



ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*



This is our first A5 Newsletter, a novelty brought on by economies of shape: the new Post Office charges for large envelopes. I prefer it, but wait to see what people think. In this number we have 'What's On' (don't miss our Apple Harvest Supper), details about Press Hire, Ben Pike's Notes, Steph Lagden's report of our Annual Gathering, David Leach on Wildlife in Orchards, Liz Turner on Trees for Health, Ben's info on Harvest Line, my thoughts on the Ditsum plum, and Trudy asking for more help from members. Hope you enjoy it!

Jacquie Sarsby, Editor.

WHAT'S ON?

Contacts for events:

Charles Staniland. (pruning courses) Tel. 01364 653169.

Orchard Link events - see address and no. on back page.

Autumn is the busiest time for Orchard Link and we have several stalls and pressing events booked. As well as providing 'community pressing' - whereby the presses are available to all who bring apples, they raise much needed funds and are our shop window- raising our profile too. So please do volunteer to help where you can.; its enjoyable - sometimes messy, and you will meet many other people keen to chat and share their enthusiasm for apples and orchards.

SEPTEMBER

Monday 11th Orchard Link Core Group meeting - 7.30pm, in the family room, Church House Inn, Harberton - see article on pg 14.

Sunday 17th. Jackie Stephens has invited Orchard Link members for an informal visit to see her orchard at Ranscombe Manor near Kingsbridge at 3p m. OS ref. SX761 449.

Saturday 23rd Come and tour an edible forest garden - full of fruiting trees, at Dartington. Led by expert Martin Crawford. 10am - 12 noon. £2. Please call SPARC on 01803 847943 for directions and to book.

OCTOBER

Saturday 7th Orchard Link stall and press at Kingsbridge farmers market. 8.30am till 1.30pm. Volunteers needed. If you have apples to sell or surplus to offer for pressing, call Orchard Link.

Sunday 8th Avon Mill Autumn Festival. Orchard Link will have the big wooden press in action at this day of crafts, food-tasting and storytelling. With a café and music this is a fun day for all ages. 10am - 5pm at Avon Mill Garden Centre near Loddiswell. Volunteers needed. If you can help for part of the day, or if you have spare apples to press, call Orchard Link.

Saturday 14th Bere Apple Fest: Bere Ferrers's apple extravaganza. Always lots to do and see. Details from Brian Lamb 01822 - 841309.

Sunday 15th Cockington Apple Day Food Festival. A day to celebrate the apple, including a marquee full of food and drink stalls, apple pressing on a historic press, over 200 apples on display, plus orchard walks, music and craft activities. 10am - 4pm. Contact Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust on 01803 606035 for details.

Sunday 15th. Apple Day at Rosemoor. 10am - 5pm. Displays of apples, food tasting, demonstrations of tree planting plus many 'apple' stalls and activities at the RHS gardens near Great Torrington, North Devon. Call 01805 624067 for details.

Saturday 21st and Sunday 22nd. Apple Weekend at Eggesford Garden Centre - another Apple Day event with displays, trees to buy, food and drink to taste. 10am - 5pm. Entrance free. Near Eggesford Station, North Devon.

Sunday 22nd

Hedgerow Management and Restoration:

Trainers from Devon Rural Skills Trust

If you have an acre or more of land then come along to this **free** hands-on day course which will help teach you the practical skills to manage your hedgerows, both as a stock-proof barrier and for wildlife and the landscape. Expert trainers will help you to lay and coppice a hedgerow - then you can practise on your own land! 9.30am till 4pm near Diptford.

Booking essential and limited to those with an acre or more of agricultural land. Call Reception at Devon Wildlife Trust to book, or speak to David Leach for further details, both on 01392 279244. [See his article later in this Newsletter].

Saturday 28th Orchard Link stall at Totnes Farmers market. We shall have a press outside the Civic Hall in Totnes. Details and times as for 7th October market in Kingsbridge. Volunteers needed, call Orchard Link if you can help.

NOVEMBER

Saturday 4th. Orchard Link stall at Kingsbridge Farmers Market. Details as 7th Oct market in Kingsbridge. Volunteers needed. Call Orchard Link if you can help.

Saturday 11th November : APPLE HARVEST SUPPER

Do come along to our Apple Harvest Supper at Stoke Gabriel Village Hall. It may be late in the year for a Harvest Supper, but not too late for an **Apple Harvest Supper!** There will be lots of good things to eat: we have 6 home-harvested Orchard Link cooks ready to combine their skills and recipes (veg and non-veg) for this event, so do fill in the form, send a s.a.e. and a cheque for £6.50 per person as soon as possible, so that you will receive your TICKETS for the event in good time. See the insert for details of where to send form, cheque and s.a.e., what entertainment is booked etc. [Editor]

DECEMBER

Sunday 3rd. Learn to prune. A hands-on course with expert Charles Staniland, tackling large mature apple trees and looking at pruning younger ones at Berry Pomeroy near Totnes. 10.30am-4pm. £20 or £15 to Orchard Link members. Please book by 26th November – tel. 01364 653169.

JANUARY

Sunday 14th Learn to prune - details as 3rd December, but in an orchard near Totnes. Please call Charles Staniland to book.

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AUTUMN PRESS HIRE

If your trees are already groaning with fruit, now is the time to book one of the apple presses and mills. The small press and mill will fit into most cars, while the stunning wooden community mill is great for a local event or a pressing party, and comes ready on its own trailer. The equipment is now being hired out by **Peter Cowper**, who lives in South Pool near Kingsbridge. Please contact Peter direct to book the equipment on **01548 531297**.

The small press and mill together, cost £35 for a 2 day mid-week hire or £45 for a weekend. (If you hire it out with local friends with orchards, 2 days will give you plenty of time to press everyone's apples and work out cheaply for all involved). The large press and a mill costs just £60 for a 2 day hire at any time. Prices are for collection from South Pool. Bookings are already coming in, so if you have a particular time when you would like to press, call Peter as soon as you can!

Finally our thanks go to Dick and Valerie Ensor, who did a sterling job for the last 2 seasons, hiring out all the equipment. You will still see them this autumn as they have both offered to help out at farmers markets and the Kingsbridge Show. *T. T.*

FRUIT-PIKER'S NOTES

It looks like being a great year for all kinds of fruit. I cannot remember a spring when I have seen such a luxurious display of blossom on the trees. Decent weather at pollination time has converted this into heavy crops. On a recent visit to Great Hill Wood at Chillington (run by the Woodland trust), I was able to pick pounds and pounds of cherries growing on wild cherry trees. Although small the cherries were delicious, both fresh and in cherry pies. It is unusual to find wild cherries in such abundance and not eaten by the blackbirds.

The dry and sunny weather has also meant that we are suffering less from the usual fungal diseases. Scab in particular has not been troublesome this year, apart from on a pear called Durendean that we have planted here at Sharpham. This is described in catalogues as having good scab resistance; oh well, you live and learn!

One disease that can be particularly annoying is Brown Rot. It doesn't threaten the life of the tree, but is frustrating because it is only when you go to pick the fruit that you notice that it has gone rotten and brown as the name suggests. Brown Rot affects most tree fruits and will persist from year to year if you leave any rotten fruit on the tree. The fruit will mummify, with white pustules on the surface, the disease spreading through rain splash or birds and insects. The only method of control is removing the rotten fruit; if you fail to do this you can lose an increasing percentage of your crop.

Now is the time to start planning your winter work. All planting and most pruning is done in the winter, so now is the time to get hold of fruit tree catalogues and start the fun part of choosing the varieties that you would like to grow. Don't forget that apart from choosing varieties that you like, you also need to consider factors such as disease resistance and pollination.

The *prunus* family of trees (peaches, plums and cherries) is pruned in the summer, so there is still time if you haven't got around to it yet.

I'm off now to see how my fruit and vegetables have fared in the Village Show. In the fruit section I've entered peaches and raspberries. I was hoping to enter apples but was disqualified as I had difficulty counting up to the required three, having brought only two apples with me. I'm hopeful of a prize in the raspberry section as there are only three entries! Happy fruit picking!

Ben Pike

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OUR ANNUAL GATHERING AT SHARPHAM

For this year's annual gathering we were lucky enough to be invited to the Sharpham Estate at Ashprington near Totnes. Sharpham house is a mansion built in the 1770's, and has grounds that were originally laid out by Capability Brown. The gardens are not as intensively looked after as in days gone by, and thus they have an air of blowsy respectability rather than the manicured formality that once would have graced them.

We were invited to Sharpham because Orchard Link member, Ben Pike, works there as Head Gardener. In the morning Ben showed us around the walled garden where his passion for such things was easy to see. He showed us several vegetables from the Garden Organic Seed Library including a pea called Parsley with edible tendrils and some unusual tomatoes such as 'Sub-Arctic Plenty', bred by the American military to provide tomatoes in cold conditions. The walls of the garden were clothed in trained fruit trees of many kinds including some apple trees grafted by the Devon Orchard Project, The Totnes Apple and Haragan Payne, and a tempting peach tree. Ben had kindly pruned only one half of the trees so that we could see pruned and unpruned versions. The garden walls themselves are a Grade 2 listed building. We were also allowed a peek at the defunct heating system for the old greenhouses, which is usually covered up.

After a hefty and delicious lunch, we toddled off to the newly planted orchards. We looked at the difficulties of guarding trees from sheep, saw how buzzards have been damaging the young trees, and discovered an apple, which is red inside and out (Sops in Wine). The Annual Gathering ended here, but some members went to visit the vineyard, or was it the café? It was a most interesting place to visit, and many thanks to Ben for sharing his enthusiasm with us.

Steph Lagden.

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ORCHARDS HELPING WILDLIFE: BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, MOSSES AND LICHENS

For the past three years the Devon Wildlife Trust's Landscape Heritage Scheme (LHS) has been providing free advice and small capital grants to landowners in South Devon. The project, part of South Hams District Council's Life into Landscape programme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has carried out 186 advisory visits to landowners and awarded 115 grants. The grant pot is now fully committed and agreement holders have until the end of February 2007 to complete their work and claim the grant.

Amongst the work funded through the LHS was the restoration or planting of 32 orchards. Orchards were a target for the scheme primarily because of their contribution to landscape, local culture and local distinctiveness, but they can also be excellent for wildlife. Orchards may combine the qualities of a number of different habitats: Non-intensively farmed, wildflower-rich grassland is often found underneath the trees. Thick hedgerows around small orchard fields are similar to the types of habitats found on woodland edges whilst the trees themselves can play host to a variety of woodland species. Light grazing allows patches of scrub to develop around the edges which, providing it doesn't dominate, can complement both the grassland and hedgerow habitats.

Many orchard owners will have spotted the more charismatic species that visit: birds such as the song thrush, tree creeper, nuthatch and the more troublesome bullfinch; badgers raiding for windfall fruit. Some may even have noticed inebriated butterflies late in the year, drunk from feeding on rotten fruit.

However, the rarest orchard residents are also the least noticeable. The moss and lichen flora of traditional orchards is of particular note in Devon. Some of these species are extremely vulnerable to air pollution and Devon's combination of Atlantic air-flows, damp climate and a lack of large scale industry provides ideal conditions. Traditional orchards with a history of management without pesticides and herbicides will be particularly good for mosses and lichens. Meanwhile dead wood in the relatively short lived orchard trees provides habitats for fungi and insects.

Fungi, dead wood insects, lichens and mosses are mostly quite sedentary species. Because they are so poor at dispersal, local

populations are vulnerable to extinction if old orchard trees die and are not replaced. Grant schemes like the Landscape Heritage Scheme and DEFRA's Environmental Stewardship help to pay for new trees for these species to colonise.

David Leach, Devon Wildlife Trust



TREES FOR HEALTH: RECONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLANTS

Liz Turner of 'Trees for Health' tells us what she thinks trees can do and how people can become involved with her group.

Trees for Health based in South Devon, aims to help foster healthy communities and healthy ecosystems through seasonal tree activities.

Although England has just 8% of woodland cover, there are many medicinal and food uses of our tree species. Much of our knowledge has been lost alongside the loss of woodland and we rarely harvest foods from our woodlands and hedgerows beyond some blackberry picking in the autumn! Many tree leaves can be used in salads, teas and medicines and flowers such as lime and elder are important medicines. The autumn is particularly bountiful with berries and nuts.

We can also benefit from trees by just experiencing them! Just seeing trees can reduce our stress levels and blood pressure but activity in woodland can reduce the risk of developing serious illness! Japanese

researchers found that a forest walk ('wood-air bathing' – *shinrin-yoku*) led to a drop in blood sugar for diabetic patients. US researchers found 120 chemical compounds in forest air (most from pockets between tree leaf cells), some of which prevent & cure cancer. Rarely does western medicine prescribe a 'walk in the woods'!

Our activities aim to provide opportunities for people to access the countryside and experience trees. The practical work concurrently aims to benefit the health of ecosystems by increasing trees in the landscape. This includes planting, tree care, collecting seed and raising saplings. We also harvest berries, leaves, flowers and other wild foods in a sustainable manner and use them to make salads, teas, oils, cordials, syrups, jams and other interesting recipes.

Join us this autumn to learn about the fruits of the hedgerows and woodlands & at other times of the year to plant/ care for trees.

5th September: Wild Berry Harvest & **tree** nursery work – Sharpham Estate.

7th September: Autumn Berry Gathering – Follaton Arboretum & Littlehempston.

17th September: Autumn Berry Bounty – harvesting/making – Dartington Estate.

15th October: Seed Gathering along the River Dart.

27th October: Harvest Haws & Hips – Sharpham Estate.

5th November: Autumn Tree Gathering – Dartington Estate.

Some events are 'volunteer days' to gather berries/seeds in quantity. Others require booking & have a charge. These include guided walks, harvesting and making recipes. Contact us for full info or view the website www.treesforhealth.org / info@treesforhealth.org 01803 762180.

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HARVEST LINE - Ben Pike

As the coming harvest looks like being a time of plenty, we are expecting lots of calls from orchard owners wondering what to do with their fruit. As usual, Harvestline will be attempting to put users of apples in touch with orchard owners so that apples can be sold and not lie rotting on the ground. In a bountiful season such as this one, we are always short of apple users, so if you are a cider maker, juice producer, chutney maker, or even an apple pie maker, then we would be delighted to hear from you, and could hopefully find some good quality apples for you. We are particularly keen to hear from people in mid and East Devon and in the Tamar Valley.

If you have surplus apples there are lots of options open to you. Apart from calling Harvestline you can make your own juice and cider, hiring our press and mill if need be: call us. Why not get together with some neighbours, or even hold a village pressing day? This can be great fun, as well as being productive, and also a good way to meet fellow fruit growers local to you. You are also welcome to bring your surplus fruit to one of our pressing days (see diary section). This can either be good quality fruit for selling on the stall, or fruit for pressing into juice. We will give you some juice in return for bringing your fruit. Please call Harvestline if you are planning to bring a large quantity of fruit.

The **Harvestline** will be open from mid September until the end of October. We look forward to hearing from you on **07792-664710**. We have already had two enquiries. One is from an orchard owner near Haytor who has large quantities of Worcester Pearmain and Coxes for sale. This year is "pick your own". The other is from an orchard owner in East Devon who has surplus apples for sale. Contact us if you would like more details.

If you would like to contribute to the Newsletter, or to tell us about something newsworthy, or to offer help or your views about anything you have read here, 'phone the Editor on 01803 866870 - Jacquie Sarsby.



The Dittisham Ploughman and Independence by the Dart

Dittisham (pronounced 'Ditsum' by locals) is famous for its plums. Nobody knows quite how they got there, but there is a tale of a German vessel, ship-wrecked on the rocks at Dartmouth; it contained a cargo of dried plums which 'Ditsum' fishermen salvaged and brought home with them. Even if the story is not true, it underlines the fact that these plums prosper in a sheltered spot above the River Dart in a county otherwise not known for its plums. I know of 3 kinds of plum which grow in the orchards there: the best known is the Dittisham Ploughman, a beautiful plum you can eat straight from the tree (I have a young tree and I eat every plum as it ripens: it's a race between me and the wasps.) It can also be used for cooking. It ripens in early to mid-August, and a lot of them are now used to make a liqueur in South Brent.

There is also a plum called the Dittisham Small Red which they say, at Brogdale, is the same as the Cornish plum, Kea. The Kea only grows in one favoured area of Cornwall, which sounds as though it has a similar, well-sheltered micro-climate. I have read about the Dittisham Black and the Dittisham Damson, both damsons, but I have only actually seen Black Orleans in the orchards, which are black, but sweeter than a damson. The problem is that there are far fewer orchards than there used to be and fewer trees; as Dittisham changed from a working village to a place for retirement, leisure and holidays, '...People bought cottages and cut down the plum-trees because they wanted the view...' Nevertheless, I would very much like an orchard-owner to show me the damsons sometime.

The Dittisham Ploughman is a nice big plum, but more like a damson from the point of view of suckering: it grows on its own roots and produces suckers, which can be separated and grown on in a nursery bed until they are ready to be planted out as new trees. This means that if someone will give you a sucker, you will have plum trees forever. If grown on a graft, (as it will be if it comes from a nursery) you will not.

Mrs. Phyllis Trant, who still has an orchard, told me that years ago they filled their baskets with little black plums and sold them to the visitors. Villagers used to keep chickens in their orchards, and this made them very fertile and the trees prolific. Phyllis's husband's uncle, Ewart Hutchings, (b. 1894) made a lovely tape about life in the village when he was a boy, which is kept in the Studies Centre at Totnes Museum. He said that in his childhood Dittisham people were very independent because '...those plum orchards brought in nice little sums...' The men used to row down to Dartmouth each day and work in the shipyards, but they could put their free time to good use in the orchards, and earn extra money. Whole families were involved in the picking of course. Visitors used to come by boat to Dittisham, and a shop would provide them with tea on the quay, before they wandered round the village and bought their plums, or daffodils, or whatever was in season.

Dartmouth Local History Society have published a little book in which Ewart Hutchings describes his life in the village.

Jacquie Sarsby

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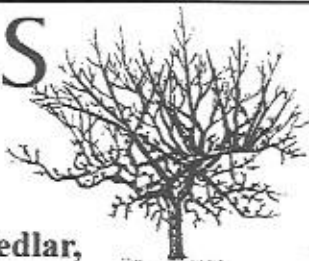
HANDS UP TO GET MORE INVOLVED!

Amidst the wonderful garden walks, delicious lunch and socialising at this summer's Annual gathering, we discussed the more serious issue of how to run Orchard Link in the future. It was established in 1997 by a small group of enthusiasts, among them, myself and Cathy Fitzroy, who were then conserving orchards as part of our day jobs in South Hams and Devon County Councils. Our employers allowed us to deal with the setting up and running of the new organisation as part of our jobs, and in doing so enabled Orchard link to access some European funds.

Nearly ten years on, Orchard Link has grown in membership and changed the way it operates. We have now run without a grant for seven years, and keep ticking over with membership, press hiring and a few training events. Reflecting the interests of members, we have purchased the pressing equipment, established farmers market stalls and offer training events.

Despite all these changes, one thing remains the same, Orchard Link is largely run by a small band of individuals, myself, Ben Pike and Jacquie Sarsby, with admin help from Steph Lagden and someone to hire out the presses each autumn. This is not a structure which really reflects our wide membership and in the long run, it is not sustainable as it places too heavy a workload on a few. So at the July Gathering we launched the concept of an appropriately named 'core group', which offers the chance for anyone interested in more than just paying a subscription to be involved in whatever way they wish and can help. The beauty of such a group is that members can choose to be involved for a short while, or be involved in just one particular area of our work. You may have a particular interest in pressing days, the farmer's market stalls, contributing to the newsletter or arranging social events: everyone's talents and interests are needed and welcomed. [Cont. on back page]

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In a core group, many more members will be taking part in making decisions and steering Orchard Link into the next ten years. The group will be open to all members and people will not be asked to commit to attend regular meetings, rather to work with a few others to achieve an aspect of our work.

Ben, Jacquie, I and others have to date been the main organisers of Orchard Link, partly because of our interest and partly due to our long term involvement, but also because others have just left it to us! To keep the organisation healthy and vibrant, and to involve as many members as possible, it has to change. We hope that YOU will wish to be part of Orchard Link's exciting future.

Trudy Turrell

ORCHARD LINK'S FIRST CORE GROUP MEETING WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY 11th SEPTEMBER AT 7.30pm IN THE FAMILY ROOM OF THE CHURCH HOUSE INN, HARBERTON. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE.

**Contact Orchard Link at:
ORCHARD LINK, P.O. BOX 109,
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