, Jane and Gillian have been tackling a wide range of 'behind the scenes' jobs, keeping our education team topped up with all they need to run engaging visits for schools and families this term.

As usual it's been an eclectic mix of tasks: kneading dozens of dough balls; winding up over 100 kite strings; making beaks, wings and tails for paper parrots; cutting hundreds of willow weavers; whittling a multitude of marshmallow roasting sticks; shaping willow into plate hoops and wassail crowns, plus cleaning, laminating and mending resources too! We are always so grateful for all the time, energy and care that these three give us each week, even offering to take resources home to work on in between times. Huge thanks as always!

One project that Gillian and Jane have enjoyed this term has been re-vamping our rather sad looking giant seed model, that we use to bring germination to life with younger groups visiting for our Plant Power and Jack and the Beanstalk days. After lots of discussion about how best to do this and what materials would work best, they came up with a plan, utilizing Gillian's sewing machine expertise and a variety of scrap materials. The finished seed and seedling look fantastic and we can't wait to put it in to action many times over the coming weeks and months - thanks very much ladies!



WILDLIFE IN FOCUS - December

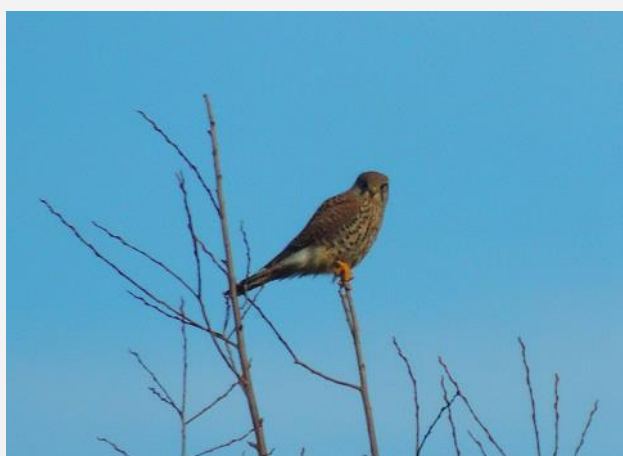
In early December Adrian ventured out around the site to see what wildlife he could capture on his camera.

'Sweetly singing their heart out, close to the round house, somewhere hidden within the hedge, a song thrush was my desired target for my camera and lens. After an hour of stalking and standing still, it was Adrian 0 song thrush 1. The song thrush remained elusive. However her song could be heard far and wide. All was not lost, as I managed to capture a photo of a beautiful kestrel, upon an ideal lookout perch, where she could scan the surrounding area for her next meal. Shortly afterwards, I watched her hovering and taking a dive behind the bushes.

Sadly, kestrels declined by 37% between 1995 - 2023, now featuring on the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

Our vegetable patch robin followed me up and down the hedge as I searched for the song thrush. Here he is posing for a Christmas special.'

Adrian



WILDLIFE IN FOCUS - January

Elsa the buff-tailed bumblebee. This photo of a bumblebee was taken 14th January 2026, at approximately 11.20am. Average air temperature 1 degrees Celsius, with frost still present in the shade, thawing in the sun. Blue skies, little to no breeze.

Knowing the lifecycle of queen bumblebees, they should be in hibernation between October to March at least making this bumble special indeed, so I have called her Elsa.

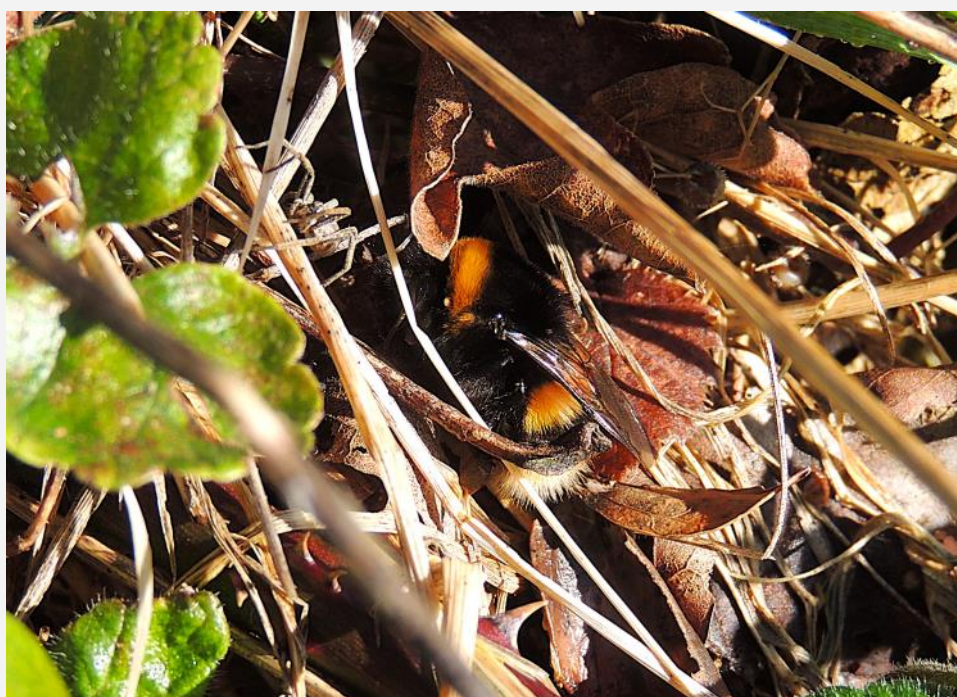
I also know that the bumblebee has evolved and adapted to colder climates, therefore cold days are not a problem for her. However, why is Elsa out and about in January? Following some research I can come up with a part answer as naturalists and scientists need more studies to fully understand why. Some possibilities are; climate change, longer flowering season, presence of flowering non-native plants etc.

Queen Elsa is a Buff-tailed bumblebee, the largest bumble in the UK. She is a master of the cold conditions. She was in good condition, alert and strong in flight.

Though the normal lifecycle of a bumblebee is to hibernate in winter, since the 1990's there have been reports of some sightings and activities, especially with the buff-tail. It appears some are taking on an adaption change in behaviour.

It also has been reported that some newly mated queens have not followed the normal lifecycle during winter at all, starting a new nest and rearing young. With any success? Unknown.

Therefore in Winter, if winds are below 20mph and the rain is little more than a drizzle, you may well see a buff-tail bumblebee like Elsa, taking advantage of the sun's rays or in search of some food from any flowers present.



Adrian

WILDLIFE IN FOCUS—January continued...

The following week (January 26th), I was thinking about Elsa, the queen buff-tailed bumblebee, who decided to pop out of hibernation, possibly to take advantage of the sun's rays for the morning and to find some flowers for a feed. She would certainly need to replenish that valuable energy resource being used up, to keep warm and in flight.

I set out to see what was on offer for her within the Carymoor gardens. I was pleased to find daffodils, just out in flower (wild or standard varieties are best. The fancier, frillier and double bloomed daffs are hybrids, containing little to no nectar and pollen, which are useless to pollinators), winter aconites, hellebores, snowdrops, honeysuckle (winter and early spring flowering variety) and variegated periwinkle.



Adrian

WILDLIFE IN FOCUS - February

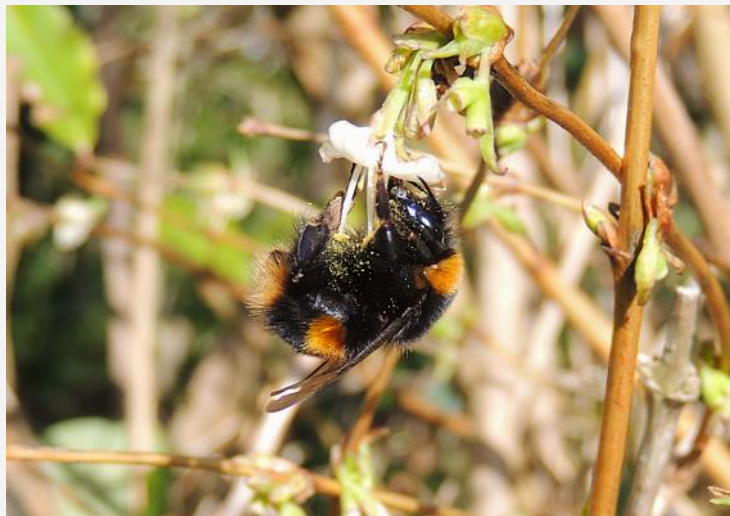
We Three Queens.

Whilst the Monday volunteers enjoyed the much welcomed sun on their backs, as they finished off working on the pond in the sensory garden, three buff-tail bumblebee queens were seen visiting the honeysuckle bush and the daffodils, feeding on the nectar and pollen.

The buff-tail is indeed, one of the first bumblebees to be seen flying around in February. They could also possibly be starting to look for a nest site now, in readiness to start laying their eggs.

I will be keeping an eye out for pollen baskets on their hind legs, as they start to take back the pollen and nectar to their nest for use and a little storage. This could be a possible sign that the nest has become live and active with hungry larvae. The cycle begins for another year.

I am very pleased with these 2 photos, you can see clearly all the pollen on their underside and head. No wonder that they are such good, efficient pollinators, spreading all that pollen from flower to flower, bush to bush.



Adrian

WILDLIFE IN FOCUS - February

The Brimstones at Carymoor

The sun shone upon Carymoor on Tuesday 24th February, with temperatures reaching the lower teens within the sunny hotspots. Though there are still just over 3 weeks to go, it certainly felt like spring was in the air. Some butterflies also felt the same, to join the spring within the air, following a winter of hibernation.

For the first time this year, I spotted 3 male Brimstone butterflies that had taken to the wing to enjoy the beautiful day, flying amongst the hedgerows and bathing in the sunshine.

The males have a green yellow underwing with a yellow upper-wing. The females are much paler in colour and cream green. When settled with their wings closed, the shape, colour and vein structure is a great disguise, camouflage, looking just like a leaf.

Adrian



EVENTS AND COURSES

CASTLE CARY MARKET—7th March

Rupert, Katie and a number of our volunteers will be at Castle Cary Vintage Market this Saturday 7th march from 10-3pm. We are hosting the café as well as having a stall with items for sale and promoting our courses and volunteering. Thank you to everyone who has offered to help and to bake cakes. We don't know how busy we will be but hopefully it's a good opportunity to get ourselves seen in the town and if we have lots of cake leftover it won't go to waste!

FUNDED COURSES

As you may be aware Neil is running two Wildflower ID courses later this year through Step up Somerset. This means the course is funded for anyone on a low income, or with a health and wellbeing need. The first course is on Friday 24th April and is an Introduction to Wildflower ID. The second course takes place on Friday 22nd May.

Beth is also running a lovely 5 week Wild Tots course for parents (or grandparents) to gain confidence in playing and learning outside. There will be lots of fun activities and plenty to keep both the adults and children entertained. The course starts on Weds 22nd April and can be booked at the link below.

Places can be booked via the Step up Somerset website. [Find courses - Somerset Employment and Skills](#)

30th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Unfortunately the Wassail we planned kept being cancelled due to the weather but our visit from Sarah Dyke MP went well and she kindly gave us a shout out on her social media channels. The next event is likely to be our 500th Schools Against Waste visit. We are waiting to see which school this will be and hopefully we can do some promotion with them to celebrate the success of this programme and the numbers of children reached with this brilliant initiative.

Don't forget to SAVE THE DATE - Saturday 8th August for our Open Day.

Katie

For Sale

WISPER

905 Torque e-bike



- * Recently serviced
- * 80 miles on a charge (charger included)
- * 2500 miles from new

£430 o.n.o.

Contact Peter

on **01749 838843** or sear.p@btinternet.com

Peter (Tuesday group volunteer) cycles to Carymoor each week. He is selling his electric bike.

Please see advert above.