

Colwall Orchard Group: Full end of year report for 2013-14

1. Introduction

Looking back, 2013-14 seems to have been an extremely busy year. We finished planting hedges and trees in the community orchard, put on some extra fund raising events and activities. We were contracted to provide training for another orchard project in Herefordshire and have also been contacted by lots of people for advice.

2. Conservation Work in the Community Orchard

As last year, most of our conservation work this winter has been targeted on delivering our commitments under the Higher Level Stewardship agreement for the Community Orchard. We planted the third (and longest) hedge alongside the plantation edge of the field and completed the planting in the orchard. We now have 243 trees in the orchard and 47 fruit trees in the hedgerows, as well as some fruit trees around the children's play area. Some of these trees have been sponsored by our supporters, mainly to commemorate their relatives, and we will be putting plaques on these trees once all the tree cages are finished. Trees are still available to sponsor whether in commemoration, to offset carbon, or for any other reason.



Tree cages on trees planted in 2012-13



Volunteers planting the last orchard tree



..and the last hedgerow tree.

3. Conservation in the village orchards

We have been so busy in the community orchard this year that we have had limited time to work in the traditional orchards around the village. We have done some management in the orchards, mainly mistletoe management, and formative pruning of new trees, but we hope to get back in to do more work soon.

Our observations suggest that the wet and windy weather over the winter had brought down trees in several of the orchards. It has even blown the tree cages off the new trees in some sites. We need to revisit the orchards to work out priorities for next winter.

Requests for help managing fruit trees in the village gardens continues unabated, so when we can spare the time we have been working in the village gardens, in return for a small donation to support our work.

4. Harvesting

We ranged far and wide this year to gather fruit, with significant collections from Coddington as well as Colwall. Most of the apples have been juiced, in 3 batches, at Pershore College. We have sold all of the juice from last year and so we are now selling the new season juice. It is also available at Colwall Coffee Lounge and Café H₂O at the Wyche Innovation Centre. Some of

the apples and various other fruit and vegetables from the allotments, went to make more chutneys and preserves. The chutneys and preserves sold well on our events with several people requesting preserves they had tried last year, especially the hedgerow jam. We also sold preserves at a garden party fundraiser, several Wyche and Colwall Horticultural Society meetings and on a stall at the Merry Tiller Play evening organised by the Malvern Hills Transition Food Alliance. There are many other potential outlets, such as Cradley Farmers' Market, the Wyche Innovation Centre Market, the Three Counties Show and other charity events, but we are limited by our volunteer availability for sales events.

Our other harvest is mistletoe, although this is really a by-product of our orchard management. We had a very successful Mistletoe Fair this year in a new location outside the Colwall Park Hotel (with many thanks to Iain Nesbitt and staff).



The Mistletoe Fair outside Colwall Park Hotel



Sustainably harvested mistletoe!

5. Fund raising events

We hold regular events throughout the year to raise our profile, engage people in orchard conservation and raise funds. Normally, we have six main orchard based events - the Blossom Picnic, Colwall Village Garden Open Day, Apple Day, Mistletoe Fair, Wassailing and a Ceilidh. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the Ceilidh due to low ticket sales, but the others all went ahead. The Open Day was well attended and introduced lots of new people to the Village Garden. There were not so many people at Apple Day this year due to poor weather but we still enjoyed ourselves, made lots of apple juice and found some more apple varieties in the village.



Bug hunting at the Blossom picnic



Apple bobbing (or not!)



Appleyard Dancers at Apple Day

We held the Wassailing in our own orchard to celebrate the new orchard and get it off to a good start in life. Again, numbers were low due to the weather and the mud, but the sight of our torchlit procession up Stone Drive and Old Church Road was fantastic.

An extra event in our calendar this year was the Jubilee Tree Planting. The Tree Council awarded us one of their 60 Jubilee Trees, in recognition of our collaboration with Bright Sparks and the School regarding their new orchard (more below). We chose a Black Mulberry and decided to plant it as the centre point of the Allotment plots at Colwall Village Garden. Bright Sparks and COG invited village organisations to join us for the morning, and we laid on lots of activities including a very popular story-telling tent with children's author Julia Jarman. We had a glorious day, culminating in a speech and planting ceremony by Lady Darnley, Lord Lieutenant of Herefordshire and a presentation to Lady Darnley by members of the Ataki tribe (a children's Celtic tribe with its headquarters on the Allotments).



Planting the Mulberry tree



Story telling with Julia Jarman



Wassailing at the new community orchard

We put on a range of other fund raising events to try to boost our funds after the poor season last year. We had a Cider Tasting event, jointly with MacMillan, at the beginning of the year and a fantastic Sweet Cider Time concert with readings from Serenata in September. We also laid on concerts with Kongero, a Swedish a cappella group, and Karen Tweed's new venture, the No.1 UK Ladies Accordion Orchestra.

We put a lot of effort into promoting these activities and events, issuing regular press releases to the Colwall Clock, West of the Hills, the Gazette and all the surrounding papers, placing items on various event websites and publicising events via e-circulation lists. Although we have maintained a high public profile, it is getting more and more difficult to draw in an audience in the current economic situation, so we will rein in some of these activities and try some new ideas next year. Our website appears to have been instrumental in supporting our funding bids and in attracting the attention of people making films on orchard topics.

6. Other happenings at Colwall Village Garden

Electricity finally reached the Village Garden in July and after that we put in place the final section of perimeter fencing required under our contract of sale.

The bee keepers had another difficult year, with 2 colonies lost due to failing queens. The one large healthy colony produced some honey, but then swarmed and the bees left in the hive were overcome by wasps (sadly, we attempted to stop this, but someone removed and emptied our wasp traps). In a last ditch effort to retain bees we collected a swarm but they failed to settle. So – we had a lot of bad luck and lost all our bees. We are hoping to buy two new colonies to start again this coming year and hope for better luck the third time round!

We had hoped to get the apple packing shed refurbished this year. We secured some funding from Natural England and Phase 1 approval from the Heritage Lottery Fund. However, we had too many other things to focus on to take this further this year, so securing Phase 2 funding will

be a priority for early in the new financial year, with the aim of completing the work within year.

The main bit of bad news from the year was the thefts from the shed. In the first incident, various items were removed in a wheel barrow whilst the shed was open. In the second incident, a week later, thieves broke off the cladding at the rear of the shed and stole further items including our generator. Sadly these are not covered by our insurance so we need to replace the stolen items out of our own funds.

7. Training and Advice

A key feature of this year has been the rise in requests for advice, visits and training, including

- Requests from Women's Institutes, Wildlife Groups etc. wanting talks or walks in the orchards (which we do for a small donation to COG)
- A request to use our orchard for singing to the trees on Earth Day
- Several researchers have come to find out about our work – with quite a focus this year on what motivates volunteers to get involved in conservation (Harry Bryer from Harper Adams, Dr Adam Bates of Birmingham University, Shelley Moreton of Sheffield Hallam, Maria Kennedy from Indiana University and Charlotte Spring, Bulmer Foundation)
- Visits to the community orchard by Schools - this year we have been visited by two classes and the gardening club from Colwall School, by Malvern Primary School and by Bright Sparks pre-school. We also have regular visits from Herefordshire Green Oasis
- We also helped Bright Sparks submit a successful grant application to the Tree Council and helped them plant a new orchard in the grounds of their prospective new site



Bright Sparks children choosing their trees, and planting them out

Singing to the trees for Earth Day

- We have been advising the AONB on their development of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Three Counties Traditional Orchard project. COG will be one of 3 'hubs' for if this project is successful and this should provide some income over the next 3 years.
- We were contracted by the Orchard Origins project to run a course of 10 training days on orchard management
- Contracts from other organisations to give advice on sites such as Putley Court, which has a range of trees including a large veteran pear and two huge 300 year old mulberries.
- We also had some training for ourselves. Two volunteers attending a bee keeping course at Trafford Hall, one an Outdoor Adventure course at Trafford Hall and two went on a 'Build a Tree Bog' course, so watch out for the new composting toilet which we should be constructing in April.
- And finally – the television... our previous piece for Countryfile was screened again at least twice this year, but the piece we filmed with the BBC Natural History Unit was not, because they failed to get the footage they needed of mistle thrushes. We had enquiries

from several programmes, including the One Show, but eventually only made one new piece for Countryfile, on birds in Worcestershire Orchards.



Training for the Orchard Origins project



Deb building a Tree bog



Tim with Helen Skelton, filming for Countryfile

8. Governance

We have lost a key member of the committee this year as our former treasurer, Kath Means, moved to Australia. She worked hard to get our finances under control and this work is now very ably continued by our new Treasurer, Peter Hughes.

We have lost other key volunteers for various reasons, making it difficult to sustain all the different committees we set up initially. In response, we have streamlined our Governance arrangements, allocating the responsibilities of each committee to a key Board member, who can call in support as required. The Board of Trustees met seven times this year, mainly covering funding of COG activities and progress against the main elements of the Business Plan.

This year we have 71 COG individual and 3 family members, and 46 supporters. We continue to communicate with members and volunteers via regular email circulation, with phone, text and postal contact for those without email. We have also maintained our website to promote and explain the work we are doing in Colwall's orchards and update people on our progress and we advertise tasks and events in the online calendar - see www.colwallorchardgroup.org.

9. Finance and funding

We borrowed about £60k for the purchase of Gas Orchard and this has left us with the challenge of finding funds to service this debt whilst maintaining our core activities and developing Colwall Village Garden. In addition, our grant income is mainly retrospective, so we have to ensure that we can afford to do the work required before we get the payment for it – so we have to take care to monitor our cash flow.

We have a range of other sources of income for the group including:

- applying for grants (Higher Level Stewardship claims for £8,840, Leader £5k for electricity installation, Trafford Hall 3 grants totalling £1,300, AONB £140 for the Tree Bog course)
- renting out the allotments
- running public events and concerts (see above)
- offering a tree pruning service for people with garden orchards
- repeating our tree ordering and supply scheme and our sponsor a tree scheme
- making apple juice, making and selling preserving and selling mistletoe
- running Colwall Christmas post

By ramping up these activities, we have generated a good income this year. Our outstanding debt at the end of the FY is still c.£50,500, but our bank balance is now in excess of £22,000. We are always looking for new fund raising ideas and this year, Board member Ron Ashman

came up trumps with the offer of a Sponsored Cycle Ride. Here is his tale:

Lands End to John O'Groat's- a journey that every keen walker and cyclist wants to make so why not combine it with raising funds for the Orchard Group I thought. Many kept saying it doesn't matter how long you take, but being 50 something I needed to set a challenge - sub 10 days was the objective. Luck was on my side for the ride, perfectly dry and sunny weather with a slight tailwind for all but the last 60 miles to John O'Groat's - that was into a thumping headwind and drizzle on day nine. I then turned around and cycled down to Glasgow to catch the train home! For those amongst us that are not cyclists you can't explain the pleasure of being on the road with thoughts only towards food and where you will put up your tent. What makes all journeys is the people you meet along the way and their generosity and the list is too long to recount each experience. A journey well worth doing that raised approximately £1,000 for the Orchard Group and a lifetime of memories for me.

Well done Ron, and if anyone has any other new fund raising ideas, please come and talk to us.



Ron gets on his bike



Preserves and juice sales



Renting out the allotments

10. Acknowledgements

Once again, we have had an excellent year and special thanks go to:

- The Board of Trustees and committee members who have shouldered so much responsibility
- Ron for completing his sponsored cycle ride
- The other volunteers who have given up so much of their time running events and working at Colwall Village Garden and in the Colwall Orchards
- All the people who have allowed us to harvest apples and mistletoe.
- Colwall Coffee Lounge and Café H₂O for taking our apple juice
- Colwall Park Hotel for allowing us to hold the mistletoe fair outside the library
- A range of local benefactors who have donated goods and services to help us on the way

Helen Stace

Colwall Orchard Group

(Colwall Orchard Trust Ltd, known as Colwall Orchard Group, is a company limited by guarantee (registration no. 07495461) and a registered charity (registration no. 1142573))

