

Friends of Dartmouth Community Orchard

Short Report to Dartmouth Town Council:

Mid July – mid September 2017

1. Over this period of high summer, there is little to be done in the Orchard. The Friends have done approximately 13 hours of work involving 3 members. In addition, BRNC Officer Cadets carried out 64 hours of work in two tranches on 20 July & 4 August. The work done:
 - Clearing developing hedge lines and tree bases of weeds; tidying the main entrance area including removal of low hanging ash; clearing path edges in eastern paddock & woodland; removing invasive sycamore in eastern paddock; some hogweed control.
 - Cutting back branches of a fallen tree blocking the path in the western paddock, salvaging the apples, and adding branches to habitat pile.
 - Sorting through picked apples and removing what won't keep for Apple Pressing Day (rotten, too small, etc.)
2. The apple crop this year seems both good and rather early. This is the pattern across South Devon. However, a downside is that because the trees are quite heavily laden with fruit, they are rather top heavy and there have been two casualties in the western paddock. One young tree simply snapped (may be rescued) and a more mature tree toppled (also may be rescued) in the strong gusting winds and exceptionally heavy rain we had on 3rd-4th September. A further mature tree seems to have succumbed to disease and needs to be removed. New trees are ordered.
3. Apple picking has begun. With the approval of the Clerk, a notice has been posted on both gates to encourage responsible picking – there's been some evidence of apple stripping already. The Friends will pick sufficient for their **Food Festival stall (22nd October in the Market Place)** and for their **Apple Pressing Day (29th October in the Orchard 12 noon – 3.00.pm or till the apples run out)**. All Councillors and their families and friends are warmly welcome at both events.
4. The 'Growing Orchard Communities' project is holding a final public exhibition at Avon Mill Garden Centre starting Saturday 16th and lasting for a week. It will give a very interesting insight into the revival of community orchards across South Devon, both well established, like Dartmouth, and newly planted. We are benefitting from the small amount of remaining funds available with an interpretation panel for the shelter. A mock-up of the panel will be shown to the Council before installation.
5. There have been no exceptional observations of wildlife. However, bird and insect life has thrived as have, presumably, the small mammals, amphibians and reptiles that secrete themselves in the long grasses. Late summer / autumn wild flowers are just about keeping their hold, but the grass now needs cutting. The Clerk has asked the contractor to complete the cut this month, but his track record is poor.

Peter Shaw

Chairman, Friends of Dartmouth Community Orchard

18th July 2017