

Community Conservation Bears Fruit



Children help plant the first tree in Winster Community Orchard

It is always a special moment when a new tree is planted and on the 12th April 2014 Winster's Community Orchard came into being as the first eight trees of a planned 25 strong group went into the ground.

I am a strong believer that conservation is more about actions than words and Winster's orchard is an indirect result of this. I have a keen interest in Damselflies and Dragonflies; sadly the shallow freshwater habitat that many of these insects rely on has been in rapid decline nationally, as pressures from agriculture and development have led to ponds being in filled. Winster has a village pond that up until 2011 was in a state of decline. Following on from the creation of a small but successful pond in my own garden, I decided that something had to be done to restore the village pond and prevent the potential loss of yet more habitat. I gathered a group of like minded members of the community and we set about writing and implementing a management plan for the pond. After several days of hard, mucky but rewarding work, we made excellent progress and the results far exceeded my expectations as a large number of species of damsel and dragonflies were observed on the restored pond the following summer.

The project gathered momentum as we turned our attentions to the area surrounding the pond. The creation of a community orchard was an obvious choice. The fruit trees would create new habitat for insects and birds with diversity from meadow planting around the trees to enhance the habitat for dragonflies. And engaging the local community in the wider project through the orchard and educating local children about the value of this habitat would go some way to ensuring its long term survival.

In December 2014, children from Winster Village School did their bit during National Tree Week by planting more fruit trees. As well as the tree planting - sponsored by the Tree Council - the youngsters learnt more about their local environment from the project team and took part in an apple-based quiz organised by local organic gardener Sally Smith. They also heard about the old miners' stone footpaths - currently being renovated - from members of the Winster History Group.

In future years, as the trees begin to bear fruit we will hold community events in the orchard. All in all, not a bad result for the local community and wildlife from just rolling up your sleeves and getting stuck into conservation.

Dave Robinson
January 2016