

Autumn

Newsletter 2020



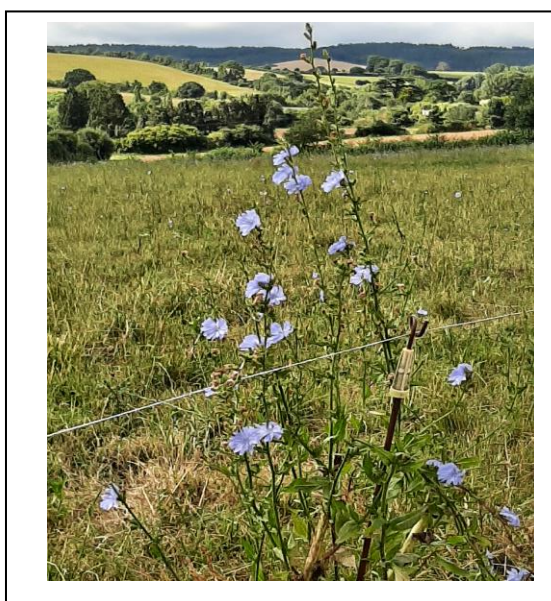
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Flower Power

For the last few months there has been a wonderful welcome to anyone entering through the EGC top gate; a whole meadow of wild chicory. The delicate blue flowers lifting the spirits of any flora-aficionado.



Seeing the Cherry Tree-by-the-pond in fruit was also heartening

Whilst we have all tried to work in harmony with nature's vagaries over the last few months; applauding the triumphs (French bean glut) and learning from the disappointments (wind-blown Runners), we have developed in many areas:

The electric fence has been a definite deterrent to Flopsy and friends,



The Reservoir has been re-lined



Loofahs are burgeoning in the small polytunnel

and construction has started on 'Jake's Annexe'. (See penultimate page)

Plans are also afoot for the wildlife pond ...



With an extra wide path in-between (Richard by Lana)



The potatoes have been harvested and two new beds have been built in the outer field (Jenny and Mike, tatty howking)

And now a necessary note of caution from Ian-The-Chair

Exeter Growers Co-Operative Coronavirus Pandemic

There does not seem to be any specific guidance for allotments in the new rules that come into force on the 14th Sept 2020. I think we can assume that, as before, working on allotments constitutes exercise so we can continue much as we have done previously.

1. Use your own gloves and tools whenever possible.
2. Sanitise tools after use.
3. If you bring food and drink to the field use your own crockery and cutlery and taken them home to wash.
4. Do not gather in groups of more than 6.
5. Always socially distance.
7. Only 2 people in the large polytunnel and 1 person in the small tunnel at the same time.
8. Remember to socially distance in the shed.
9. Wash your hands frequently.
10. There are no specific 'work days' – come along to the field at any time.
11. If you do not want to visit the field at the moment, don't worry, everyone will understand.
12. Do not leave belongings laying about.

If you think you may have coronavirus – stay at home. We don't want to be the centre of a coronavirus outbreak !

Thank you.

September 2020.

Over the summer, we've been lucky to meet-up with most of the 'familiar faces' at The Field, whilst welcoming a few (?) new members and were most grateful for additional help from Margaret's grand-daughter:

Volunteering At the Field

Over lockdown I have been in the process of completing my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and for the volunteering task I decided to help out at the Exeter Growers field.

My grandma and I had such an amazing time throughout the three months that I spent, going up to the field weekly for an hour each time. We gathered wind-fallen apples in the warm, late afternoon sun and picked sour black currants to make into current cordial.

One thing I remember that was particularly enjoyable was in the third week when I took a break from watering the broad beans and went down into the flower field at the bottom of the steep, grassy hill and I saw beautiful flowers of all colours. One of my favourite flowers is 'Love In The Mist' but before then I had thought that they could only be blue but in that flower field I discovered Love In The Mist in the most gorgeous pastel pink colour.

Completing this volunteering task gave me a chance to be out in nature a lot more and to spend more time with a few people I usually wouldn't see as often. It's the little things in the outside world that made my lockdown so much better.

Alice



Love-in-a-Mist (Nigella)

Work and Play by Ted Hughes

The swallow of summer, she toils all the summer,
A blue-dark knot of glittering voltage,
A whiplash swimmer, a fish of the air.
But the serpent of cars that crawls through the dust
In shimmering exhaust
Searching to slake
Its fever in ocean
Will play and be idle or else it will bust.

The swallow of summer, the barbed harpoon,
She flings from the furnace, a rainbow of purples,
Dips her glow in the pond and is perfect.
But the serpent of cars that collapsed on the beach
Disgorges its organs
A scamper of colours
Which roll like tomatoes
Nude as tomatoes
With sand in their creases
To cringe in the sparkle of rollers and screech.

The swallow of summer, the seamstress of summer,
She scissors the blue into shapes and she sews it,
She draws a long thread and she knots it at the corners.
But the holiday people
Are laid out like wounded
Flat as in ovens
Roasting and basting
With faces of torment as space burns them blue
Their heads are transistors
Their teeth grit on sand grains
Their lost kids are squalling
While man-eating flies
Jab electric shock needles but what can they do?

They can climb in their cars with raw bodies, raw faces
And start up the serpent
And headache it homeward
A car full of squabbles
And sobbing and stickiness
With sand in their crannies
Inhaling petroleum
That pours from the foxgloves
While the evening swallow
The swallow of summer, cartwheeling through crimson,
Touches the honey-slow river and turning
Returns to the hand stretched from under the eaves -
A boomerang of rejoicing shadow.

And now - a possible oxymoron - from Margaret

Kale made delicious!

I can't find the recipe with quantities and timings all laid out, and I don't remember them as I rarely measure or weigh for vegetable recipes! So I'm just offering spicy ideas and an approximate method which all can make their own!

Ingredients:

Coconut or Rapeseed oil
Red or Spanish onion, chopped.
Garlic, crushed.
Spices: Chilli, Root ginger, Turmeric
Bundle of Kale well chopped.
Half a red cabbage (or white will do!) very finely sliced.
Vegetable stock
Creamed coconut, grated

Method:

Heat the oil and gently sauté the onion, garlic and spices until softened.
Tip in the kale and cabbage and stir round for a minute or two before adding the stock.
Simmer until as soft as you like it and the stock is mostly absorbed.
Stir in the grated coconut.

Enjoy! I like it with our lovely red potatoes, either baked or mashed.

Many of you may have read ‘Wilding’, a story of farming with nature, rather than suppressing it. Jane not only read the book – she got to see wilding in action.

Knepp Farm in West Sussex is the site of a great rewilding, or wilding, project that began about 20 years ago, when the owners, Isabella Tree and Charlie Burrell, decided that their working livestock and arable farm was no longer viable. Isabella Tree’s book, “Wilding”, is a great read,



informative and entertaining but also gentle in its descriptions of nature taking back the land from its brutal industrial farming prison that drove it to near death. If you are thinking of visiting for the first time, I’d highly recommend reading the book first, as a one-off visit does not tell you the whole story of what’s going on over the seasons of the year on Knepp Farm. The book also interweaves the tragedy that is unfolding on earth, the destruction, through human activity and consumption, of our ecosystems and the loss of so much wildlife over the past centuries and particularly over the past 50 years. It is both a sad and inspiring book.

I went to visit in early August, and took one of the farm’s “Safari tours” - a guided walk at dusk through the fields that once grew wheat and other crops, but were now filled with overgrown hedges, wild thickets of bramble and young trees, and yellow ragwort everywhere you looked! (Isabella devotes a whole chapter to this much-maligned plant, titled “Living with the Yellow Peril” and describing the “moral outrage” that still apparently rages over this plant being allowed to flourish in its natural habitat.)

We took in the fields of ragwort, with wild Exmoor ponies and longhorn cattle happily grazing between the untouched yellow flowers. We saw 2 of the 6 wild pigs that roam the estate, plus several owls, bats, dragonflies, butterflies, moths and crickets.... The stars of the show were, of course the storks - introduced in 2016 from Poland, one of the females has successfully mated with a migratory male stork and they hatched chicks this spring. Several migratory males flew over our heads to show off in the high branches of a dead tree to exclamations of awe from our little gathering.



Ragwort and Storks – Knepps Farm, West Sussex

One September Day on the Field

In the freshness of early morning I looked out over the field, then turned to open the shed door: in flitted a wren, flew once round and straight out again - somehow a welcome! A bit later on he sang his bright and cheerful song as I weeded the herb garden...

Mid-morning conversation stopped as we first heard, then saw a buzzard high above the woods, soaring and mewing its high wild call, while alongside in contrast there was the deep croak of a raven, hidden in the trees. Another distinctive call was of a jay, acorn gatherer and planter of oak trees!

At about midday we were called to gather round our wildlife pond for some expert advice from Dave on plans for its future. We were so glad to hear how, despite a few problems, it is already host to thriving creatures including dragonfly larvae, newts and frogs - while above it pairs of Common Darter dragonflies prepared to deposit eggs! The pond doesn't need moving, just deepening and enlarging - a day's work for a number of diggers: it must be dug fast while present inhabitants are temporarily housed in a bin or tank. Later when I recounted this to volunteer Alice she was thrilled at the news of the aquatic creatures and thoroughly eager to join in the digging!

Setting off for home I felt another leap of joy at hearing and looking up to see "gathering swallows twitter in the skies" while in the hedge a flock of sparrows merrily chirped!

Margaret

OUR WILDLIFE POND

We have had our Wildlife Pond for just over three years. The term 'wildlife' is very appropriate as, other than the occasional topping up during dry spells and the very rare 'tidying', we have left the pond to look after itself. Despite that, it has survived and we have newts, frogs and many types of water insects.

However we were not happy – there was a general feeling that the pond was too small to be of much interest and of any real benefit to wildlife. Enter David Bartlett, aquatic ecologist and Friend of EGC!

Gathered around the pond (socially distanced) we listened to David give his professional opinion on the pond and possible development. First of all he said that any pond, no matter how small, was better than no pond and ours was doing well with, particularly, many dragonfly larvae – in fact as he was speaking there were two pairs of dragonflies laying eggs.

He was pleased we had newts as all species are now rare. It is true they eat the frogspawn and tadpoles in great numbers but there are plenty of frogs about, and few newts, so we can let nature take its course.

The main criterion of a good pond is its depth. Ideally it should be more than one metre deep. This depth of water helps stabilise the temperature – a shallow pond such as ours will heat up too much during hot weather, to the detriment of wildlife.

Ideally, the pond would have some shade and we should attempt to limit the volume of leaf litter entering, as this has a significant impact on nutrient levels and the growth of nuisance algae.

The meeting agreed that the area of the pond should be greatly increased to about 6 by 7 metres and at least 1 metre deep in part. This will mean digging a very large hole – whether it is possible to do this by hand or whether we will need a mechanical digger we will have to consider.

Work on the new pond will start in the autumn months of October or November, when the insect hatches and flowering plants have finished but before it gets too cold, as this would be problematic for holding the present inhabitants in containers until their new home is ready.

David has kindly offered to draw up plans for a new pond to give us an idea of the work involved and the cost of a liner. He has also offered to join us in the construction of the pond.



Thank you very much David.

Ian



Providing food and habitat encourages visiting wildlife

A Hawker (?) Dragonfly at the pond, a Bumble Bee on Phacelia and a Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly

By **Lana**



Dee has another suggestion for what to do with Kale ...

Kale Pesto

(A bit vague on the measurements but very tasty)

Take a few handfuls of any kale, stalks removed, chopped roughly then blanched for a few mins in boiling water ... drain and squeeze out water

Olive oil

Any nuts

Any herbs

Parmesan cheese

Pepper/ salt

Whizz up in a processor and adjust by adding more of any of the ingredients to taste.

Delicious stirred into pasta, on a baked potato, in a sandwich, in a potato salad in fact with pretty much anything!!!

Compost Care



Worms love living in our bins, breaking down the debris to make premium compost, but they need to be fed on a diet that will encourage them.

So PLEASE –

NO LEEK or ONION leaves or citrus peelings!

They just hates them!

We've had a fantastic crop of Tomatoes (artistic photo by Lana)





Sarah made good use of them (with other ingredients from The Field) in Ratatouille and Tomato sauce

We also had an over-abundance in the orchard, with an (estimated) harvest of 25 kg of Bramleys alone!



Luckily there are plenty of uses for apples. Read on for **Dee's** delicious idea ...

Cinnamon Buns

360ml dairy-free milk

120ml unsweetened apple sauce

120ml maple syrup

60g almond butter

150g jumbo oats

150g porridge oats

1 apple, chopped

1 egg*

2 tblsp walnuts, chopped

2 tbsps raisins

1 teasp baking powder

1 teasp vanilla paste

1 teasp cinnamon

¼ teasp nutmeg

2 tblsp sugar to sprinkle on top

***Alternative: 1 tablespoon of Chia seeds or Flaxseeds mixed with 3 tablespoons of water.**

Method

Pre heat the oven to 180C, and lightly grease a 12 hole baking tray

In a bowl, stir together all of the ingredients, making sure they're well combined

Spoon the mixture into the tray and make sure each hole is filled all the way to the top (approx. 60g per hole)

Sprinkle a little sugar over the top of each bun, then bake in the oven for 25 minutes, until nice and golden

Remove from the oven and allow to cool before removing from the tray

Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a week

Puzzle – What is going on in Jake's Annexe?



Is Jake showing David a few moves?

Is he just excited at the new build?

Or could this just be his best-ever construction?
(Not the word he used to describe it but what the hey...)

Answers on a postcard ...



Many, many thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter. I think you'll agree that it shows what a diverse and talented bunch we all are. Jx