

**Cripley Meadow Allotment Association
Newsletter
June 2021**

Thanks to the sterling efforts of our **first Working Party of 2021**, the bonfire area was cleared and is now manageable again. The wind was in the right direction, and members' assiduousness in bringing dry material and keeping it covered meant that the fire burnt relatively cleanly and quickly. Thank-you.



We are now back into the regular rhythm of Working Parties on the second Sunday of each month (apart from break in December) and dates for the rest of the membership year are now on the website. Our assumption is that from now on 'just turn up' will be OK within Covid rules (we'll let you know if that changes). So, the **next WP is Sunday 13th June – no booking needed – just come to the green Association Shed at 10am. It is forecast to be hot so in addition to usual advice about wearing sensible clothing/footwear and bringing gloves, consider water, suncream and a hat.** We'll be dividing our efforts between OxClean in the Car Park/surrounding area, and work on the Site. **Anti-climb paint is ready for the gate so if you fancy doing that, please come wearing clothes you never want to wear again as it is a filthy job and the paint never comes off!**

While we are on the subject of dates, I hope you already have our **Big Summer Party** in your diary. Reminder – it's **Sunday 18th July** lunchtime onwards, the idea is a 'bring and share BBQ' on the Green for members, family and friends. Let's hope it's safe and permitted for us to be in a big (30+) group outside by then. If not, we'll think again.

The **Audit** took place as planned on 9th May. Committee members Christine, Emma, Ilias, Julia and Keith toured the whole site over four hours, checking on every plot. Keeping your plot within the rules has always been important – both to respect our privilege of occupying scarce land, and to be considerate to fellow and future plot holders. But at the moment, when we have a long and growing waiting list it is even more incumbent upon us to make the best use of what we have. Where action is needed, you'll receive an email. As ever, if you have too much space for the time and energy you have available, please consider trading down and making someone on our waiting list very happy.

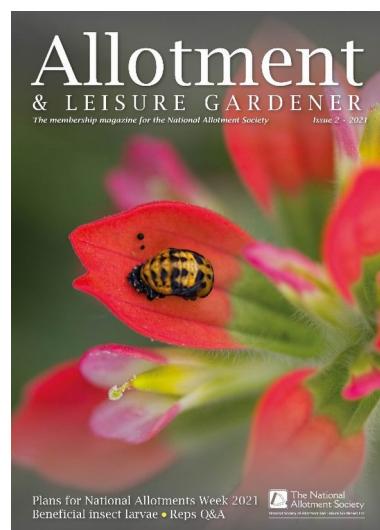
If you haven't heard anything from the Audit team by mid-July (please check your Junk folder), no significant problems were found on your plot.

The audit team also kept an eye out for recent joiners who had made a particularly good start on their patch so that we can award this year's



Harry's Cup Prize. A tiny cup was awarded to Harry Stone (seen here) in 1938 and donated to Oxford allotments by his grandson, Mike, who sponsors the £50 prize. A winner will be chosen from the audit team's shortlist by Wendy (thank-you, Wendy) in time for the prize to be awarded at the Big Summer Party.

Electronic copy of NAS quarterly magazine - If you missed out on a paper copy of the latest magazine from the National Allotment Association, you can still access it electronically via this link - <https://online.flipbuilder.com/cwao/lpnd/>



Now for the Birds ...

Member Ada got in touch to say she was working on her plot recently when she saw a wood pigeon trapped under some bird netting nearby.

"Thankfully I'm a licensed bird ringer and quickly extracted the bird, who wasn't injured," says Ada. "It was lucky as the bird was facing hours in the scorching sun with no water and possibly a slow death. Could you please mention in the newsletter that in order to keep netting effective and safe it should always be strung taut on the canes and checked that there are no holes or slack pieces hanging loose. That way birds will stay on the outside and easily bounce off the net if they fly into it."



Here is the lucky bird. I hope people will agree that we shouldn't be harming wildlife, even when they're after our strawberries.

... And the bees

First, regular readers will be aware that we have two beekeepers on site – Christine on 10A and David on SF12/13. David recently reported that his bees are **swarming**. Colonies which have successfully over-wintered grow from around 4,000 to 40-60,000 bees, as pollen and nectar increase. *Swarming is the bees' natural reproduction, with the old queen leaving the hive with up to half the workforce, including most of the young bees. She leaves behind new queens to emerge from queen cells in the hive.*

Beekeepers try to 'control' this natural process. We don't want people troubled by a swarm, and we may lose a queen and half our the honey workforce. The techniques for increasing hive

space, splitting the colony to reduce its size, and removing queen cells to deter swarming are not fool-proof; and bees do not follow instructions or take holidays. Finding every queen cell in a hive of 40,000 bees is not guaranteed, the natural urge to swarm is strong, and changeable weather also adds to uncertainty.

Swarms often leave around midday, and usually travel a relatively short distance where they collect in a bush or on a wall-usually just out reach! They may rest for a few hours up to a few days whilst scouts are sent out to investigate possible new permanent homes. It is estimated that only a quarter of swarms survive in the wild.

A swarm in flight, or on a branch or wall, looks spectacular- but it is usually very passive and is best left alone (avoid the flightpath and keep children and pets clear!). The bees have filled up with honey for their trip, and apart from scouting for a new home, most stay clustered around the queen. Where practical we collect and re-hive our own swarms, if they arise-but the service does not extend to wasps or other types of bees!

You can see the swarm collecting on the right-hand edge of David's screening.



Swarms may also come from outside the allotments, including wild colonies. We have limited space, so we cannot hive them; also there may be risks of disease, temperament, etc and we do not keep quarantine hives to assess new colonies. These swarms should be allowed to disappear back over the fence given time, as part of the natural process.

If you ever need to contact either of our beekeepers in a hurry, their details are on the Honey Bees page of our website.

Second bee-related item, we have many species of solitary bees. Unlike honey bees, they do not live communally but make a one-bee nest.



I have noticed a few '**bee hotels**' that members have created around the site; here are a couple of recently-erected ones made from old bamboo canes, pallet sections and roof tiles. The Natural History Museum has a brilliant page all about bee hotels, ways to make them, the bees that use them, how to tell if they are being used...

Third bee-related item. We'll soon have a student, Chloe, from Brookes University, coming on site to **survey our bumble bees**. Committee member and beekeeper Christine has briefed Chloe, including the need to respect members' plots as private spaces. So if you see someone around the site netting bees, it is OK! Chloe is qualified to catch them (then she lets them go).

A less welcome animal visitor – member Peter alerted the Committee that something had been digging up his produce. It appeared whatever it was had got in via a gap between gate and fence along Fiddler's Steam and Peter kindly patched it.



Alex inspected the boundary and found evidence of something digging/ trying to escape along the edge of 'Badgerland' (the wild bit outside our fence by the Shop and South Field).

Jeremy later spotted these hairs trapped on the wire – **it was a badger!**



We believe we've blocked the route, but please would all members keep an eye out for unusual digging and new gaps in the fence and, if found, let someone on the Committee know. Thanks!

Our Orchard Manager, Ilias, continues beaver away (if that is not an unfortunate way of putting it!) on our **communal orchard** by Castle Mill. He has prepared a set of aluminium **tree tags** with laminated labels for all one hundred trees. Each label shows the kind of fruit tree, the variety and the year of planting. A numbered tag on each tree will be associated with a line in an Excel file; encyclopaedic information about each variety will be available on the website. Photo shows the tags and cable ties ("no nails or pins that can potentially traumatised the trees", says Ilias).



A recent post on the Friends of Cripley Meadow Allotments Facebook group mentioned that ne'er-do-wells might have been **scoping out the allotments for criminal activity**. Theft and vandalism on site are thankfully extremely rare. Overlooking from the flats, excellent fencing and good gate-etiquette all help to keep it this way. **Keep on locking!** (And if you find a problem with the locks, please don't oil the them as this gums them up – just let a Committee member know and we'll get it sorted).

Allotment shop update – Sarah, who manages our site shop, will be taking a break for the next two to three weeks. Fellow Committee member Iulia, has kindly offered to help members access the shop during this time. Details about this and the stock situation will be updated on the [Trading Shop page of the website](#).

On the plot, whereas the theme for most of last month was “cold, wet and windy”, suddenly it’s summer. Some things that love cool and damp, such as spinach and rhubarb were romping away but others, such as asparagus, were way behind. My tomato seedlings, that were looking most pathetic, have put on a spurt and now look quite respectable.



I saw this notice outside the Charterville Community Garden Centre in Cutteslowe Park (just north of the ringroad at Summertown). It seemed apropos. Charterville is a horticultural therapy charity. Their garden centre is worth a detour if you are nearby – some nice chemical-free plants for sale at sensible prices (card only). It is sited right inside the park so you can only reach it by bike or on foot. There are also craft stalls there (cash only).

Water, water... Watering has started to be a major job – much later than last year. Regular readers will have read many-a reminder in these

pages about the need to harvest and store rainwater from sheds and any other structure on your plot. But holders of small plots are reliant on communal tanks. Those next to Castle Mill store rainwater from the roofs of the buildings, while most of those along the other side of the site use stream water. **If you use these stream-filled tanks, please put your hand up to join the small band of members trained to use the pumping equipment that fills them** (secretary@cripleymeadow.org.uk). The current team is not able to keep up and, **unless more join, the tanks will more often be empty**.

While I am on the subject of communal water tanks – you may only use cans, buckets, wheelbarrows etc to transport the water. No hoses.

Finally, in addition to my usual plug for this month’s advice on our website ([Your plot—The gardening year](#)), take a look at the NSALG page for June jobs, also very useful.

Good gardening,

Manda, CMAA Secretary and Vice-chair
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