

Colwall Orchard project SDF/06/0708

Summary

Highlights to date:

- We have assembled a band of 13 volunteers (with minimal advertising, numbers still rising)
- We identified 41 potential orchards in the parish and have surveyed 36 of these
- We have had a noble chafer training day from PTES
- We have found frass thought to be from noble chafer from 4 sites (PTES to confirm)
- we have already been offered one orchard to manage as a community orchard, in association with the local prep school
- we have identified 5 other orchards that we think would be suitable for various community events
- we are getting a good reception from most owners
- we have been contacted by 2 orchard workers and 1 perry maker interested in working with us

1. Orchard database

An initial database was obtained from Herefordshire Local Records Centre, comprising 25 potential orchards identified on the Millennium Map. This was cross checked against the aerial photographs and then against orchard data for the Parish provided by the People's Trust for Endangered Species. A large number of discrepancies were found, including differences in boundaries, differences in treatment of sub sites, discrepancies in coding of bush orchards and several new orchards ranging in size from 6 to 114 trees.

The full list now comprises 41 orchards, approx 150% of our original estimate. Of these 41;

- 5 no longer qualify for orchard status
- 3 are of unknown status (1 access refused and not visible from public access points, and 2 without owner information and not yet surveyed),
- 1 is known to be an orchard but access permission has been refused
- 2 are modern bush orchards
- the remaining 30 have been surveyed.

Three of the sites without owner information and/or access permission may be viewed from public access points and will be surveyed at some point this month.

2. Orchard surveys

We have 13 volunteers working with the project, and between them they have contributed at least 30 days of their time. We also have 3 paid contractors working for the project, who have contributed at least 8.5 days.

36 of the 39 traditional orchards on the list have been visited by our volunteers. Permission for survey was refused on 3 sites. Where access permission was refused, or we lacked owner information, preliminary records of the sites were made from public footpaths or viewpoints where possible. Records have now been made for 35 of the 41 sites. Photos were taken on several of these sites to aid evaluation.

For the 30 sites where access was available, and the orchard still meets the criteria for current orchard status (6 trees remaining with canopies within 20m) a full survey form was completed. The form used was based on the PTES survey form, modified to accommodate some additional factors relevant to our project.

The forms are currently with the Herefordshire Local Records Centre for entry onto

their database. This information will be forwarded to the People's Trust for Endangered Species, for their noble chafer survey. All orchards have been checked for noble chafer frass, and potential frass has been located in 4 sites. Samples have been forwarded for checking by PTES. In addition, the noble chafer information sheet in the owner's pack elicited a phone call from one of the owners, whose husband has seen grubs and iridescent green beetles when chopping up a fallen pear tree from their orchard. Hence we are fairly confident that we do have noble chafer in our orchards. Further visits will be made to key sites in the summer, when the grubs are more active and the frass in the tree cavities is dry and easier to identify.

The orchards vary in age, management and value, with only a few still under active management. Most are no longer in active use. For some of these sites, the owners are interested in receiving assistance to return them to active management, whilst others are abandoned or mismanaged, usually as part of larger grazing units, so that trees are being barked, dying and collapsing.

3: Training and events for the volunteers

We held the initial training day on 24th November 2007, at the Down's School in the village. The main trainer was Anita Burrough, from the People's Trust for Endangered Species, with support from Helen Stace. 6 volunteers from the project were trained, together with 2 contractors and 2 others from outside the project area.

We held an evening gathering on 9th January to introduce the contractors, discuss the project, confirm allocation of the orchards for survey and as a social gathering. This was attended by 3 contractors and 7 volunteers.

We held a follow up training event for those who missed the original training on 13th January. This was led by Helen Stace and attended by 4 other volunteers.

4. Conservation library

A library of orchard conservation material has been compiled over the course of the project, main contributors Helen Stace and Carol Marsden. This is currently housed by HES, and is available for use by volunteers. We intend to investigate a more formal storage/access arrangement, perhaps through the Village Society or the village library. We have also established a web page on the Colwall Greener website at www.greener.colwall.info. This signposts volunteers and other interested parties to key information and websites, and includes a blog for the project.

5. Orchard conservation handout

In compiling the Orchards conservation library, we discovered a range of excellent handouts, and decided to prepare a Colwall Orchard sheet to supplement these (attached), rather than design a whole new leaflet. We packaged up the handout with some key information sheets in Plastic wallets, which we posted out to all the known orchard owners in the Parish. The packs included a questionnaire asking the owners about the history and management of their orchards and asking if they need help and/or wish to participate in future activities. So far we have received 9 questionnaire returns from the owners. We have also gathered this information direct from orchard owners during our site visits and discussions.

6. Community Orchards

From the survey we have identified 1 core areas for development of community

orchards, and 2 further main centres for events and other activities.

The Down's School has already offered its own orchard for development as a community site, and is prepared to allow use of various premises and facilities for events. An adjacent orchard owner is considering the possibility of their orchard being a community orchard. There are 2 other orchards within a few hundred metres, and their owners are prepared to allow us to take their fruit and may consider use of their orchards for training and/or community events.

The second centre of activity, nearby, comprises 4 separate orchards under a single ownership. The owner is prepared to consider collaboration with us, and further discussions are needed re the exact nature of their involvement. These orchards are likely to be particularly important for wildlife and need some restorative pruning, management and tree planting.

The third potential area of activity is a large orchard adjacent to one of the main residential areas, which is already well used by the community (in part as the owner lives away from the village). Again this is likely to be one of the more important sites for wildlife. Unfortunately, the owner has rebuffed our approaches to date.

There do not appear to be any suitable sites for community orchards around the periphery of the Parish, although various 'outlying' owners would like assistance or are prepared to collaborate with the project. One of these is Bill Wiggin MP, who is the Chair of the All Party Cider Group. In the future it may be possible to establish new sites in these areas and 2 potential sites have been identified.

7 Costing for Phase 2 of the project

I have started scoping out and made preliminary costings the main elements of the Phase 2 project, which I have submitted as an expression of interest for further SDF funding. Should we be successful in obtaining SDF funding, I wish to use this as leverage to obtain further match funding from other grant sources to extend the project to a 3 to 5 year programme.

Wildlife Surveys

I am currently considering appropriate wildlife follow up surveys and have already notionally booked the following:

Moth surveys: David Lovelace and Butterfly conservation

Bat Surveys: Stephen West (Chair Worcs Bat Group)

Fungus surveys, including 1 public foray: Herefordshire Fungus Survey Group

Orchard training

We have already made direct contact with FWAG and with 2 contractors who may be able to offer management training (pruning, planting etc), I am exploring further contacts.

We have been approached by a local perry producer seeking sources of perry pears in exchange for a share of the perry

I have made contact with Marcher Apple Network, and hope to have one of their expert trainers (Mike Porter) run an apple ID day in October

Public events

Presentation to national Orchard conference (see below)

Inclusion of relevant events in Colwall Festival (planned for mid July)

8. Other items of interest

Publicity

We put an article for Colwall Clock in December (inc special request for younger volunteers, as per offer letter)

Article in Malvern Gazette, 22/11 issue – conversation with Richard Hale and notes sent by email.

Entry on Colwall Greener blog, with link to People's Trust for Endangered Species website.

Brief entry recognising our formation in the National Orchard Forum Winter Newsletter No 11 (with note to editor to ask for fuller article for Newsletter 12)

9 Special conditions

i) Demonstration of attempt to involve local young people

The article in Colwall Clock made a specific request for younger volunteers, perhaps people interested in pursuing a career in conservation. Unfortunately we received no response to this. However, we will definitely be including events for young people in the programme of activities for phase II of the project.

ii) Liaison with HC/WCC survey.

I had spoken to Juliet Wheatley when drawing up the project. I contacted her again in November informing her of the success of the project. She has now invited me to support Herefordshire Council by offering a 10 minute presentation re our project, as part of an overview of orchard projects in Hfds, at a national orchard conference in September at Sheffield Hallam University.

NB: Project spec also sent to relevant Natural England staff

iii) Data to be forwarded to LRC

It had always been my intention to provide all data to Hfds LRC, and a sum of £200 has been factored into the project costs to cover processing of these data.

Summary

The project has got off to a good start, with a good willing band of volunteers, good coverage of orchards and on the whole a positive response from the orchard owners. There is clearly sufficient interest within the Parish to support a Phase 2 project, and I intend to scope this out and apply for further funding for this.

Helen Stace

On behalf of Colwall Greener and Colwall Parish Council

Attachments

Colwall Orchard database (latest list)

Colwall Orchard survey form

Colwall owners outline interview form

Orchard owners handout