



Volunteers get to work



Isn't it great to feel that we really can make a difference. Just look at the hedge along Hospital Lane. As soon as everyone saw it greening up, I believe that it inspired us all to roll up our sleeves and do some more volunteering.

The work to coppice two areas on the hill will improve the paths in both areas, as they are usually a sea of mud this time of year. Hopefully by the time you receive this news letter we may have had some rain. It is not due to our hard work that the paths are dry and cracking, just the lack of water. I am sure nature will eventu-

ally give us a downpour, to prove that our efforts to reduce the usual mud bath have not been in vain.

Before it felt that we had even started the clearance work it was time to respect the early nesting birds and go off and find some other good deed to do.

The other on going project is to record the wildlife on the hill and finding a starting point has not been easy. How, Where, What and When? A small group of us have learnt a lot in the process, firstly to have an up to date map would be a really good start.

This newsletter is packed with articles concerning all our on going projects. There is one thing I really must correct. I have made a special effort to thank and name everyone that turns up to the Volunteer days in an email after the event. What I have not done is to say,

“THANK YOU”

to all those volunteers that have quietly gone out on the hill possibly every day, picking up litter and scooping poop. These are the nameless volunteers we really must give the praise too.

I hope you all enjoyed the wonderful display of Blue Bells, a lovely reward for all our hard work.

Inside this issue



Learning on the job.
Coppice work starts on “The Drive”.
Find out what happened next.

Find out how to help design a new map for the Hill



Planning for the future.
A woodland to be proud of.



Spring on the Hill

Future funding

Your news and views.

Worked planned by The Woodland Trust

Work on the hill

Those of us that enjoy the hill today may not be aware that only a few decades ago, the hill was mostly pasture land with grazing cattle. On the lower slopes facing hospital lane, potatoes once grew. It was thanks to The Woodland Trust that we have a wood as we know it today.

Time marches on and nature has been mainly allowed to create its own wonderful mix of different habitats on the hill. Sadly some plants are very invasive and do need human intervention to control them.

Woods have been managed by man for thousands of years, with skills such as hedge laying and coppice work. We need to find a balance between maintaining what we have, controlling the invasive plants and continue to develop the hill as a natural wood.



RAGWORT

Looks lovely, but is not only poisonous to grazing animals, but very invasive. It needs to be removed before it sets seed.



BRACKEN

Very dense invasive plant. Blocks light from lower growing plants. Spores from the plant can be harmful.



BRAMBLE

Very fast growing and creates a dense mass, killing all plants growing underneath it. Provides far fewer insects and wildlife benefits than the habitat that it takes over.

One of the tireless labours on the hill over the summer months is to try to keep certain plants under control. There are a number of species in the plant world that are so vigorous that they will take over and swamp everything else out if left to their own devices, and unfortunately we have several already established on the Hill: bracken, bramble and ragwort. Now the first two are bad but they only spread slowly and by regular intervention we can keep on top of them (wearing thick gloves for the bramble of course!). Ragwort is completely different as it has airborne seeds, tens of thousands from each plant which can travel miles. The implication of this is that if you leave one plant to go to seed you will have a huge problem the following year, or as the old country saying goes: One year seeding 7 years of weeding

Some people like to see a sea of the delicate yellow flowers in late June, and they do provide food for the caterpillar of the cinnabar moth, so the plant does have a place in nature. However ragwort has another little secret only revealed when eaten - it is highly toxic, especially to horses. Even a small amount eaten fresh or in a bale of hay can cause serious life-threatening illness. That is why the 1959 Noxious Weed Act was passed to force landowners to control ragwort on their land. This is why I would encourage everyone to pull up the ragwort where you find it and why the contractors will be out in the summer to remove it from Allington Hill.

Jon Burgess. The Woodland Trust

STAMP! it out

No need to go to the gym to build up those leg muscles. Go up on the hill and have a good stamp on the bracken. Target areas along the path edge, ideally before the stems get to tough and the leaf has fully opened. Kick the stem at the base. Hit it right and you will hear this little snapping sound. Job done. Please keep your stamping under control, as small mammals and even ground nesting birds may be in the area. If we control the outer growth it will help stop it spreading. As for bramble, keep snipping it back until autumn, when clearance work can begin.

DOWN IN THE WOODS TODAY.....



It's no good Paul, you can't hide behind the tree. And.....



.....I'm not too sure if the boy's have quite got the hang of pole dancing!



"No, it wasn't this tree I wanted you to cut down. Quick push it back up again."



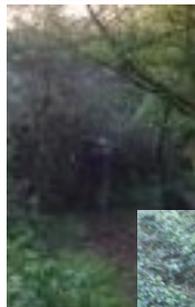
"If we let go quick enough, we might be able to hit him on the head. Who is he any way?"

This tree had canker and needed to be felled. Jon did a really good job of showing Paul and Jon how to fell the tree properly and safely. As you can see the tree had other ideas. Jon Burgess is still alive to tell the tale. The camera angle makes it look worse than it was and he was in no danger of being hit. It is a good example though, to high light that things don't always go to plan. Safety first, if in doubt, don't

.....and more action packed photos



Taylor says "Thank you" to our two young Hillbillie Volunteers.



A fallen tree blocking a path. Jon is in there somewhere. What a difference, half an hour later.



Why we needed to remove the sleeves from some of the trees. On this tree the bark had started to rot.



Opening up the pathway to allow more light in and help with drainage.



This ants nest was built around one of the young trees in Coopers Wood.

We did not disturb this nest and the parent birds returned shortly after we found it.



NATURE ON THE HILL

So, what did you see on the hill today?

These are just a few things that our nature watchers have seen on the hill in the last month. I have chosen just some of the sightings, so that hopefully you will start looking at the nature on the hill and not just the view. You are missing so much and it is all around you.

I hope that the bird identifier that was produced a few weeks ago has also helped.

See how many of these you can find.

All the photo's were taken on the hill in the last four weeks.



Lady's smock or Cuckoo flower.



Speckled wood



King Alfred's cake fungi. It's true I didn't make it up!



Blackthorn flower appears before the leaves March/April.



Dryad's saddle, (greek for Wood nymphs)



Red Champion

Hawthorn flowers May/ June after the leaves open.

What to look out for next

THE MAY BEETLE (Cockchafer)

This is an impressive bug. The Larvae live underground feeding on roots for several years. They turn into an impressive beetle and you will hear it coming before you see it. My first encounter with one, was when it flew in through the Bathroom window, while I was having a shower. The scene was like some horror movie, panic stricken by the noise and it's size, the forth coming screams deserved an Oscar.



So I have great respect for these beetles. If you manage to trap one under a glass (as I did eventually) they are worth having a look at. They appear on warm evenings in late April and May.

ADDERS



They are very shy and although they have been seen on the hill, you will be lucky to spot one. There are also Grass snakes in the area as well as slow worms, which would be great food for our birds of prey.

FOX GLOVES

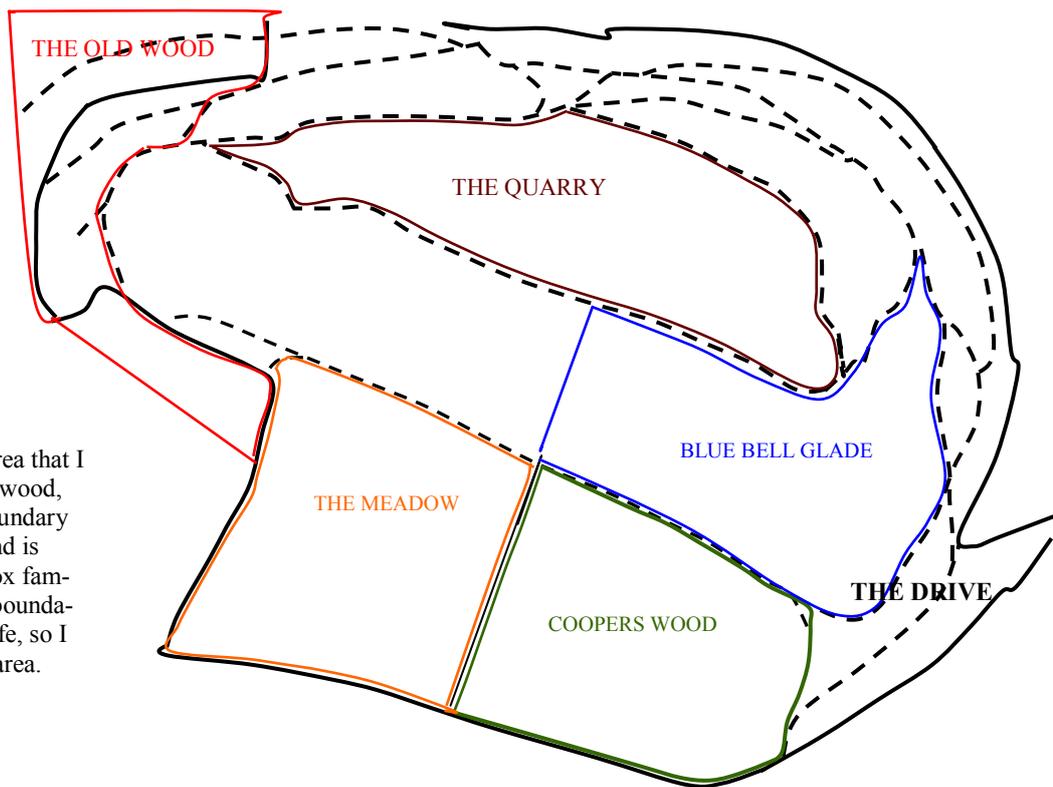
The Majestic flowers of the wood. Unmistakable stately flower spike 3 to 4 foot tall, attracting bees from far and wide.



WILD GARLIC

flowers. A pungent smell of garlic gives away the name of this plant. Young leaves are great chopped up in salad, to add a hint of garlic.

The Map



Please note. The Area that I have called the old wood, goes outside the boundary of Allington Hill and is owned by the Colfox family. Trees have no boundaries nor does wildlife, so I have included this area.

Yes, I know, the map is up side down! North should of course be pointing to the top of the page. Most people's first view of the hill is from Hospital Lane, looking up at the hill across the field and Coopers Wood. I just think it makes more sense looking at it this way round.

You can help produce the new map for the hill. Only two areas of the hill are known by name. "Coopers Wood", named after the previous land owner and "The Drive", which is the wide track running up the West side. This is used by the Woodland Trust to access the top of the hill.

The map above shows parts of the hill which have their own distinct character and could easily be named. The main pathways could also benefit by being named. If we produce a guided walk leaflet or information concerning the nature on the hill it would be vital.

We need your help. Some of you already have your own nicknames for different areas on the hill. Oak Tree cross, being one of them. Even trees have their own character, the Majestic tree, the Mother Tree, are several names I have heard.

If you wish to name a path or part of the woodland, please put your idea forward. We would hope to have the final touches put together to have the new map showing all the paths and points of interest ready for next Spring, which really is not that far away!

Woodland Trust Work

The Woodland Trust schedule of work for this year, between these dates weather permitting.

19th– 30th May. Ragwort control. Cutting paths to 3m width on the Hill and Coopers Wood and Field.

20th– 31st July. Partial mow of grass on top of hill, ragwort control. Cutting of paths as before.

26th-30th Sept. Cutting of paths as above.

Work on hedge no longer required due to hedge laying in the spring.

Funding

All the Hillbillies have come up with some wonderful ideas to help promote and protect the Hill. Fund raising can often be hard work and take up a lot of time in organising events. So we will do it the easy way. At the moment we have three different ways to help projects on the Hill.

Firstly, we have applied to Waitrose for funding. I am sure you have all seen the green counter collection at the front of their store. It will be a waiting game, as I'm sure there are many good causes in front of us in the queue.

Secondly, we can apply for funding from the Parish Council. They would obviously like to sponsor a certain project. Money towards an information board seems the most popular idea.

Thirdly, the Woodland Trust have a scheme where committed volunteers can become an official volunteer for the Woodland Trust. You are able to have reimbursed small amounts for expenses. Due to some costs incurred in producing posters and printing some News letters, (people without computers should not be left out) I have decided to go down this route. Jon Burgess kindly backed this idea and at the time of going to print, Jon and myself are waiting to be officially adopted.

If you have any other ideas to receive funding, please let us know.

Tools of the trade

We need tools. Do you know of anyone that has given up gardening, down sized, or are now too old to use all those valuable tools locked away in the shed?

Any type of saw.

Mattocks

Scythe

Secateurs

Loppers

Other unusual items that someone might have up in the attic, such as a butterfly net, grabbers, (to pick up litter etc).

Please donate any of these items as they can be put to very good use.

Pixie George

I think we all ought to thank Pixie George for sprinkling the pixie dust on all the Bluebells this year. Such a fantastic show. A short rest now before they start harvesting the Elderflower. He likes a little tippie of Elderflower wine does our George.

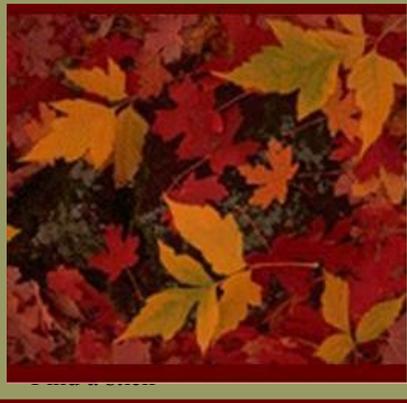
FLY TIPPING

Not a problem as yet. But with the tip closed on a Sunday, it is going to be tempting for people to dump their garden waste, in the field, on the verge or even on the hill. Please report any fly tipping to Environmental health, The Woodland Trust or email allingtonhill@gmail.com

CHILDREN AT PLAY

So many people have said it is such a shame that they do not see children at play anymore in the woods.

There was a scheme last year in Devon called "Dad and me", which was aimed at fathers bringing their children to the woods and learn to build a den, make a bow and arrow, or a kite, track through the woods, pick berries etc and get lovely and muddy. Mum could go off and do some serious window shopping with a girlie friend, and everyone was happy. It was all supervised, but as all children had to bring their Dad or Grandad, parents concerns were overcome. I think it is a great idea. Can we do it? The fathers said it was great to have some quality time with their kids. Beats going to the supermarket any day.



HILLBILLIES CONTACT DETAILS

To receive a newsletter
Send an email to
allingtonhill@gmail.com

Mobile
07789705345

Facebook
Allington Hillbillies

Your News and Views

COMMENTS FROM THE HILL

“ Your doing a grand job keep up the good work”

“ We have noticed that all the rubbish has gone and hardly any dog poo on the paths. It looks so much better”.

“ Can you tell me what the flowers are”. (great that people are starting to look around them and not just at the view)

“ My husband has sponsored a 1/4 of an acre of the Hill through the Woodland Trust”. Did you know that you could do that?

“ What are these black fly’s called”. Not an easy one to answer. Try typing, “black fly” into Goggle! After some research ,I found that they are called St Marks fly. St Marks day is on the 25th of April and this is around the time that the flies first appear. Only the male fly hangs his back legs down when in flight.

Special volunteer projects

It seems that you are all beginning to find your feet and start up your own little projects. The first of which you may be able to get involved in.

We have one Hillbillie who is digging into the archives and finding out about the history of the hill. So if you have any special memories, or photographs, old or new then please let us know. I can pass your details on and our avid historian may even come and interview you. You may know someone who has lived near the hill all their life, it would be lovely if you could encourage them to join in.

We also have one Hillbillie who has gone underground (not literally). It’s top secret and they spend most of their time in hiding. Once the job is done hopefully we can share this top secret mission with you.

Dates for your Diary

Spring Watch BBC 2

Monday 30th May

to

Thursday 16th June

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Special Event

Including guided walks on the
hill

Sat and Sun June 11th and 12th

Details to follow

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Spring, special edition

Newsletter, coming next month

#

WANTED

Any tools in good condition that would be suitable for clearance work, including mat-tocks and scythes, saws, secateurs etc.

Please contact allingtonhill@gmail.com

Anyone who has a First Aid certificate or would like to go on a First Aid course.

Please contact me at

allingtonhill@gmail.com

Do you feel that you are not fit enough to volunteer? It would be lovely to have a few people as overseers on volunteer days. Sometimes we are too busy hacking away at the bushes to realise that someone may be in danger, or people are walking by. All you need to do (we can provide a folding chair) is sit and watch, shout “timber”, or stop workers when people are passing by. The reward is plenty of fresh air, great company and you have done your bit to help out with the Hillbillies. We would give you guidance on the main health and safety issues and ask you to keep an eye on the tools.